



TARAS KOVALIV/THE GLOBE AND MAIL

Sami Kehela, left, and Eric Murray, both of Toronto, never socialized much but were still a dynamic partnership — at the bridge table. From completely different backgrounds, they frequently represented Canada at the bridge Olympics and at annual world championships.

# Coming up trumps

## Once Canada's best, the team of Kehela and Murray will join the bridge Hall of Fame

BY TIM COOK

Despite a partnership that has lasted more than four decades, Sami Kehela and Eric Murray agree they are not close personal friends.

This month, Mr. Kehela, 66, and Mr. Murray, 72, will become the first Canadians inducted into the American Contract Bridge League's Hall of Fame, a feat they accomplished with a relationship that has been — and remains — almost strictly professional.

The honour will be bestowed on Thursday in Toronto.

"We're both sensitive people," Mr. Kehela said of himself and his partner. "We were best when we spent as little time as possible together."

Mr. Murray agreed. They respected each other for their skills

but socializing would not have improved their game.

The two have quite different backgrounds.

Mr. Kehela, who was born in Baghdad, was 16 when he first saw the game being played on a ship taking him to California from India.

Bridge came naturally to him and he played to supplement his income while studying English and economics in California.

"You could make an extra dollar or two and, when sandwiches were 15 cents and Coke was a nickel, that was pretty good," he recalled.

He soon moved to Jamaica for a short time, then on to England where he honed his bridge skills. By the time he moved to Canada in 1957, he was a high-level player.

But making a living was tough. "It wasn't very elegant," Mr. Ke-

hela said. He worked as a bridge journalist and he taught the game, as well as playing in tournaments.

Mr. Murray's roots are more traditional.

Born in Hamilton, Ont., he watched his parents play the game. As a young man, he organized games in Hamilton before moving to Toronto.

The two teamed up in 1959 when Mr. Murray's previous partner moved to San Francisco.

"Here was this pitiful creature Kehela and I felt sorry for him because no one would play with him," Mr. Murray said with a hint of sarcasm. "But Sam turned out to be a pretty good player."

And it's hard to argue with success.

They frequently represented Canada at the World Team Olympiad — the bridge Olympics, held every four years — from 1960 to 1988. They won many tournaments, and played in several Bermuda Bowls, the annual world

championship.

But getting to the Hall of Fame was tough. They have been nominated before, but because Americans dominate the organization, it's difficult for Canadians to get in. And because they stopped playing competitively in 1988, their names had fallen out of the spotlight.

This year, however, they are being given the von Zedtwitz Award — a kind of life-time achievement award. Winners are chosen by a panel, not a vote.

This is the first year the award has been given to two players.

"It's a recognition that's long overdue," said Eric Kokish, a Canadian bridge professional.

Though he is not competing, Mr. Murray still plays and hopes to compete again when he retires.

But not Mr. Kehela.

"The game has changed a lot and I just don't enjoy playing it," he said. "I've been playing every day of my life for nearly 50 years. It gets boring after a while."



*Two Canadians enter the Hall of Fame. David Ezekiel of Bermuda, center, master of ceremonies, congratulates Sami Kehela, left, and Eric Murray. See related story on page 3.*

## SAMI KEHELA

**Presenter:** Eric Kokish, one of the foremost bridge writers in the world and a fine bridge player in his own right. He has been the editor of the World Bridge News for many years, and he has been a major contributor to world championship bridge books for the past two decades.

**Hall of Famer:** "It became apparent very early in my life that I was not ready for honest toil," Kehela revealed. He learned bridge aboard a cargo ship – "first I learned that you needed 2 ½, and then later I discovered you needed 13." He learned a lot by watching Adam Meredith, one of the great British players.

He also was proud of learning how to handle Eric Murray's bidding. "I listened to the opponents' bidding and I believed them, not my partner. It worked during the 30 years of our partnership."

Kehela has been a frequent champion and also has come close in Bermuda Bowl competition, although no world championship, thanks to the incredible reign of the Italian Blue Team.

## ERIC MURRAY

**Presenter:** John Carruthers, a fine Canadian player who told how Murray asked him to be his presenter. "He called me up and said, 'John, all my friends are dead. Would you do this for me?'"

Carruthers called Murray an expert in bridge, oratory and litigation. "You're going to find out about oratory in just a moment."

**Hall of Famer:** Murray proved he was better at oratory than bridge, if that's possible. He offered side-splitting comments on Kehela's lack of ability at the bridge table, but he concentrated primarily on Larry Cohen, who called him to tell him about being named to the Hall of Fame. "He wrote a book about some kind of law," said Murray. "Somewhere it says to be aggressive at the three level whenever you have 18 trumps. Must have been a typographical error. Larry lives in Florida – maybe he had something to do with that election down there."

Murray, like Kehela, has an outstanding record in bridge, with many North American championships and high finishes in several world championships. But that hardly measures up to his abilities as a stand-up comedian.

Like Kehela, he is a great card player with many championships to his credit. ♣