

# Bridge Outside the Box with Val Kovachev

A fearless approach



## Bridge Outside the Box with Val Kovachev

by Dennis Dawson and Charlie Wilkins  
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There was once a time, not so long ago, when your side could bid 1♥:2♥, 4♥ in peace. Those days are gone. If someone doesn't open a super-weak two or three bid in front of you then one of your opponents will make an ultra-weak overcall or jump over your 1♥ to give you problems.

In this age of germ warfare Val Kovachev is a high priest of the black arts. We see a myriad of examples of him taking away space, making pressure bids and generally creating doubt in his opponents' minds. When 4th seat opens 1♦ at both vulnerable he recommends to overcall 1♠ with AJ876, 52, 65, 5432. He comments, "I overcalled 1♠ to get a spade lead and to stop North from bidding 1♥. Textbooks that require a certain number of high card points are completely misguided. The important points here are to get a spade lead because that's the only suit I have strength in and to disrupt their auction."

Val also recommends to open 3-bids with very strong 6-card suits. In first seat both vul Val favours a 3♥ opening with J10, KQJ1092, 10, 9863 pointing out that in the Losing Trick Count the 6-4 shape has one less loser than the 6-3-3-1 shape.

The second half of the book is a (large) collection of interesting and exciting hands from Val's career. This deal in from the 2008 European Championships in France, Norway vs Bulgaria:

Dealer W | Vul Nil

♠ 43 ♥ JT832 ♦ K ♣ KQJ64	♠ AQJT972 ♥ 97 ♦ 864 ♣ 3	♠ ♥ Q65 ♦ AQT732 ♣ AT98
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W	N	E	S
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♠ K865 ♥ AK4 ♦ J95 ♣ 732
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W Brogeland	N Vladi	E Lindqvist	S Kovachev
P	3S	X	4H
5C	//		

In 2008, no one played 4♥ in this auction as a lead-directing bid with support for spades. Val made it up on the spot, hoping his partner would understand it. This bid won the board and today it is a standard expert agreement.

The defense started with ♥AK and a heart ruff, down one, +100. Back then, people didn't know Val, and getting this great result against one of the world's best pairs helped establish his credibility at the top level of bridge.

A most entertaining book. Even if you don't plan to play like Val it is good to see how a totally fearless approach functions at the table.