

Bridge

By PETER CRONIN

THE most prestigious pairs tournament in North America is the blue ribbon pairs, held annually at the fall national tournament of the American Contract Bridge League.

It is extremely difficult to even get to play in this strictly invitational event let alone to win it.

Sammy Kehela and Willy Lebovic recently became the first Canadians (both are Torontonians) ever to win this most precious pairs pearl of bridge.

They were narrowly victorious in New Orleans over a star studded field which included such name players as Lew Mathe, Phil Feldesman, Edgar Kaplan, Sam Stayman and Norman Kay.

Not only was their victory worth 125 master points to each but more importantly, carried with it right to compete for a position on the North American team for the 1969 World Bridge tournament. For Sammy, the right was redundant, but for Willy, it was certainly an added plus.

Sammy and Willy were the only pair to bid the grand slam on the following deal and it paid off handsomely when Sammy brought the contract home

on a squeeze, despite a 4-0 trump split.

Vulnerable: N-S; Dealer: W

N (Lebovic)

♠ A 7 6 4

♥ K 9 2

♦ A 8 7

♣ K J 3

West

♠ Void

♥ 6 3

♦ K Q 5 4 3 2

♣ Q 10 9 8 6

East

♠ 10 8 5 3

♥ J 10 8 7 5 4

♦ J 10

♣ 7

S (Kehela)

♠ K Q J 9 2

♥ A Q

♦ 9 6

♣ A 5 4 2

W

3 ♦

5 ♣

N

Dbl

5 ♦

E

4 ♦

Pass

S

4 NT

7 ♠

Opening lead: ♦ K

With a normal spade split, the play will simply hinge on the position of the

club queen; with trumps 4-0, no club ruff is possible and the thirteenth trick must be found by squeezing West in the minors.

Sammy won the diamond opening and cashed two high trumps from his hand

followed by two hearts. He then crossed to dummy with a trump, sluffed a diamond on a heart and ruffed a diamond. The play of the last trump now finished West. He chose to pitch a club, so Sammy finessed the jack and ran the club suit.

A last hand that is a handful

Nobody knew the exact score, but the players knew it was close when, as luck would have it, the two leading partnerships in the recent Blue Ribbon Pair Championship in New Orleans met face to face in the final round. Sammy Kehela and Baron Wolf Lebovic of Toronto had come into the final session with a comfortable margin and were playing to defend their lead. But Lew Mathe of Los Angeles and Phil Feldesman of New York were moving up very fast and felt sure two more top scores would win the title for them.

Lebovic normally would not have been there as Kehela's partner. He is popular, friendly and does not pretend to play better than Kehela—"which," as Sammy puts it, "certain other partners do." This was a reference to Kehela's usual partner, Eric Murray, who arrived in New Orleans too late for the Blue Ribbon Pairs and was at the moment downstairs winning a side game entitled the Lafitte Pairs. "Obviously," added Sammy, "a setup for a pirate."

Play at the table began, and on the first board Mathe-Feldesman took a

jolting 12 out of 13 points. So the title was now almost certainly at stake on the very last hand (left), and Kehela faced a serious problem. He realized that if he made the "right" bid for the strength of his hand—a cue bid in diamonds—Lebovic might become declarer and the opening lead would come through South's holding. So he made a deliberate underbid of two hearts and hoped that Lebovic would carry on. But two hearts is not forcing, and Lebovic, with a minimum hand for his double, let the contract stand.

As Kehela had figured, the defense was helpless with West on lead. Against the spade opening, South had time to knock out the ace of clubs and the ace of hearts and to discard all his diamond losers on dummy's good clubs to make five. But North-South's failure to get to game looked like the second big swing Mathe and Feldesman needed to win, and, if a majority of North-South pairs had reached game with South as declarer, the Canadians indeed would have ended in second place instead of winning by two points. But Kehela and Lebovic salvaged six of the 13 points on the board because, with North playing a four-heart contract, which happened at several of the tables, a diamond lead from East was fatal to declarer. Whether North won the first diamond or put on the queen and won the diamond continuation, he could not avoid a third-round diamond ruff. The defenders could get the diamond king, a diamond ruff, the ace of hearts and the ace of clubs to hold declarer to nine tricks. So the Blue Ribbon title went to Kehela and Lebovic.

With the title went qualification to play in the Team Trials that will select the North American team for 1969. There were immediate rumors that Kehela had promised to play in the Trials with Lebovic if they won. Kehela tried to laugh this off, but Murray, asked if it were true, answered, "Of course." Who would be Murray's choice for a partner? "Anyone but Kehela," he replied. Pressed to state whether this indicated a change in their friendly relationship, Murray denied that he and Kehela ever had been friends.

All of which was flippant. The next day Murray and Kehela were partners in another event, while poor Wolf Lebovic, the new Blue Ribbon champion, needed somebody to play with. **END**

East-West
vulnerable
South dealer

		NORTH			
		♠	A K		
		♥	K J 4 2		
		♦	9 8 2		
		♣	Q J 10 2		
WEST				EAST	
♠	Q J 5	♠	9 8 7 6 3		
♥	A 10	♥	8 3		
♦	K 7 6 4	♦	J 5		
♣	A 8 7 5	♣	9 6 4 3		
		SOUTH			
		♠	10 4 2		
		♥	Q 9 7 6 5		
		♦	A Q 10 3		
		♣	K		

SOUTH (Kehela)	WEST (Mathe)	NORTH (Lebovic)	EAST (Feldesman)
PASS	1♦	DBL.	PASS
2♥	PASS	PASS	PASS

Opening lead: queen of spades