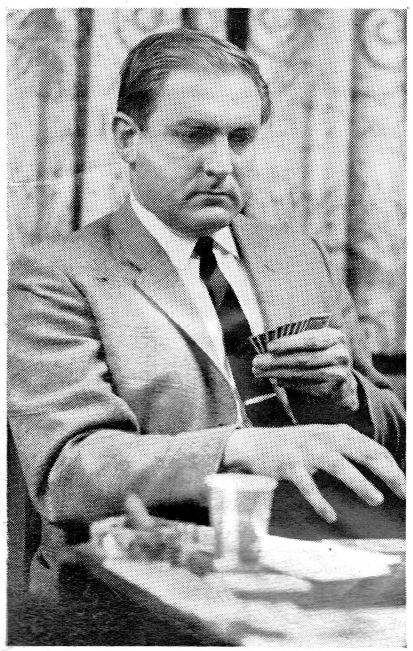
BRIDGE / *Charles Goren*

'You opened with that kind of rubbish?'

This and some other provoking questions were heard last week at the International Team Trials

The process of selecting the six-man team that will represent North America in the World Bridge Championships is called the Trials, and a trial of ability, resolution and temperament is what it proved to be last week in Pittsburgh.

It took 10 days of play, involving 462 hands, before the Trials were completed and the North American team chosen, the coveted places going to the pairs who had finished first, second, and third out of the 16 that had qualified for the finals. By playing brilliantly toward the end, when the combination of pressure and fatigue was taking its toll, the Canadians, Eric Murray and Sammy Kehela, finished first, followed by Edgar Kaplan and Norman Kay, and Alvin Roth and William Root, who now will make up the rest of the North American team.



CANADA'S MURRAY TOOK HIS CHANCES

In the best of times, bridge masters are not known for their private serenity of soul nor their public exhibitions of tact, a fact noted by *The Bridge World* magazine prior to the Trials when it published a form chart on the 16 teams. "Temper Temper," the chart said beside the names of Ira Rubin and Curtis Smith. Rubin is a computer programmer whose bidding system is more than a computer could digest. When things began going badly Smith showed what he thought of his partner's system by reading a detective story during the bidding and play. Of Tobias Stone and Ivan Erdos the warning was: "The shorter the fuse the longer the odds." The fuse all but blew when Stone, a man known to make more than an occasional wager on football games, played Saturday afternoon with a transistor radio at his elbow. Neither of these teams survived the cutting of the field to 10 pairs for the final rounds, though Stone and Erdos missed by barely a field goal, finishing 11th.

Through much of the final round first place was held by Roth and Root, but in the very last session they found themselves playing against Murray and Kehela, and they took such a beating that it appeared for a moment they might be knocked out of the top three completely. It was, therefore, ironic, as well as indicative of the large variations in bidding systems and play at championship events, that earlier Murray had approached Roth—an apostle of ultraconservative opening bids—to discuss a hand which had given him trouble.

Murray explained his holding was:

♠ A Q 9 3 ♥ 10 8 7 3 ♦ A J 8 6 ♣ 4

"What do you open?" he asked Roth. "You can't open," said Roth. "Well," said Murray, "I opened a heart." Roth winced. "Then Sammy said two diamonds," continued Murray. "Don't tell me you bid two spades on that rubbish," said Roth. "No, I didn't think my hand was that good," said Murray. "I said three diamonds. Sammy tried four clubs and I almost cue bid my spade ace, but instead I said four diamonds, and we played it at five diamonds." Roth looked even more unsettled.

Here are all four hands:

NORTH
(*Murray*)
♠ A Q 9 3
♥ 10 8 7 3
♦ A J 8 6
♣ 4

WEST
♠ K J 8 5
♥ J 9 5 4
♦ 7
♣ Q J 5 2

EAST
♠ 10 7 2
♥ A 6 2
♦ Q 4 2
♣ K 9 8 3

SOUTH
(*Kehela*)
♠ 6 4
♥ K Q
♦ K 10 9 5 3
♣ A 10 7 6

Opening lead; 5 of spades

Kehela played the hand well. He won the spade finesse, entered his hand with the ace of clubs and ruffed a club on the table. If he could find the queen of diamonds he had a good play for 12 tricks, but he saw a surefire line to guarantee 11. He led a heart from dummy, and, when East played low, South's king won. He ruffed another club on the table and again came back with a heart.

This time East took his ace. He did not want to lead a diamond away from his queen, so he led a spade to dummy's ace. Kehela ruffed a spade, the last club was trumped in dummy, and the last spade was played. There was no point in East ruffing, so he discarded a heart as Kehela ruffed low. A diamond was led to the ace, and when a heart was led from the board East was caught in a trump coup—no matter which card he played, Kehela would make the last two tricks.

Murray had hardly finished explaining it when Roth said, "I know that hand. We played it, and what I don't understand is how anybody can play bridge with somebody who bid that hand the way you did."

"Oh," said Murray. "Well, what did you play the hand in?" "Two diamonds, making seven," said Roth, as he stalked away.

The essential point of this story is that two such widely divergent bidding philosophies are going to be represented on the same team with the hope that each can achieve winning results against the defending champion Italians and the three other international squads in the world event next May in Miami Beach.

The qualifying system that led up to the Pittsburgh Trials is the most demanding that we have ever tried—even though it will be changed again next year. The hope is that it has given us, at last, a squad that can beat the seemingly invincible Italian Blue Team, which has won the world championship eight years in a row. What it has definitely produced is an experienced team. Four of the members—Murray, Kehela, Roth, Kay—have played against the Italians in world competition before. Kaplan has studied the complex Italian bidding systems more than any other player outside of Europe, and Kehela ranks right behind him. And in soft-talking, tough-playing Bill Root, Alvin Roth might have found the partner he needs to make his own particular brilliance pay off against the Italians. The trials of Pittsburgh may have been many, but the team that results is a good one. **END**