

A thinking game



THE BRIDGE PLAYER'S BRIDGE PLAYER

Last spring, the name of Samuel R. Kehela came to our attention because the 29-year-old Torontonian was asked to coach the North American team for the 1963 world bridge championships, the twelfth event of the competition held this past June in Italy. It seemed a signal honor for a young player, and we resolved to know more. It wasn't an easy resolution to implement since, it turns out, Kehela is more a citizen of the world than of Toronto.

Caught between tournaments however, Kehela revealed something of his history. An Iraqi, he was born in Bagdad and lived there for seven years. Then his family moved to India, where Kehela stayed until he was of university age. The University of California claimed him from 1951 to 1955, and that's where Kehela began to play bridge. School bored him, bridge didn't, and he went to England to perfect his game, play winning tournament bridge and study European bridge conventions—he is now an acknowledged expert on these, which is why he was asked to coach the North American team. Kehela came to Canada in 1957, and he's been here ever since, playing, teaching and writing. He's making a kind of odyssey through the world's bridge tables, however, and might well move on. He'll almost certainly be travelling with the Canadian Olympic team in 1964.

Toronto, Kehela says, is becoming a big bridge town. There are three schools, giving lessons that cost anywhere from \$10 to \$50 and last two to three hours each. It's now possible to play duplicate twice a day, which it wasn't when Kehela first came to Toronto. Next summer's North American tournament will be

held at the Royal York the third week in July; this, the world championships and the Olympics, every fourth year, are Grey Cup time to all serious bridge players on the continent. Three thousand Canadians belong to the American Contract Bridge League, are eligible to play in all its tournaments.

For those who've gotten out of touch since the army or school or wherever they were momentarily members of the leisure class—bridge, Kehela says, is a game for those with leisure—the current bidding system used by Toronto's bridge experts is called the Acol-Culbertson. A British concept (Acol is the name of a street in London where a bridge club hangs out), it's based on under-strength bidding in early rounds.

A good bridge player, Kehela says, must hold the desire to play above everything else. After this, come concentration, card sense and intelligence. "It's a thinking game, but not as intellectual as chess." Kehela feels card sense is something that can be cultivated by playing—"It's simply the ability to imagine what you can't see, a mental picture of the cards' distribution in your opponents' hands." The intellectual challenge of trying to get the most out of the cards you hold and outwit the opposition is what bridge experts get their kicks from.

How can you tell who's a first-rate player? "Some go by master points," Kehela says; "this is a pseudo-objective standard." Master points are accumulated in tournament play, and someone who plays constantly can collect more than a superior player who rarely competes. The best standard of judgment, Kehela insists, is the player's own opinion of his game, even though "bridge players are basically egoists." He says he'd consider Terence Reese (English) and Pietro Fourquet (Italian) the world's best, next to himself.