

# Young bridge player tests his skills locally

By SPECIAL TO THE WEEKLY VISTA

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A 14-year-old basketball player from Fayetteville, Ark., walked off with a lion's share of the coveted gold master points recently at the American Contract Bridge League's tournament in St. Louis, Mo.

Cole Spencer, who plays Thursdays in the Duplicate Bridge group in Bella Vista, first learned about the game when reading a novel, *The Cardturner*, by Louis Sachar. The Woodland Junior High student was so intrigued by the challenges and techniques the protagonist used in the novel, that he went online to learn more about the game.

Two years later Cole attended his first National Bridge Tournament, playing with Northwest Arkansas' bridge ace, Joe Scott. He picked up 26 points, winning the Tuesday Pairs session where he bested a roomful of longtime bridge players, most of whom had won their Life Master Designation years before.

After downloading the Learn to Play Bridge software from the American Contract Bridge League's website ([www.acbl.com](http://www.acbl.com)), Cole read several more books and tried his hand in some online bridge games before venturing into a game at the Sunday Duplicate Bridge Club in Springdale.

Immediately, he began winning master points in the local games.

A story appeared in the ACBL Bulletin about the young player, who at 13 years of age was already making a name for himself in Northwest Arkansas games, and that story led to many calls to the ACBL by grandparents who wanted to know more about Sachar's book. Bridge players themselves, they wanted to purchase the novel for their grandchildren, in the hopes they would also take up the game.

Cole, who also excels at basketball, will be attending the ACBL Nationals August 1-3 in Atlanta, Ga., where he will compete in the Youth Bridge Championship games. Since bridge is a partnership sport, he will have to find another teenager to play with him. At the rate Cole is mastering the game of bridge, his only challenge may soon be in finding someone his age to play with him.

Once a popular game for all ages, bridge is now played primarily by seniors who learned to play in college dorm rooms, on military bases, or by watching their parents play after dinner parties.

Such notable businessmen as Microsoft's Bill Gates and billionaire investor Warren Buffet, consider bridge to be a major pastime and relaxation. Studies have shown that playing bridge develops and improves higher level thinking skills and leads to an improvement in other classes

such as math and science. The two high profile players have given millions of dollars to several schools where bridge has been put into the elementary and junior high curriculum.

Basketball continues to be an important part of Cole's life, (his team was undefeated this season), but when school is out and summer rolls around you can expect to find him playing bridge several times a week at the area bridge clubs.

Anyone interested in playing duplicate bridge should visit the website [www.acbl-unit-247.org/](http://www.acbl-unit-247.org/) for information.

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