



Canada's 52 All-Time Greatest Bridge Players

by Andy Stark

This past July Canada turned the big One-Five-Oh. To help commemorate the occasion I thought the Kib should get in on the action by celebrating Canada's greatest bridge players. Many of these players are "ours" as they reside in Ontario. Now for the number: 50 or 100? Years ago Brent Manley, editor of the ACBL Bulletin, published a list of the 52 Most Influential People in Bridge. Why 52? You know why. 52 is the perfect number; it means you're playing with a full deck.

In the past few years, sports leagues like the NBA and NHL have showcased their own top players of all-time, 50 for the NBA, 100 for the NHL. More recently, CBC Radio compiled a list of the 100 greatest Canadian bands. Arcade Fire was their No. 1 pick and coming in second was my No. 1 pick and maybe yours—The Band. Seriously? The CBC judges must have been up on crippled creek the night they drove the ol' Band down to number two. Ah, but there it is—the Band represents the old guard and Arcade Fire represents the new

kids on the block; any kind of all-time list of anything has to reconcile nominees from multiple generations. Which segues nicely to this question: will the Top 52 list be universally agreed upon? The answer is: not likely—well, about as likely as you never going down in a contract again for the rest of your life. Jeff Rubens, editor of the Bridge World, was asked for his thoughts on who should be on this list and he politely declined to participate. However he did add that the project "seems potentially controversial."

So we must compile and view our list knowing that it is a mosaic of subjectivity (40 Canadian players were asked to provide their picks), mixed with the objectivity of looking up player records. WBF, NABC and CNTC victories all weigh heavily in determining a player's excellence. Of note, not all CBF Hall of Famers make the top 52; plus many fine young players such as Shan Huang do not make the list because they have yet to build up their resume with NABC wins and international medals.

Just how difficult is it to make the top 52? Check out the following group of players who round out the top 100 (in alphabetical order):

Les Amoils, Aidan Ballantyne, Gloria Bart (Silverman), Jackie Begin, Corti Boland, Harry Bork, Gerry Charney, Don Cowan, Bill Crissey, Susan Culham, Mike Cummings, Karen Cumpstone, Cam Doner, Doug Drury, Sheila Forbes, Waldemar Frukacz, John Gowdy, John Guoba, Subhash Gupta, Mike Hargreaves, Barry Harper, Arno Hobart, Ted Horning, Shan Huang, Marty Kirr, Piotr Klimowicz, Beverly Kraft, Irving Litvack, Steve Mackay, Zygmunt Marcinski, Buddy Marsh, Mike Martino, Jim McAvoy, Gord McOrmond, Mickey Miller, Danny Miles, Pamela Nisbet, Duncan Phillips, Frederic Pollack, David Sabourin, Duncan Smith, Jeff Smith, Sylvia Summers (Caley), Paul Thurston, David Turner, Frank Vine, Hazel Wolpert, Linda Wynston

52 Michael Schoenborn



If you're playing in the CSTCs (Canadian Senior Team Championships) and you look over and see a guy nicknamed

"The Shoe" as your screenmate, prepare to finish in second place. The

Shoe has won the CSTCs a total of five times, most recently with partner Fred Lerner and teammates John Gowdy and David Turner. They will represent Canada in Lyon in August. The Shoe has won one Canadian National Team Championship (1986) and is known to be a squeeze expert, often identifying any type of squeeze at the table, and then writing an article or even a book about it. That book's title is 'Bridge on a Shoestring,' published by Masterpoint Press.

51 John Rayner



John has won one CNTC, one CSTC, and one Canadian Open Pairs Championship, (COPC) and has represented

Canada on numerous occasions, most often with his long-time partner Mike Roche. One of John's top five finishes in an NABC was in the Blue Ribbon Pairs where he and Mike came fourth overall, just missing victory by one poor result on a board. John is a popular bridge teacher in the GTA and widely considered Canada's third best bridge teacher behind Audrey Grant and Barbara Seagram. Pretty good company! JRay founded the Mississauga-Oakville Bridge Centre, now known as MOBridge, which is a strong community-oriented club—a must visit if you are ever in Mississauga or Oakville.

50 Sandra Fraser



Sandra, of Victoria BC, has won 3 CWTCs and 1 CNTC (2006). Sandra is one of only four women to have won the

Canada's Open Team Championships. Sandra has represented Canada many times at WBF events, from Biarritz in 1982 to Chennai in 2015. At NABCs, Sandra has one first-place finish, the Mixed Board-a-Match teams in 1981 and five runner-up finishes, most recently in the Senior Mixed Pairs.

49 Kismet Fung

You can call it destiny or karma or kismet, but Kismet Fung pulled off the super-rare double silver at the World Championships in Philadelphia in 2010. She came second with Brian Glubok in the Mixed Pairs, and then she came second overall with her regular partner Susan Culham in the Women's Pairs. The only other player on this list with two WBF silvers in pair events is Peter Nagy. Incredible stuff. Kismet is also no slouch on the home front as she has amassed a total of five Canadian Women's Team Championship (CWTC) victories.

48 Bryan Maksymetz

Isn't it nice when partner is always "max" for his bidding? Well, that's what you get when you play with Bryan "Maks" Maksymetz.¹ Bryan is a perennial favourite at the CNTCs

no matter what team he is on. His first win was in 1984 with a band of upstarts and his most recent victory was 30 years later in 2014 with yet another dark horse squad. Five times Bryan has come second in an NABC including twice in the Spingold.

47 Jurek Czyzowicz

Jurek is one of our country's most thoughtful players. Not quite a human rain delay but Jurek is known for his deep studies and for most often coming up with the right play. He has won 3 CNTCs, 3 CSTCs, 3 COPCs, and 1 WBF Bronze (Sanya Senior Teams, 2014) mostly playing with another top Canadian, Dan Jacob. If this list combined the top 52 players with the top 52 nice guys, Jurek's name would be at the top.²

46 David Lindop

Some know David as Mr. David Lindop while others know him as Mr. Audrey Grant; we can all agree David is a very good bridge player. He has three CNTC wins under his belt, the first coming in 1991 with a young up-and-comer on the team, Geoff Hampson. In 2014 he partnered with Doug Baxter to win with Rayner-Roche and Hargreaves-McAvoy. In addition, David has won one NABC event, the Wernher Open Pairs with Robert Lebi and he has a runner-up finish in the Truscott Senior Swiss. While David is still an active player today he keeps himself busy designing the daily column on Audrey's website, betterbridge.com

¹ Maybe I should check with his partners on this claim.

² As for who's name would be on the bottom...hmm.

45 Doug Fraser

Aka “Foggy,” Doug originally hailed from Montreal but now resides on the left coast. Doug has won three CNTCs and two NABCs, including the Mixed Board-a-Match Teams with his wife Sandra. Doug also has three runner-up finishes in NABC events. On the world scene, Doug has represented Canada ten times with his best finish fourth overall in the 1997 Transnational Open Teams in Tunisia.

44 Keith Balcombe



If you ever want a lesson on how a defender should smoothly play his cards in tempo try to kibitz KB. I'll never forget

one of his deceptive plays on opening lead. He led the spade 2 from QJ1082 into dummy's known spade length. Declarer went up with the ace and down with the contract. Keith has won one CNTC, (and come second too many times to tell—all right, six). Keith's all-time highlight was winning the 2002 IOC Grand Prix in Salt Lake City. He and his team (Joey Silver-Fred Gitelman, Nick Gartaganis-Peter Jones, and partner Gord Campbell) surprised Team Italy in the semis, and Team Poland in the finals—a fantastic achievement for Canada.

43 Mary Paul



There is a trophy that is awarded bi-annually to the women's team representing Canada at the Venice Cup.

Mary's name appears five times on this trophy—four times because she won that year's CWTC, and once because the trophy is named after her! Mary won a total of 7 CWTCs and in 1977 she became the first woman to win a Canadian Open Championship. She won her second CNTC in 1993.

42 Joan Eaton



Joanie Mitchell is to Canadian folk music as Joanie Eaton is to Canadian bridge.³ Joan the bridge player has won

the CWTCs a total of seven times with two different partners, Barbara Clinton and, in more recent years, Karen Cumpstone. In addition, Joan has four NABC victories—including two in the Mixed Board-a-Matches with life/bridge partner Nader Hanna, and one Mixed Pairs victory with Les Amoils. Joan came second in the 2005 Women's KO Teams and has represented Canada internationally eight times.

³ I've looked at it from *both sides* now.

41 Gordon Campbell

Gordon was part of a historic win for Canada in 2002. It what seems like ages ago the International Olympic Committee looked long and hard at adding bridge to the Summer Games schedule. To test out the possibility, the IOC co-hosted world-class events with the WBF. In Salt Lake City, Team Canada upset two powerhouses in the semis and finals to win the gold medal. GC was on that team partnering Keith Balcombe. Gordon has won three CNTCs, finished runner-up three times, and won one NABC—the Baldwin NAP Pairs with Piotr Klimowicz in 2006. Gord also won a gold medal in the 2002 Commonwealth Nations Bridge Championships.

40 David Grainger



"The Grange" has won one CNTC (2009) and quite a few NABCs with his most recent victory coming in the

GNTs during the most recent NABC in Toronto. The win was sweet revenge for losing in the finals last year with the same team from California. That makes for his sixth NABC win to go with two NABC runner-up finishes. Coming up with the likes of Dan Korbel and Gavin Wolpert, David was a star for many years on Canadian Junior Teams. He was part of the team that won bronze at the 2005 World

Youth Teams in Australia. David won the Richmond Trophy in 2011.

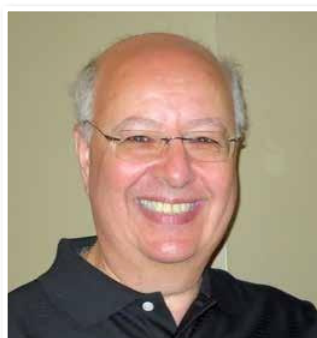
39 Michael Roche



Aka "The Piglet." Many of North America's top bridge players have a nickname and the Piglet is no exception. Mike's wit is

as sharp as his cardplay. Many years ago he sat down with partner John Rayner to play against the great Bob Hamman in a major KO event at an NABC. Mike noticed Bob's shirt buttons were threatening to pop open due to Bob's belly being housed by too small a shirt. Mike said, "I see you go to the same tailor we do." Many teams have augmented themselves before heading off to international play by adding Mike. The Piglet has won three CNTCs, one CSTC, and two NABCs and represented Canada ten times in international play. Mike was a long-time resident of Toronto but now resides in Victoria, BC.

38 Nader Hanna



Nader has a unique resume of NABC and Canadian Bridge Federation (CBF) victories in that he has won events

with four different types of scoring:



the Wernher Open Pairs (2005), the Keohane North American Swiss (2011), the Freeman Mixed Board-a-Match (2012 and 2014), and two CNTCs (1996 and 1999). Nader can often be seen at WBF championships representing Canada as a player or coach or NPC. Nader was president of the CBF from 2009-2016—setting the record for longest tenure. Fun fact: Nader is a better bridge player than he is an Oh Hell player.

37 Sharyn Reus



Sharyn won a total of ten CWTCs and three WBF bronze medals. One of those bronzes came at the World

Women's Team Olympiad in Rhodes in 1996. Sharyn was part of an all-star squad that also included Dianna Gordon, Francine Cimon, Rhoda Habert, Beverly Kraft, and Barbara Saltsman. The other bronzes came at the 1988 Women's Team Olympiad in Venice and the 1989 Venice Cup in Perth.

36 Katie Thorpe



Have you ever heard of a Thorpe Dummy? Say your RHO opens the bidding with 4 Spades. You overcall

5 Hearts, get doubled, and play it

there. You await with bated breath the sight of the dummy. Well, if Katie is your partner you are more than likely to receive three trumps and two aces, or the like. Now there are 850 reasons why Katie has made this list, but mainly it's because she is one steady solid player and partner. Katie has won ten CWTCs, one COPC, in 1990 with life/bridge partner John Carruthers, one CSTC—the only woman thus far to have won a CSTC (2015), one WBF silver medal for the 2000 Women's Team Olympiad in Masstricht, and two WBF bronze medals (1988, 1989). Katie is a CBF Hall of Famer.

35 Darren Wolpert



There once was a time when Gavin Wolpert was known as Darren's younger brother, but nowadays Darren is more

known as Gavin's older brother. But this has nothing to do with bridge ability and more to do with Darren not playing as much as he used to. Darren is considered a "natural." He makes plays and bids that escape many of us, and he makes it seem effortless. Darren has won six CNTCs, one COPC, one WBF silver for the Transnational Mixed Swiss in Lille in 2012, and one NABC—the 2012 Vanderbilt.



34 Dan Korbel



Known as 'dank' on Bridge Base Online, Dan's bridge ability is the opposite of dank. He also has a talent at explaining what

experts are thinking at every given moment of a bridge hand. Just get onto YouTube, search for 'Dan Korbel' and see for yourself. Dan's magic number appears to be 4—he has won four CNTCs, four NABCs, and has four second-place finishes in NABCs. One of his bridge highlights was garnering a silver medal in Lille (2012) in the Transnational Mixed Teams. Now living in the USA, Dan is a bridge professional attending NABCs and contending in any and every event he enters. Dan is definitely trending upwards on this list.

33 Drew Cannell

Drew has a bridge career that is as eclectic as it is successful. How many of us can say we have won a bridge championship on five continents? Heck most of us are happy to win on one continent. If Antarctica ever hosts a bridge event I'm betting on Drew. Drew has won one zonal gold and one zonal silver in the Central American and Caribbean Bridge Federation (CACBF) championships, two CNTCs and four NABCs including the NAP Baldwin Flight A in 1986 with G. Sekhar. They were the first Canadian pair to win this prestigious ground

roots event. Another first for Drew came in 1985 when he was on the first all-Canadian Bermuda Bowl team. Up to that point Canadians playing in a Bermuda Bowl were part of a North American team.

32 Francine Cimon



Francine has been victorious in the CWTCs a record sixteen times! Francine won the inaugural CWTC in 1980 and

most recently in 2014, a span of 34 years of championship level bridge. At the international level Francine has won one silver medal (Maastricht in 2000) and two bronzes (Rhodes in 1996, Perth in 1989). Back in 1976 she competed in the Women's Team Olympiad and finished fourth overall along with Canadian luminaries, Dianna Gordon and Sharyn Reus. Francine is a CBF Hall of Famer.

31 Kamel Fergani



Kudos to Kamel—after a serious health scare a couple years ago Kamel is back and seemingly playing better

than ever. Just last May his team came second in the CNTC, losing the final by twoimps. In total, Kamel has won six CNTCs and two NABCs

including the 2016 Wernher Open Pairs with regular partner Frederic Pollack. Together they form a world-class partnership. In Wroclaw last year they finished 13th in the World Open Pairs and 5th in the World National Open Teams. Kamel also forged a strong partnership with Nic L'Ecuyer as four of Kamel's CNTC wins came while partnering Nic.

30 Judith Gartaganis



If Judy's name sounds familiar it's because there was an article in the ACBL July Bulletin about her induction,

alongside her life/bridge partner Nicholas Gartaganis, into the CBF Hall of Fame. Judy has won the CNTCs four times, and has been second six times. Judy won a World Bridge Federation (WBF) Silver Medal in the 2012 Transnational Mixed Teams and she won a gold medal in the 2002 Commonwealth Nations Bridge Championships. In 2004 Judy won the inaugural CIPCs with partner Piotr Klimowicz.



29 Bruce Ferguson



Number 20 on the ACBL's Top 500 all-time list of masterpoint holders, Bruce, originally from the Maritimes, is now a bridge

professional living in California. Bruce has won one CNTC (1992), three NABCs including the Baze Senior KO Teams in (2007) and twice he finished runner-up in NABCs including the Reisinger in 1995. Bruce brings to the table his 'down East' folksy charm combined with razor sharp hand analysis.

28 Dan Jacob

Dan, originally from Romania, is a contender in almost every event he enters. He has won three CNTCs, two CSTCs, four COPCs with three different partners, and one CIPC. 2014 was a hot year for Dan as he and his partner Piotr Klimowicz won the COPC and CIPC—that's two titles over three days. As for NABCs, Dan has two firsts and three seconds. Dan's best finish at the WBFs was when he and his partner Jurek Czyzowicz won bronze at the Senior Teams in Sanya (2014).



27 Bruce Gowdy

When you were 19 years of age were you playing bridge? Bruce was. Not only that, he was winning a Spingold! Way back in 1949 he played on the Alvin Landy squad and defeated a team that included Oswald Jacoby and Waldemar von Zedtwitz in the finals. Wow. 15 years later Gowdy played in another Spingold final but lost to four slouches named Murray, Kehela, Sheardown, and Elliott. Bruce has also won one CNTC (1971) and represented Canada in WBF tournaments on four occasions, winning silver in the Senior Pairs in Montreal with Arno Hobart (2002) and bronze in the Open Teams Olympiad in Miami (1972). Bruce is in the CBF Hall of Fame.

26 Vincent Demuy



Mesdames et messieurs, je présente un joueur de bridge merveilleux!

Before leaving Canada behind, along with his

three CNTC victories (2003, 2008, 2012), and WBF Bronze at the 2005 World Youth Team Championships (WYTCs), Vince has gone on to win three NABCs, finish second twice in NABCs, and most tellingly, earn a bronze medal at the 2015 Chennai Bermuda Bowl as part of USA 1, which means he won a US Trials. Vince's talent and ability were recognized early on as ten years ago Vince and

partner Gavin Wolpert were featured in a Canadian documentary film 'In the Cards: The Secret World of Professional Bridge.' You can view it on YouTube. Here is a very recent photo of Vince with his daughter Jade—clearly as proud of her father as we Canucks are.

25 Gavin Wolpert



Darren's younger brother Gavin⁴ is a bridge professional now living in FLA. Before he left the Great White

North, Gavin won one CNTC (2003) and one WBF bronze at the 2005 WYTCs. Since then GW has added six NABC wins and two NABC seconds. Most impressive was winning the US Trials in 2015 and going on to win bronze at the Bermuda Bowl in Chennai. One of his all-time bridge highlights must be when he won the 2005 Blue Ribbon Pairs with Jenny Ryman, his future wife. You've heard of the Group of Seven? Well Gavin is part of the Group of Six, the number of Canadians who have won the Kaplan Blue Ribbon Pairs. The other five? Haig Tchamitch, Mark Molson, Robert Lebi, Wolf Lebovic, and Sami Kehela. Pretty awesome company!



⁴ For you, Darren; could be the last time in print.

24 Dianna Gordon



Dianna is without a doubt one of our most accomplished players—she has a sparkling resume that culminated in

her becoming a CBF Hall of Famer. Dianna has won the CWTCs a total of fifteen times and has represented Canada in 23 world championships, from 1976 in Monte Carlo, where she finished fourth in the Women's Teams, to 2011 in Veldhoven. She won one NABC, the Machlin Women's Swiss Teams in 1985 and finished second in three NABCs. Most tellingly, Dianna has a WBF gold medal: she and her partner George Mittelman won the Mixed Pairs in Biarritz in 1982. To complete the WBF championship medal trifecta, Dianna has one silver and three bronze medals.

23 Ralph Cohen



How good was Ralph? Sami Kehela once said, "Sam Gold and Ralph Cohen played at least as well as did Murray and

Kehela." Ralph played on a team with Murray-Kehela at the 1964 Olympiad where they finished fourth overall. Later, after moving to the USA, where Ralph worked for the ACBL in various

roles, Ralph would go on to win four NABCs and finish second twice. Ralph represented the USA at a few world championships, his best finish being a fourth in the 1994 Senior Teams, and fifth in the 1990 Rosenblum. Ralph, father of two other Cohens you may have heard about—Jordan and Billy—won the Lazard Sportsmanship Award in 2006.

22 Billy Cohen



Billy was born a Canadian and he remains a Canadian, but his family moved to the USA when he was about 12 years old. Billy

stayed in the warmer climes where he has built up a stellar bridge career. He has one CNTC victory (1989) and five NABC wins, including the prestigious Reisinger Board-a-Match Teams (1987). The team, which won by 5.5 boards, was comprised of Ron Smith, Billy, Jaggy Shivdasani, and Zia; afterwards Zia famously remarked how wonderful bridge is for bringing people together since the team "had a black, a Jew, an Indian, and a Paki playing together." Billy also has nine NABC second place finishes, including four in the Spingold.



21 Nic L'Ecuyer



Nic grew up playing all kinds of card games with his parents, uncles, and grandmother; one day he got the chance to

replace an uncle at the bridge table and that was that. Nic is a mainstay at the Canadian Nationals where he is a contender every time. So far he has 6 CNTC wins, perhaps the most exciting being when he partnered Kame Fergani and teamed with D. Wolpert-Czyzowicz and Doug Fraser-Jeff Blond in 2000. Nic also has 4 NABC wins with three different partners, one NABC second, and a 5th place finish at the World Open Teams in Wroclaw in 2016. Before his grandmother died Nic made a pledge to her that he would one day be part of Canada winning a world championship. No pressure, Nic, but I believe you will come through.

20 Sam Gold

Aka Mr. Bridge of Canada, Sam Gold, died in 1982 but was mentor to all of the Montreal greats such as Kokish, Mittelman, and Silver, to name a few. By extension he had an influence on L'Ecuyer and Demuy without those two ever having met Mr. Bridge. Sam was an excellent player, an innovative tournament director (inventing many new duplicate movements) and a bridge administrator as he built up the Montreal Bridge League. Sam

represented Canada in the 1964 World Team Olympiad where he played with Ralph Cohen and teamed with Murray-Kehela. The team eventually lost in the semi-finals. In 1948 Sam achieved his Life Master status, only the second Canadian to do so, thus becoming ACBL Life Master #132. Sam is one of the few people on this list who has a trophy named after him: the Sam Gold Canadian Senior Team Championship Trophy. Players to this day speak with reverence when they talk about Sam Gold.

19 Robert Lebi



Robert is like vintage wine in that he gets better with age. He has won three CNTCs, two CSTCs, and four NABCs,

including the Kaplan Blue Ribbon Pairs with Mark Molson in 1989. In addition, Robert has two NABC seconds, including the Reisinger with a team that was five-sixths Canadian. 2006 and 2008 were especially good years as Robert won a CNTC and an NABC in each of those years. Fun fact: Robert cannot play cards without chewing gum. Well, he can, but not as well. Popeye is to spinach as Robert is to aspartame.



18 Neil Chambers

Neil was born in Saskatchewan, spent a few years of his life in Vancouver, and now lives in the USA. Before leaving Canada, Neil had some early success playing with Allan Graves as they reached the semi-finals of the 1975 Olympiad Trials. Neil has won six NABCs including the Vanderbilt in 1992. He also has three NABC second-place finishes including the Spingold in 1986. At the world level, Neil has three gold medals and three silvers. His big win came in Istanbul in 2004 in the Senior Teams while playing with regular partner John Schermer.

17 Nick Gartaganis

If you happen to be walking around a major bridge tournament and you see a man wearing a small red backpack with a Canadian flag, no, it's not some lost Euro-bound student in the middle of his gap year, it's Nick! Formerly of Montreal, now living in Calgary, Nick won his first CNTC in 1982 and his most recent CNTC in 2016 and in between he won three others. Nick is always a threat. Always. Possibly the most underrated achievement in the history of Canadian bridge was Team Canada winning the 2002 IOC in Salt Lake City. Nick was part of the Cinderella dragon-slaying squad that defeated Italy in the semis and Poland in the finals. If that event had been a Bermuda Bowl, the six players on the team, (Silver-Gitelman, Balcombe-Campbell, and Jones-Gartaganis),

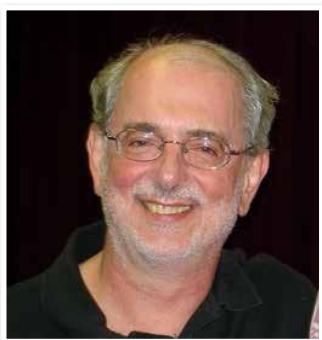
would have streets named after them from Richmond to Rimouski. In other WBF events Nick has two fifth place finishes—the 2013 Bermuda Bowl in Bali, and the 2016 World Bridge Games in Poland. Nick won a gold medal at the 2002 Commonwealth Nations Bridge Championships and a silver medal at the 2012 World Transnational Mixed Swiss Teams. This year Nick and his wife Judy were inducted into the CBF Hall of Fame.

16 Boris Baran

Aka 'Bo,' aka 'BoBo,' aka 'The Only Man in the History of the CNTCs Who Showed Up to Play Bridge Wearing a Speedo.' Okay maybe he only did that once. Not sure if it counts as intimidation tactics because, fortunately, screens were in use. Boris has won seven CNTCs, five NABCs, four of which were the Keohane North American Swiss Teams, and two NABC seconds. On the international scene Boris won a silver medal as part of the great Canadian run in the 1995 Bermuda Bowl when Canada made it to the final but lost to Team Nickell. But Boris did go on to win WBF gold in the Senior Swiss Teams in his hometown of Montreal in 2002. He also has a bronze for coming in third at the 1990 Rosenblum in Geneva. In 2012 Boris was inducted into the CBF Hall of Fame along with long-time partner Mark Molson. Bo knows bridge.



15 John Carruthers



Here's an overheard conversation between Sami Kehela and Bob Hamman at a previous NABC in

Toronto: Hamman: "Long time no see! How are you?" Kehela: "I'm doing well, but I'm not playing all that much." Hamman: "So who's the best Canadian team nowadays?" Kehela: "Oh...John Carruthers and some other guys." John, aka JC, is frequently in the winner's circle. He has four CNTC victories, three NABCs, plus a second place finish in the 1988 von Zedwitz LM Pairs, five CSTCs, with two seconds, one COPC (1990) and a WBF silver medal for finishing second in last year's World Senior Pairs with partner Joey Silver. JC has won two prestigious international events, both held in Netherlands: the Forbo Teams in 2000 and the International Invitational in 2001. Another feather in his cap was when he won the first Richmond Trophy race for most masterpoints in 1974—with a whopping 524.⁵ JC is a CBF Hall of Famer, IBPA editor, coach, non-playing captain, mentor, former Kibitzer editor...he does it all and he does it well.

14 Joey Silver

It's only fitting that Joey and JC, "Men with Hats," are next to each other on this list. They have now played as

partners for almost 20 years. A CBF Hall of Famer, Joey will tell you what he thinks is their biggest highlight but it might be winning a silver medal in the 2016 Senior Pairs. Joey has a superb record dating back to the 70s. One of Sam Gold's protégés, Joey burst on the scene in 1974 by winning the Vanderbilt with Eric Kokish and the Crossley brothers, David and Bob. Continuing the run in '74, Joey had two NABC seconds that year: in the Reisinger and the Mixed Board-a-Match. Joey has won five CNTCs, five CSTCs, four NABCs, two NABC seconds, two WBF silver medals, the aforementioned Senior Pairs and the 1995 Bermuda Bowl. In addition, he is the 1985 Cavendish Invitational Pairs champ and the winner of the 2002 IOC Grand Prix. Although bridge did not become an Olympic sport, for all intents and purposes, Joey can say he has an Olympic gold medal.

13 Bruce Elliott



From the CBF website's Hall of Fame section: "Bruce Elliott was born in 1922...Bruce won the Chicago Trophy (now

the Reisinger) in 1948 playing with Agnes Gordon, the first of his four major North American titles. He won the Chicago Trophy again in 1951 playing with Percy Sheardown. With Sheardown, Kehela and Murray, Elliot won the 1964 Spingold Master

⁵ Today for Shan Huang that's two regionals and a sectional.

Knockout teams and the foursome successfully defended the title in 1965, becoming the only foursome to date to achieve such a feat. Elliott represented Canada twice in the World Team Olympiad, winning a bronze medal in Deauville, France in 1968." Last year I received a letter to the editor of the Kibitzer and the writer expressed his gratitude to Bruce for playing with him up in Muskoka. Bruce was not only still playing but still winning.

12 Peter Nagy

Peter won not one but two WBF silver medals in the Open Pairs! He first won in 1978 in New Orleans with Eric Kokish, then again in 1990 in Geneva with Ralph Katz. Peter was part of one of the greatest Canadian teams ever assembled: Nagy-Kokish, Mittelman-Graves and Murray-Kehela; they won the bronze medal in the 1982 Biarritz Rosenblum. Before moving to the USA (to be with the love of his life Donna Hay), Peter won two CNTCs. He also won four NABCs, including the 1993 Vanderbilt, and he came second eight times. Peter is in the CBF Hall of Fame and just last week was inducted into the ACBL Hall of Fame as the latest recipient of the von Zedwitz Award. Peter died too young, just 60 years of age in 2003; otherwise he would surely have added to his major victories.

11 Agnes Gordon



Winner of the 2009 von Zedwitz Trophy, Agnes won ten NABCs including the Wagar KO Teams in 1967, the year that

she died. She won the Reisinger in 1948. Let that sink in. Perhaps most famously she won the Mixed Pairs in 1963 with Eric Murray, posting a 78% game in the final session. Murray, a frequent partner, once wrote, "Agnes never came close to touching a wrong card or making a questionable bid. Everyone who played with Agnes marvelled at her perfection. There was no better female bridge player in North America (including Helen Sobel) and very few male players her equal." Agnes also has eight second-place finishes at NABCs.

10 Eric Kokish



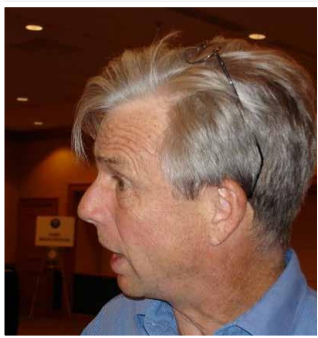
Widely considered to be the world's greatest bridge coach, Koach K makes the top ten of Canada's greatest players.

Let's see why. Look no further than earlier this month when Eric and his new partner Fred Gitelman were part of the team that won the Yeh Bros Cup in Japan, a tourney that featured a world-class field. Now let's look way back to 1974 when Eric burst on



the scene with a win in the Vandy partnering Joey Silver. Eric claimed second in another NABC that year. But a favourite year for Eric might be 1978 when we won the Mitchell Open Board-a-Match Teams and a Silver Medal with Nagy in the World Open Pairs in New Orleans. Although he has not played all that often in the last 20-odd years, Eric has won five Canadian National Team Championships (CNTCs), two NABCs, two WBF silver medals, (including the 1995 Bermuda Bowl), and two WBF bronzes for placing third in two Rosenblums (1982 and 1990). Eric is in two Halls of Fame—the CBF and the ACBL. Like former NHL star and Hall of Famer Jacques Lemaire, Eric is an excellent player and an excellent coach. But unlike Lemaire, Eric is playing again and tearing it up.

9 Mark Molson



Back in the 90s I got the opportunity to go out for dinner between sessions of a regional pair game

in Montreal with Mark Molson. I couldn't wait to talk about the hands. Nipping that idea in the bud, Mark said to me, "I don't like to talk about the hands; I prefer to give my brain a rest." I may have been crestfallen then but I so get that concept now. Mark was an easygoing guy but at the table he liked to push his opponents around with partner Boris Baran. They

were known as "The Thugs" after all. Mark won seven CNTCs, seven NABCs including two in 1989: the Blue Ribbons (with Robert Lebi) and the Reisinger. He also came second four times in NABCs. On the world scene Mark won a WBF silver medal in the 1995 Bermuda Bowl and a bronze medal in the 1990 Rosenblum. Mark was inducted into the CBF Hall of Fame alongside Baran in 2013. Try taking Mark's advice next time you're in contention—at dinnertime just talk about an interesting hand or two.

8 Allan Graves

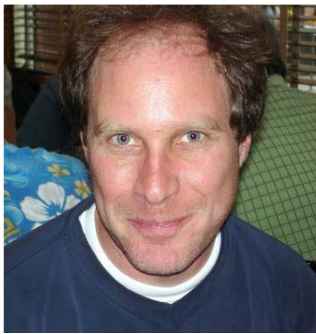


Here is the seven-word entry for Allan on Wikipedia: "Allan Graves is a Canadian bridge player."

Given that most of us only aspire to be a bridge player, that is high praise indeed. Thank you, Wikipedia. Actually if you're ever looking for hope and inspiration it's worth delving deeper into AG's playing record. He has a total of eight NABC victories since 1986, but six of those wins have come in the past four years! Talk about getting better with age. He has three NABC second-place finishes and seven CNTC wins. Allan won one WBF bronze medal, at the Rosenblum in Biarritz in 1982. Two years ago when Allan was inducted into the CBF Hall of Fame he was the highest ranked Canadian Grand Life Master. It's probably due to Allan coming on so strongly in the past

few years that he is ranked so highly amongst his peers still playing.

7 Fred Gitelman



As Master of Ceremonies at the 2017 ACBL Hall of Fame Dinner, John Carruthers said at one point, "Just my opinion

but if the ACBL had their own version of Mount Rushmore the four people on it should be Vanderbilt, Culbertson, Goren and Gitelman." Founder of Bridge Base Online (BBO) and therefore instrumental in popularizing online bridge (with assist from his life/bridge partner Sheri Winestock and programmer extraordinaire Uday Ivatury), Fred is also a fabulous player. He has won two CNTCs and eight NABCs including two Spingolds and a Reisinger. Fred also has eleven NABC seconds. On the world stage Fred is all-world winning two gold medals (the IOC Grand Prix in 2002 and the Knockout Teams in 2010), four silver medals (including the 1995 Bermuda Bowl while playing with George Mittelman and the World Juniors with Geoff Hampson) and two bronzes. Earlier this month while partnering Eric Kokish, Fred won the Yeh Bros Cup held in Japan against an international field. Fun fact 1: Fred and his mom Joan play together at least once per year on BBO. Naturally they get hundreds of kibitzers. Fun fact 2: Fred is too young to be inducted into the CBF Hall of Fame, but you can bet

the house he'll be voted in the year he turns 60.

6 George Mittelman



Ready to play Jeopardy? Alex Trebek is a Canuck so what the heck. Answer: This world champion Canadian bridge

player does not shop at Walmart or Costco because they cut out this, also his last name. Question: What is the Mittelman? There is no weakness in George's game; he's just one of those natural card players that make you sick to play against because he's so good. For starters he has two WBF gold medals—the Mixed Pairs in 1982 with life/bridge partner Dianna Gordon and the Senior Teams in 2002 in his hometown Montreal. Completing the medal trifecta, George won silver in the 1995 Bermuda Bowl and two bronzes in the Rosenblum (1982 and 1990). On the national front, George has won eight CNTCs, more than any other player, and one CSTC. As for NABCs, George has four wins and four second-place finishes. According to Joey Silver, George has formed two partnerships that rank in the top ten all-time Canadian bridge partnerships—one with Graves and the other with Gitelman.

5 Hugh Ross



Hugh's inclusion on this list may be a surprise because you didn't know he was Canadian, but it should be no surprise

that he would make the top five.

Hugh was from Montreal but left for California soon after graduating from McGill University. Hugh's WBF and NABC records are extraordinary. Representing the USA he has three Bermuda Bowl victories with three different partners: in 1987 with Mike Lawrence, in 1985 with Peter Pender, and in 1976 with Erik Paulsen when they beat the Blue Team in the final. Hugh has three WBF silver medals and one bronze. As for NABCs, Hugh has 19 wins and eight second-place finishes. Two of his wins came with Zia. They won the 1990 Nail Life Master Pairs and then defended that title in 1991.

4 Percy Sheardown



If this top-52 were purely objective-based then CBF Hall of Famer Percy Sheardown, aka 'Shorty,' would appear a little

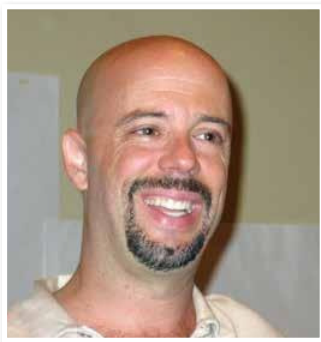
further down since clearly he does not have as many major event titles as Hugh Ross.⁶ But this list was based on some Canadian bridge players

taking the time to send to me who they think are Canada's best. One has Shorty ranked 18th, another has him ranked first (!) and everyone else has him ranked somewhere in between but typically in the top five. The late Ralph Cohen once said he was the greatest ever. Percy went into the ACBL Hall of Fame in 2005 for winning numerous Canadian titles before the CNTCs existed. He won the Reisinger before it was called the Reisinger—the Chicago in 1936 and 1951 and he was part of the great Canadian foursome of Murray-Kehela, Sheardown-Elliott who won back-to-back Spingolds playing as a foursome in 1964-65. They also won a WBF Bronze in Deauville in 1968 at the Open Olympiad. Shorty is to Toronto as Sam Gold is to Montreal as Meyer Schleifer is to Los Angeles—one of those players who is a mentor to the greats, someone who, "when they get their paws on the dummy," produces more tricks than anyone else. Shorty had a policy, amazing when you think about it—to help mentor local Toronto players he would accept any and all requests for a game at the club. It may have amounted to only one game, but folks remember gestures like that. Sheardown became Canada's first Life Master in 1948.



⁶ Nobody else has close to 19 NABC titles. (Except the next player on this list.)

3 Geoff Hampson



Aka “The Pup,” for following around John Gowdy and kibitzing him at local tournaments in the late 80s; aka

“The Hamster” for, well, you can work this one out. If #1 Jeff Meckstroth is concerned about anyone surpassing his masterpoint total it has to be Geoff, currently #10 on the ACBL Top 500. Current score, not including this NABC: Meck, 84 thousand and change, Hamp, a mere 46 thousand and change. It’s just a matter of time... But let’s see why Geoff ranks so highly. He has 19 NABC wins and 15 second-place finishes. You name an event and Geoff has won it. (Except for the Vandy; c’mon Geoff.) Before leaving for the USA to become a professional player in the early 90s Geoff won one CNTC with Gowdy as his partner. At the WBF level Geoff has two gold medals (the 2010 KO Teams and the 2001 Transnational Open Teams), one silver (the 1991 World Juniors while partnering Gitelman) and two bronzes. Geoff’s current partnership with Eric Greco would be widely considered to be on pretty well anyone and everyone’s shortlist for world’s best. Fun fact: Geoff can sing! Geoff’s parents are Joe and Sharon Hampson. Who are they? Joe was a singer/songwriter and a member of the Travellers, a Canadian folk group in the 60s-70s. Sharon is the Sharon of Sharon, Lois &

Bram, a famous Canadian children’s entertainment group.

1/2 Eric Murray & Sami Kehela



When we talk about Canada’s greatest all-time bridge players there is Eric Murray and Sami Kehela and then there’s everyone else. So it’s only fitting that they’re being ranked as tied for 1-2. Why are they tied? Let’s just say it’s

a nod to the game’s most important maxim: Bridge is a partnership game.

Not for the first time are they being put on the proverbial pedestal. Long-time Toronto player Roy Hughes wrote an excellent book published by Masterpoint Press called, “Canada’s Bridge Warriors: Eric Murray and Sami Kehela.” Here’s an excerpt:

“For my generation, Murray and Kehela were a Canadian legend. There was front-page coverage of Canada’s progress at the Olympiads, and Murray and Kehela were always the anchor pair. Whenever there were magazine articles or television clips about bridge, Murray and Kehela were there. Murray was always outrageously quotable, and Kehela, dressed in black and a study in

concentration, made the perfect foil. And, of course, the cigars made for good photographs.”

Let’s look at their numbers.

Sami won three CNTCs and ten NABCs including three Spingolds, two Vanderbilts, one von Zedwitz LM Pairs and one Blue Ribbon Pairs (with partner Baron Wolf Lebovic). He finished in second place at four NABCs (including a runner-up finish in the Blue Ribbons with Eric). In WBF events Sami has three Bermuda Bowl silver medals and three bronzes. Sami represented Canada thirteen times at world championships, (sometimes teaming with top US pairs to represent North America). I have no idea how much Sami won at the rubber bridge table at Irving Litvack’s Regal Club in Toronto but it was more than the other pigeons, er—guys.

Eric won four CNTCs and 14 NABCs. As mentioned under Agnes Gordon’s bio, Eric won the Mixed Pairs with her in 1963, recording a 78% game in the final session. Before Eric partnered Sami he played and won with Doug Drury. Together they won the Wernher Open Pairs in 1954 and defended in 1955. At the world level, Eric has four WBF silver Medals and three bronzes. The extra silver was when Eric played in the 1962 Bermuda Bowl in New York, losing to the Blue Team in the finals. If only YouTube were around then. It would be so interesting to watch them play bridge without screens—plus all that

smoking... all those... “randomly” placed cigarettes. But I digress.

Here’s what other people have to say about the WGBP and the GOAT.⁷

Eric Rodwell wrote in an email, “I played once with Eric Murray. We were just under average after 9 boards. He poured on the afterburners and we wound up with a 226 on a 156 average. He was a nice man, and funny.”

Bob Hamman, from Hughes’s book: “You never really beat Murray and Kehela—you were just temporarily ahead of them.”

Peggy Sutherlin: “Doug Drury created the Drury convention as Eric opened all hands in third chair.”

Eric Murray: “The convention was invented for the express purpose of mitigating the losses suffered by my partners because of my uncontrollable mania for opening balanced Yarboroughs in third or fourth position with one spade.”

John Carruthers: “It was de rigueur to criticize Murray and Kehela’s bidding as agricultural but Murray has the best bidding judgement of anyone I’ve ever seen, at the table or in print. Not to mention table presence AND presence at the table.”

Eric Kokish (and others): “Eric was a great player but Sami was

⁷ World’s Greatest Bridge Player and Greatest of All Time.

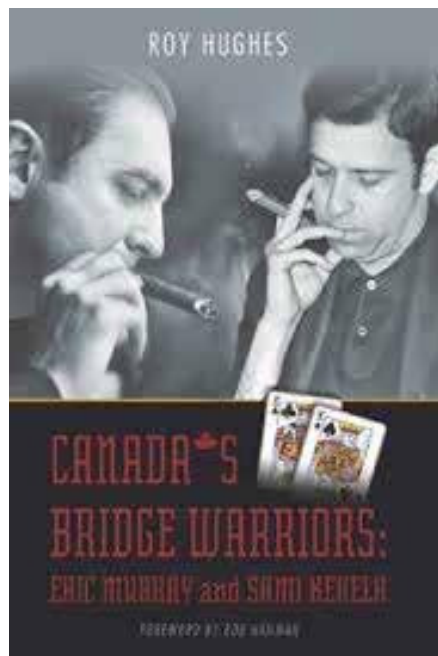
the better technician."

Eric Murray, in a letter to the Editor of the Globe and Mail in 1982: "Mr. Kehela is still Canada's most effective bridge player and still one of the best in the world, an opinion which I invite you to test by selecting your favourite partner."

Edgar Kaplan, in a world championship report featured in the Bridge World: "Sami Kehela played an entire World Championship without touching a wrong card."

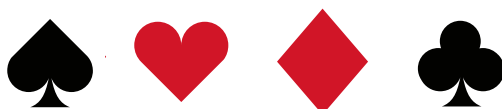
Joey Silver: "Murray-Kehela, an easy choice, the two greatest Canadian bridge players for Canada—one of the world's great partnerships."

It was once said that the secret to their successful partnership was because each thought the other the greater player. Ladies and gentlemen: the WGBP and the GOAT, Murray and Kehela.



Thank you to the following who assisted in this project: David Baker, Drew Cannell, John Carruthers, David Colbert, John Duquette, Nick Gartaganis, John Gowdy, Nader Hanna, Mike Hargreaves, Neil Kimmelman, Eric Kokish, Ray & Linda Lee, Vince Oddy, John Rayner, Eric Shepherd, Joey Silver, and Ross Taylor

An earlier version of this list was serialized in the Daily Bulletin of the recent Toronto NABC. The list has since been further vetted and revised.



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