

# ABF NEWSLETTER

## AUSTRALIAN BRIDGE FEDERATION INC.



Editor: Barbara Travis ([editor@abf.com.au](mailto:editor@abf.com.au))

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### A WORLD CHAMPION IN OUR MIDST: KATE McCALLUM

#### Who is Kate McCallum?

Kate, aka Karen, has won six Women's World Championships and one Mixed World Championship, multiple National and Regional titles in her home country, USA, as well as European and National titles all over the world, including our own Gold Coast Teams.

From 1973 onwards, Kate's primary occupation has been as a professional bridge player. She is also a bridge teacher, mentor and coach.

#### Background:

Born in San Francisco, California, Kate grew up as daughter of a U.S. Air Force Colonel. She travelled throughout United States as a military "brat" before, in 1972, settling in New York City, where she was based until moving, in 1993, to an old white farmhouse in Exeter, New Hampshire, where she still resides. She has two daughters, Donna and Justine, two stepsons, Jamie and Rory, and six grandchildren.

Despite being one of the finest bridge players in the world and being obsessed by bridge, Kate is an eclectic individual with multiple passions – she is the darling of devout crime fiction readers after writing and publishing The Copperfield Collection of Mystery Checklists, and The Copperfield Collection of Mystery Authors. A prolific ghost-writer, Kate is also the author/editor of several best-selling books on bridge, but none under her own name. Together with her late husband Alex, she founded a financial public relations firm based in Manhattan, and served as Alex's editor for more than 40 years. Kate also operates a successful B&B in New Hampshire, USA, and owns a small jewellery design business called Eclectica.

#### What are you doing in Australia?

"The World Championships in 1989 were in Perth. It was the first time I represented the USA in a World Championship, and we won it. This began my love affair with Australia and I have been coming back ever since. I love the country and want to spend time here.

On my last visit I was attracted to a talented local player, Axel Johannsson. I feel Australia is good for me - something about it raises spirits. It is a healing environment and the people are upbeat and happy. This time, I am here for the Northern winter to see how things work out with Axel and to coach the Australian Women's Team and other aspiring international partnerships."

#### What is Kate's style of Bridge?

Kate is well known for her aggressive style, and likes to be a difficult opponent. She is a strong believer that points don't take tricks, fit is what counts, and suit quality is irrelevant when not vulnerable. At favourable vulnerability anything goes. She doesn't like to give the opponents a chance so nudges them into making mistakes.



Kate's primary claim to fame is an aggressive style of pre-empting. "Pre-empt any time you can", she says. Kate has been tracking weak twos at favourable vulnerability in National and International Tournaments for 30 years and discovered they have a winning margin of 1.28 IMPs. When you consider that the lifetime average winning margin per board is 0.58 for top players, it's evident that her pre-empting style has made the difference to Kate's winning in World Championships and Nationals. "It's a huge contribution. I don't believe I would have won a World Championship without them. Pre-empt means opponents have to guess. If top players only guess correctly 60% of the time I have a distinct advantage," she quips.

Kate is also an advocate of relay bidding. Relay is used after Strong Club or when you are in a Game Force. "Relay is the future," she assures me. "Did you know that it originated with Roy Kerr in New Zealand, who developed Symmetric Relay? Modern relay is based on this. The way it works is that one partner asks questions and the other responds to establish shape, then controls, then cue bidding until the exact hand is known. This is a far more accurate way to bid slams where many IMPs are to be gained."

As one would expect of a World Champion, Kate is also a skillful card player. Her 4♣ in the first session of the final of the World Championships in Orlando has been nominated as hand of the year where her table feel and card reading enabled her to make 4♠ when no one else did. The secret was not to draw trumps because of the 4-1 trump split. Her line of play also works for a 3-2 trump split.

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Dealer West ♠ K J 8  
 EW Vul ♥ A 5 4  
 ♦ A 10 7 6 4 3  
 ♣ 3

♠ 9 ♠ A 10 3 2  
 ♥ Q 9 8 2 ♥ J 10 7 6  
 ♦ 9 8 ♦ J 2  
 ♣ A Q J 10 5 4 ♣ 9 7 6

♠ Q 7 6 5 4  
 ♥ K 3  
 ♦ K Q 5  
 ♣ K 8 2

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
Double	Redouble (1)	2♥	4♠
All Pass			

(1) Showing 3 spades

After a heart lead, when a spade to the King held, declarer immediately played three rounds of diamonds. East ruffed the third round, but now declarer was in control. After two rounds of clubs, Kate could simply ruff and play more diamonds through East, eventually losing just one club and two spades.

**What do you see as the Role of a Professional in Bridge?**

"Like every sport, Bridge needs its 'stars' to make the game more colourful and to inspire players," she tells me. "Professionals add to the enjoyment of the game for many and provide the opportunity for the average player to raise their standard. It opens their eyes to what is possible, something they could not achieve with their peers. The average player also gets the opportunity to compete against stars."

Kate enjoys her role as a professional because she likes to watch people improve and feels pride and great joy when her clients make a good play. Kate is a perfectionist who is completely devoted to her clients and brings absolute commitment and willingness to go the extra mile to help them improve. Her favourite clients are those who are interested in developing and progressing. Kate tells me the secret to her success is that she has the ability to express complicated concepts in a straightforward uncomplicated manner and of course, because "I teach them how to win".

**What is your opinion of Women's Bridge?**

"Women's Bridge teaches us that we can compete and how to win. You can take this learning with you into Open Bridge. For the most part women have not played as well as men - why is a vast topic and I have some ideas as to the why - but when you look at results that is what we see. Now we are seeing women have the ability to win some Open events though not the long knockouts. Without Women's Bridge this wouldn't have happened. "

"I believe the future of Women's Bridge is up in the air. Behaviour in women's events can be very unpleasant. Sometimes it is nicknamed the 'viper pit' with normal players dropping out to reduce the numbers, leaving mainly the vipers.

"In addition Women's Bridge is diminishing because women are getting better - they have improved a great deal in recent times especially in Europe and North America. Women are finding they can compete effectively in Open events. Younger women don't believe in standard stereotypes and don't accept the limitations of the current generations.

In fact today many more women are playing Open Bridge than Women's Bridge. "

**What advice would you give Australian Bridge Players?**

- Work hard.
- Bid more aggressively.
- Talk bridge with better players whenever possible (and listen).
- Bid your cards. Play with confidence and accept your mistakes. It's a game of mistakes. Winners are the people who make the fewest mistakes - accept them and move on.
- Don't be afraid to look stupid - look at your errors as learning opportunities.
- Slow down and think before you act especially at trick one. Many errors are avoidable if you take the time to construct the unseen hands.
- Play within your partnership - have what your partner expects you to have - EVERY time. Don't have solo flights of fancy.
- Focus on partnerships. Treat your partner as the best player in the world and your results will improve. Understand partner's point of view when there's a mistake.
- Build team spirit and take care of the weakest link; individuals don't win, partnerships don't win, a team does. Study team sports and how they win as a team.
- Enjoy bridge - it's only a card game!

**What is Kate's most Unforgettable Bridge Memory?**

Kate's most unforgettable Bridge memory and the most painful moment in her bridge career is the last board of the last match in the prestigious Sunday Times Invitational Swiss Pairs Event (then the Macallan).

Kate and Kerri Sanborn were invited as the token Womens' Pair during the 1st Gulf War. Due to the dangers of travel, Kerri was unable to get there and Kate formed a scratch partnership with Sally Brock - who became a dear friend - and they surprised everyone, having developed a strong One Club system overnight. Competing against the legends of bridge, they were never below 5th place. After 15 matches they were in 2nd place before the last board against Boris Shapiro and Irving Gordon. The opponents ended up in 7♣ after a bidding mix-up. Kate was on lead with a singleton ♣K. She led a spade, dummy's known void, to get into his hand. With no re-entry to his hand, declarer guessed to play a low club from 1064 to dummy's AQJxxx to capture her singleton ♣K. Just like that they went from 2nd to 10th in one board. Meckstroth-Rodwell won that year.

**What makes Kate a winner?**

"I play with confidence and work very, very hard. I'm not afraid to look stupid. I see mistakes as learning opportunities. I didn't fall in love with any conventions or systems - I just learned to use what works."



Liz Sylvester

Ruth Frydman and Dan Craine, winners of the Two Day Novice Swiss Pairs, SFOB, Canberra