

**HIGH-POWER and LOW-COMPLEXITY  
DUPLICATE BRIDGE METHODS FOR  
BABY BOOMERS**

By

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**Endorsement.** Wonderful tournament player Paul Trent has provided a much appreciated endorsement: "John Memory's pamphlet on bridge methods for babyboomers is an excellent guide for both new players and experienced club players." Paul will reach Diamond Life Master (5000 masterpoints) during 2013. Bridge Bulletin panelist Randy Joyce kindly gave me suggestions for improvement of eight pages about common bridge mistakes I wrote and included in the book in 2013.

**Contributors.** An earlier version of this short book was completed in 2010, and the following people read a late draft and provided very helpful suggestions for improvement: Phil Gresh (Gold Life Master), Barbara Bristol (advanced Silver Life Master), Jim Muller, and Jack Williams. Many thanks!

**2013 revision process.** This version reflects the present stage in revision and updating in 2013. Suggestions for improvement are invited, especially : (1) suggestions about techniques/ methods from very strong players; (2) any type of suggestion from Baby Boomers who have become duplicate players or are considering becoming duplicate players; and (3) suggestions about how this book can best be made available with no charge to persons who would like to obtain it.

**An approach to use of the book.** The first five chapters provide a high percentage of the information needed to play in a duplicate bridge game. The remaining chapters can be used as resources in improving particular aspects of a player or partnership's duplicate bridge methods.

**Some repetition.** Several brief points are made more than once in the book. This is partly because most people need to cover new bridge techniques more than once to become able to use them. Of course, readers can skip over points they have already learned.

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## INTRODUCTION

This short book is intended primarily for Baby Boomers, who were born from 1946 through 1964. About 75,000,000 babies were born in the U.S. during that period.

My guess is that a very large majority of Baby Boomers don't know much about duplicate bridge. This book gives a fairly quick overview of information about **skills needed to compete in highly competitive duplicate games**, which very clearly is not an easy activity.

**Benefits of playing duplicate bridge.** Chapter 27 provides discussion of the remarkable benefits of playing serious bridge, which includes duplicate bridge.

**The need for Baby Boomer players. The average age of American Contract Bridge League members is probably over 70.** This figure alone makes the case for need for Baby Boomer duplicate bridge players. Chapter 28 provides thinking about why there's a shortage of Baby Boomers coming into duplicate bridge and about ways to attract and retain them.

**The origins of this book.** In 2000, I was asked to become a director and teach bridge before a large local game in Southern Pines, NC. I passed the director's exam and started writing mini-lesson sheets to distribute and teach from during the 30-minute lessons. Those sheets were the seeds which grew into the chapters of this book.

The methods in this book come primarily from five sources:

**My reading of newspaper bridge columns carefully for 40+ years (which equals reading 60 bridge books).**

**Reading (two times) the big revised Goren bridge book in the early 1990s**

**Playing with an excellent player, Sam Kass of Pinehurst, NC, about 300 times in the 1990s. Sam was a superb mentor for me. Earlier in his life, he had won 650+ gold masterpoints in tournaments in the NYC area.**

**Reading several of the excellent Marty Bergen books**

**Studying play and bidding hands on Mike Lawrence's excellent website, Bridge Clues, every day for the last 6 years. (I do not, however, try**

to learn and use all of his many “gadgets”.)

**The crucial idea in this book.** Often, but certainly not always, **bridge methods recommended by top experts are not the best methods for Baby Boomers transitioning to duplicate bridge from playing some amount of social bridge.** This is further developed in many parts of this short book.

**My qualifications to write this book.** Serving as a duplicate bridge game director a good bit between 2000 and 2008 helped me to learn a lot of important things about duplicate bridge and about duplicate bridge players.

In 1970 in Seoul, Korea, I started my transition from social bridge to duplicate bridge. I know what that transition can feel like. I’m hoping to help with convincing a good number of Baby Boomers to make that transition. I am only 2½ years older than the oldest Baby Boomers and have played a lot of social and duplicate bridge with and against them. I will admit, however, that I don’t fully understand the Baby Boomer generation.

Except for playing many times with my mentor, Sam Kass, I have very seldom asked a very strong bridge player to play with me. Instead, **I have preferred playing with mentees and other “developing players.”** While I’ve generally been very happy with our scores, I have been particularly pleased with results since early in December of 2012. My fine partner and I won the big western NC unit Christmas game with 70%. My scores since the early 1990s provide some indication of the potential usefulness of the methods suggested in this book.

As I discuss in chapter 28, playing bridge involves problem solving and decisionmaking, both of which can be stressful. My doctoral dissertation was on work-related stress of judges, and I developed, edited, and wrote most of a commercially published book on police problem solving; therefore, I have scholarly expertise on problem solving and decisionmaking and the effects of stressors and stress on both. I have tried to use that information carefully in recommending methods that will help Baby Boomers to enjoy and succeed enough in duplicate bridge.

**Some reasons for selection of particular methods.** Having played duplicate bridge a great deal since 1981 with and against fairly new players, I have developed impressions concerning methods that are particularly important for them to use. Also, the fairly simple methods Sam Kass and I used in the 1990s worked very well for us. To a large extent, they are the methods recommended in this book. Recently, I talked about complexity of methods with two very strong “A” players living in the NC mountains. They agreed, with each other and with me, that

about 80% of players with less than 400 masterpoints use methods that are too complex.

As discussed in chapter 6, I try to recommend **methods that have high power and low complexity**. Still, some readers will view the methods I recommend as very complex. Of course, players who are new to duplicate should go slowly in adding to their conventions and other methods. You should never go beyond your comfort level in methods and systems. This book can provide important information to entirely new duplicate players. It is primarily intended, however, **to provide the information one needs to play in an "open" game against very strong players**. Though you may not use all of these methods, you need to understand methods often used by strong opponents.

**Opportunities to play duplicate bridge.** To learn about duplicate bridge games in your area, you can do an Internet search for ACBL. You can then follow prompts to find a local bridge club at which you can play. Though most duplicate games are open to all players, even pros, many cities have one or more games for novices or for developing players below particular masterpoint levels, such as 300 mp, 500 mp, or 750 mp.

When I was playing in the Pinehurst-Southern Pines, NC area and in Columbia, SC, there were few, if any, duplicate games for novices or developing players. Fortunately, it was not uncommon for fairly new pairs to have excellent results in very competitive games. Hendersonville, NC presents a very different situation. On some weekday afternoons, there are as many as three levels of game below the open game. So, many players in the Hendersonville area have a good chance to find a "comfort level" in duplicate bridge.

**Getting partners.** If you want to play in a duplicate game but don't have a partner, the director will probably be glad to find you a partner. I think most active duplicate players will say that it is good to play with several partners regularly. (But playing very different methods with several partners invites mistakes by you.) If you play poker, you may think that you have the advantage over a bridge player in not having to find a partner. My experience, however, is that **finding partners with whom you will play regularly or occasionally can be a fabulously great aspect of participating in duplicate bridge**. You know a lot about your partner after one duplicate bridge game. I have been quite fortunate, you might say blessed, in having often learned that my partner is a very fine and able person. I must acknowledge, however, that it is entirely possible for a person to have problems regarding getting partners. As you would guess, it helps to be a good enough player for the game(s) you want to play in and a good and considerate partner.

**Bridge instruction.** You may have a chance to participate in an "Easybridge" program, which is promoted by ACBL to introduce people to playing elementary duplicate bridge. Nearly all bridge clubs have free or paid lessons on various aspects of bridge play. Studying bidding and playing hands on Mike Lawrence's excellent web site, *Bridge Clues*, is an effective way to move steadily ahead in duplicate bridge. (I did important research on judge knowledge of search and seizure law. **The only activity that tended to improve knowledge of that law was regular self-study.** That is what *Bridge Clues* offers.)

**Duplicate bridge results of fairly new duplicate players.** I have observed, sometimes participated in, **many** remarkable successes of fairly new duplicate players in competition against terrifically strong players. This may be surprising: I know from a great deal of experience that **many genuinely excellent social bridge players can successfully move directly into open games**, especially if they have a strong and experienced partner.

**Deciding whether you have the right makeup to play duplicate bridge reasonably well.** I'm confident, based on my observation of fraternity brother football players, college "coeds", and Army lieutenants in Korea, that a substantial percentage of at least older Baby Boomers played a good bit of bridge early in their lives. If that describes you, you have a good idea concerning whether you have the potential to play good bridge. If not, you can get a clue from whether you have generally been good at card games. If not, you may not have good "**card sense**," which you need in bridge. My impression is that engineers make the best bridge players. (Engineers go into problematic situations, collect important information, and decide on a plan to use proven methods to solve the problems. Then they implement their plan. That's similar to what you do in duplicate bridge. That may or may not appeal to you.) **Please don't give up quickly if your first few game scores are disappointing. Bridge is a difficult activity.** It takes time and effort to reach a point at which you can make a good decision about whether you can enjoy bridge and achieve enough success. If you wait until you are having significant age-related memory and thinking problems, it will be too late for you to develop the ability to play genuinely competitive duplicate bridge.

## Chapter 1

### BASIC INFORMATION ABOUT PLAYING DUPLICATE BRIDGE

**Your goal.** In the ordinary (matchpoint) duplicate game, you will play either North-South or East-West. If you play East-West, you try to have better scores on the 24-to-27 hands than the other East-West pairs. If there are 9 East-West teams, you and your partner make +110 on hand/board # 1, and the other teams

make +100, you and your partner will make a score of 8, the highest score, on the board. If the opposite occurs, and you score +100 with all of the others making a higher positive score, you and your partner will get a score of 0 on the board. The same applies to your negative scores, those on which your opponents made a positive score. If making a positive score is realistically unlikely on a board, you want your opponents to make the lowest possible plus score. For example, you are sure they can make 4S V (four spades vulnerable) for a score of 620. You and your partner have distributional hands and a fit in diamonds and are not vulnerable (NV). If you bid 5D, are doubled, and go down three, your opponents will make +500, which will be much better for you than the +620 they would otherwise make.

This applies also on lower levels of bidding. Your opponents have bid and can probably make 2S for +110. You are NV. You usually can safely bid three of a minor or two of a major because opponents will not want to double you into game.

In this type of scoring (matchpoints), it's not a tremendous disaster to go down a lot, though you would prefer not to. If you get a top score on the next board, the two boards together have an average score. Average scores in duplicate are good. (In Swiss team and knockout games, getting one very bad score can cause you to lose the whole match.)

**Defensive and competitive bidding.** Many social bridge players seem to assume that the pair with the better cards gets to play in a comfortable contract they select. To play effectively in duplicate bridge, you must reject that idea. You must try to force the opponents to bid too high. If they can make 4H V, you should bid 4S NV, if you think you can go down no more than three. This is not unfriendly. It is a crucial aspect of duplicate bridge.

**The convention card.** To play in an ACBL duplicate game, you and your partner will have to complete and each have a copy of a convention card, which describes your bidding system. It is perfectly OK to start duplicate play with simple bidding systems. It is best to very gradually increase the sophistication of your bidding system. If you try to add too many new bidding wrinkles at one time, you will run the risk of making mistakes, resulting in bad scores. In this booklet I suggest several groups of bidding conventions that can be adopted more or less together. (For example, if you play weak 2 diamonds, hearts, and spades bids, you will have to play the strong 2C bid.)

**Bridge ethics.** It is important to always try to be honest and fair while playing duplicate. If you do that, it is unlikely that you will get in a bad spot. As you play more duplicate, you will learn more specifics about bridge ethics. If you don't know what you should do in an ethically difficult situation, you can leave the



table and ask the director for advice. You should not do this, however, if doing so will give your partner information he can take advantage of. You must avoid communicating information to your partner through any means other than legal bids and plays. There's much more about bridge ethics in the next chapter.

**Alerts of bids.** Bids that are printed in red ink on a convention card must be alerted. An alert is made by the partner of the person who makes the alertable bid by saying "alert" immediately after his partner makes the bid. The opponent who is about to bid can then ask the person who said "alert" what the alerted bid means. For example, if a bid of 3C in response to one of a major is an artificial bid having nothing to do with clubs, the partner of the 3C bidder must say "Alert" immediately after the bid is made. Though bidding an opponent's suit (a cue bid) is very often artificial in meaning, cue bids do not have to be alerted.

**Calling the director.** If a player thinks there may have been a violation of duplicate bridge rules, he has a right to call the director. The director will come to the table and resolve the matter. **Ordinarily, calling the director is not a mean, unfriendly, or nasty thing to do.**

**Miscellaneous information.** **If your partner doesn't follow suit on a trick, you should immediately ask partner, "No clubs (or other suit partner apparently is out of), partner?"** If you notice partner turning a trick incorrectly, you can point it out then, but not later. Of course, sometimes you have to take extra time bidding or playing, and that is OK. You, however, are not allowed to play so slowly on a continuing basis that you slow down the game for everyone. The player sitting North has responsibility for turning the boards. Any other player should get permission from North to turn the boards. If you want to "kibitz" (observe) at a table, you must first get permission from the players. Kibitzers shouldn't say anything. While both players in a partnership are supposed to have identical convention cards on the table, having one card that you point out to opponents will keep you from being penalized. Failure to have a fully completed convention card can make it more likely that there will be a director's ruling against your side, if the director is called to deal with a situation.

## Chapter 2

### IMPORTANT DUPLICATE BRIDGE RULES AND ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

My impression is that the vast majority of active duplicate bridge players are courteous and honest. Below is information about ACBL rules concerning bidding, play, courtesy, honesty, and ethics.

**The zero-tolerance policy.** The ACBL now has a policy called the "Zero Tolerance" policy concerning player misbehavior. It prohibits gloating when your side achieves a good outcome, criticizing your opponents' play or bidding and even your partner's play or bidding, and being rude to anyone. Congratulating opponents is encouraged. If you think a violation of this policy has occurred, you can, but aren't required to, call the director. **You should not allow a rude or inconsiderate person to diminish your enjoyment of duplicate bridge.**

**Psych bids.** Psych bids are bids that you clearly have no basis to make. (Such bids are off more than one card and/or two high-card points (hcp).) In the Hendersonville, NC games, it is legal to make one psych per game. If, after the play of a hand, you think an opponent psyched during the bidding, you can call the director to make sure he knows about the psych. (My experience is that a psych is more likely to hurt the side of the person making the psych than the opponents.) The partners of some players who psych frequently may have unauthorized information regarding the possibility of a psych. This can be a prohibited secret understanding. A player can make any bid or play he wants to. He must, however, fool his partner, if the bid or play is contrary to their understandings.

**Leading from the wrong hand.** When declarer leads from the wrong hand, either defender can (without consultation) accept that lead.

**Concessions.** If one defender attempts to make a concession of tricks, his partner has an absolute right to prevent that concession. A player cannot concede tricks she cannot lose, as discovered when all of the hands are exposed.

**Claims.** The declarer can "make a claim" by saying she will win a certain number of the remaining tricks. When doing so, she should mention drawing any remaining trumps and the intended line of play. Otherwise, the director may rule that the defense gets one or more tricks the declarer could have gotten.

**Bridge ethics.** Here are some specific points about bridge ethics:

1. If you have no significant card to play to a trick, it is unethical to pretend that you do to induce another player, usually the declarer, to think you do. For example, it appears that the declarer is finessing you for the K and Q of a suit. You have neither card, so your partner must have both, possibly as a doubleton. When the declarer leads toward the board, it is a violation of duplicate rules for you to pretend to have a significant card. You must play a card at a normal pace. Generally, playing cards and bidding at a consistent pace is desirable.

2. If, during bidding, you take an especially long time to make a bid, your

partner will need to make sure that her later bids are based only on her hand and your bids and not on your delay. Your opponents have the right to call the director to make sure that your partner's bids are not based on your delay.

3. If your partner communicates information by any means other than a bid or play to a trick, such as a facial expression or body language, you have a duty not to let that **unauthorized** information influence your bidding or play. Players can ethically consider facial expressions and body language of their opponents but not of their partners.

4. If an opponent is allowing you to see her cards, it's probably a good practice to say something like, "Hold your cards back, Sarah." My practice is to say that once.

5. If you hear something from another table that you could use to your advantage when you play a hand, you should by some means tell the loud person at the other table to lower his voice. Using that information is prohibited.

6. When you are going to be declarer or dummy on a hand, and your partner has incorrectly explained one of your bids, you have a duty to give the correct explanation before play starts. This doesn't apply when you are going to defend on a hand. When your partner has obviously misinterpreted a bid by you during the auction, you have a duty not to alert your partner, by means other than another bid by you, that she is wrong. You can make a corrective bid, such as bidding the suit you earlier tried to transfer into.

7. If an opponent has given incorrect information regarding their understanding on the meaning of his partner's bid, and you are harmed, you are entitled to redress provided by the director. If the information about their understanding is correct, and an opponent made a bid not according to their system, and you are harmed, you are not entitled to redress.

8. It can be a violation to ask questions about bids to alert your partner to something important. For example, declarer is in 3NT after her partner opened 1C, and the eventual declarer bid 2NT. Declarer's RHO has 5 good spades. It would be unethical for him to ask the opening bidder if declarer had denied a 4-card major with his first bid, hoping that his partner will deduce that he wants a spade lead.

9. Understandings about psych bids are prohibited. If you make one, you must fool partner as much as your opponents.

10. You aren't allowed to look at your own convention card during an auction.

11. If you renege, you have no duty to bring this to the attention of your opponents. There cannot be a renege on the last two tricks.

12. If opponents commit a violation of rules, it is entirely ethical to use that violation to your advantage.

### Chapter 3

## WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY DUPLICATE BRIDGE WELL

1. **A brain that is capable of working well.** It doesn't have to work well all the time, just when you're playing bridge.

2. **The abilities to prepare your brain to work well and to make it work well during play.** Exercise tends to improve one's thinking, as does a nap. Drinking alcohol and/or over-eating may hurt your brain function.

3. **Knowledge of and ability to use at the right time hundreds of bridge problem solutions, techniques, etc.** You must have **discipline** in applying solid principles and techniques. For example, don't bid Stayman with only 6 hcp simply because you have an intuition that your partner has a 4-card major. Don't expect to know bridge techniques and conventions nearly as well as top players. Make up for this by excelling in other aspects of performance.

4. **A partner who is also seriously trying to achieve very good play.**

5. **Excellent understandings with your partner regarding bidding and defense.** I think that **excellent execution is much more important than advanced methods.** One misunderstanding with partner can easily move your score from 54% to 51%. I played with an excellent player maybe 300 times during the 1990s. I studied our convention card before every game. (I had also done physical exercise and had taken "smart pill" supplements before 95%+ of the games.)

6. **Conscious minimization of mistakes.** When I feel mistake-prone, I cross two fingers on my left hand to remind me to take my time, interpret things correctly, and make good decisions. (Making good decisions equates with exercise of good judgment, which is crucial.) If you make a mistake early in a game, use it to your advantage by forcing yourself to play more alertly.

7. **Ability and stamina to stay very alert for 3.5 hours.**

8. **Competitive attitude that continues throughout the game.** Many players who have a few bad boards during the first three rounds will give up. That is far too early to give up. No matter what happened on the first three rounds of 3 or 4 boards (hands), you still have the ability to win or place high. Along with this goes avoiding complacency. If you know you've had a very good game and get lazy in the last two rounds, you can easily drop from a 60% game to a 50% game.

9. **Understanding with your partner that you will both be considerate and uncritical of each other and will avoid behaviors that will upset your partner.** I think that the majority of players play worse after criticism. Courteous, constructive suggestions between rounds and away from the table by a significantly stronger player can possibly be OK. **Even when I am clearly a stronger player than my partner, I carefully stay away from criticizing my partner's declarer play.** Such criticism can easily make an OK situation much worse.

## Chapter 4 WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR MEMORY AND THINKING

**Why this has been important to me.** In 1981, as I was getting into duplicate bridge, I learned that I have four major heart-disease and artery-occlusion risk factors. So I decided to use exercise prior to bridge as part of my heart-health program. I intuitively and **correctly** sensed that I needed to work harder than most people to get my brain to work well enough. I figured that exercise would help with that. Many years later, I learned that I have two other conditions that can inhibit good thinking: low oxygen and low thyroid function. Fortunately, I have generally done the right things over nearly 30 years, and, as a consequence, I'm pretty sure that I have actually improved my brain. (In the early 1980s, I read a good book on building your brain power. There are current good books on that subject now.)

There are several supplements, foods, and beverages you can consume to help your memory and thinking. Of course, you can take one of the commercially marketed combinations of vitamins, minerals, and herbs designed especially for memory and thinking. It's easy to find these products in the vitamin/mineral section of a drug store or on a supplement web site. I prefer taking several separate pills and capsules. Below is some information on specific supplements.

I have had an article published in a scholarly health journal and have served as a consulting editor of a scholarly health journal. I, however, am not a physician or a qualified expert on nutrition and supplements; therefore, I am not providing this as expert advice. It may be prudent for you to consult a physician, naturopath,

or nutrition expert concerning taking supplements.

Unfortunately, many physicians with little knowledge in this area simply advise against taking supplements. I have found that physicians who are well qualified in this area generally recommend that some people take certain supplements. I strongly believe that taking supplements has been **extremely beneficial** to me. For example, though I have terrifically serious heart disease risk factors, my cardiologist recently concluded that my heart is quite healthy. Also, my blood pressure is very low.

**Vitamin E.** Recent research indicates one should not take vitamin E beyond what is found in a multi-vitamin. I take the less available and more expensive form, tocotrienols, because it helps with prevention and reduction of atherosclerosis.

**Fish oil.** Fish oil is unquestionably good for your health in several ways. It definitely helps with thinking and memory. I think everyone over 50 should take fish oil.

**Vitamin B12.** This vitamin helps greatly with memory and thinking. Senior citizens commonly gradually lose the ability to efficiently use small amounts of B12. Therefore, experts recommend that senior citizens, especially those with memory problems, take a B12 supplement. It does not build up dangerously in the human body. Research has shown that severe B12 deficiency results in **brain shrinkage**.

**L-carnitine.** This is very important for heart and brain health and brain function. Surprisingly, it helps with athletic performance.

**Ubiquinol.** Persons who are over 45 generally have lost the ability to convert co-enzyme Q10 into ubiquinol, which is the form that actually "does the work." I am sure I have been getting several significant benefits since I started taking ubiquinol about two years ago.

**Lecithin.** This is found in soybeans. It metabolizes in the body into choline, which helps with short-term memory. I read in one book that choline tends to clean out dangerous substances collecting on the inside walls of blood vessels. Lecithin and choline do not build up dangerously in the human body.

**Magnesium.** Magnesium is very important for cardiovascular and brain health.

**Vitamin D3.** Though I have taken at least the minimum daily allowance of vitamin D3 for decades, I recently learned that I had a troubling vitamin D deficiency. Experts report that a very high percentage of adults in the U.S. are deficient in vitamin D3. (D3 is the desirable form of vitamin D.)

**Ginkgo biloba.** This herb apparently helps with memory and alertness. It may help with Alzheimer's prevention. There are potential problems with taking it while taking aspirin. (Egyptians used it as an aphrodisiac.)

**Alpha lipoic acid.** If you take this and exercise, your body will produce glutathione, which is crucial in prevention of Alzheimer's and other dementia.

**D.H.E.A.** This helps brain function and memory. It is recommended more for men than women.

**Coconut oil.** Don't worry that coconut oil is saturated. It is listed as an important thing to consume in prevention of Alzheimer's. I think it helps with normal functioning of blood vessels (endothelial function).

**Caffeine.** Research definitely shows that caffeine increases alertness. I think, however, that you can over-caffeinate yourself. If you're playing an afternoon session of bridge, are going to play that evening, and are getting sleepy, taking a nap between sessions is **far superior** to having a big dinner and drinking lots of coffee during the evening session. Drinking coffee in mid-life helps with Alzheimer's prevention.

**Fish.** Many people know that fish qualifies as "brain food." Of course, you should avoid fried fish.

Taking aspirin, garlic, lecithin, fish oil, and vitamin E reduces your blood's clotting ability.

**If you know much about supplements, you know that this list of supplements will help with brain function and brain health, heart/cardiovascular health, and, to a significant degree, cancer prevention.**

## **OTHER MEMORY AND THINKING BOOSTERS**

**Naps.** A nap, even a short one, can dramatically improve one's alertness and thinking.

**Exercise.** The research is very clear: exercising long enough and vigorously

enough to oxygenate your brain helps your thinking, memory, and even stress coping. A brisk 25-minute walk helps. During the Ocean City, MD regional a few years ago, my partner and I won the six knockout sessions before which we both walked at least 25 min. We lost the three before which we did not both walk at least 25 min. You may assume that getting your pulse over 150 bpm during exercise will provide greater benefits. Surprisingly, there can be adverse health effects of this.

**Deep breathing.** Because I tend to be low on oxygen, I very frequently do deep breathing during a bridge game. Remember the advice about getting ready to give a talk or sink a putt when you are nervous: **Take several deep breaths.**

## **BRIDGE AND A PHYSICALLY ACTIVE AND HEALTHY LIFE STYLE**

**I know from my experience that it is not difficult at all to include duplicate bridge in a physically active life style.** Though I will be 70 at the end of this year, recently I mowed with a heavy push mower in the morning, played duplicate in the afternoon, then walked 9 holes of golf, and then attended a very nice dance. I was surprised that, when I left the dance, I didn't feel tired at all.

## **BUILDING YOUR BRAIN POWER FOR BRIDGE**

Serious athletes and coaches know that one needs several types of strength to perform well in nearly all sports. (I have done strength exercise for golf since the middle 1970s and have been getting great benefits.) I think that similarly one needs a special type of brain power to perform well in duplicate bridge.

During the 1990s I worked on building this by reading a newspaper bridge column in the morning, memorizing the north and south hands and bidding, and then recalling all of that hours later. I would then, without looking at the column, think about alternative bidding, work on various ways to play and defend the hand, etc.

I am now doing something that is significantly more difficult. I dream up an entire hand without writing anything down. Then, I think about ways to bid the hand and about optimum declarer play and optimum defense. It's fun using this exercise to test things, such as how well the Law of Total Tricks works. Practice will make this easier.

Here's something most people don't know: **Physical exercise is one of the best ways to build your brain power.** (My highly successful computer engineer, doctoral student son is benefitting greatly from exercising strenuously before every work day.)



So, doing physical and mental exercise will help one greatly in cognitive activities, such as duplicate bridge.

## Chapter 5 IMPORTANT "DO"s AND "DON'T"s

This chapter provides especially important "do"s and "don't"s and some previews of later chapters.

The most important "do" is: **"Know, understand, and use as many of the probably thousands of bridge problem solutions as you can (without getting confused)."** For example, Stayman and negative doubles solve the problem of needing to locate an 8-card major suit safely in as little bidding space as possible. Both bids are very important to use.

The most important "don't" is: **"Don't make mistakes."** There are many types of mistakes in bridge. They include accidental actions (e.g., playing the wrong card or pulling the wrong bid card and failing to correct in time); failing to use a known and proven method when it would have worked (e.g., failing to transfer); using a problem solution when other action would have been better; and many others. **Through experimentation, you can determine how you can minimize mistakes, possibly by making your brain work optimally.**

### BIDDING

**Consider vulnerability heavily in bidding, especially defensive bidding. (You want the highest possible positive score or the lowest possible negative (opponents') score.)**

**You-NV; opponents-V Bid aggressively.** (If your opponents can make game, you can afford to go down 3 tricks doubled.)

**You-V; opponents-NV Bid conservatively.** (Even if your opponents can make game, you cannot afford to go down 2 tricks doubled.)

**Both V. Avoid risky sacrifice bids.** (If your opponents can make game, you can afford to go down 2 tricks doubled.)

**Neither V. Bid more aggressively than when both sides are vul.** (If your opponents can make game, you can afford to go down 2 tricks doubled.)

**Going down 2 tricks undoubled and V (200 points) is a terrible outcome when your opponents can't make game, which is usually the case.**

I think that, while you must be able to recognize hazardous bidding situations, **generally being somewhat aggressive in bidding is better than generally being somewhat conservative.** There are elaborations of this in later chapters.

**Use a bidding system that is sufficiently advanced to allow you to compete.** Use only bids that you and your partner can reliably execute. Nearly every bidding miscommunication results in a bad score for your side. While driving with your partner to a duplicate tournament or game, carefully review all aspects of your bidding and defense.

**Conventions every developing duplicate player should use: Stayman, transfers, negative doubles, limit raises, weak two bids, and strong 2C.** If you don't presently play them, I recommend that you strongly consider adopting them as soon as you can. You can later consider adopting more advanced/complex conventions, several of which are recommended in chapter 6 for developing "serious" duplicate players.

**"Captain of the team" in bidding.** The partner who first gets enough information to sensibly set the contract should make herself/himself captain and set the contract. **When you make yourself captain, make sure you get to probably makeable games and slams.** For example, if you and partner each have an opening bid hand and together have at least 8 of a major, you must bid at least game in the major.

Here are three pretty distinguishable ways of evaluating your hand: (1) number of likely winners; (2) number of likely losers; and (3) how much you like your suits (You have an excellent hand if you like all of your suits, including, for example, a void.). Of course, as the bidding goes along, you revise your assessments based on the bids of your partner and the opponents.

If I have tenaces (e.g., A,Q or K,J,9) in two or three suits, I want to become the declarer to have the first lead coming into my hand. So, in such hands I often make the first bid in NT to make sure that, if we play in NT, I will be the declarer.

**Passing after partner opens can be a great action (technically a "call").** Even if your partner's 1C or 1D bid suit might be as short as three, pass if you don't satisfy the requirements for a bid. Later in that auction, you can bid (maybe with 5 hearts headed by the K or Q) without misleading partner.

**Occasionally, a very early, very high sacrifice bid is justified, especially if you are NV.**

**When you open one of a minor, and partner responds one of a major, generally you shouldn't raise partner's major unless you have 4 of them. To show you have 3 of them, you can raise him the next time you bid. Sometimes, when you have no other sensible bid, you should raise your partner's bid of a major with only 3 in the suit.**

**Force your opponents into bids they can't make.** Sometimes they pass after your pushing bid, and you have a sacrifice contract in which you expect to go down. That's often OK.

**Consider the location of honors, as indicated by the bidding, in your bidding.** If your opponents reluctantly bid 3NT, you have honors in the two suits of your RHO, and you assume your partner has honors in the two suits of your LHO, double. They may not have anywhere to escape. Maybe you should double.

**Avoid pushing opponents into good contracts.** Aggressive bidding NV early in the auction can be safe-unless you are playing against excellent, very dangerous opponents. But, stop soon enough to avoid pushing opponents into a good game contract. (But, remember: A secret understanding that you make psych overcalls is prohibited. You are required to be within two points of your bid. If you overcall light, so note on your convention card.) Here's an example. During the early bidding, you realize that, if the opponents bid game, most of their finesses will probably work, and they will probably make it. Be careful to avoid pushing them into game.

**If your opponents probably can escape to a better bid if doubled, don't double, even if you're sure you can set them in their present bid.**

**Everything else being equal, it's best to have a contract in a major suit, then in NT, and then in a minor suit.** You need 26 points (hcp and distribution) for game in a major; 25-26 hcp for game in NT; and 27-28 points (hcp and distribution) to have a good play for game in a minor suit. You get **420** points for bidding 5D and making six NV. You get **420** for bidding and making four of a major NV. You get **430** for bidding 3NT NV and making 4.

**When an opponent is obviously making a sacrifice bid, double.** Doubling is a crucial part of successful duplicate play. **Don't make a double which will give your opponents game, unless you're very sure you can set them.** Some bridge

expert said, "If your opponents never make a bid you have doubled, you aren't doubling enough."

**When your RHO opens 1H or 1S, bid aggressively defensively if you have 0 or 1 of his suit or a strong 4- or 5-card holding in his suit. If you have 3 low cards in his suit, you will probably lose 2 or 3 tricks in his suit, if you or partner becomes the declarer.**

I don't favor bidding 1S with 4 spades in response to partner's 1H opening bid. 1NT forcing will find the 4-4 spade fit. Since my partnership never plays the strong reverse system, my partner can open 1H and then bid 2S without promising a giant hand.

**When you open one of a suit, you are forced to continue to bid as long as your partner, who has not previously passed, continues to bid previously unbid suits.**

**Avoid bidding on hunches.** Though reading the opponents' body language can possibly be helpful, following accepted bridge principles generally works much better than using intuition. As you already know, you are not allowed to interpret your partner's body language to your advantage.

**When you realize or strongly suspect you and your partner have a hopeless misfit, STOP BIDDING!!!**

**When you and your partner have together at least 15 points, you, according to vulnerability, should benefit from bidding to the level equal to the number of cards you have in your trump suit.** For example, if you have 10 spades between you, you should, especially with favorable vulnerability, be willing to bid 4S.

**It's especially good to have a lot of spades in your hand.** This allows your good 2S bid to be over your opponents' good 2H bid.

**Just as you need to avoid being predictable to opponents in poker, you need to be somewhat unpredictable to opponents in duplicate bridge.** If opponents know that you always bid aggressively, you are at a disadvantage. If you alternate playing North, South, East, and West in your regular games, you will slow the opponents' attempts to "get a fix" on your style.

## **DECLARER PLAY**

**When planning declarer play, count winners, count losers, check**

transportation with the dummy, think about your opponents' suit distributions, identify the "threat" hand (the hand you don't want to be in the lead), and plan needed discards before you play to the first trick.

Learn declarer play on your own by reading the bridge column in the newspaper and playing hands in Mike Lawrence's excellent web site, "Bridge Clues." Test your memory of these bridge hands by trying to play them later in the day in your head. This is superb mental exercise.

Be very alert to take every available trick in matchpoints play--as a declarer or defender. Missing one available trick usually gives you a bad score. In team games (Swiss teams and knockouts (KOs)), it is more important to simply make sure you make your bid or set the opponents. Extra tricks have much less value in team games.

## DEFENSE

Most importantly, don't give declarer a trick she can't easily make for herself. Sometimes, when you think you're trying to set up a trick for your side, you're actually setting up a trick for declarer.

Work hard on defense, even when you have bad cards. One way to work on defense is to count the declarer's hand, which is easier than you may think.

Have an agreement with partner about the first discard on defense, and carefully make and notice those discards.

## YOUR OWN FRAME OF MIND

Don't get upset by a bad outcome on a hand. In an ordinary pairs game, getting one "top board" will substantially make up for the zero score and return your game to average. Especially don't get upset when how you and your partner bid and played on a hand was justified, but disaster still struck.

Consider getting mad at yourself when you have done something stupid and gotten a bad result. I use these situations, especially early in a game, to get myself alert and motivated.

Try to stay alert, especially when something important may be about to happen. Avoid getting too tense, for example, as a result of drinking too much caffeine.

## RELATING TO YOUR PARTNER

**Don't criticize your partner's declarer play.** If you do, you will reduce her enjoyment of the game and may make her too tense, causing errors.

**It's OK to calmly talk with partner between rounds about misunderstandings concerning bidding or defense.**

**Trust your partner.** When you realize either your partner or an opponent "is lying" in bids, you should generally trust your partner. **If your partner is significantly stronger than you, you should virtually never take her out of what appears to you to be a risky bid or double.** If your partner has been doubled and wants to be rescued, she can redouble, which says, "Please rescue me!"

## RELATING TO OPPONENTS

**Be friendly with opponents, but don't let this distract you from your play.**

**It's not always bad when stronger players try to take advantage of you.** This can produce many good outcomes for you. These players will not go easy on you because you are a novice.

**How expert your opponents are can make a big difference.** Weaker players are more likely than strong players to overbid when they bid game. (This is partly because their declaring skills aren't excellent.) With this in mind, I try to avoid inadvisable sacrifices against weaker players. Don't sacrifice if you have a 30% chance of setting the contract. I believe strong players when they say they can make game. **Against strong pairs, bid and play cautiously in hopes of getting average outcomes.** The better players will nearly always double you when you make a silly bid. Weak players often let you make an outrageous bid without doubling you.

## Chapter 6 RECOMMENDED CONVENTIONS

Reasonable people can differ even greatly concerning bridge conventions and methods they think developing players should adopt or avoid. Some brilliant players who can dedicate lots of time to a small number of partnerships can benefit from using extremely complex bidding systems. All of the rest of us run the risk of having systems that are too complex.

**Except at the highest levels of bridge competition, surprisingly simple bridge methods can produce excellent results against strong competition.** A study was done to determine whether "super scientific" methods would outperform something close to "standard American." The "super scientific" methods won by a tiny bit. One small mistake in execution will squander that small advantage and more. In Pinehurst, NC during the early 1990s, when there was **extremely** strong play in the club games, two women in their 80s competed very successfully, though they had very simple systems, which included nearly none of the conventions I recommend below. They played Stayman and negative doubles and little else. Using relatively simple duplicate bridge methods since the early 1990s, I have generally been happy with my and my partners' play and our outcomes against strong opponents. So, I don't feel the need for more complex bidding systems.

As you know, the primary intended readership of this book are the, I'm sure, several million Baby Boomers who have played and enjoyed a significant amount of social bridge but little or no duplicate bridge. Butch Harmon, the top current representative of the most important family of American golf instructors, emphasizes using "what comes naturally" to a golfer as the starting point, instead of teaching an entirely different golf swing technique and concept. Similarly, I favor encouraging former social bridge players to build on viable aspects (e.g., five-card majors, better minor, opening 13-point hands, opening balanced 15-to-17 hcp hands as 1NT) of the methods they used in social bridge.

My doctoral dissertation was on work-related stress of judges. I studied a type of decision stress. Playing bridge can be experienced as a type of work. There are two types of work-related stress: quantitative (too much work) and qualitative (work that you are not capable of doing well). Playing too many complicated conventions can produce a combination of quantitative and qualitative stress that can result in a degradation of the quality of your attention, thinking, memory, and judgment. Recently in a club game in which several regionally prominent players were playing, I saw two players fail to recognize a transfer, after opening 1NT or 2NT, resulting in both cases in a "bottom board." (The transfer is very much simpler than many common conventions, and I recommend that all duplicate players use it.) In a recent tournament Swiss team, I saw a strong **pro** player and one of his regular customers make two significant and costly system mistakes during seven hands.

**Criteria for selecting conventions.** My rule of thumb in selecting conventions is "**high power, low complexity.**" I think, for example, that 1NT forcing and Jacoby 2NT meet the standard of "high power, low complexity." Obviously, you need sufficiently powerful methods to get optimum results. Because nearly all of us have a limit to our brain power, alertness, and stamina, we run the

risk of making mistakes, if we use systems that are too complex. **I want to use my brain power through highly reliable execution of fairly simple systems that my partner and I entirely agree on.** I recently played with a retired chemical engineer who liked my fairly simple methods because, he said, they allowed him to concentrate on the cards without being distracted by systems that were too complex.

## **RECOMMENDED CONVENTIONS FOR ALL DUPLICATE PLAYERS**

In chapter 5, I recommend that **all developing duplicate players play at least the following conventions: Stayman, transfers, negative doubles, limit raises, weak two bids, and strong 2C.** All of these conventions are described in the next few chapters.

## **RECOMMENDED CONVENTIONS FOR BABY BOOMER PLAYERS WHO WANT TO ADVANCE IN COMPETITIVENESS**

**If you decide to really "get serious" about duplicate bridge, I highly recommend that you consider gradually adopting the following:** 1NT forcing along with simple two-over-one; transfers; Jacoby 2NT; Stayman; weak two bids; Western cue; negative doubles; cue bid of opponent's suit showing a limit raise in partner's suit; unusual NT; Michaels; weak jump shifts (by unpassed hand); doubling when partner opens 1NT, and your RHO makes the bid you wanted to make ("shadow double" or "stolen bid doubles"); responsive doubles; support doubles; Cappelletti; Roman key card; redoubling when partner opens, and your RHO has doubled, to show 10+ hcp; weak jump raises in competition; and Jordan. **If you play these conventions well, you can play comfortably as the partner of a high percentage of duplicate players who compete successfully in strong club games.** (Nearly all of these conventions are covered later in this book.)

Recently there was an article in Bridge Bulletin in which two experts argued concerning whether the full two-over-one system is valuable for a significant percentage of players. I recommend staying away from the vast, complicated two-over-one system but still playing that a two bid of a new suit by an unpassed hand over an opening bid of one of a major is forcing, promises an opening bid and at least five of the suit, and presumably should lead to a game contract. I think that using this, along with one-NT forcing, generally works very well.

## **CONVENTIONS I DO NOT RECOMMEND FOR BABY BOOMER DEVELOPING PLAYERS**

**Drury.** This is a way to find out whether your partner opened light in third



seat. Even strong players mishandle Drury fairly often. You, as dealer, pass. Partner opens one of a major in third position. The Law of Total Tricks justifies your bidding three with a limit raise. If you sign off in two after bidding Drury, nearly all strong players will compete, pursuant to one of Mike Lawrence's most important teaching points. He says that you should try to keep opponents from playing in two of a major.

**Strong reverses.** This system is extremely complex. It sometimes requires opening a shorter suit first or making a highly non-descriptive bid (i.e., 2C with only 2 low clubs to avoid making a reverse of 2S, after opening 1H).

**The very elaborate version of two over one.** I recommend the "stripped-down" version. If I open 1S and my unpassed partner bids 2C, 2D, or 2H, she promises at least 5 of the suit and an opening hand. All of the later bids are common sense and not artificial pursuant to agreements.

**Inverted minors.** A limit raise system in response to an opening bid of one of a minor works just as well and is simpler. The full inverted minor system can reveal your side's weakness to your opponents.

**Smolen.** It applies when partner opens 1NT, and you are five, four in the majors. Here is a commonsense alternative that works well. Partner opens 1NT. You have 11 hcp evenly spaced in four spades and five hearts. You bid Stayman. Partner bids 2D. As a simpler alternative to Smolen, you can bid 4H, telling partner that is where you want to play.)

**Lebensohl.** Lebensohl applies, among other times, when your partner opens 1NT and your RHO makes an interfering bid. It is very extensive and complex. I greatly prefer "shadow doubles," which involves you as partner of a 1NT opener to double when your RHO makes the bid you want to make. Except for doubling in the stolen-bid situation, all systems (Stayman and transfers) are on.

**Flannery and mini-Roman.** These are artificial systems started with a 2D bid. If you have several partners, playing a weak 2D bid is simpler and better. Flannery and mini-Roman give opponents information that helps them to compete successfully. My observation is that Flannery is more valuable to play than mini-Roman.

**Extended cuebidding looking for slam.** I prefer using Roman key card.

**Opening 1C with less than three.** My card says I usually have 4 diamonds when I open 1D.

**Lavinthal and Roman odd-even discards.** These are complex discarding methods. The excellent Goren bridge book I studied in the early 1990s recommended against those methods. If I discard at least a 7, I want that suit led. If I discard lower than a 7, I don't want that suit led.

**Bergen raises.** Here are several of my reasons for not recommending Bergen raises. First, most of your less experienced partners won't know Bergen raises. Second, 1NT forcing does a good enough job in a very high percentage of cases in getting to good major suit contracts. Third, even fairly able players occasionally get into a bad contract when they have "messed up" Bergen raises. Fourth, there are endless examples of players competing very successfully without Bergen raises. Fifth, the Bergen 2S raise range of 6 to 10 points is too broad. Sixth, a Bergen raise of 3C will get you higher than you want to go a significant amount of the time. Seventh, bidding the Bergen raise of 3S without competition, especially with 0 to 2 points minimum, can get you into very dangerous contracts. Eighth, with the Bergen 3NT hand, it makes sense to bid 1NT forcing and then make a bid based on the additional information you receive about partner's hand. Ninth, Bergen raises give the opponents extremely precise information they can use in making decisions about competing and defending. Other than that, I think Bergen raises are great!

**Bidding "gadgets".** A bidding "gadget" is a bid, often an artificial bid, that has a very specific, non-obvious meaning. While studying Mike Lawrence's excellent "Bridge Clues" pages daily for six years, I have read about hundreds of bidding gadgets. Babyboomers moving into tough open games should be careful to avoid playing too many gadgets. I want my partners (and opponents) to be able to figure out the meanings of my bids. Using 200 "gadgets" in addition to your bidding conventions and defensive understandings would be like using a wordprocessing program needing to know entirely from memory, without reference to written guides, at least 450 commands. That assumes that you wouldn't be playing the conventions I have recommended against, which would require vastly more knowledge.

**If you decide to play duplicate bridge, some more experienced players will say, "You have to play Bergen raises and Drury!"** Please remember that there are sensible counters to such statements.

## **Chapter 7** **FINDING A MAJOR-SUIT FIT**

Generally, the easiest way to make a good score is to reach a makeable

contract in a major suit. Bidding NT is second best. Bidding a minor-suit game, which is five, should be avoided, if possible. **So, finding an 8-card fit with partner in a major suit can sensibly be viewed as the most important goal in bidding.** A very high percentage of experienced ACBL duplicate players use the bids below to help them reach good major-suit contracts. I think each convention and bid is important to gaining ability to compete in duplicate bridge.

1. **Opening one of your major when you have at least 5 cards and an opening hand.** If you open your long minor first, it will be hard to convince partner that you have five of your major.

2. **Stayman.** Your partner opens 1NT. Your RHO passes. (If your distribution is 3, 3, 3, 4, don't bid Stayman, because you have no ruffing value.) With at least 8 hcp and one or more 4-card major suits, bid 2C. Your partner will bid his 4- or 5-card major suit. If he doesn't have a 4- or 5-card major suit, he will bid 2D. You might safely bid Stayman with less than 8 hcp if you can tolerate any bid your partner might make. This is "junk Stayman." For example, partner opens 1NT, and you, for example, have 5 hcp and 4 hearts, 4 spades, 4 diamonds, and one club. Bid Stayman, and then pass whatever she bids.

3. **Transfers.** With a 5- or 6-card major suit across from a 1NT opener, you nearly always should transfer by bidding two of the suit immediately below your suit. (For example, you have hearts; therefore, you bid 2 diamonds.) Your partner will bid two of the suit immediately higher than the suit you bid, which makes him the declarer playing a contract in your good suit. If he has 4 or 5 of your suit and a very good hand, he should bid 3 of your suit, which is called a "super acceptance" of your transfer.

4. **Bidding your major suits up the line.** After your partner bids one of a minor suit, bid your 4-card heart suit first and, on your next bid, you can mention your 4-card spade suit. Of course, if you have a major suit with more than 4 cards, you mention your longer major suit first. Don't rebid a 5-card major suit unless it is very strong.

5. **Negative doubles.** When your partner has opened one, and your RHO has overcalled, and you have 4 or more of any unbid majors, make a negative double with 6 points if your partner can bid one of your major or with 8 points if your partner must bid two of the major. If your RHO jumps to 3S, you will need 4 hearts and an opening hand to make a negative double. Your partner opens one of a suit, and RHO overcalls. Here's another use of a negative double. You have five of the unbid major, but you aren't strong enough to bid two of the major. You can make a negative double, which does not lie to your partner about what suit you have at least

four of or about the strength of your hand.

6. **Constructive raises.** An unpassed hand should raise his partner's one of a major to the two level when she has 7 to 9 points (including distribution points) and 3 or 4 of the major suit. One NT forcing gives you a way to raise partner's suit with weaker support.

7. **Limit raises.** When your partner has opened one of a major, and you have 4 or 3 (with the A or K) of the major, and your hand counts in that major to 10 to 12 points, you should raise to 3 of the major, unless your RHO has doubled. If she has doubled, you should use **Jordan**, which involves bidding 2NT in exactly that situation, to show that you have a limit raise.

8. **1NT forcing.** An unpassed hand should bid 1NT forcing when his partner has opened one of a major, there is no interference bid, and she has one of the following hands:

- a. support for the suit but less than a constructive raise. Bid two of the major at your next bid.
- b. a limit raise but only 3 of the major. Bid 3 of the major at your next bid.
- c. a weak hand, no support for partner, and a 6- or 7-card suit. Bid your suit after partner's second bid. You expect your partner to "drop dead" and let you play there.
- d. a square hand, no more than two of partner's suit, and 7 to 12 hcp. Unless partner's second bid suggests a different bid or call, bid 2NT after partner's second bid.
- e. a good hand but not quite a two-over-one hand. Bid 1NT, and then jump in your suit. Partner will know what you have.

9. **Jacoby 2NT.** Partner has opened one of a major, and you have 13 or more points counting in that major and four of the major suit or three with a high honor. Your first bid is 2NT, which partner will alert as "Jacoby 2NT." If opener has a void or singleton, he should announce that by bidding that suit. If not, he should bid 4 of the major with a minimum opener, 3NT with 15 to 17 points, or 3 of the major with 18+ points.

10. **Support doubles.** You open, for example, 1C. Your partner bids 1H. Your RHO bids 1S. You have 3 hearts. Double, telling your partner that you have exactly 3 hearts. If your RHO doubles, your redouble shows 3 of partner's suit.

11. **Second-round support of a major suit response with 3 of the major.** You open 1C. Your partner bids 1H. With 4 spades and 3 hearts, you bid 1S. Your

partner bids 1NT. You can then bid 2H telling your partner you have exactly 3 hearts.

12. **Michaels.** When your RHO has opened one of a minor suit, and you have at least 5 hearts and 5 spades, bid two of the same minor suit. Your partner will not know how many points you have but will know your distribution. If your partner's RHO doesn't bid, your partner should bid his better major suit. If your RHO's bid was one of a major suit, bid two of that major indicating you have five of the other major and five of a minor suit. **Being 6/5 in the majors is extremely valuable.** A bridge expert famously said, "**Six/five, come alive!**" In this situation, you are delighted to bid Michaels. Very occasionally, you may bid Michaels with a 5-card and a 4-card suit. I have found that, if you have three of your RHO's opening bid minor suit, two of the other minor, and two excellent 4-card majors, bidding 4/4 Michaels will often get a very good result. Still, with 4/4, you should probably later pass.

13. **Weak two bids.** You have a chance to open the bidding and have 6 diamonds, hearts, or spades and from 6 to 10 hcp. If you are NV, you should have at least 3 of the top 5 in your suit. **If you are V, you should have at least 2 of the top 3 of your suit.** Open two of your suit. This is obviously a preemptive bid, especially if your partner has previously passed. This highly descriptive bid will help your partner set the contract. **If partner simply raises your suit to three, she is only continuing the preempt.** Your RHO probably has the best hand at the table. If your partner bids 2NT, she is asking you if you have an ace or K in a side suit for transportation back to your hand after your suit is established in a 3NT contract. If you do have a side ace or K, you bid 3 of that suit. Most strong partnerships play that, if the partner of a weak two bidder bids a new suit, the weak two bidder is obligated to bid again. It is important to have an agreement about this. **In recent months I have become convinced that making weak two bids is a terrifically important part of bidding techniques.**

14. **Rebidding a six-card suit.** As opener or responder, you generally should rebid a 6-card suit, especially if it is a major suit, unless you've already made a weak two bid in that suit. If my partner makes the opening bid or doubles for takeout, it is extremely unlikely that I will fail to mention my six or seven card major, even if I have little else.

15. **The 3/4 major-suit trump fit.** Especially if you and partner have nearly all of the honors, declaring with a 3/4 fit in a major suit can be your most feasible contract.

16. **When you and partner are 4/4 in one major and 5/3 in the other,**

**you, according to experts, should declare in the 4/4 suit.** This allows you to discard two losers on the 5-card major suit. It also allows ruffing in both hands.

17. **Help suit game try.** You open 1 of a major with 16 to 17 points (hcp + distribution). You have three or four low cards in a side suit (not spades). Partner raises to 2 of your suit. If you bid 3 of your weak suit, you're saying, "If you can keep us from losing three quick tricks in this suit, bid 4 of my suit. If not, bid 3 of my suit."

18. **The strong jump shift not in competition.** While it is best to play weak jump shifts in competition, I can't find good arguments against using strong jump shifts with a hand counting at least to 16 points, when partner has opened and the responder's RHO passes. Of course, the partnership must have clear understandings about this.

### **"Doing the math" in major suit auctions**

Hand 1. Your side ordinarily needs 26 points (hcp + distribution) to bid game. You open 1H and have 12 hcp and a doubleton. LHO passes. Partner bids a limit raise, 3H. Since partner's maximum hcp + distribution count is 12, **pass**. If you have 13 hcp and a doubleton, you probably should bid game when V in IMPs (Swiss teams and knockouts) scoring, probably not in masterpoints. If you have 14 hcp and a doubleton, you probably should bid 4H.

Hand 2. Your RHO passes. You have 5 clubs, 4 good spades, 2 diamonds, 2 hearts, and 12 hcp. LHO passes. Your partner bids 1S. Given that you can't pass, you should raise to 2S. If you have this distribution and 15 hcp, you should jump to 3S. If you have this distribution and 17 hcp, I favor jumping to 4S because of the danger, if you jump to 3S, that partner, with 4 spades, 7 hcp, and a singleton will think you have 15 hcp. Of course, there is the worst case scenario that your partner has 4 spades, a square hand, and 6 hcp.

## **Chapter 8 ONE NO-TRUMP FORCING**

This is an excellent system for **bidding not in competition an unpassed hand in response to your partner's opening of one of a major.** I strongly believe that it is a mistake to make 1NT forcing or even semi-forcing for a **passed** hand. In that situation, use of an ordinary 1NT bid can be very helpful and descriptive. First, I will list and briefly describe bids and conventions that ordinarily are played along with 1NT forcing.

## BIDS USUALLY PLAYED WITH 1NT FORCING

**Constructive raises.** When your partner opens one of a major, you raise to two of that major **only** with 7-to-9 points, including distribution, and 3 or 4 of the major suit.

**Limit raises.** Partner has opened one of a major. Jump to three of that major **not** in competition with four cards in partner's major and 10-to-12 points, counting distribution. You can make this bid when you have three cards in the suit and one or two high honors. This bid can be made by a passed hand. It is not alerted.

**Weak (preemptive) jump shifts.** Alerted. 1C-2S or 1S-3C I prefer instead bidding 1NT forcing and then making a minimum "drop-dead" bid in my suit at my second call. (As mentioned in the previous chapter, you may want to play strong jump shifts not in competition.)

**Cue bidding the RHO's overcalled suit** to indicate a limit raise in support of your partner's opening of one of a major suit. Not alerted. (N)1H (E)1S (S)2S

**Jacoby 2NT.** With 4 or a good 3 of your partner's suit and 13 or more points, you jump to 2NT. Alerted. Your side definitely has at least game. This is discussed much more fully in the previous chapter.

**Two-over-one game forcing.** This applies when your partner bids one of a **major** before you have bid. If you bid two of a lower suit over that bid, not jumping, you promise an opening hand and, ordinarily, at least 5 of the suit. Usually, opponents can't bid, and you can make game. If your fit is in a minor suit, you may sign off short of game. Fully describing this system requires several books. I play the simplest possible version.

**Opener rebidding a 6-card major suit.** 1S-1NT-2S Jump in spades with 6 spades and 17+ points, counting distribution.

## ONE NO-TRUMP FORCING

Again, this bid is **not made in competition**. It is made by an **unpassed** hand in response to partner's opening of one of a major. As the name states, the opener cannot pass this 1NT bid. You can make this bid with at least five types of hands. **These are the hands you can have.**

**Support for your partner's major suit short of a constructive raise.** For example, you have 6 points and 3 (maybe only 2) of partner's major suit. You may have 4-to-6 points and 4 of the major. Bid 1NT and then, at your next call, bid 2 of the major, if you can. Your partner usually will pass. 1S-1NT-2C-2S-P **You sometimes should make this bid with 2 of partner's suit.**

**A limit raise (10-to-12 points) but only a bad 3 of partner's major suit.** Bid 1NT and then at your next call jump to 3 of partner's major. 1S-1NT-2C-3S

**No support for partner and a good 6- or 7-card suit.** Bid 1NT and at your next turn bid 2 of your suit. Your partner should drop dead (pass). 1S-1NT-2C-2H-P. This often works like a weak jump shift. In the auction just above, you sign off at 2H, instead of 3H pursuant to a weak jump shift.

**No support for partner and a good hand and suit, a little short of a two-over-one bid.** Bid 1NT and then jump in your suit. Your partner will know exactly what you have. 1S-1NT-2C-3H

**You have 1 or 2 of your partner's suit, between 7 and 12 hcp, and NT distribution.** Your hcp count can range from 7 to possibly 12. With more, you should manufacture a two-over-one bid. Make commonsense bids later in the auction.

Use 1NT forcing to get your partner to describe her hand further. This will help you find a sensible bid. **A key to the power of 1NT forcing is that responder knows opener's hand after opener's second bid, and opener knows responder's hand after responder's second bid.** Either can become captain and set the contract.

## Chapter 9 RESPONDING TO PARTNER'S BID OF ONE OF A MINOR SUIT

Duplicate players nearly never open a major with only four of that suit. Therefore, there are many openings of one of a minor suit. **I recommend more or less a "better-minor" system.** When your partner opens one of a minor suit, he usually will have at least 4 of the suit, though holdings of three may occur. **Below are bids of the partner of the opening bidder.** If you haven't yet passed, your partner cannot pass if you bid one of a new suit. Therefore, you do not need to make a strong jump shift to tell your partner that you have a very strong hand.



**When you have at least 5 hcp and at least 4 of a major, bid one of that major.** Don't hesitate to pass, if you have less than 5 hcp with 4 of a major and without really good hand shape. Recently, I have decided that, if partner has opened a minor suit of which I have no more than two, I want to try very hard to find a sensible bid. I don't want partner to play 1C or 1D, maybe V, with 5 or less of the suit.

**When you have 4 of both majors, bid hearts first,** no matter how much stronger your spade suit is. Even when your hand is strong enough for only one bid, bid the 4-card heart suit over the stronger 4-card spade suit. Your partner can bid spades, if she has 4. When you have 5 spades and 4 hearts or 5 spades and 5 hearts, bid spades first and then hearts, if your hand is strong enough for 2 bids. Your partner will know your distribution.

**When you have 5 of a major, bid one of that suit.** Don't rebid that suit unless it is extremely strong. The new-minor-forcing convention allows rebidding your 5-card major in some situations. I don't recommend using the full new-minor-forcing convention. (It's dangerous to "fall in love" with a 5-card major suit.)

**When you have 6 of a major, bid that suit.** You can rebid that suit. If you are an unpassed hand and have nothing beside a decent 6-card major suit, make a weak jump shift to two of the major (unless you play strong jump shifts not in competition). My understanding with my partners is that, if you have previously passed, your jump shift to your major suit is strong and invitational to game in your suit. It says that you have nearly an opening hand and a strong major suit. **Six cards in a major suit, especially with some honors, is extremely valuable. I often see opponents getting bad results as a result of failure to bid and, possibly, rebid a 6-card major suit.**

**When you have 5 of each major, bid spades first.**

**When you don't have 4 or more of either major suit, you can bid 1NT with 6-to-9 hcp; you can bid 2NT with 10-to-12 hcp; and you can bid 3NT with 13-to-15 hcp.** Don't worry about your lack of a good stopper in a suit. Your partner has opened and will nearly always compensate for your hand's weaknesses. I'm reluctant to make one of these bids, however, if I have no honors in either major.

**Some expert players play that an unpassed hand bidding 2C over partner's 1D is a two-over-one bid showing an opening hand.** Regardless, that bid shows a strong hand and is forcing for one round.

**Your partner bids 1C, and you have a good hand with 4 or 5 diamonds and 4 of a major suit.** Bid 1D and later bid the major suit. With enough strength for only one bid, bid the major first. (It would not be a mistake to bid the major first because of the importance of searching for a fit in a major.)

**A limit raise of a minor suit requires 5 of the suit and 10-to-12 points counting in that suit.** Your limit raise in your partner's minor suit will allow your partner to bid 3NT, if that appears to be the best place to play. Since partner will be considering 3NT, I recommend that you have at least 9 hcp.

### **"Doing the math" after opening one of a minor**

You ordinarily need 25-26 hcp to bid 3NT. You open 1D and have 15 hcp with a club singleton. LHO passes. Partner bids 1NT. The most hcp your partner can have is 9. **Pass.** If you have 16-17 hcp, you probably should invite game by bidding 2NT. If you have 18 hcp, you should bid 3NT.

Remember that possibly runnable length in a suit and intermediate cards (10s & 9s) make your hand better in NT.

## **Chapter 10 OPENING ONE NO-TRUMP**

Unless you have a long, runnable suit, your pair usually needs 26 hcp for game (9 tricks) in 3NT. (I had a partner (Sam Kass) who was such a good declarer that I could safely put him in 3NT contracts with only 25 or maybe only 24 hcp.)

**Point count needed.** Most duplicate players open 1NT with from 15-to-17 hcp. Aces and Ks are higher quality cards than Qs and Js. If you have two 10s, add one point to your count. It's helpful to have 10s and 9s.

**Shape needed.** You need a balanced hand. If you have 2 doubletons, your hand isn't balanced. While opening 1NT with 5 of a minor is common, you should open 1NT with 5 of a major only when it is a weak suit. Bidding 1NT tells your partner your hcp count and allows use of the excellent NT response bids. Having a 5-card suit in a NT contract is very good because it may provide a runnable suit.

**Stoppers needed.** You should have stoppers in at least 3 suits, unless, for example, one of the suits is 4 of a suit headed by the 10, 9. 10s and 9s are undervalued. Js are overvalued.

**Overcalling 1NT.** When your RHO opens one of a major or minor suit, and you have at least a possible double stopper in that suit, at least 14 hcp, and a square hand, don't hesitate to overcall 1NT. In addition to doing the best job of describing your hand, this bid allows partner to use a Stayman or transfer bid.

## RESPONSE BIDS

1. **Stayman.** Your partner opens 1NT. Your RHO doesn't bid. With at least 8 hcp and one or more 4-card major suits, bid 2C. Your partner will bid his 4- or 5-card major suit. If he doesn't have a 4- or 5-card major suit, he will bid 2D. You might safely bid Stayman with less than 8 points if you can tolerate any bid your partner might make. For example, you have 4 spades, 3 hearts, 5 diamonds, and one club. You know your partner will bid 2S, 2H, or 2D, all of which you can tolerate. If you have a 4-card major suit, three 3-card suits, and 8 hcp, don't bid Stayman. Pass. You have no trumping values for your partner.

**The "leaping Stayman" response bid by the 1NT opener.** If my partner bids Stayman in response to my 1NT opening bid, and I have 5 of a major and a very good hand, I bid 3 of that major. This bid is easily interpreted by partners, even without an understanding.

2. **Transfer to a major.** With a 5- or 6-card major suit across from a 1NT opener, you should transfer by bidding 2 of the suit below your suit. Your partner should bid 2 of the suit immediately higher than the suit you bid, which makes him the declarer playing a contract in your good suit. If he has 4 of your suit and a very good hand, he can bid 3 of your suit, which is called a "super acceptance" of the transfer. Your partner opens 1NT, you transfer to a major, and then you bid 2NT. You aren't inviting game. You're letting partner decide between 3 of the major and 2NT. If you are sure you want to be in game, jump to 3NT or 4 of the major.

3. **Transfer to a minor.** Partner has opened 1NT. You have 5 or 6 clubs. To transfer to clubs, bid 2S. Partner will bid 3C. You have 5 or 6 diamonds. Bid 2S. After partner bids 3C, you correct to 3D. She knows that you are asking to play in 3D.

4. **Inviting game by bidding 2NT.** If you have 9 hcp and no 4-card major suit, you can invite game by bidding 2NT. If your partner has 17 hcp, he can raise to 3NT, confident that you together have 26 hcp. You might invite with a little less if you have lots of 10s and 9s and/or a potentially runnable suit.

5. **Raising to 3NT.** If you have 10 hcp and no 4-card major suit, you should

raise directly to 3NT. Again, your hand will be especially valuable if you have lots of 10s and 9s (which are called intermediates) and/or a potentially runnable suit. If you have a 6-card runnable minor suit, bid 3NT even if you have only 7 or 8 hcp.

6. **4NT, quantitative, inviting slam.** When partner opens 1NT, and you also have a 1NT opener and no 4- or 5-card major, to invite slam in NT, you can bid 4NT. You are saying, "Partner, if you are at the top of your range in 1NT, you should bid 6NT."

7. **Further describing your hand.** After an initial responsive bid, such as a transfer, you can further describe your hand, as by bidding a five- or six-card minor suit.

## Chapter 11 OPENING TWO NO-TRUMP

**Point-count needed.** You need 20 or 21 hcp. With 22-23 hcp, bid 2C and bid 2NT on your next bid. Your partner will know you have an especially strong hand and will respond using responses to 2NT. If you have 24+ hcp and a square hand, open 2C and bid 3NT on your next bid. Your partner can still use Stayman or a transfer.

**Shape needed.** Same as 1NT

**Stoppers needed.** You definitely cannot have a worthless doubleton. Worthless tripletons also are very undesirable.

**Responses.** Fortunately, the responses to 1NT apply also after 2NT openings. Of course, since partner has 20-21 hcp, you, as responder, can support partner with less than when she opens 1NT.

**Asking for aces.** If your partner has bid some level of NT, you can ask for aces using Gerber, which asks by bidding 4C. 4D=no aces or all four aces. You ask for kings by bidding 5C. When your partner has opened 2NT, and you have at least a 5-card major and a hand that counts to at least 11, to ask for partner's aces, you first transfer to your suit. Then you use **Roman Key Card** (4NT) to ask for key cards (aces and K of trump) in that suit. In the 3-0, 1-4 version, the responder bids 5C with 3 or 0 key cards, 5D with 1 or 4 key cards, 5H with 2 key cards without the Q of trumps, or 5S with 2 key cards with the Q of trumps.

**Responder's discretion in questionable hands.** The partner of the 2NT

opener must exercise sound discretion concerning responding. For example, partner opens 2NT; you are V; you have 4 hcp; and you are playing in a team (Swiss team or KO) event. Though you and partner together may have only 24 hcp, you need to stretch a little in that type of game. You should raise to 3NT. In these situations, having a potentially runnable 5- or 6-card suit and/or several 10s and 9s argues in favor of raising to 3NT. If you have 6 of a major, possibly with the Q, 10, 9 of that suit, and a queen in another suit, you definitely should go to game in your 6-card major suit. If your 6-card suit is a minor in which you have high cards, you should probably play in 3NT.

**Overcalling 2NT over a weak two bid.** Most strong players play this bid as showing a very solid 1NT bid and nearly surely a double stopper in the weak two bid suit. It is important to have an understanding with your partner on this.

### **"Doing the math" after partner opens 2NT**

Your partner opens 2NT (20-21 hcp). You have 9-10 hcp. Bid 3NT. You have 11-12 hcp. Make a slam try. If your hand counts to 13 (maybe 11 hcp and a singleton), make yourself captain and search for the likely good slam bid. You make yourself captain because you know a lot about partner's hand, while you don't have good tools for telling her about your hand.

## **Chapter 12 PREEMPTIVE BIDDING**

"Preemptive bidding" is bidding in which you or you and your partner make relatively high bids early in the auction, not expecting to make your bids but rather hoping to keep your opponents from finding their best contract.

To think sensibly about preemptive bidding, we must think about overall bidding philosophy and style. If you divide duplicate bidders into "very conservative," "conservative", "balanced", "aggressive", and "very aggressive," I'll bet that nearly none of the highly successful players are "very conservative" or even "conservative". If you make an aggressive bid, the following good things can happen: (1) you have the highest bid and get an acceptable outcome, which can include improbably making your bid, going down undoubled, or going down doubled with an acceptable score for opponents; (2) you keep opponents from finding and getting to their optimum bid, which often is a game bid; (3) you force opponents to bid higher than they can make; (4) you take up so much bidding space that opponents, with insufficient information, make a bid that results in a positive score for you; or (5) you learn enough to defend successfully. That is five possible

excellent results of aggressive bidding. If you bid conservatively, the main good outcome is avoiding overbidding. Of course, you can avoid pushing opponent into a game or slam contract they can make. I would rather have five possible good results of my bidding style than two.

**I am not, however, advocating bidding aggressively in nearly all situations.** You need to consider vulnerability, expected positions of honors, quality of your opponents, and other factors. Unquestionably, excellent bridge players have a good sense of when to proceed cautiously. If you study Mike Lawrence's writing on his excellent website, "Bridge Clues," you may get the impression that he is a somewhat cautious bidder. I think this is because he plays against very dangerous players.

## TYPES OF PREEMPTIVE BIDS

**Weak two bids.** You make an opening bid of 2D, H, or S with (nearly always) 6 cards in your suit and between 6 and 10 hcp. If you are V, you should have 2 of the top 3 honors. If you are NV, you should have 3 of the top 5. If you make a weak two bid, LHO passes, and your partner raises to the 3 level, she is not inviting game. She is **extending the preempt**, hoping to make life miserable for her LHO, who nearly surely has the best hand at the table.

### "Doing the math" after partner's weak two bid

Hand 1. After a pass, your partner opens a weak two H or S. You have 2 of partner's suit, no other shortness, and 14 hcp. **Pass** or maybe bid 3 of partner's suit, which clearly is not inviting game. Hand 2: You have 2 of partner's suit and 15-17. Make a game try. One way would be to bid 2NT, asking if partner has a feature (Ace or K in a side suit). You can have the understanding that partner will deny a feature if she doesn't have at least a good hand. Hand 3: You have 2 of partner's suit and at least 18 hcp. Bid 4 of partner's major or ask for a feature and bid game accordingly.

If your partner opens a weak 2D, your best chance for game is probably 3NT.

**Preemptive three bids.** They are similar to weak two bids but usually need 7 cards in the suit bid. If you make such a bid vulnerable in the third seat, you should be able to take at least 7 tricks. Otherwise, your LHO can double, and your RHO can leave it in for penalty.

**Preemptive four bids.** You usually have 8 cards in your suit and **think you**

can probably make 8 tricks. If you are sure of  $8\frac{1}{2}$  tricks, open 2C instead of a preemptive four. This better describes your hand, forces partner to bid twice, and leaves open the possibility of your side bidding slam.

**Weak jump overcalls.** This is an overcall at the two, three, or four level. You need about the hands needed for an opening two, three, or four bid, respectively.

**Weak jump shifts.** Of course, you and partner must decide whether to use strong jump shifts not in competition. Your partner has opened one of a suit. You have 6 or 7 cards in a different suit, probably no more than 5 hcp, and no support for partner's suit. If you agree to use weak jump shifts not in competition, when you jump shift, into 2 or 3 of your suit, you are asking partner to let you play there. **My understanding with my partners is that, if the partner who makes a jump shift had earlier passed, the bid indicates nearly an opening hand and probably 6 of the suit.** (Decades ago, that was a very common understanding in duplicate bridge.)

**Preemptive jump raises by opener's partner.** You usually make this bid after your RHO has doubled or overcalled and you have at least 4 of partner's suit and nearly no defense.

**Preemptive jump raises by overcaller's partner.** Again, you usually have at least 4 of partner's suit and nearly no defense.

Here's a generally accepted principle: **If you have made a preemptive bid, especially an opening bid, you should not make another bid in that auction.**

## EXAMPLES OF GOOD SITUATIONS FOR PREEMPTIVE BIDDING

Your LHO, V, opens 1C. Your partner, NV, bids 2D. RHO makes a negative double. You have A,Q,10, xx of diamonds and nothing else valuable. You have 4 cards in the majors. With that hand in a regional Swiss team event, I immediately bid 6D. Our opponents could not find their cold slam bid. **Since partner had 7 diamonds, and I had 5, one of our opponents was void.**

Partner, NV, bids 2S. RHO, V, doubles. You have A,J,xxx of spades, no other honors, and a singleton heart. During the same regional, I bid 5S, and our opponents failed to find their cold slam.

Partner, NV, opens 1H. RHO, V, doubles. You have 6 baby hearts, one spade, and absolutely no defense. I would certainly bid at least 4H immediately. Against

excellent opponents, I would bid 5H immediately.

Partner, NV, opens 2S. RHO, V, passes. You have 4 spades, one heart, the Q of clubs, and the Q of diamonds. I would bid 4S, thereby limiting opponents' ability to find an excellent fit in hearts. Your LHO nearly certainly has an excellent hand, probably including a good heart suit.

You will notice that in these hands you had little or no defense. If you have meaningful defensive values, you need to avoid saving the opponents from a bid they cannot make, thus converting a positive score for your side into a positive score for opponents.

## Chapter 13 STRONG AND ARTIFICIAL TWO CLUBS

A very high percentage of duplicate players open a very strong, 20-21 hcp, balanced hand with a 2NT bid. They open 2C with a NT hand and more than 21 hcp or at least  $8\frac{1}{2}$  tricks in **any suit**.

If you play weak two bids in diamonds, hearts, and spades, you obviously need to use an artificial 2C bid to indicate a very strong opening hand in a suit. (I don't recommend Precision or strong 1C systems.)

Some players make a 2C bid when they have at least 20 hcp and the hand isn't appropriate for NT. My impression is that experts tend to disagree with that approach. They aren't as concerned about hcp. **They want to be sure they can take  $8\frac{1}{2}$  tricks.** This allows their partner (responder) to confidently calculate the minimum number of tricks they together can take. If the opener's suit is spades and the responder has 3 spades and  $1\frac{1}{2}$  tricks playing in spades, he can confidently take opener to 4S.

### RESPONDING TO TWO CLUBS OPENING BIDS

There are several good ways to respond to a 2C opening bid. Below is the approach I favor.

If your hand counts to at least 6 or 7 points, including distribution, and you have a decent suit with at least 5 cards in the suit, you should respond by bidding your suit. If you have at least 6 points and NT distribution, you should bid 2NT. **Regardless of your holding, you are forced to give your partner at least two bids.** If you don't have the right cards to bid a suit or 2NT, bid 2D. This is



referred to as a "negative or waiting" bid. You may have absolutely nothing, or you may have something but are waiting to see what your partner bids.

**Telling your partner, who opened 2C, that you have absolutely nothing.** If you have absolutely nothing in support of the opener's second bid, you still must make a second bid, which will allow your partner to set the contract. Your bid is called a "**second negative**" bid. You bid the cheapest/lowest available minor suit. For example, your partner bids 2C. You have a very weak hand, so you bid 2D. Your partner indicates his suit by bidding 2S. You have no more than 2 spades and no tricks in side suits. You bid the cheapest available minor suit, which is 3C. Your partner now knows that you have absolutely nothing and can set the contract accordingly.

As another example, your partner bids 2C. You have nothing and bid 2D. Partner bids 3C, clubs being his suit. You bid the cheapest available minor suit, which is 3D. He now knows you have absolutely nothing.

**Responding when opener's second bid is 2NT.** When your partner opens 2C, you bid 2D (negative or waiting), and he bids 2NT, he is saying he has a NT hand and 22-23 hcp. You now bid as though your partner opened 2NT. You can bid Stayman or a transfer. You can raise your partner in NT. Since your partner's hand is now limited, you can pass, if you have absolutely nothing.

**When you as responder have an unusually good hand.** In the unusual situation in which your partner opens 2C, and you have a very strong hand, you may need to jump or make yourself the captain in setting the contract. Your side nearly certainly has slam somewhere.

## Chapter 14 SLAM BIDDING

My impression is that genuinely excellent bidders excel the ordinary good player by a greater margin in slam bidding than any other aspect of bridge play. Having known for decades that slam bidding has not been a strong part of my game, I have recently been working hard on slam bidding. Around 2000, I had a practice of suggesting to my partners that we never bid slam when we were missing an ace or the K of trumps. Now, I realize that competent players must sometimes bid a slam missing an ace or the K of trumps. (During a Swiss team in which I was teamed with three excellent novice players I was mentoring, two high-level teams bid a slam missing **two** key cards. We set each team on the hand in question and beat one of them.)

## SOME IDEAS ABOUT SLAM BIDDING

In most club duplicate games, it is not necessary to bid and make a grand slam to make at least an average score, provided you bid and make the small slam. When the field includes many genuinely excellent pairs, it can be necessary from time to time to bid and make a grand slam to compete effectively.

If you think that, to succeed in a slam bid, one out of two finesses must succeed, you should bid the slam. If, however, you think you will need to make two successful finesses, you shouldn't bid the slam.

During team games (Swiss teams and KOs), you should stretch a little in bidding a V slam. If the opponents at the other table bid and make that slam, and you don't, you will nearly surely lose the contest. My calculations and those of experts suggest that you should not stretch in bidding NV slams in team games.

Excellent players often use a cue bidding sequence in getting to a good slam bid. For example, North opens 1S. South bids 2NT, which is Jacoby 2NT. North bids 3S, indicating that she thinks playing in spades is probably best and that she has substantial extra values. South bids 4C, saying he has the ace of clubs. N bids 4H, saying he does not have the ace of diamonds but does have the ace of hearts. While I respect the skill employed in such auctions, I prefer, in such situations, for my partner or me to bid Roman Key Card and then set the contract.

I tend to doubt that we can make slam if an opponent has made an opening bid at the one level in that auction.

I was playing with an excellent player for the first time. My partner bid 1H, and my RHO bid 1S. Later in the auction, I jumped to the bid of 5H. She figured out that I wanted her to bid 6H if she had no more than one loser in spades. She bid and made 6H.

I have had some success recently in trying harder to get to the non-obvious slams that top players are likely to get to. Sometimes I bid five of our agreed major suit, asking partner to bid six if she has significant values she has not told me about. This might be four or five likely tricks in a side suit.

When neither six of a major nor 6NT appears to have good prospects, six of a minor, even with a 4/4 fit, might work.

When there is a **strong** likelihood that you can make 6 of a suit or 6NT, you should bid 6NT in a matchpoints event. In Swiss teams, however, you should opt for

the safest contract, which might be 6 of a suit.

## Chapter 15

### OVERCALLS AND DOUBLES OF OPENING BIDS

Bidding immediately to the left of the opening bidder is important and challenging. My understanding of overcalls and doubles in that seat has changed greatly. The following ideas are consistent with Marty Bergen's excellent books, Points Schmoints and More Points Schmoints. Here's the crucial principle: **If you have good trick-taking ability and/or good point count, you're handicapping your side if you fail to enter the auction.**

**If your hand appears to have better potential value on defense than offense, try to reach this conclusion as early as possible and pass smoothly after your RHO's bid. Maybe they will overbid.**

**Overcalls.** I now overcall with weaker hands and stronger hands than previously. When we're NV, and I can overcall a decent (usually 6-card) major or diamond suit at the one level, I will do so with no more than 6 hcp. Since my partners know (**and our card indicates**) that we tend to overcall light, it nearly never gets us in trouble. (We may find a fit; my partner will know what to lead; the opponents may be discouraged enough to stay out of a makeable game or slam.) Bidding V and/or to the two level requires significantly more. If my partner has already passed, I am very reluctant to overcall V to the two level with much less than an opening hand. Still, if I can count 6 or 7 likely tricks, I will overcall V at the two level. **I nearly never make a preemptive jump overcall because they seem to rarely work. Instead, I just overcall.** Because of this, my partners know that my overcalls tend to suggest more offensive than defensive trick-taking ability.

I was taught as a teenager in the 1950s that, when you're bidding over an opening bid and have an opening hand, you must double. **Of course, I no longer accept that principle.** If my hand counts to 15 points or less, and I know what suit, often with at least 6 cards, I want to play the hand in, I overcall in that suit. This rarely causes our side to miss a game. If your partner has enough for you to make game, she will support your bid or make some other bid. **A jump by your partner in your overcall suit is preemptive and must be alerted.** Your partner can tell you she has at least a limit raise in your suit by cue-bidding the opening bidder's suit. If she does, and you have a minimum hand with no hope of game, you should rebid your suit at the lowest available level. Any other bid says you're open to exploring for game.

When your partner has overcalled, you have the opportunity to make a Law of Total Tricks bid to the level equal to the number of cards your side has in the suit. The "Principle of Early Arrival" suggests that you should bid to that level immediately. For example, LHO opens 1H V. Your partner overcalls 1S NV. RHO bids 2S, promising a limit raise in hearts. You have 6 spades and nothing else. You know your partner has at least 5 spades. You should bid 4S or even 5S.

**Bids by overcaller's previously-passed partner.** Recently, I have fairly often passed a possible opening weak-two bid because we were V, and I did not have 2 of the top 3 honors. My LHO then opens. My partner bids two of a suit in which I have no more than one card. Opener's partner passes. I then bid my 6-card suit. My current understanding with partners is that I cannot stand her suit and want to play in two of my suit. Since I am a passed hand, it is nearly impossible that we will be missing game.

**Doubles.** A double of an opening bid of one of a suit promises one of these two types of hands:

(1) **You have at least 3-card support for the other three suits, no significant holdings in the previously bid suit, and at least nearly an opening hand.** I like a Law of Total Tricks bid in this situation. My RHO opens 1C. We are NV, and I have a singleton or a void in clubs and at least 10 (maybe 9) hcp scattered among my three 4-card suits. I'm confident my partner will be able to safely bid two of one of those suits. If you make this type of double, you do not later bid your best suit, which would suggest that you are very strong. If partner cue bids 2C, she is asking you to bid your better major.

If you have significant holdings in the opener's suit, less than 3-card support for one of the other suits, and less than 17 points, counting hcp and distribution, **you absolutely must do something other than double.** (If you double, your partner will nearly always bid your weak suit, which will put you in a nearly impossible situation.) Why not overcall with an excellent 4-card suit? This virtually never gets me in trouble. Especially NV, I sometimes make a 4/4 Michaels bid.

(2) **You have at least 17 points, counting hcp and distribution.** You can double with less than 3-card support for the other three suits and holding high cards in the opener's suit. You ordinarily have a long and strong suit that you will insist on declaring in. You definitely can and should double and later bid your suit. **If you double and then bid your suit, your partner must "sit up and take notice."** She doesn't need to have much (maybe 8 hcp or ruffing ability in opponents' suit) to raise you to game.

**If your hand doesn't fit one of these descriptions, you must find a bid other than a double.** (I once lost 2.5 gold points because my partner made a minimum, off-spade double, and I did not alert that possibility.)

## Chapter 16 RESPONDING TO PARTNER'S TAKEOUT DOUBLE

Your partner, by making a takeout double, is saying she has one of two types of hands: (1) 12-to-16 points, at least 3-card support for the unbid suits, nearly certainly 4 of the other major (if the first bid was one of a major), and little in the bid suit; or (2) a big hand, probably with an excellent suit, in which case she does not have to have 3-card support for the unbid suits, and she can have strength in the bid suit. Your partner will let you know which she has later. You should alert if it is your understanding that she can have any other type of hand, such as minimal points without at least 3-card support in the unbid suits.

If your RHO bids over your partner's double, you can pass with a bad hand. Making a free (unforced) bid in this situation shows some values (8+ points including distribution).

If your RHO doesn't bid over your partner's double, **you must bid, no matter how weak your hand is**, unless you want to defend the doubled contract. Of course, defending a doubled bid at the one level rarely pays off.

When you're forced to bid (your RHO doesn't bid), making the minimum response in your longest suit shows **no values**. Your partner, who had doubled, must remember this.

With 9-11 points, including distribution, jump in your longest suit. This bid shows strength and is not preemptive. **A jump bid in response to a takeout double is strong. A jump raise in response to partner's overcall is preemptive.**

With 12+ points, you can force to game by cue-bidding opener's suit, or you can just jump to game, if you have a 5-card major. Of course, if you jump to 4S holding 5 spades, you are taking the risk that your partner has a big hand with hearts and no support for spades.

NT responses to a takeout double show positive values and interest in playing in NT. 1NT shows 8-10 hcp; 2NT, 11-12; and 3NT, 13+. You must also have at least one stopper (preferably two) in the opener's suit, especially if the opening bid was one or two of a major suit.

**Responsive doubles.** Your LHO opens one of a minor. Your partner doubles. Your RHO either raises the opener's bid or bids the other minor. If you have 4 of each major and 8+ hcp, you can make a responsive double, which asks partner to bid her better major suit. Your LHO opens one of a major, your partner doubles, and RHO bids the other major. If you have 8+ hcp and at least 4 of each minor suit, you can make a responsive double, asking partner to bid her better minor.

When RHO has redoubled after your partner's double of the opening bid, promising 10+ hcp, it is mathematically impossible for you to have many hcp. If you bid in this situation, you are promising a suit of at least 5.

## Chapter 17 THE LAW OF TOTAL TRICKS

My main introduction to the Law of Total Tricks was my reading of Larry Cohen's 1994 book, Following the Law. Proponents of the Law, who have won many national events using it, claim that using it results in better bids and outcomes than the best subjective judgments of the best players. I think the Law of Total Tricks can help you to make better bids.

1. **Generally, the Law applies to hands in which points are fairly equally distributed between the sides.** Your side needs at least 13-14 hcp to apply the Law. The Law may even apply in freak distribution hands when you have fewer hcp than that. The Law doesn't apply to your side when **your side has the clear majority of the hcp**. For example, you may occasionally bid a slam in a minor suit with 8 trumps and nearly all of the high cards. For example, if you and partner together have 20 hcp and 11 diamonds, your side should bid 5D in a competitive auction. If you have 23 hcp and 11 diamonds, your side probably **shouldn't** bid 5D in a non-competitive auction because opponents can't make four of anything.

2. **Both sides, North-South and East-West, can presumably justify a bid equal to the number of cards they have in their best suit.** Think more about your side's trumps than about the opponents' number of their trumps.

3. If the cards are favorably placed for your side, that will help you on offense or defense. For example, you're sure the opponents will succeed in a shaky 4S bid because their finesses will work. Consider sacrificing at a level equal to your side's number of trumps, especially NV, in hopes that the opponents won't double. When deciding whether to sacrifice, consider your chances of setting your opponents, the vulnerability of both sides, the number of the trump suit you and partner have, and how many you expect to go down.

4. In equal hcp hands, never outbid the opponents on the 3 level with 16 trumps total held by the two sides, your side holding generally 8 of your trump cards. (Refusing to bid 3 of a suit with 8 trumps and equal point-count between the sides is very often an excellent bid, especially when you are V.)

5. Always outbid the opponents on the 3 level with 18 trumps total held by the sides, your side holding generally 9 of your trump cards.

6. "Soft" holdings in the opponents' suits, such as Q/J doubleton, should cause you to lower your estimate of your total trick count.

7. **You should always bid to the level equal to the combined number of trumps held by your side**, provided you have at least 13-14 hcp. Arrive at this bid as quickly as possible. This is the "Principle of Early Arrival."

8. Ways to tell partner about your trump length include preemptive raises in competition and responding to Jacoby transfers with a "super-acceptance" (1NT-2D-3H) when you have at least 4 in the suit and a good hand.

9. Especially when the opponents are V, and you are NV, the Law is said to guarantee that you can safely make bids according to the Law. Though proponents argue that you are safe in following the Law in equal vulnerability situations, I think that this is not always true and that, occasionally, following the Law will get you a bad board. **Consider vulnerability carefully to avoid these bad results.**

10. Try to keep the opponents from playing at the level equal to their number of trumps.

11. Aggressive minor-suit raises keep opponents out of a 2-level contract in a major suit.

12. The 5 level belongs to the opponents. It's usually best not to bid to the 5 level, unless you are sacrificing with favorable vulnerability.

13. When in doubt, bid 4S over 4H.

14. When in doubt, bid one more on freak-distribution deals.

15. When you hold 4 of the opponents' trumps, seriously consider making a penalty double.

16. Negative adjustments (reasons to reduce your number of expected

tricks by 1): holding minor honors in opponents' suits or **poor** interiors, 9 through Q, in your own suits; misfits with your partner; flat hands. Misfits are when your side has no fit in any suit.

17. Positive adjustments (reasons to increase your number of expected tricks by 1): absence of minor honors in opponents' suits and **good** interiors, 9 through Q, in your suits; double/double fits (both sides have double fits); and excellent shape (extra length in suits or voids).

There have been several published attacks on the Law of Total Tricks. My impression is that applying the Law tends to have a net positive effect on one's game.

Here's an example of my application of the Law. My LHO, V, opens 1H. My partner bids 3D NV. My RHO doubles (negative). I have 5 diamonds, 2 spades, 1 heart, and no defense at all. I bid 6D because I am sure opponents can make 5 of a major and suspect they can make 6 of a major.

## Chapter 18 HANDLING COMPETITIVE AUCTIONS

I believe that the most important skill in bidding, and, therefore, probably the most important skill in bridge is being able to make good decisions on whether (and, if so, how) to bid in a competitive auction. Getting to good contracts without interference is fairly easy. Here are some ideas.

1. **Remember and seriously consider vulnerability, especially your own.** I carefully note vulnerability after arranging my cards on every hand. Forgetting vulnerability can be disastrous. Minus 200 from going down two while V is nearly always a very bad score, since opponents probably can't get that good a score on offense.

2. **If the opponents sign off at the one level, make a bid, especially if you are NV.** If you have an unbid 5-card or longer suit, bid that suit. If you are a passed hand with 10 hcp and 4 of each of the unbid suits, double and your partner will bid her best suit. If you double and your partner bids 2 of a major over the opponents' 1NT or one of a suit, it's extremely unlikely that you will get doubled, since you would score game if you make two or more. (Especially in Swiss team and KO competition, you should **never double opponents in two of a major or three of a minor.**)



3. Especially when you are NV, try to force your opponents into a contract they can't make. For example, RHO bids 1S. You have KJXX in spades and 5 hearts with 9 hcp. Overcall 2H, hoping to get opponents over their heads in spades or NT. If you have 3 little spades, be careful about bidding V.

4. In a competitive auction after an opponent has made a bid, and it's your turn to bid, ask yourself very seriously, **"Have we succeeded in forcing them into a bid they can't make? If I bid on, will I just be turning an earned positive score into a negative score?"** Vulnerability may not be the key here. For example, you open with a minimum opener and your partner makes a free, unforced bid to the 2 level. The opponents have not very confidently bid 3S. You have a spade singleton. Your partner may have 4 spades. Your opponents need about 23 points and 8 spades to make 3. I doubt they can. And I doubt you can make 4D, which would require 26 points and a good diamond suit. Pass. **If you're 90% sure you can set opponents at the 4, 5, or 6 level, double regardless of how good the declarer is. This usually requires 1 or 2 tricks in their trump suit.**

5. Be careful not to push opponents into game contracts you suspect they can make, given your suspicion that their finesses will work. With a good long suit, bid aggressively early in the auction and pass later, hoping they don't bid game. Especially if partner likes your suit, you will get no more than one trick in that suit on defense.

6. Remember the Law of Total Tricks. It says, **in a competitive auction when you and your partner have at least 13-to-14 hcp, you can safely bid to a level equal to the number of cards you have in your trump suit.** (Of course, if you have enough points for game in a major suit, don't worry about having only 8 trumps.)

7. **If one of the opponents opened and the other one made a free, unforced bid, it's unlikely your side can make game, unless there's extremely freaky distribution.** Similarly, I'm reluctant to try to get more than a partial when an opponent has opened or overcalled 1NT. In these situations, making a game try while V can be disastrous.

8. **If one of your opponents made a strong bid, such as opening at the one level or overcalling at the two level V, your side probably doesn't have slam, unless you have no losers in the opponents' suit.** It's better not to ask for aces or otherwise make a slam try.

9. The Law of Total Tricks says, **"If you are sensibly considering bidding 4S over 4H, go on and do it."** Of course, that rule applies more strongly when

your opponents are V and you are NV than in the reverse situation. It applies if there is equal vulnerability.

10. The Law of Total Tricks says that **the 5 level belongs to the opponents**. Generally, don't expect to make 5 when there has been a competitive auction. That said, I will admit that my favorite bid in bridge is a sacrifice in 5 of a minor NV, when the opponents bid a solid V major-suit game. Doubled, we need to make only 8 tricks for down 3 doubled, 500 points, which is a great score. If the opponents press on to 5 of the major, you often have a good chance to set them. **Of course, don't sacrifice if you have a significant chance of setting opponents as a result of good cards, good defense, or poor declarer play.**

11. Once you make a preemptive bid by opening, overcalling, or responding, you should not bid again. Leave the decision to your partner, who knows a lot more about your hand than you know about hers. If your partner preempts, don't bid your own suit preemptively.

12. Especially in IMPs competition and when the opponents are unfamiliar with your style, tending to bid aggressively is much better than tending to bid conservatively. Your partner (NV) opens 1S in third seat and is doubled by RHO (V). I have 3 hcp and 5 spades. I will immediately bid 4S. There are 4 possible outcomes, three of which are good for us: (1) we make 4S; (2) we keep opponents from finding their good game contract; (3) opponents bid 5 and go down; (4) we bid higher than we needed to and go down. I like our odds when three of four possible outcomes are good for us. If our suit is H, I may not bid 4H (a weak bid) immediately. Opponents may bid and make 4S.

13. **Even in aggressive bidding, maintain discipline** (i.e., bidding weak two V only with 2 of top 3).

14. If it should be obvious to your partner that your side should either bid or double, you can pass and let partner decide.

15. Mike Lawrence emphasizes that, if opponents have comfortably signed off at the 2 level (in a major or minor), you should try very hard to find a sensible contract for your side.

### **"Doing the math" in competitive auctions**

Hand 1. Partner makes an opening one bid. You have 12 hcp. Opponents initially pass at every opportunity. You and partner sign off at 3 of a minor or hearts. NV, an opponent doubles and the other opponent makes a 3-level bid.

Ordinarily, they need 24 points (hcp + distribution) to make 3. You are nearly sure that they don't that. If it is a matchpoints game, you nearly certainly should double. If it is an IMPs scoring game, there is some hazard in doubling their 3 bid into game.

Hand 2. LHO opens 1NT (15-17 hcp). Your partner, V, bids 2C (Cappelletti indicating a long suit). RHO doubles, a double-stolen-bid double, indicating desire to bid 2C, Stayman. You pass, since partner will be able to bid. LHO bids 2H. Partner bids 2S. RHO bids 3H. You have 3 spades, a singleton heart, and 4 hcp. **You should pass.** LHO has at least 15 hcp. RHO indicated at least 8 points by bidding Stayman and raising to 3H. Since your side is V, going higher in spades is very dangerous.

Hand 3. Assume everything in hand 2, except you have 4 spades. The Law of Total Tricks says you should bid 3S. **Do you see the danger?** If you bid 3S, they may bid and make 4H, since RHO probably has a void or singleton in spades, which would allow 3 or even 4 spade ruffs in dummy. Reverse the vulnerability, and you may be able to justify bidding more aggressively.

## Chapter 19

### THE "SMALLEST AVAILABLE LIE" BIDDING PRINCIPLE

I developed this name for methods I'm sure lots of reasonably good players use. I am sure, however, that some able players will have sensible arguments against this approach.

#### THE PRINCIPLE

Because there are obvious benefits to pairs that enter the bidding, there are times when one should, instead of passing, make a bid that constitutes the "smallest available lie" to partner and opponents. Such bids should be legal and must not be based on secret understandings with partner. **The "smallest available lie" bids below are not psych bids.**

**1NT overcall with 13 or 14 hcp.** Your RHO opens 1D. You have A, Q, 10 of diamonds, 13 hcp and a square hand. You have another 10 and three 9s. Your diamonds are upgraded in value, and RHO's presumed K and J of diamonds are downgraded in value. Your most descriptive and workable bid is 1NT.

**Michaels with 4/4 in the majors.** RHO opens 1D. You have two excellent 4-card majors, 3 small diamonds, and 2 clubs. Your hand counts to less than 16. You cannot double. Your most workable and safe bid is 2D, which is Michaels.

**Negative double with 5 of a major, slightly light in point count.** Partner opens 1C. RHO overcalls 1S. You have 5 hearts, and your hand counts to 6 or 7 points. Your most descriptive, workable, and safe bid is a negative double. If your hand counts to 9 or 10 points in hearts, you may later bid hearts, and partner will know what you have.

**Bidding partner's negative-double suit with 3.** You open 1C and LHO overcalls 1S. Partner makes a negative double. You have 3 hearts, 1 or 2 spades, and a good hand. You can ruff spades in your hand and draw trumps with dummy's hearts. Your most workable bid is 2H. Of course, there is a danger that your partner will get excited and bid too high in hearts.

**Law of Total Tricks double.** Vulnerability is favorable. RHO, the dealer, opens 1C. You have 1 club, 4 spades, 4 hearts, and 4 diamonds and 9 hcp, with honors spread among the unbid suits. It is nearly certain that partner has 4 cards in spades, hearts, or diamonds. Your most workable and descriptive bid is a double for takeout.

**Rebidding a very strong 5-card major suit.** Partner opens 1 of a minor. You have an excellent 5-card heart suit and nearly nothing outside that suit. After your 1H, partner bids 1NT. Your most workable, descriptive, and safe bid may be 2H, even though your understanding with partner is that you will not rebid a 5-card major. Of course, you could bid new minor forcing, asking partner if she has three of your hearts. The danger here is that partner will rebid NT, never get a heart trick, and go down 2.

**Bidding 1NT forcing for further description of partner's hand.** Partner opens 1 of a major. Not having yet passed, you have a hand that does not comfortably fit any hand covered by 1NT forcing. If you bid 1NT forcing, partner's further description of her hand will probably allow you to make a sensible and safe bid or call.

**Three-clubs preempt with 6 clubs.** Vulnerability is favorable. You have an excellent 6-card club suit and don't satisfy the Rule of 20 for opening. Your most descriptive and workable bid is 3C.

**Weak-two bid with 7 D, H, or S.** Vulnerability is favorable. You have 7 diamonds, hearts, or spades and a flawed suit. A weak-two bid in that suit should be safe and workable.

**Weak-two bid, NV, with 2 of top 5.** You are NV, and your partnership has disciplined weak-two bidding. You have 6 diamonds, hearts, or spades with Q, J, 9

or even Q, 10, 9 in that suit. Otherwise, your hand meets the requirements for a weak-two opening. A weak-two bid should be safe, workable, and descriptive. This is better if your partner has already passed.

**Weak-two bid with five cards in the suit.** Your side is NV, and your partner, the dealer, has passed. Your RHO passes. You have, for example, K,J,10,xx of hearts or spades (better) and 4 or 5 other hcp. This is nearly certainly the opponents' hand. Opening 2 of your major can result in the opponents bidding too little or too much. My experience suggests that this bid produces tops and bottoms, with more tops than bottoms.

**Off-shape 1NT opening.** You have 5 diamonds, 4 spades, Kx of hearts, and ace,x of clubs and 16 hcp. Your bid that best describes your hand for partner is 1NT. I'm reluctant to bid this with a worthless doubleton.

**Overcalling with a good 4-card major.** Partner passes NV. RHO opens 1C. You have 3 clubs, 4 good hearts, 3 spades, 3 diamonds, and 10 hcp. I think overcalling 1H is much safer and more justifiable than doubling.

## **Chapter 20**

### **BIDDING MISTAKES TO AVOID**

The chapters on particular aspects of bidding have been completed. This chapter is sort of a review, with emphasis on costly mistakes to avoid. Remember: All of the language for the rest of this chapter describes mistakes to be avoided.

Failing to adopt genuinely essential bidding conventions (e.g., Stayman, negative doubles, transfers, limit raises)

Adopting conventions and systems that are too complex for you and/or your partner or adding conventions too quickly

Failing to carefully review your convention card before every game

Failing to get your partnership to a contract YOU know you should reach. This can be playing in a particular suit, playing in NT, bidding game, bidding slam, etc. The partner who knows more about the partners' hands should become "captain" and set the contract.

Failure to listen to and trust your partner's bids. If she/he insists on playing in a suit, you should probably let her/him. Similarly, if you have 6 or 7 good cards in

a major and little else, you should continue to insist on playing in that suit.

Failing to emphasize looking for at least an 8-card fit in a major suit

Playing in NT when you and partner have 8 or more good cards in a major

Tending to be distinctly conservative or aggressive in bidding. You must be able to adjust to the circumstances of each hand.

Failure to consider vulnerability of both sides

Failure to consider the strength of opponents. Be especially cautious when playing against very strong opponents.

In a competitive auction, continuing to bid after you have forced opponents into a bad bid. Don't convert a deserved positive score for your side into a negative score. I think that, for some men, bidding on is a type of "macho" thing.

Being unwilling to make a high-level sacrifice, especially when you are not vulnerable and opponents are vulnerable

In no-trump bidding, failing to consider presence of intermediate cards (10s and 9s) and length (suit to set up and run). These things make your hand better. Of course, their absence makes your hand worse.

Failure to consider probable location of high cards and suits. (e.g., If you are behind one opponent's two suits, and your partner is behind the other opponent's two suits, their finesses will fail. Consider doubling.)

Failure to make needed penalty doubles. If your opponents steal your side's hand, you nearly always should attempt to punish them. Double!

Failing to stop bidding as soon as you realize you and partner have a hopeless misfit

Failing to have discipline in bidding, which involves genuinely having cards very close to what you are promising. In other words, don't lie to partner.(e.g., If partner opens, pass, if you don't have a qualifying bid. You can bid later without misleading your partner.)

Doubling with less than a very strong hand when you don't have at least three cards in each side suit

Allowing opponents to play in 1NT, when one of them opened one of a suit. Maybe you can bid a suit, or maybe you should double for partner to bid her/his best suit.

In a competitive auction, bidding higher than the number of cards your side has in your trump suit. (e.g., Partner opens 1 Club; you answer 1 Heart with four hearts; your LHO doubles; your partner bids two Hearts; your RHO bids 2 Spades. Since this is a competitive auction, you should be very reluctant to bid 3 Hearts, since that is above the number of trumps you and your partner have. This is the Law of Total Tricks.)

## Chapter 21 DECLARER PLAY

### PLANNING YOUR DECLARER PLAY

It is crucial to develop a plan for play of the hand before you call for the first card from dummy. To avoid a costly error making the first play from dummy, you should take as long as necessary before playing. My mantra is: "**winners, losers, transportation, distribution, threat, discards, deception.**" I actually silently repeat it to myself and go through the following steps. This is like a pilot's pre-flight check list. First, line up the suits in your hand with the suits in the dummy, alternating red and black suits. This makes counting winners and losers much easier. **Most hands primarily involve either creating winners or getting rid of losers.**

1. **Winners.** Count your winners, starting with the suit, usually the trump suit, on the left. You know right away whether you need to develop one or more winners. Often you want to develop a winner to get an overtrick--especially in matchpoints. If you know you can trump a loser in dummy, you count that as a certain winner. You give more attention to counting winners in NT contracts.

2. **Losers.** Count your losers. Determine whether you have one or two losers you need to get rid of. You give more attention to counting losers in suit contracts, though you always count winners and losers.

3. **Transportation.** Assess whether you will have enough transportation to get from your hand to the dummy and back as many times as necessary. Is there a danger that an important suit will get blocked, for example, leaving you in your hand, unable to get back to the dummy to cash a final winner in a suit? Newer players are

especially likely to make a mistake about this.

4. **Distribution** (of the opponents' high cards and length). Quickly review the bidding and decide whether there is something important you need to remember about where the opponents' high cards and length probably are.

5. **Threat**. Thinking about distribution helps you to decide what the **threat hand** is. That is the hand you don't want to get the lead. You should go to great lengths to keep that hand from getting the lead. Take finesses into the non-threat hand. For example, even with 9 clubs and AK, you may decide to finesse for the Q into the non-threat hand, instead of playing for the outstanding clubs to be 2/2.

6. **Discards**. If you want to discard one or more losers, you're probably going to need to do it very early in the play of the hand, before the opponents can get in and cash their winners.

7. **Deception**. Very occasionally you may need to use some deception to steal a trick or two. For example, while playing 3NT and not having nine winners to run, I will, maybe once a year, lead the suit in which I have no stopper. If that suit is evenly split between the defenders, they may turn their attention to another suit, thinking I am trying to set up tricks in the suit I just led. Excellent players are rarely tricked by this tactic.

**Remember:** In most suit-contract hands, it is important to draw trumps as soon as you can. You have to decide at this planning stage whether you will draw trumps immediately or delay in order, for example, to trump losers in dummy.

From your answers to these questions, you develop your plan for playing the hand. How many tricks to try for can depend on the likely bid at other tables. For example, you are playing 2NT but think most other declarers will be in 3S, making 3. You must try for 9 tricks to avoid a bottom.

## ALTERING YOUR PLAN

As the hand proceeds, you may need to alter your plan. For example, if opponents let you win 2 tricks in a suit, it may be advantageous to desert that suit and attack another suit.

## SOME DECLARER TECHNIQUES

**The two-way finesse.** When you can finesse for a Q either way, start your finesse by playing the J or 10 from one hand. Try to "sneak up on" your opponent



and observe her body language. If your opponent doesn't cover and there's no body language suggesting she has the Q, play your high honor and finesse going the other way. You will find that this picks up the Q one way or the other 80%+ of the time, which beats the heck out of 50%. Again, excellent players are rarely trapped by this tactic.

**Squeezes.** Squeeze plays involve running a long suit, forcing opponents to discard valuable cards. Remember: "When in doubt, run your established long suit." You may not know exactly how you're hurting your opponents, but you are still hurting them. If you want them to discard hearts, notice carefully who discards how many hearts. This usually will tell you how to play the suit.

**End plays.** You realize during the play of the hand that you need to make an end play. Often you need to "strip the side suits" by eliminating all of one or two suits in your hand and the dummy. Then you may throw a particular opponent into the lead, forcing him to make a lead that will be beneficial to you. I learned this technique at least 30 years ago in 5 consecutive newspaper bridge columns. That knowledge has paid off many times.

## **MISTAKES TO AVOID**

**When your best plan is to develop a runnable suit, consider doing so before drawing trumps, especially if you have losers in your hand you need to play on that suit.** If you do, you can abandon trumping losers and instead discard them on the running suit. Some weak declarers continue to trump losers even though a good running suit has been established or obviously can be established.

**When an opponent is obviously ready to "get a ruff" (trump declarer's or dummy's high card), you may need to forego finessing in trumps and instead draw as many trumps as possible as quickly as possible, conceding a high trump trick to defenders.**

**Early in a hand, avoid returning to your hand by trumping a card from dummy. Doing so can dangerously reduce your trump suit.**

**You have a short (7) and weak trump suit but have side winners. Take your lumps drawing trumps, and then cash your winners.** Otherwise, defenders will trump your side winners with their low trumps. Then they will score their high trumps.

## **WAYS TO DEVELOP DECLARING SKILLS**

Regularly studying a subject on your own is probably the most efficient way to develop a good command of it. (I reached this conclusion in a research I conducted on judge knowledge of search and seizure law.) Reading the bridge column regularly is like carefully studying two bridge books per year. Since bridge columns concern declarer play at least 80% of the time, they help you most in your declarer play. I used to regularly read the bridge column bidding and North-South hands before driving to work. I then tried to figure out how to play the hand without referring back to the column. While driving home, I would force myself to recall the bidding and hands and finish playing the hand without looking at the column. During that period my declarer play improved. I recommend that you try this exercise, which may seem difficult at first. This improves general brain functioning. During a game, immediately after a hand is played, I sometimes review that hand carefully in my head. This is like doing "brain pushups." Exercising your brain strenuously can have immediate and long-term benefits. **Another way to develop declarer play is to study Mike Lawrence's "Bridge Clues" website every day.**

### COMMON DECLARING MISTAKES TO AVOID

Failure to draw trumps early, unless you have a good reason (e.g., trumping losers in dummy or cross-trumping)

Failure to draw trumps when you and dummy lack several high trump cards. (If you don't draw trumps, opponents will be able to trump your high cards in the other suits.)

Failure to discard losers very early

Failure to set up a good long side suit to run. (Often it is a fatal mistake to try to trump losers in dummy and also set up a suit to run.)

Failure to draw reasonable inferences from actions of opponents (e.g., On the first lead in a suit contract, left-hand opponent (LHO) is much more likely to underlead a Q than an ace in a side suit.)

Failure to try to win overtricks in an ordinary (matchpoints) duplicate game. You should take modest risks (maybe 30%) of going down in this effort.

Taking an unnecessary finesse. It's better to solve a problem without a 50/50 finesse.

Giving up on what appears to be a hopeless hand. Sometimes a squeeze

(running a long side suit and looking for something good to happen) or an end play (throwing a particular opponent in and making her/him lead back to you) will save what looks like a hopeless contract.

Failing to try hard to visualize (figure out) what cards each opponent has

Failing to take advantage of an opponent's penalty card. This is not illegal or unethical. (e.g., An opponent accidentally exposes an ace. As a penalty card, it must be played at the first legal opportunity. Play a suit she/he is out of, and the ace will have to be played.)

Failing to read "tells" of opponents. If an opponent has a facial expression or "body language," you as declarer can use any suggested information. You cannot ethically consider the facial expressions or "body language" of your partner. You can consider delay in bidding of opponents but not of your partner.)

Allowing the "danger hand" to get into the lead, when you can avoid it. For a declarer, this is usually the RHO. With declarer in 3NT, LHO has led a suit. After taking the first trick, declarer has J, 7, 3 of that suit remaining. The declarer doesn't want his RHO ("danger hand") to get in and lead that suit.

Failing to develop needed "transportation", when you have the opportunity to do so. Cards that are established winners are worth nearly nothing if you can't get to them. (Maybe opponents will eventually have to lead to them.)

Failing to lead up to honors. If you lead toward the K and Q in dummy, maybe your LHO will have the ace.

Failing to notice "spot cards." (e.g., In NT, if you fail to notice that an opponent plays the 9 and 10 of a suit to the first two tricks, you may fail to realize that your 7 and 8 are good.)

## Chapter 22

### SOME IDEAS ABOUT DEFENSE

You will defend about twice as many hands as you will play as declarer. Therefore, your score will depend more heavily on your defense than on your declarer play. Experts agree that defense is harder than declarer play.

**Make leads that don't give the declarer a trick he can't easily get on his own.** I have played a good bit against Kay and Randy Joyce, a nationally known pair

from Raleigh, NC. When I am declarer, they **absolutely never** give me a trick I can't easily set up for myself. Unless you're setting up a trick for your side, leading a new suit is likely to help the declarer.

**Unless you can benefit from finessing your partner, don't do it.** If you lead from J,10,9 of a suit, you can benefit from finessing your partner.

**In a suit contract, avoid underleading an ace or king in a side suit as the first lead.** When my RHO is declaring in a suit contract, I often underlead a Q or J with my lowest card. My partner can confidently play third-hand high. This is unlikely to give the declarer a trick.

**If the bidding indicates that declarer will try to ruff (trump) losers in dummy, lead trumps first.** Otherwise, lead something else to cash or establish a winner. Sometimes you can draw dummy's trumps after the first lead.

**It's very occasionally good to lead an ace first to get a look at dummy.** Don't do so if you will probably make the declarer's K of that suit good. Leading K from KQx often gives up a trick. Against a slam bid, leading K from KQx tends to be a good lead, because it establishes a winner your side can cash the one time you get the lead.

**When the dummy comes down, add your hcp, dummy's, and the declarer's assumed hcp.** That tells you how many hcp your partner has. During the play of the hand, keep count of your partner's play of high cards to know whether he still has a high card that may take a trick.

**Count the declarer's hand during the play of the hand.** Top bridge writer Eddie Kantar says that learning to **COUNT, COUNT, COUNT** is the most important way for developing players to improve their games. Counting a declarer's hand is easier than most developing players think. For example, your RHO is declarer in 4S. You lead the ace of D, which wins. Declarer trumps your K of diamonds. (She had one diamond.) Declarer opened 1S and bid 2S after his partner bid 1NT. (You assume she has 6 spades.) She draws 3 rounds of trumps, getting 3 from you, 2 from dummy, and 2 from your partner. (You now know she had six.) Dummy has 4 clubs, and you have 3. Declarer leads clubs. On the third one, your Q wins, and your partner shows out. You now know that declarer had 6 spades, one diamond, four clubs, and two hearts. Go back over this. **You can count the declarer's hand.** Counting both defenders when you are the declarer is harder.

**When defending against a NT contract, lead a low card in your partner's suit when you have a jack or higher and at least two more of the suit.** This

probably will allow you to keep one of declarer's cards from taking a trick. With a doubleton, lead your higher card. With more than 2 headed by something lower than a J, lead your highest card. If I have Ax in partner's suit, I sometimes decide to lead something else and kill declarer's K or Q with my ace later.

**When making a first lead against a suit contract, your partner having bid a suit, I strongly believe that you should lead your highest card in her suit. If you have the K and don't lead it, she won't know, after taking the ace, that another trick can be cashed.** The problem here is that you probably can, at most, cash two winners in her suit. You need to get them immediately, before losers are discarded. (Of course, this will sometimes give the declarer a trick.)

**When you are defending against a NT contract, get rid of your high cards in the long suit your partner is trying to set up.** If partner leads Q and you have Ax in that suit, play the ace on the Q and lead the suit back.

**Obey the maxim, "Third hand high."** Your partner leads the 6 of clubs. You have the K and don't want to lose it to declarer's ace. Trust your partner and play third hand high. Otherwise, declarer may win with a card that should not take a trick.

**Lead your highest of a 3-card sequence headed by an honor.**

**When making a first lead to a 3NT contract, if you would have no chance to get in later to run an established suit, lead the top of your short holding in an unbid major suit, which you hope is partner's best suit.** She will recognize your lead as "top of nothing."

**When making a first lead to a 3NT contract, if you or your partner has bid a suit and declarer still confidently bid NT, look carefully for a good lead other than your side's suit.** This forces the declarer to establish his own tricks in your suit and may allow you to set up another suit for your side to run. Also, partner may be able later to lead the suit, which may reduce declarer's possible tricks in that suit.

**Try to isolate a long suit in dummy that declarer may try to set up and run.** This may involve forcing him to play his cards (often two) in that suit. It may involve holding off on taking your high card in the suit. It can involve forcing him to play his high-card entry to the board before the long suit is established.

**Avoid defensive signaling that is too complicated for you to follow.** Notice your partner's first discard: high in a suit he wants led; low in a suit he

doesn't want. When partner is deciding when to take a trick in a suit in dummy that the declarer is trying to establish, you should show your count in the suit: high-low with an even number; low-higher with an odd number.

**Try to avoid leading Q from Q,J,9.** This may allow declarer to take Q with the ace in his hand. He can then finesse toward K,10 on the board. Without your lead of the suit, you will nearly always get a trick in a suit with Q,J,9.

**If declarer is about to lose a finesse, let him do it.** If declarer is playing toward K, J on the board, and you have the ace, play low smoothly with no hesitation. **Think ahead to prepare yourself to play smoothly.**

**Give declarer chances to guess wrong.** LHO is playing 3NT. You get the lead and have A9xx of clubs. Dummy has xx of clubs. Don't lead the ace. A low club or even the 9 will give declarer a chance to guess wrong. It can be a mistake to lead away from an ace in a suit contract, unless you're sure you will eventually get your ace. If dummy has a 9 or 10, play a higher card to take the 9 or 10 out of the trick.

**Never lead a suit when declarer can trump in one hand and discard a loser in the other.** This is called a "ruff and a sluff" and is a very bad defensive mistake. Avoid also letting declarer ruff your or partner's high card, setting up a winner(s) in the suit in dummy he otherwise wouldn't have.

**Avoid playing your ace or K on air.** Declarer, your RHO, plays the K of a suit of which you have the ace. The Q and J are on the board to your left. Cover the K unless you need to hold off to isolate winners in dummy. Otherwise he will probably make the K, Q, and J good. Similarly, declarer plays the J toward the AQx on the board. Cover the J with your K. This may allow your partner to win the 10 and/or 9.

**When defending, follow with your lowest card that will get the job done.** Your partner leads a low spade. You have the K, Q, and J. Play the J. It will tell your partner that you probably have the K and Q when the declarer plays the ace. Lead the highest of a sequence. When you play the J, you are probably guaranteeing that you have the 10, unless you are playing your top of nothing, shooting for your partner's suit.

**When your declaring opponents have blasted confidently to a game contract, consider seriously trying to get your side's tricks immediately.** When there is no better lead, you might even lead low from Kxx, hoping to catch your partner with the ace or Q. Your low lead will tell partner you have a high card.

**When your partner makes the first lead and obviously won't continue that suit, ask for lead of the high ranking side suit by following with a high card or for the low ranking side suit by following with a low card.**

**When declarer has led a suit, and you have taken the trick, it is nearly certain that your continuing that suit will be a mistake.**

## **COMMON DEFENDING MISTAKES TO AVOID**

Failing to work as hard as you can on defending. ( e.g., Failure to count declarer's hand. This is easier than many new players think.)

Failure to notice your partner's first following card (e.g., when you make the first lead) and partner's first discard

Nearly always, underleading a side suit ace or K in a suit contract. Try to find another lead.

Failure to lead your ace or K in partner's suit when defending a suit contract. (Some high-level experts disagree with my idea about this. There actually is a danger your partner will think you have a doubleton, when you don't have a doubleton. But, if you don't lead your K in partner's suit, how does she/he know you have it?)

Failing to play "third hand high." Here's an exception. You play your lowest card that will get the job done. You have K, Q, J of a suit partner leads. Follow with the J, so partner will know you may have the K and/or Q. Here's another exception. Generally, don't play an ace or K that covers an unplayed K or Q in dummy. Your ace or K will probably kill that high dummy card later, which will deny a trick to declarer.

Giving declarer a "tell" he can interpret to his advantage. (e.g., Declarer leads toward K, J, 9 in dummy. If you have the ace, prepare ahead of time for this lead, and play low "smoothly". You want her/him to lose a finesse to your partner's Q.)

Failing to unblock in partner's suit. (e.g., In NT, your partner leads a Q, and you have the ace and one more card. Cover the Q with your ace, and lead the suit back toward your partner's J, 10, x x.)

Putting your partner in a difficult position with a lead. (e.g., Dummy on your

left has A, J, 10, 9 of a suit. You know declarer has a much stronger hand than your partner's. Don't lead the suit, since partner's Q will probably be killed by declarer's K. Give the declarer a chance to lose a finesse for the Q.)

Failing to put declarer into a difficult position, when you have the opportunity to do so. (e.g., Dummy on your right has a suit headed by a fairly low card. Lead low in that suit, and make declarer guess.)

Having defensive systems that are too complex

Failing, if you can, to prevent declarer from trumping cards in dummy. Often a defender needs to lead a trump as the first lead.

Failing to cash your side's winners. When declarer is about to establish a suit to throw losers on, go ahead and try to cash your side's winners. Often, this involves trying the only remaining thing that might "work" for the defense. Maybe you need to lead a K, hoping that your partner has the ace.

## Chapter 23 STRATEGY IN SWISS TEAMS AND KNOCKOUTS

There are important differences in strategy in ordinary pairs games (matchpoints) and team-of-four events, such as Swiss teams and KOs. Here is a fairly brief listing of recommended approaches and strategies in team-of-four, IMPs events.

**1. Notice vulnerability and consider it on every bid.** This helps you to

**a. Avoid big penalties.** Some people say one should **never sacrifice** in Swiss team. I don't go quite that far. If we are NV with 11 diamonds and 16 hcp, I might, after especially careful study, go to 5D over a sure V major-suit game bid of opponents. However, **DON'T EVER SACRIFICE VULNERABLE..**

**b. Avoid missing V games and slams.** It's OK to bid V games and slams **a little light**, but not 3 points light on a game bid or needing two successful finesses on a slam bid. Since your opponents at the other table will nearly always bid V games and slams when there's a reasonable chance to succeed, there's not much risk in your doing so also. If the opponents bid and make a V game or slam, and your team doesn't, you're very likely to lose the match.



c. Mathematical comparison indicates that you don't need to press for NV games and slams. However, if you think the opponents playing your cards will bid NV games and slams a little light, you should be able to safely do so.

**2. Differences of IMPs and matchpoints strategies.** In matchpoints, you must scratch for every extra trick, even every extra 10 points. In fact, sometimes you should accept a 30% chance of going down in order to make an overtrick. In Swiss teams and KOs, an extra trick gets you only one IMP. An extra 10 points usually gets you nothing. Therefore, **avoiding big errors, such as giving up big penalties or missing games and slams (especially V games and slams), is much more important than avoiding small errors.** In matchpoints, making a very big mistake on one hand need not keep you from having a very good game. In a Swiss teams match, with at most seven hands per match, **a very costly (many IMPs) mistake will usually cause you to lose the match.** Here's an example of the difference. In matchpoints, you fail to get in the good two spades contract that will make 140, which most others will be in. Instead, you are in 2NT, which apparently will make 120. Since +120 is nearly as bad as -50, you must take risks to make 9 tricks for 150. In Swiss teams and KOs, you don't take those risks. Instead, you settle for the safe 120.

**3. Accept that there are many hands on which you and your partner must pass and let the opponents play the contract they reach.** (However, you should nearly never let the opponents have a bid at the one level.) I like being a hero (i.e., bidding and making a questionable 3NT or making a risky, but successful, penalty double) in Swiss teams. I must remember, however, that I may have only 2 chances all day to be a hero. I must be willing to sit with a few good cards on many hands and let the opponents play contracts. The Law of Total Tricks usually tells you whether you should bid on in a competitive auction. In matchpoints, you might bid a somewhat risky 3D V. In IMPs scoring, you let the opponent play 2H and refuse to take the risk of going down 200 or 300.

**4. You must be more cautious doubling in IMPs contests than in matchpoints. Never double 2 of a major or 3 of a minor.** Double only when you're **confident of a 2-trick set.** Doubling tells the opponent how to play the hand. If the opponents think they can make a game, it's probably better not to double, unless you have strong trump cards. Some good players hardly ever double in Swiss team. I think that, **if the opponents are obviously stealing your side's hand and sacrificing, you must double.** I used to readily double the opponents when they reached game in Swiss teams because I was not doubling them into game. I now think you should double opponents in a game contract only when you are confident of a 2-trick set. If they make the doubled game, based on information from your double, and get the extra points, and your partners make the game

undoubled at the other table, the opponents win as much as 6 IMPs on the hand.

**5. Do everything the safe way.** If 4 of a major is safer than 3NT, play 4 of the major. Research has shown that, when a pair have a NT contract as a plausible alternative, fairly even distribution, and 8 of a major suit, they make on the average 1.5 more tricks in the major suit contract than in NT. Make safety plays, for example, giving up a trick to **make sure you make your contract**. Take **no risks** to make overtricks. If you are sure you can set a contract, go on and set it, rather than taking risks trying to set it more than one trick.

**6. Make sure you have enough stamina to play well all day on Sunday.** If you play 2 sessions Friday and Saturday until late at night in a sectional tournament, you may set yourself up to run out of gas Sunday afternoon. A 20-to-30 minute walk before the game and, if time permits, again after lunch will help your alertness more than you can imagine, unless they wear you out. A nap helps a lot also.

**7. Knockouts.** In KOs, your team of four plays 24 hands against another team of four. The points above apply, except that you have a better chance to overcome a very bad early result on a hand in a KO match than in Swiss teams. You have also more time to lose a big lead.

**8. Stay relaxed but alert.** Have confidence in your game, and don't try to play beyond your normal good game. Remember: **You don't have to win the match at your table.** Have confidence that your teammates at the other table will play their cards well, but don't criticize them if they fail. You may survive very risky bids against weak players. Don't make them against strong players.

## Chapter 24 VISUALIZING DISTRIBUTION OF SUITS AND LOCATION OF HONORS

To advance in bridge play, one must become adept at visualizing the distribution of suits and location of honors during the bidding and play of the hand. Highly expert players have little trouble counting the declarer's hand on defense and the defenders' hands when playing a hand. While counting the hands of both defenders is beyond the ability of many good bridge players, there are techniques we can use to visualize the distribution of suits and location of honors. First, a suggestion:

**Overlearn the possible distributions of 13 cards.** Knowing that the most

Common distribution of a suit is 4,4,3,2 will help you. For example, when you have 6 of a suit, and dummy has 4, you immediately know that the other two players together have 3 of the suit.

## COMMON SITUATIONS

The opponents have established a fit in hearts. You have 4 hearts. Therefore, your partner has no more than one heart. Your partner has bid spades and you have 4 spades. Why not have your partner play a spade contract, trumping hearts in his hand and drawing trumps with your spades? This is called a "dummy reversal."

Your partner has made a negative double promising 4 spades. The opponents have bid hearts. You have one heart and 3 spades. Why not bid spades with at least 7 between your hand and partner's? You can probably trump hearts with your 3 spades and draw trumps with partner's spades.

You open 1C, holding 3 spades and 3 hearts. Your LHO overcalls 1H. Partner makes a negative double, promising 4 spades. Your RHO raises hearts. Don't even consider bidding spades. You will have to trump hearts with the 4 spades in dummy, which is a recipe for losing control of the hand.

Your RHO has made a jump overcall in diamonds promising 7 of them and little hcp. You are playing 4H with 5 in your hand and 4, headed by the K, J, on the board. You're missing the Q of hearts. RHO has denied having many hcp. Play the heart ace in your hand first, and then finesse your LHO for the Q.

Your RHO has bid clubs twice and diamonds once. You are playing 3S with 4 in your hand and 4 on the board. The J is missing. Lead the ace of spades in your hand, hoping to drop the J from your RHO. Then, unless you can play the K or Q in your hand to learn more about distribution, finesse your LHO for the J. Your LHO probably has at least 3 spades, possibly 4, and is the favorite to hold the J. RHO may have 6 clubs and 5 diamonds, leaving 2 cards total in hearts and spades.

Your RHO opened 1NT. You passed with 13 hcp and even distribution. LHO jumped to 3NT. The dummy shows up with 9 hcp. Declarer must have at least 15 hcp.  $13+9+15=37$  Your partner has at most 3 hcp.

Opponents establish a 2-suit fit in spades and clubs. You have 3 hearts and 6 diamonds. Who has hearts? Partner.

RHO bids spades. You have 3 little spades. LHO never supports spades. If

you become declarer, you'll nearly surely lose 3 spade tricks, with LHO trumping any spade honor your partner has. Partner has 3 or 4 spades. If you ruff the fourth spade from RHO, your partner having 4 spades, LHO may overruff. Let them declare on this hand.

RHO bids 1S. You pass. LHO bids 1NT forcing. Your partner, V, passes. RHO bids 2C, promising 5 spades and denying 4 hearts. You pass. LHO bids 2D, promising 6 and telling his partner to drop dead, which he does after your partner passes. You have 4 spades headed by the ace and a singleton diamond. You have 4 hearts, with the ace. You have 4 clubs headed by the ace. Why not bid 2H, hoping to trump spades in dummy and diamonds in your hand? Or you can double, promising partner support in hearts and clubs, since you also have 4 clubs. Put the diamonds in your hand and the spades in partner's hand, and a cross ruff won't work.

RHO has bid clubs and spades. You have 4 of each, with the K and J in each suit. LHO has bid hearts and diamonds. You have 2 hearts and 3 diamonds, with no honor in either suit. Opponents reluctantly arrive at a 3NT contract. Why not double? You know that all of their finesses are going to fail, and they have no place to escape. Partner has 6-to-8 hcp.

Your opponents carefully give each other count (e.g., high-low signaling an even number) and attitude (following high encouraging continuation of the suit) defensive signals. Use their signals to your advantage.

You have estimated partner's likely hcp count and think she, toward the end of a hand, has about a Q left. If dummy, to your left, has K, J, 9 of a suit, and you have the 10, don't lead that suit. Probably, partner's Q would lose to declarer's ace. Force declarer to decide how to finesse.

## Chapter 25

### STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING AS A DUPLICATE BRIDGE PLAYER

Study Mike Lawrence's excellent website, "Bridge Clues," (free new hands every day) regularly. This is the most efficient approach for improving.

Study a newspaper bridge column every day. Challenge your brain. (e.g., After memorizing declarer and dummy hands and the bidding early in the day, try to remember those hands and the bidding later in the day. Then, play the hand in your head.)

Study every Bridge Bulletin, especially the section for your level of play and,

probably, the next higher level.

One way to improve a partnership is to deal hands at home and talk with each other about how you would bid or defend on those hands.

My guess is that an excellent gardener who grows vegetables and flowers knows an extremely large number of problem solutions, methods, and tricks. Similarly, an excellent bridge player knows many hundreds of problem solutions, methods, and tricks. The more you know and can reliably use, the better you are.

Understand that truly excellent bridge players regularly make decisions as well as an excellent doctor, lawyer, engineer, investments manager, military colonel, or college sports coach does in work. You can make thinking and deciding that well a goal for yourself.

Carefully prepare yourself to play (including memory, thinking, concentration, stamina) as well as you possibly can. Get enough sleep, take healthful "smart pills," exercise, don't drink alcohol, don't overeat, don't allow yourself to be "worn out." If you are not genuinely well prepared to play, you will be letting your partner down if you go ahead and play.

If you can, get an excellent bridge mentor.

Realize that it is difficult for a pair of weak novice players to advance as duplicate players. The unfortunate truth is that, if you continue to play with an especially weak player or one who is not really trying, you will be wasting your time, if you really want to improve.

If possible, play some against much stronger players. You can learn from them. You can realize that inadequate systems and conventions often fail to get a good result. Maybe you'll find a mentor.

Learn from your mistakes. Get an individual printout at the end of the game, and try to identify the main mistakes or weaknesses of your partnership's play. Also, make sure you remember especially costly (and probably stupid) mistakes you have made. (I remember some of my stupid mistakes from 25 years ago.)

Learn the differences of matchpoints (ordinary pairs) scoring and IMPs (Swiss team, knockouts) scoring. This will allow you to make special adjustments in bidding and play of hands. (e.g., In IMPs scoring, an extra 10 points in score gets you nothing, and getting overtricks gets you very little, so you should take no risks trying to get an overtrick.)

Gradually, learn as many of the duplicate bridge rules as you can. This will help you to avoid penalties and to play ethically, and it can allow you to ethically take advantage of rules.

Set realistic, reasonable goals for yourself. (e.g., Don't expect to often place in A in a very strong club game.)

Remember that bridge is only a game. In life, you wouldn't consider accepting a 35% possibility that your child will be injured. But, in bridge, you ordinarily should bid a slam if you think you have a 65% chance (maybe less) of succeeding. So, in order to compete successfully in bridge, you must be willing to take risks you would never take in nearly all aspects of real life.

When you or partner has done something that was sensible but doesn't work well at all (e.g., risky bid, risky defensive strategy), don't allow yourself to be upset, and, for sure, don't suggest to partner that you are upset. Superb techniques sometimes don't work. That's just the way bridge is (and life is).

## **Chapter 26**

### **A STRATEGY FOR EARNING LIFE MASTER**

**Is trying realistic?** If you think you have as much bridge potential as some of the Life Masters you play with or against, it's probably realistic for you to work on making Life Master. If you are consistently very competitive as a social bridge player against strong players, going for Life Master is probably realistic.

**Masterpoint requirements.** Unless you joined ACBL recently, you must earn at least 300 masterpoints. There must be at least 25 gold points and 50 silver points. While there is a requirement of 25 red points, gold points can be counted as red points, though each gold point can be counted only once. (If you have 50 gold points and no red points, you have covered gold and red point requirements.) For new ACBL members after January 1, 2010, the requirements are 500 mp, at least 75 black points (won at local club games), 50 silver points, 50 red or gold points, 50 gold or platinum points, and no more than 165 points earned online. I'm afraid these new requirements will discourage some Babyboomers who consider playing duplicate.

**Yearly masterpoint totals.** If you earn 40 masterpoints per year, you can have 300 mp in 7.5 years.

#### **WAYS TO EARN MORE POINTS IN CLUB GAMES**

1. Obviously, you've got to have good partners and partnerships. I don't recommend working constantly to have more complex systems. Averaging 1.5 miscommunications per game resulting from complex systems will reduce game scores by an average of 5%, which can alone keep you from earning points.

2. When you don't understand why you aren't getting better results playing with a particular partner, get your game summary printouts and figure out whether your bad scores result from bad declaring, bad bidding, or bad defending. Doing this regularly will clearly show your weaknesses. You can then work on overcoming indicated weaknesses.

3. Attempt to find a good, more experienced player who will mentor you. Having an excellent mentor in Pinehurst for 10 years has been the best thing that has happened to me in bridge. If you have a mentor, it's best for you two to play at least twice a month. Otherwise, it's hard to have continuity.

4. Some partnerships just don't work. I played some with a very good player and person in Fayetteville in the early 1990s. We were both very aggressive bidders at the time. Our best games were in the middle 40%s. We agreed to give up on our partnership, but not our friendship.

5. If you especially like the comfort of playing in limited-masterpoint games, going for Life Master may not be for you. Playing against the best local players will help you to prepare yourself and your partnership for tough competition. If you don't do this, you will be vulnerable to being "psyched out" by strong players at tournaments.

## TOURNAMENTS AND VARIOUS TYPES OF MASTERPOINTS

1. Silver points are won nearly exclusively at sectional tournaments. **Winning the 50 silver points will probably require that you go to a large number of sectional tournaments.** If you have a 7-year plan, I think going to a sectional every other month is probably about right. **My observation has always been that play in sectional pairs events is likely to be strong.** So, it's probably better to play some sectional knockouts and Swiss teams.

2. Gold and red points are won at regional and national tournaments. If you go to two or three regionals each year, and you and your partner are a fairly good and improving pair, **winning your gold and red points should be easier than winning your silver points.** Eventually, you'll probably win between 10 and 15 gold points in one regional. I have always especially enjoyed regional tournaments.

**As you've heard, regional knockouts (especially the first two or three in the the week) are the best places to win your golds. Remember: Extra gold points can be counted as red points.**

**My observation in recent years has been that the play in single-session pairs at regional tournaments is sometimes not as tough as play in sectional pairs. A high percentage of the best players are playing in KOs. While you ordinarily don't win gold in single-session pairs, you can win red. Two-session pairs play is tougher, but, if you play both sessions, you can win gold points. Playing two-session pairs definitely gives you a better chance for gold points than playing in a KO with a weak pair.**

### **APPROACHES TO PLAY IN TOURNAMENTS**

If you stay in an expensive hotel and dine a lot with friends at nice restaurants, your expenses will be fairly high, and your effectiveness might suffer. Most people are not drawn to my approach. I usually stay at a less expensive motel. After the afternoon session, I go back and take a nap. Then I have a quick, light supper. Then I have a 30 to 40-minute brisk walk (sometimes on the beach or in another pretty setting). This makes me as prepared as I can be for the evening session. There is no doubt that preparation that is consistent with research about thinking and memory helps greatly.

### **FINDING PARTNERS THROUGH PARTNERSHIP CHAIRS**

I have had several very unhappy experiences finding partners at tournament partnership desks. If you know you will need a partner or an additional pair at a tournament, you can send a nice letter or email to the tournament partnership chair two or three weeks ahead of time.

## **Chapter 27 BENEFITS OF PLAYING DUPLICATE BRIDGE**

Playing serious bridge has been shown to delay the onset of Alzheimer's. Strenuous mental exercise, such as serious bridge, can prompt the growth of valuable neural structures in the brain. Improbably, research has shown that playing serious bridge bolsters the immune system by prompting production of white blood cells.

Since the two richest people in the U.S., Bill Gates and Warren Buffet, have



duplicate bridge as a primary recreational activity, **it is obvious that playing duplicate bridge makes you rich!** Actually, it helps you to hold onto your money by providing comparatively inexpensive excellent recreation. Many duplicate-playing couples enjoy mini-vacations attending bridge tournaments.

Here are my estimates of possible benefits, in financial terms, from regularly playing duplicate bridge. The **estimated benefit values are per month**. Of course, **these figures are extremely speculative**. Also, it is unlikely that any one player will achieve all of these benefits. The point is that playing duplicate bridge can possibly have many different types of really significant value for players of various ages. While some benefits seem redundant, I think each contains a distinctive element.

<u>AGE RANGE&gt;&gt;</u>	<u>Under 50</u>	<u>50-65</u>	<u>65-100</u>
<u>BENEFITS</u>			
Improving thinking and memory and building brain power	\$100	\$100	\$100
Helping with prevention or delaying of senility (Alzheimer's or other dementia)	\$50	\$100	\$200
Bolstering immune system	\$60	\$80	\$100
Providing a regularly available fun activity	\$75	\$100	\$125
Avoidance of boredom or a low quality activity (e.g., couch potato)	\$75	\$75	\$100
Very low cost for high quality recreation	\$100	\$100	\$100
Producing more enjoyment of life (including depression prevention or reduction)	\$60	\$100	\$150
Provision of <b>exquisitely challenging</b> pair v. pair game (not important to everyone)	\$100	\$100	\$100

Providing an excellent activity for some couples	\$100	\$100	\$75
Improving functioning in a partnership and in teamwork	\$150	\$125	\$100
Increase of friendships (with partners and opponents)	\$125	\$125	\$125
Development of support net	\$40	\$75	\$125
Affirming the importance of <b>hard work</b> learning methods and using them	\$150	\$100	\$75
Improving problem solving using proven solutions	\$150	\$100	\$75
Practice in taking great care to avoid mistakes (very important in many professions)	\$100	\$100	\$100
Practice in extremely well simulated high-risk decision making	\$100	\$75	\$50
Practice in making good decisions, exercising good judgment in stressful circumstances	\$150	\$125	\$100
Affirming the importance of acting honestly, ethically, and according to rules	\$150	\$125	\$100
Self-esteem enhancement	\$75	\$50	\$50

Getting these and other bridge benefits can help a player to deal better with potentially powerful stressors, which can cause the physiological stress (the fight-or-flight) reaction.

Bridge situations correspond incredibly more to real life than poker situations. I have presented at a scholarly conference a paper in which I showed

that 85 principles, strategies, and tactics I formulated and stated apply as well to Chicago-scoring bridge (similar in strategy to IMPs scoring) as to two-officer patrol policing.

For people with ability or potential to be very high earners, I am sure that monetary values of bridge benefits in some areas can much greater than my estimates. I have not lived in that world. Still, during some of my years since starting regular duplicate play in 1981, my benefits were clearly as great as or greater than many of these estimates. I told one player about this thinking. She immediately said, "**Bridge saved my life.**" While you may think this is ridiculous, think of the savings if bridge helps a person to live at home for five years instead of going to an assisted living facility. **A year of long-term care costs about \$75,000.**

If a person plays duplicate bridge three or four days a week and adopts and follows an ACBL Heart and Brain Health Program (taking carefully selected supplements, waiting a while, walking briskly for 30+ minutes, and then playing duplicate bridge), **these benefits will probably be multiplied to an astonishing extent.**

## Chapter 28

### ONE OF THE REASONS FOR SHORTAGE OF BABY BOOMER DUPLICATE BRIDGE PLAYERS AND SOME POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

I have for years been interested in whether enough Baby Boomers are coming into and staying with duplicate bridge. So far I haven't been able to get definitive numbers on this subject. My subjective impression is that Baby Boomers are coming into and staying with duplicate bridge at less than a desirable rate.

As mentioned in the introduction, I have scholarly writing products (doctoral dissertation, commercially published book) that indicate that I have expertise concerning problem solving, decisionmaking, stressors/stress, and the effects of stressors and stress on problem solving and decisionmaking.

### A POSSIBLE REASON FOR LOW BABYBOOMER PARTICIPATION

Based on my very extensive experiences and conversations with Baby Boomers, I believe that one of the many reasons that remarkably few of them are moving into and staying in duplicate bridge is that, for many of them, **duplicate bridge either is or is expected to be too stressful and, therefore, not fun and not rewarding.** (I didn't collect and analyze data about this. Therefore, this is a

subjective impression based on many types of information.)

**Explanation of scientific terms and phrases.** Things ordinary people refer to as stress are, in technical lingo, "stressors". Stressors have potential to trigger the hormonal, physiological, and psychological stress reaction. In technical scientific language, "stress" is the stress reaction. Stress in humans results from interactions between persons and their environment that are perceived as straining or exceeding their adaptive capacities and threatening their well-being. When we say something is stressful, we are saying that it might, but might not, trigger occurrence of a stress reaction. (The stress reaction can be extremely significant regarding a person's health and well being. The most persuasive book I have read about causes of cardiovascular disease argues that stress is, by far, the most important cause. I, however, am sort of addicted to potentially stressful activities (bridge, golf, performing music), partly because I generally do not experience them as too stressful to be enjoyable. As discussed in chapter 27, I believe that playing bridge generally does not adversely affect the health of reasonably able bridge players and others who find their "comfort level.")

**Things that can make duplicate bridge stressful.** A tremendous number of things can make duplicate bridge stressful for Baby Boomers, especially if they are in the process of trying to transition from social bridge to duplicate bridge, including

(1) Bridge involves competition with your opponents at the table and with others at the other tables, sitting in the same direction. In a way, your opponents at the table want to annihilate you and partner the entire time you are playing a hand. For many Baby Boomers, the perceived prowess of their opponents tends to increase the stressfulness. This type and extent of stress can be desirable for the individual through its prompting of attention and motivation.

(2) A player's behavior is highly visible and highly regulated by detailed rules. This can result in punishment, which can result in stressful embarrassment or anger.

(3) To succeed, you must take risks, and risk taking tends to be stressful.

(4) There is time-pressure in duplicate bridge, which can be stressful. Also, especially at tournaments, the room can be too cold or too hot, which can be stressful. Too much noise can be stressful.

(5) It appears to me that nearly everyone who is in the "teacher role" for Baby Boomers suggests adopting a wide variety of complex conventions/

methods/systems (e.g., Bergen, Drury, Lebensohl, Smolen, the strong reverse system, the entire 2/1 system, puppet Stayman, Lavinthal, Roman odd/even discards, etc.). Trying to implement many or all of these systems can, for a Baby Boomer, be very stressful.

(6) Partners can be critical and/or incompetent. Both conditions can result in stress. (I strongly believe that straight forward criticism of one's partner is **very** likely to be counter-productive.) Of course, opponents can be critical or can give uninvited "lessons".

(7) Opponents can treat each other in ways that make their opponents uncomfortable and unhappy. Being uncomfortable or unhappy tends to be stressful. My estimate is that many tens of thousands of Baby Boomers have tried duplicate bridge but had some type of negative experience. We can hope that the zero-tolerance behavior policy is reducing the frequency of these incidents.

(8) Once one of these things or some other stressful thing happens during a duplicate bridge game, **the hormonal, physiological, and psychological "stress reaction" may, or may not, occur.** Of course, the severity of the stress reaction makes a lot of difference. Severe stress can be paralyzing.

(9) **A stress reaction can reduce the quality of the following aspects of cognitive functioning: attention, memory, information processing, judgment/decisionmaking.** So, it is obvious that experiencing stress (the stress reaction) can dramatically reduce one's performance as a bridge player.

(10) Bridge playing can validly be viewed as a type of work. Having **too much work** to do (having to implement too many bridge methods and systems) can produce **quantitative overload**, which can produce stress. (A motel maid who is assigned more rooms than she can clean well during her shift will experience quantitative overload.) Having bridge methods and systems that are **very complex** can result in **qualitative overload**, which can produce stress. (A young prosecutor who is assigned a case to prosecute that requires doing things (e.g., understand and remember evidence, deal with several types of complex law, understand relevant science) which she/he simply is not competent to do will experience qualitative overload.) Both types of overload and the resulting stress and anxiety can degrade the quality of bridge performance. There can then be a vicious feedback loop. The resulting mistakes can increase the anxiety and stress, which can produce more mistakes, unhappiness, and, maybe, criticism from partner. A bad game score will be discouraging. (I think that discouragement involves a low-grade stress reaction.)

(11) One manifestation of stress is experiencing "performance anxiety." As

nearly everyone knows, performance anxiety is likely to reduce quality of performance in public speaking, sports, test taking, and, horrors, even sex. Shouldn't I include "bridge" in this list? Performance anxiety sometimes involves "blanking", which involves being unable to retrieve important information. That's what happened recently when my partner did not recognize my Michaels bid.

## MY SUGGESTIONS FOR OVERCOMING THESE PROBLEMS

(1) Baby Boomers should be encouraged to be extremely careful to avoid adopting too many bridge systems, especially if some of them are very complex. By their nature, artificial bids (bids that don't mean what they apparently should mean) introduce complexity. It is crucial for both partners to know, to agree on, and to be able to reliably execute their systems. Remember: One mistake executing a bidding or defensive method tends to reduce your final score by 3%.

I recommend that Baby Boomer players adopt some version of what I call "high power, low complexity" systems. (As an example, I will assert that shadow doubles have high power but low complexity.) To find out whether my systems work against fairly strong competition, go on the unit 171 website and check my game results in the 2012 Christmas party and in Asheville and Tryon games since early December of 2012. During the summer of about 2008, three of my strong novice mentees and I, using most of my systems, placed in A in a sectional Swiss with 63% of available V.P.s. About six weeks later, my same partner and I and two other strong novice mentees, using most of my systems, placed in A in a sectional Swiss with 63% of available V.P.s.

(2) Baby Boomers should **overlearn** systems that meet these criteria and try to stay with them with all partners. (The first few times you make maybe six turns driving to a new residence, you can easily get one or more of the turns wrong. After living there for some period of time, the directions become **overlearned**. After playing/singing/whistling a new musical composition a large number of times, I have it overlearned and won't forget it as long as my brain works normally.) It is crucial to understand that research indicates that, even when stressed, **a person generally can perform a behavior that has been overlearned**. So, even when stressed and upset, a player can recognize and use Jacoby two-no trump, if it has been **overlearned**.

(3) Everyone playing with a Baby Boomer should try to reduce the stressors and stress and increase the enjoyment for their partner. (Because I know this will help my partners to play well, I have tried to use this approach for decades.) Enjoyment, including humor and laughing, helps with stress coping.

(4) Everyone playing with a Baby Boomer should provide emotional/social support for their partner. Emotional/social support helps with stress coping.

(5) Taking, at least 30 minutes before the game, supplements that help with brain function can help with cognitive performance, stress prevention, and stress coping. Waiting maybe 20 minutes after taking the supplements and then exercising (maybe brisk walking) for 20 to 40 minutes can further help with brain function, stress prevention, and stress coping. I am absolutely sure that doing these things before three duplicate games during nearly all weeks will tend to protect and even improve your cardiovascular health. (I had a short book about heart health approaches for women released by digital publishing at Wake Forest University during 2012.)

(6) In spite of all of those stressful things, many tens of thousands of us love playing duplicate bridge. Fortunately, duplicate bridge can have a wide variety of significant benefits. We experienced players need to know about these benefits and, hopefully, exemplify them. Helping Baby Boomers to learn about these benefits can lead to there being more Baby Boomer duplicate players.

## **I LEARNED ABOUT PARTNERSHIP AT THE BRIDGE TABLE**

**Have a partner you can trust, and then trust your partner.**

**Have a partner you can respect, and then treat your partner with respect and courtesy.**

**Try to avoid putting your partner in unnecessarily risky or uncomfortable situations.**

**Do everything you can to keep partner from feeling uncomfortable or uneasy in potentially difficult situations.**

**Don't hesitate to compliment your partner.**

**If your partner makes a mistake, there's nothing to be gained by criticizing him or her.**

**If you get annoyed with partner around others, express your concern when you two are alone.**

**Don't hesitate to acknowledge it if a bad outcome was your fault.**

**Make sure you and your partner know how you can communicate with each other about lots of things and in lots of ways.**

**It helps to talk about how to work together effectively and enjoyably.**

**Teach only if you know your partner wants to be taught.**

**Both of you should be able to take the lead if the circumstances suggest it.**

**Know each others' strengths and weaknesses, and use that information to get good outcomes and avoid bad outcomes.**

**If you communicate and work together well, you can capitalize on good opportunities and avoid or reduce bad outcomes.**

**You owe it to your partner to be well prepared to do important things well.**

**If you try to help your partner to have fun, most likely you will both have fun.**