

Bridge

The Top Ten

by Florence Osborn

Two Colonial Acol bidders from Toronto, Ont., and five Roth-Stone bidders, four of them from Miami Beach, dominate my list of the top ten tournament players of 1963. Canadians Sammy Kehela and Eric R. Murray are first and seventh. Alvin Roth, of New York, is fourth; two of his leading disciples, Cliff Russell and Harold Harkavy, are tied for second, and two more disciples, Mrs. Edith Kemp and her brother, William Seamon, are fifth and eighth. Completing the list are Lew Mathe, of Los Angeles, sixth; Mrs. Victor Mitchell, of New York, ninth, and Norman Kay, of Merchantville, N. J., tenth.

I have selected these players on the basis of their performance in the major events of the year's three leading tournaments, the Spring, Summer and Fall Nationals. Excluded is the year's top event, the International Pair Trials, because it was restricted to winners of major events of both 1962 and 1963. I have not considered regional and sectional tournaments, or the total number of master points won during the year. Several of the members of my top ten will not appear among the year's top master-point winners, since they had neither the zeal nor the leisure to attend a tournament every weekend during 1963. As John R. Crawford has observed, "Master points are just a test of attendance at tournaments." How the nation's experts performed against their peers at the highest-rated events—the nationals—seems a more meaningful criterion.

Kehela, who is only 29, won the men's pairs and the life master men's pairs, placed second in the knockout teams, tied for third in the open teams and placed high in two additional events, giving him the best record of any tournament player for 1963.

Sammy—his name is not Samuel—was born in the Eastern Mediterranean, moved to London while in his teens. He played rubber bridge there, but little duplicate. He settled in Toronto about 10 years ago and is now a naturalized Canadian. He qualified for the recent Miami Beach Pair Trials, held to select the U. S. Olympiad team for 1964, but did not compete because he had already made the Canadian team.

Kehela, one of the most popular players in the bridge world, teaches the game, and because of his familiarity with the Italian bidding systems was hired by Captain John Gerber to coach the last two U. S. entries in the World Team Championship.

Both Kehela and Murray use a Canadian form of the British Acro system. Their bidding is perfectly natural (standard), except that their opening one-bids are light. An opening two clubs is forcing, and a two-bid in another suit is intermediate; that is, strong but not forcing. Since they use intermediate two-bids, partner may drop an opening one-bid sooner than in other systems. For conventions they like non-forcing Stayman, Gerber four clubs for slams, Drury two-club reply for weak third and fourth-hand opening bids, Ripstra over opponent's one no-trump, and the unusual no-trump overcall.

Both these young men are aggressive players who like to get into the bidding. At the 1962 World event,

Murray, a member of the U. S. team, shocked the spectators with daring calls on light values.

A barrister and solicitor (in Canada, a lawyer may be both), Murray won the life master men's pairs (with Kehela as partner); he also won the mixed pairs and scored high in four additional contests.

Roth, Russell, Harkavy, Mrs. Kemp, and Seamon accomplished the unusual feat of winning both of the year's most important team events, the Vanderbilt and the knockout teams. Roth credits this to the group's completely methodized bidding, which is geared to International Match Point Scoring, where heavy emphasis is placed on part scores. By employing such Roth-Stone features as sound opening bids, five-card majors, one no-trump response as a one-round force over one heart or one spade, weak two-bids, negative doubles, and unusual no-trump overcalls, they find that they can both compete and bid games and slams more accurately than their opponents.

"By stressing very sound opening bids," says Roth, "we prevent our opponents from taking liberties in the bidding. They're not as confident in doubling as we are, and they can often be pushed a trick too high."

In addition to their two team wins, Russell and Harkavy placed second in the year's most impressive pair event, the six-session Blue Ribbon pairs, and finished among the leaders in the mixed team, leaving them tied for second on the list of the top 10. Harkavy, noted for his table presence, is one of the best card players in the world. He is also one of the players most feared by opponents, because he is tough and unpredictable. He operates the Yarbrow Bridge Club in Miami Beach.

Russell, partner in R&R Builders, has constructed many homes and shopping centers in Greater Miami. Formerly an undisciplined bidder, with a penchant for fancy calls, he has been toned down and strengthened by recent hard competition, and is considered one of the most improved players in the country. He likes rubber bridge and will play against anyone for any stake.

Fourth on the list is the brilliant maestro Roth, who as chief architect of the Roth-Stone system has made more original contributions to the theory of bridge bidding than any other living player. An imaginative genius and a tense, self-demanding perfectionist, Roth has for years been considered one of the world's strongest players. His one weakness is that he is a severe and withering partner.

Mrs. Kemp, fifth, is one of a very few women who play regularly with men in open events, and her partners give her the highest praise when they say that she "plays like a man." Her stockbroker brother, Bill Seamon, who ranks eighth, is one of the most natural players in the game. He makes the winning bid or play easily, as though by instinct.

Sixth on the list is Lew Mathe, whom many consider the finest player in America. A Los Angeles realtor and a bomber pilot in World War II, he represented this country four times in international events; there is perhaps no tougher bridge-table competitor. Mathe, whose bidding is Standard American—with limit raises, strong but non-forcing overcalls, and weak two-bids—won the life master pairs, was runner-up in the Vanderbilt, and tied for third in the open teams.

Mrs. Jacqui Mitchell, ninth, was taught the game by her husband, Victor, and is highly regarded by partners Sam Stayman and Sol Rubinow. She is a skilled practitioner of a complicated bidding system

composed by Stayman and Mr. Mitchell; it contains many conventions, such as Stayman, five-card majors, weak two-bids, and weak jump overcalls. Mrs. Mitchell was first in the mixed pairs and was close to first in four other events.

Rounding out the list, in tenth place, is Norman Kay, a stockbroker with Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner and Smith, Inc. He was a member of the U. S. international team in 1960 and 1961, and is the sort of player who hides his expert technique under a quiet, unobtrusive demeanor—his opponents are frequently surprised to find that he has just taken the board from them. During 1963 he won the open pairs, was second in the men's teams, third in the Vanderbilt, fourth in the men's pairs.

Kehela demonstrated his fine dummy play in the life master pairs by making four hearts with an over-trick by a crisscross squeeze. His partner's four-diamond cue bid as shown in the box asked for a suit, thus the four-heart response. West opened the diamond ace and continued the suit, and Kehela took the diamond king, heart ace, club ace and heart king. Next he led a spade to the ace, put West in with a third trump and won the diamond return with the queen, leaving this situation:

North	East	South	West
♠ 9 5 2	♠ J 10 7	♠ K Q	♠ 8
♥ none	♥ none	♥ 6	♥ none
♦ none	♦ none	♦ none	♦ J 10 5
♣ K 10	♣ Q J	♣ 9 7	♣ 8

South led the heart six, discarding dummy's club ten, and East was squeezed. If East unguarded the club queen, declarer would drop it under North's king and cross back with a spade to claim the club nine. If East threw a spade, declarer would lay down the spade king and cross over to dummy with a club to claim the spade nine. Either way, Kehela made five-odd, losing a diamond and a trump trick. ♠

SOUTH DEALER Neither Side Vulnerable

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

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

South	West	North	East
1 NT	3 ♦	4 ♦	Pass
4 ♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening lead: A♦