

Canadian renaissance began at Toronto '64

Toronto 1964 was the site of the 36th annual Summer North American Bridge Championships — and the first major ACBL tournament staged outside of the United States.

"The bridge-population explosion set records in almost every championship event and came within a thousand tables of the record we thought would be unapproachable," *Bridge Bulletin* editor Dick Frey reported.

ACBL President Leo Seewald wrote in the *Daily Bulletin*: "It is difficult to find new words to describe the achievement of our hosts at this 36th Summer Nationals, except to say that 'Canadian Hospitality' must now take its place as one of the superlatives to describe not merely the finest of entertainment but the warmth of those who dispense it. I am sure I speak for all who have come to Toronto, as well as for my wife and myself, when I say we have had a marvelous time."

"A marvelous time" was also had by the all-Canadian team of Eric Murray, Sami Kehela, Bruce Elliott and Percy "Shorty" Sheardown who won the Spingold — the first (but not last) time an ACBL national team title was taken outside the U.S.

The Spingold, in those days a double-elimination contest, drew 108 squads. The Murray team breezed through their rounds as did the squad captained by Johnny Crawford (George Rapee, Bobby Jordan, Arthur Robinson, Norman Kay and Edgar Kaplan). The two teams, both undefeated, met in the eighth round and Murray crunched out a 7-point win.

Their reward: a ninth-round bye, followed by entry to the semifinals as the only undefeated team. Defeat for Murray in the semifinal would mean a three-team round-robin final with the two semifinal winners. Victory in the semifinal would mean a final where Murray could win in one session but could not be ousted in less than two. Murray won its semifinal match, as did the team captained by Bruce Gowdy (Fred Hoffer, Marvin Altman and Ray Jotcham), to set up an all-Canadian final.

"The fratricidal final fracas was a relatively gentle affair which Murray never seemed likely to lose," reported Frey. "He strolled quietly home by 36."

Murray & Co. successfully defended their Spingold title the following year in Chicago. With the win, Murray became the first team ever to repeat with the same four players.

The format for the 1965 competition had changed — no more double elimination. Instead, the 128-team field was split into 16-team sections, each playing a round-robin of six-board matches at the rate of 30 deals per evening. After three sessions, the top four teams from each section qualified for two-session, sudden-death knockout matches.

Murray, never in trouble in the early rounds, won its quarterfinal match with ease but struggled a bit against Howard Schenken (Peter Leventritt, Lew Mathe, Alfred Sheinwold, Bob Hamman and Albert Weiss). Murray carved out a narrow 5-IMP advantage after the first quarter but by halftime Schenken had shaved this to a thin 1 IMP. In the third quarter, however, disaster struck the Schenken forces as the Murray team, playing steadily and well, jumped ahead by 57. The final quarter was wild but Murray held all but 7 of his margin and won by 50.

In the final, Murray romped off to a 37-12 lead over Edgar Kaplan (B. Jay Becker, Dorothy Truscott and Norman Kay) in the first quarter and added another 37 IMPs before the half ended. Both teams fought on nearly level terms in the third set and Kaplan could retrieve only 3 IMPs.

"When the last card was played shortly before 3 a.m., no one in either room had any doubt about the

outcome," reported the *Bridge Bulletin*. "Murray had successfully defended the Spingold, winning by 91 IMPs."

Here are some key deals:

Dlr: East ♠ 10 8 7 6 5

Vul: Both ♥ 8

♦ --

♣ A K J 10 7 6 3

♠ Q J 9 4

♠ 3 2

♥ 9 4

♥ Q J 6

♦ A 10 8 6 2

♦ K Q J 9 5 4

♣ 9 8

♣ 5 4

♠ A K

♥ A K 10 7 5 3 2

♦ 7 3

♣ Q 2

West	North	East	South
	<i>Sheardown</i>		<i>Elliott</i>
		2♦	3♥
Pass	4♣	Pass	4♥
Pass	4♠	Pass	6♣
Pass	7♣	All Pass	

Sheardown and Elliott sailed into the grand slam while their opponents at the other table failed to reach six. One heart ruff was all that was needed to make 13 tricks a laydown.

Dlr: North ♠ A 4

Vul: E-W ♥ Q 5 3

♦ A 10 6 5

♣ K Q 6 4

♠ J 10 9

♠ Q 8 3 2

♥ J 7 4 2

♥ K 10 6

♦ J 8 3

♦ K Q 9 7 4

♣ 10 9 3

♣ 2

♠ K 7 6 5

♥ A 9 8

♦ 2

♣ A J 8 7 5

West	North	East	South
	<i>Kehela</i>		<i>Murray</i>
	1♦	Pass	2♣
Pass	2NT	Pass	3♠
Pass	5♣	Pass	6♣
All Pass			

Murray and Kehela bid their share of slams too. In the semifinal played against the Schenken team, West found the only lead that would present Murray with his optimistic slam contract: the ♥2. Murray won East's ♥10 with his ace and immediately ran the ♥8. When this lost to the king and a third heart went to dummy's queen, Murray was home. He cashed one high club in dummy, followed by two high spades and a spade ruff.

Now he cashed the ♦A and ruffed a diamond, ruffed a spade and cashed another high trump. He ruffed a diamond, drew the last trump and claimed his slam.

So who were these guys, this Canadian foursome who captured a top team trophy two years running?

Sheardown (1911-1993), a bridge club owner and manager, became Canada's first Life Master in 1948. Teacher and mentor of many of Canada's leading players, he was widely known as Canada's greatest player of the Thirties, Forties and Fifties.

He began his bridge career while a student at the University of Toronto in 1933 and was a consistent winner before the inauguration of tournaments and masterpoint ratings. He served overseas with the Canadian Army during World War II from 1939 to 1945.

Sheardown represented Canada in the World Team Olympiads of 1960 and 1968 and won the Canadian National Open Teams more than a dozen times. In addition to the two Spingold wins, he won the Chicago Board-a-Match Teams (now the Reisinger) in 1936 and 1951. He won the Sally Fishbein Trophy for the best performance by an ACBL member at the Toronto NABC in 1964. In addition to the Spingold, Sheardown and Elliott finished second in the Life Master Pairs.

Elliott was also Sheardown's partner in the two World Team Olympiads. Now retired, Elliott lives in Weston ON and still draws a gallery at his frequent rubber bridge games.

Kehela and Murray were inducted into the Bridge Hall of Fame just before the start of this NABC. Kehela, born in Baghdad, is a semi-retired bridge journalist and teacher who enjoys wine and films. He is the former editor of the Ontario *Kibitzer*, bridge columnist for *Toronto*

Life, contributor to ACBL *Bridge Bulletin* and contributing editor to the *Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*.

His record in national and international competition is well known. Kehela and Murray are the only pair in the world to represent their country in the World Team Olympiad since its inception in 1960 thru 1988 (missing only 1984). Their partnership lasted for more than 30 years.

Murray, barrister and solicitor, also has an impressive record in national and international competition. In addition to winning the Spingold in 1964, Murray was also the organizing chairman for the Summer NABC. He was a District 2 director on the ACBL Board of Directors.

The North American team for the 1966 World Bridge Championship was Ira Rubin-Phil Feldsman, Bob Hamman-Lew Mathe and Eric Murray-Sammy Kehela (that's the way he spelled Sami back in those days). *The Bridge Bulletin* introduced the team in a three-part series.

Murray wrote "The Sammy Kehela Story" while Kehela penned "The Eric Murray Story." *Bulletin* editor Richard Frey added this note: "Just to reassure literal-minded readers, the Murray-Kehela style of humor and cigars is used with equal devastation on their opponents."

Here are a few excerpts:

"Sammy Kehela began his battle with the world in Bagdad in 1935," wrote Murray. "India was blessed from 1941 until 1951 when California was selected, that state yielding to Jamaica and England in 1955 and subsequently Canada in 1957.

"It is noteworthy that Kehela has never stayed in one country for more than 10 years and Canada may well have additional cause for celebrating its centennial in 1967.

"A dearth of talent permitted Kehela to play for Canada in the 1960 Team Olympiad in Turin, Italy — we lost.

"An inability to understand Kehela's bidding persuaded ACBL authorities that he was an authority on peculiar and complicated systems and he was accordingly appointed coach of the 1963 North American Team for the Bermuda Bowl in Italy — they lost.

"Kehela's indifferent success as coach and player turned him to the pen, but his contributions to the *Bulletin* have not noticeably improved the standard of that publication."

Kehela countered with:

Murray "discovered bridge in his second year as a freshman when he happened upon four people seated at a table holding cards and screaming at each other at the top of their lungs. Eric Murray was — and is — the possessor of a stout pair of lungs and he was soon the outstanding player in his circle.

"As such he came to the attention of one Harry Bork, a patient man and the leading player in Hamilton, who attempted, without any success whatsoever, to teach Eric some of the finer points of the game. (He did, however, cultivate in him a taste for cheap cigars).

"Murray's early stay in Toronto marked a period of unprecedented prosperity for that city's rubber-bridge players. Penniless and desperate, our hero threw himself at the feet of Douglas Drury. Drury consented to make a disciple of the callow youth and I can pay him no greater tribute than to point out that he and Murray won the National Men's Pair Championship in 1954 and 1955.

"When the burden of carrying Murray alone eventually proved too great, Drury craftily conscripted Percy Sheardown and Bruce Elliott to help. As a team they developed a formidable reputation and, beginning to believe that he was not such a dreadful player after all, Murray demanded that he be permitted to bid notrump once in a while. This was too much for Drury, who fled to San Francisco."

The Murray-Kehela partnership was formed in 1959 and Kehela added, "Though we have won our share of national titles (including the Spingold Cup in 1964 and 1965), my proudest moment came when I let Eric out on his own for the first time in 1961 and he justified my confidence by winning the Vanderbilt Cup in partnership with Charles Coon and a pick-up pair from Philadelphia (Bobby Jordan-Artie Robinson), and then going on to represent North America in the 1962 Bermuda Bowl."

The Patron Member reception is scheduled for Saturday, July 21, after the evening session in the suite of ACBL President Jim Kirkham (Room 16-161 at the Royal York).