

## THE MISSION: LEARNING TO PLAY BRIDGE



### **WILL SMITH LEARNS SOMETHING NEW | November 24th 2008**

After months of lessons, Will Smith is delighted to learn that he is a "natural" at bridge. "It is a milestone in my life to be declared a natural at a sport. Any sport", he gloats. Here are ten of his discoveries ...

**I Am, Apparently, a Natural Player** I was told this by Andrew Robson, bridge correspondent and former world champion. It is a milestone in my life to be declared a natural at a sport. Any sport. Which bridge is, having been recognised as such in 1997 by the International Olympic Committee.

**It's More Complicated Than It Seems** Like cricket, the basic rules are easy to grasp. Bridge: win tricks with suit's highest card. Cricket: stop ball hitting sticks. Also like cricket, bridge has myriad rules and obfuscating terms. Such as "undertricking", which sounds like a magician cutting short his act at a children's party.

**Don't Try to Explain the Rules to Your Wife When You've Had Only One Lesson** There is nothing more humiliating for an apparently natural player than having your statements questioned, and being forced to check the facts on Wikipedia. Actually, there is. Discovering she was right.

**Telepaths Only Need Apply** The element of mind-reading involved in silently agreeing a trump during the bidding stage makes picking your partner a delicate process. In one beginners' game I played, it might have helped if mine had known the difference between clubs and spades. They also suggested it would be easier if more colours were introduced to the pack. This is the sort of person you should follow to see how they manage to open doors.

**At Some Point Someone Will Make a Very Bad British Film About Bridge** I predict it will tell the tale of a working-class British player who shakes up the bridge establishment with his uncouth, rock'n'roll ways. The story will climax at the World Championships, where some crusty old traditionalist will try to sabotage our hero's chance of winning because he doesn't want to see the

game popularised and full of riff-raff. But our hero wins the game, the audience and the heart of a random girl. There'll be an excruciating cameo from David Beckham and an unfunny scene with the Queen and Prince Philip watching the TV in bed.

**Bill Gates Plays Bridge** Online, of course. He may play it in person as well, but he definitely part-owns [bridgebase.com](http://bridgebase.com) and regularly uses it. I tried to join in, but, typically, Bill required me to run Windows on my Mac, something I am not prepared to do. If I wanted my Mac to run like a PC I would leave it out in the rain and whack it with a hammer before turning it on.

**Don't Play With Your Mum and Dad** When my parents retired, they did exactly as the rest of their peer group did: they tried to learn home computing, and took up bridge. If the former caused untold stress (I've lost count of the times I've tried to explain to my dad the difference between a file and a folder), the latter has thrown us back into the traditional parent-child relationship, where I know absolutely nothing, and they have god-like powers. I may have to install Windows on my Mac after all, as the only way I'll regain the upper hand with my dad is to introduce an element of computing--Kryptonite to his Superman.

**There Were Italian Foot-Tapping Cheats in the 1970s** I love this; it's like something from a Le Carré short story. During the [1975 World Team Championships](#), the Italian entrants were spotted touching toes under the table, apparently as a way of relaying information about what cards they held. I so wish this ended with a defection and a speedboat chase; in reality, the Italians stayed in the competition, although blocks were put under their table to prevent any more footsie.

**Etiquette is Important** When your partner puts down their hand, you have to say "Thank you, partner" and then they wish you good luck. This slipped my mind once, when I was more concerned with seeing what cards my partner had. The other players were family friends--yet I still felt as if I had broken wind while kneeling to receive a knighthood.

**You Will Think About It When You're Trying to Sleep** I am a past master at reliving events and fantasising about different outcomes. But it's normally with things that matter, like whose black-gloved hand picks up the ring at the end of "[Flash Gordon](#)". Not whether I'd have won the rubber if I hadn't bid hearts with a king, when it was glaringly obvious that my opponent had the ace. After hours of sleepless deliberation, I can say with some certainty that the respective answers are: "Dale Arden", and "Probably not".

**Picture credit:** David Yeo

([Will Smith](#) is a comedian and actor. His earlier missions include [joining the circus](#), learning how to [make a soufflé](#), [play golf](#) and [strum a banjo](#).)

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