

Bridge Tips for Advanced Beginners and Intermediate Players

Introduction. The following material is a compilation of valuable tips regarding the play of the game in general, bidding, declarer play, and defensive play. It should be considered an adjunct to the many available books covering all aspects of the wonderful game of bridge. In order to keep this as concise a document as possible, many common terms are used with no amplifying explanation provided. The reader should Google or otherwise look up terminology with which he or she is unfamiliar. Content is geared to advanced beginner through intermediate player level, or roughly players with 50 to 1500 Master Points. The tips were gleaned from multiple sources. The two primary sources were articles from the Bridge Bulletin (by such luminaries as Philip Alder, Marty Bergen, Larry Cohen, Billy Miller, August Boehm, and Billy Miller) and Eddie Kantar's voluminous series of bidding, declarer play, and defensive play tips. Also included are Alan Greenberg's treatise on key bridge strategies (he is currently president of the Ojai bridge club board of directors) and Karen Walker's Online Notes. Many thanks to Rose Buckley for her extensive review of the first and second drafts with numerous constructive comments. Equal thanks to Josh Rosenbluth, Bob Gruber, and Alan Greenberg for also taking the time for an extensive review and providing excellent comments and recommendations.

1. General Tips

- 1.1. Rules of the game:** become reasonably knowledgeable about the rules governing the set-up, movement, bidding, and play of the game.
- 1.2. Movements:** become familiar with the different types of player movements (Mitchell, Howell, Teams) and such constructs as sit-outs, relay and bye stands, "bumpers", and "skips".
- 1.3. Scoring:** know the fundamentals of scoring a hand, as well as the difference between regular match points and International Match Points (IMPs). Learn how to operate the Bridgemate wireless scoring device.
- 1.4. Etiquette:** learn and observe the basic rules of etiquette that should be followed by all players.
 - 1.4.1.** Be a supportive partner (congratulate good play; constructive comments only).
 - 1.4.2.** Be a gracious opponent (congratulate good play; constructive comments only).
 - 1.4.3.** While waiting for an opponent to bid or play, do not stare at them, sigh loudly, drum your fingers on the table, make a testy comment, or otherwise show your impatience.
 - 1.4.4.** Be particularly patient with new players and those of lesser ability.
 - 1.4.5.** Do not conduct extensive "post-mortems" after the play of a hand and keep your voice low for any comments you make.
 - 1.4.6.** Politely call the director to resolve any questions, problems, or perceived rule infractions; do not try to handle the situation amongst the players at the table!
- 1.5. Active Ethics:** practice active ethics at all times during the duplicate session:
 - 1.5.1.** It is unethical to take advantage of any unauthorized information you receive, either from partner, from inadvertently seeing an opponent's cards, or overhearing comments from other tables. An example of this would be you or partner showing surprise or displeasure with the other's bidding or play via facial expressions or body language.
 - 1.5.2.** All information available to a partnership must be made available to the opponents. Alerts must be used for almost all other than natural bids. A player must, at the appropriate time, correct any incomplete or incorrect information given by partner (or make known his failure to alert) during the course of bidding or play. For the declaring side, the correction must be made before

the opening lead is turned face-up. For the defending side, the time is after the play of the hand has been concluded. If any player feels his side has been damaged by such misinformation, the director should be called, the situation explained, and a ruling obtained.

- 1.5.3. Do not touch the bidding box cards until you know *exactly* what your bid is going to be. Prolonged fumbling and/or hesitation is a clear sign of *indecision* and is NOT authorized information for your partner.
- 1.5.4. After the declarer (to your right) leads a card for a possible finesse in dummy and you do not hold the apparently missing honor, it is unethical to unduly hesitate or “finger” your cards as if you do have it, before playing a losing card.
- 1.5.5. Slow play by a partnership inconveniences the other players; when you fall behind the normal pace of play, make every effort to catch up as quickly as possible and stay caught up.
- 1.5.6. Both you and partner are required to have identical convention cards filled out and with you at the table.

2. Bidding Tips

2.1 General System: A partnership agrees to play within a general bidding system such as Standard American, Two-Over-One, Strong Club, etc. Their convention card is then filled out on that basis. The card details the partnership meanings for notrump, major, and minor suit opening bids, strong opening bids, overcalls, doubles, preempts, all alertable bids, and responder bids, as well as information on leads and defensive carding.

2.2 General Hand Evaluation:

- 2.2.1 **Opening in 1st or 2nd seat:** a full opening is generally made on the basis of a hand with 12 or more HCP. The rule of 22, ZAR point count, or losing trick count can all be used to decide whether or not to make an opening bid. A hand should be downgraded if too many of the HCP are from queens & jacks, if it is ace-less, or if it is 4-3-3-3 distribution with scattered honors. It can be upgraded in value for long, running suits, or when most of the honor cards are in the longer suits.
- 2.2.2 **Opening in 3rd seat:** “third-seat light” major suit openings are often made with a strong 10 to 11 HCP. A minor suit opening in third seat should have at least 5+ cards, a strong 11 HCP, and good suit quality (2 of the top 3 or 3 of the top 5).
- 2.2.3 **Opening in 4th seat:** the “rule of 15” is widely considered the best guidance for deciding whether or not to open in this position - if the HCP plus the number of spades is equal to, or greater than, 15, the hand should be opened.
- 2.2.4 **Opening bid preempts:** this type of bid is made in first through third seats, consisting of bids from 2D all the way through 5C. 2-level bids show either 6 or a moderate quality 7 cards; 3-level bids typically show a solid 6-bagger or 7 cards; 4-level bids show a solid 7 or a good 8-carder; 5-level bids show a good 8+ card suit. In all cases, the preemptor guarantees that the proposed contract will not go down more than three at favorable vulnerability, two at neutral vulnerability, or one at unfavorable vulnerability.
- 2.2.5 **Overcalls:** an overcall of an opponent’s bid, at the cheapest level, can either be to compete for the contract or to indicate an opening lead for partner. Suit quality is therefore much more important than for an opening bid.
- 2.2.6 **Doubles:** as indicated on the convention card, doubles can either be for penalty, negative, take-out, in support of partner’s suit, or responsive to partner’s double if RHO bids over his

double. A standard take-out double shows at most 2 cards in the opponent's bid suit, a good 11 to 16 HCP, and at least 3-card support for each of the other suits. Doubler plans to pass after any bid by partner, unless a good trump fit is found and competitive bidding is in order. A big take-out double can be made with any distribution, shows a good 17+ HCP, and is usually followed up with another bid by the doubler, including a non-forced raise of partner's minimum response, unless partner passes for penalty or the opponents bid too high for further competition.

2.2.7 Table Position: during competitive bidding, your table position with respect to the stronger opponent's hand is critical. If you are in front of her, you must downgrade all non-sequential kings, queens and jacks, as she will be able to finesse right through you. If behind her with 2 or 3 honors, you will probably win 2 of them.

2.3 General non-competitive bidding after you or partner opens:

2.3.1 Based on partner's opening bid and your hand evaluation, make the most informative bid you can as responder. Your first thought should be whether you want to be in a partial, game, or slam, followed by the strain in which you think the contract should be played. If game or slam is likely, you must make forcing bids until the desired contract is reached. Once you have described your hand to your opening-bid partner, don't make a second bid that adds no new information. If partner's second bid is non-forcing, and you are at or near the bottom of your point range, just pass with some support or make a weak suit preference bid.

2.3.2 As the opening bidder, following a non-forcing, [informative] reply by partner, your second bid should further describe both your strength and the texture of your hand. If your hand is strong enough for game even if partner is at the low end of his point range, you must either jump to game on your own, or make a suitable forcing bid such as a reverse or jump shift. A jump to 2NT shows a balanced hand and 18-19 HCP, leaving the game or partial decision to responder. A jump bid in your own suit to the 3-level is also invitational, showing 16-18 points and a 6+ card suit. If you open 1 or 2 NT, it is up to responder to help you decide on the optimum contract, whether it be a partial, game, or slam.

2.3.3 In general, if both opponents are silent throughout the bidding process, they will either have flat, featureless hands with less than 10 HCP, OR they may be "lying in the weeds" with a trump stack or strong defensive values with which they hope to set the contract.

2.3.4 do not use Blackwood or RKC version with either a void or a doubleton loser in an unbid side suit. Instead, initiate a control bidding sequence to investigate for slam.

2.3.5 Do not count a void as an ace when responding to Blackwood or RKC.

2.3.6 When responding to standard Blackwood, bid 5C to show no aces or all four aces; partner should have no trouble knowing your holding.

2.3.7 Do not ask partner for kings via 5NT unless you know the partnership holds all 4 aces (or all 5 key cards), and you are interested in a grand slam.

2.3.8 When partner asks for kings via 5NT, just directly bid the grand slam if you can count 13 tricks.

2.3.9 Every 4NT bid is not Blackwood or RKC. A bid of 4NT over partner's 1NT or 2NT opening is quantitative, asking her to bid 6NT with a maximum hand or pass otherwise.

2.4 General Competitive Bidding Guidelines:

2.4.1 When both sides are bidding, each partnership will generally be able to make a part-score contract, and perhaps game or slam, depending on how distributional the four hands are. The

side with the higher suit has the advantage, often being able to force the opponents to a higher level than they would like.

- 2.4.2** When bidding, keep in mind the vulnerability situation (favorable, neutral, or unfavorable), the table position of your side's strong hand vs. theirs, your side's estimated losing trick count, the likely hand distributions, and the Law of Total Tricks which states that your side can safely compete to a level equal to your combined number of trumps.
- 2.4.3** The decision both sides must make is how high to bid, in hopes of either making the contract or going down with a sacrifice that gives the opponents an inferior score to what they could have made if your side passed out their last bid. Experienced players will rarely let the opponents play in a 2-level contract in which they have a fit, unless it is obvious they should be in game. When opponents stop at a 2-level bid, they will usually have a combined HCP value of 20-24, with an average of 22. If they are in a minor suit contract, your side should strain to overcall in one of the majors. If they stop at the 2-level in a major, either you or your partner can make a direct take-out or balancing double with as little as 8 HCP, as the doubler can expect partner to have about 10 HCP. If you go down 2 tricks, undoubled and not vulnerable, they will score 100 points vs. 110 points. If your side is vulnerable, you can only afford to go down one trick. You must consider the possibility of the opponents doubling your 3-level contract for penalty when one of them holds a trump stack. Two-level contracts are rarely doubled, as the risk-reward ratio is too high.
- 2.4.4** When a misfit is apparent during partnership bidding, cut your losses by terminating the bidding at the lowest level possible.
- 2.4.5** Make as clear-cut bids as possible to avoid possible confusion of partner as to your true meaning and intent.
- 2.4.6** In general, your long (6+), solid (at most one loser) suit will be the trump suit. Caveat: if it is a minor, you and partner should strain to play in a NT partial, game, or slam contract, provided the other suits are well controlled, and transportation to the long suit hand is not a problem.
- 2.4.7** A player who hesitates during the bidding is likely to have a problem hand; remember this.
- 2.4.8** After partner has described her hand, and you know what the final contract should be, bid it! The one who knows, goes...
- 2.4.9** Don't bid the same values twice!
- 2.4.10** Study to know when responder bids are constructive (6 to 9 pts), invitational (9 to 11 pts with 4-card support, or 10-12 pts with 3-card support), or forcing to game (13+ pts).
- 2.4.11** Don't be afraid to bid game with a *good* 7-card trump fit.
- 2.4.12** As responder, pay careful attention to the denomination and level of opener's second bid so you don't miss a reverse, assuming you play reverses.
- 2.4.13** Support partner if at all possible when she freely bids at the four level in a competitive auction.
- 2.4.14** Always consider where the field is likely to be when bidding.
- 2.4.15** When possible, at no harm to your side, take bidding space away from the opponents.
- 2.4.16** In a competitive auction, the 4-level of a minor usually belongs to the opponents; it is short of game, may very well be set, and, barring very distributional hands, you will probably be too high at that level.

- 2.4.17 Use *negative inferences* from both partner and the opponents in the bidding and play; ask yourself what could have been the reason a certain bid or play was NOT made by a certain player when it could have been.
- 2.4.18 Hands with a singleton or void almost always play better in a suit contract.
- 2.4.19 Misfits do not play well in NT as there are no suits in which to establish winners.
- 2.4.20 NEVER open 1NT with a 6-card major suit!
- 2.4.21 When in doubt, don't sacrifice at the 4-level or above; you may avoid a costly double, and you just may set the opponents with sterling defensive play! Avoid sacrifice bids with weak side suits!
- 2.4.22 With a very distributional, weak hand having no defensive value, strain to make a sacrifice bid in your one good long suit. With no distribution prospects and good defensive values, aim to set the opponents' contract.
- 2.4.23 Strive to not let the opponents play in a 4-level preemptive contract.
- 2.4.24 Be on the lookout to make a lead-directing double of artificial bids (Blackwood/RKC, Jacoby transfers, cuebids, control bids, splinter bids)

2.5 Specific Hand Evaluation Tips.

- 2.5.1 When considering whether to open 1NT, treat a 5-card suit with 3 of the top 5 honors (or 2 of the top 3, with the 9 present) as worth 1 extra point.
- 2.5.2 Do not open with a below-game preempt holding 2 aces or an ace and two kings; you are too strong defensively.
- 2.5.3 It is dangerous to count extra points for short suits before the bidding starts. Marty Bergen recommends counting 1 extra point for the 5th and subsequent cards in a long suit, but not counting points for shortness until a trump suit has been agreed upon.
- 2.5.4 When all your honors are in your 2 long suits, add one extra "purity" point.
- 2.5.5 Upgrade hands with working spot cards (8/9/10).
- 2.5.6 An opening suit hand typically has 7 losers, although the range is 6-8. An invitational hand typically has 8 losers but could have 9. The Modern Losing Trick Count (LTC) method is as follows: count 1 loser in each suit for each missing A, K, and Q, except that an unsupported or vulnerable Q is counted as one-half loser (e.g., Q-x-x-x counts as 2.5 losers, Q-J-x-x counts as 2 losers, A-Q-x-x and K-Q-x-x count as 1.5 losers. A holding of K-x in a suit counts as 1 loser unless your LHO has bid that suit, then it counts as 2 losers. Note that the most losers you can have in a suit is 3 for all 3+ card suits; similarly, the most you can have for doubletons and singletons is 2 and 1, respectively. The number of tricks that can be taken is estimated as 24 minus the number of combined losers in your and partner's hand. Also note that LTC is not applicable to NT bidding.

2.6 Specific Tips for Opening Bids/Rebids

- 2.6.1 It is permissible to open 1NT or 2NT with a small doubleton, or even with 2 doubletons provided at least one has a stopper.
- 2.6.2 With 4 of a minor and four of a major in a hand strong enough to open 1NT, but with no stoppers in the other two suits, open one of the minor suit. You can show strength by "reversing" at the 2 level.
- 2.6.3 After a 2-level response to an opening bid, a new suit by the opener is forcing; after a 1-level response, a 2-level rebid by opener is not forcing, unless it is a reverse.

- 2.6.4** After a single raise, a new suit is forcing, showing extra values (16-18 pts).
- 2.6.5** If you have 7-4 distribution with a long strong major, consider opening at the 4-level.
- 2.6.6** After you open 1H or 1S and partner responds 1NT, do not rebid your major unless you have 6+ cards, or a rock-solid 5.
- 2.6.7** When partner opens 1D, there is a 97% chance that she has 4+cards in that suit.
- 2.6.8** After responder makes a 4th *suit forcing* (FSF) bid, opener further describes her hand:
 - Supports responder's first suit with 3+
 - Rebids her second suit to show a rare 5-5 or 6-5 two-suiter
 - Raises the 4th suit with 4+
 - Bids NT with a stopper in the 4th suit, as FSF is a device to ask partner for that stopper.
 - Rebids her first suit as an economical waiting bid, denying the ability to do anything else.

Note: The FSF bid can be played as forcing for one round or to game and must be alerted.

- 2.6.9** With a 6-5 distributional hand, bid the 6-card suit, then bid the 5-card suit twice with a strong hand; otherwise, bid the 6-carder twice. With a 5-5 hand, bid the higher-ranking suit first, then bid the lower-ranking suit twice. Do not be concerned about which suit is stronger. With 5 of a major and 6 of a minor, bid the minor then the major with a strong (17+HCP) hand; otherwise, bid the major and then the minor 2-3 times. With 6 of a major and 5 of a minor, and 5 – 11 HCP, preempt in the major.
- 2.6.10** Opener's delayed raise of responder's major suit bid shows 3-card support.
- 2.6.11** After partner's Jacoby transfer in a major, jump to the 3-level (super-acceptance) with 4+ trump and a 6-loser hand.
- 2.6.12** With an opening hand and 4-4 in the minors, bid 1C, unless the D are much stronger; you will make it easier for partner to find a bid. Don't worry about not being able to bid the diamonds without a reverse-strength hand – you can always bid 1NT (this is a Bergen "best bridge tip").
- 2.6.13** Do not preempt holding a 4-card major side suit! You risk missing a good fit in the major.
- 2.6.14** With unfavorable vulnerability (your side vul, theirs not), your preempt suit should contain 3 of the top 5 honors or 2 of the top 3. Otherwise, you can consider a preempt with 2 of the top 4.
- 2.6.15** After you preempt and partner bids a new suit beneath game level, you cannot pass! Partner's forcing bid shows a very strong hand.
- 2.6.16** If partner responds 3NT to your preemptive bid, PASS – that ends the auction!
- 2.6.17** Preempt as often as possible, consistent with the vulnerability situation; it makes the bidding process much more difficult for the opponents.
- 2.6.18** After you preempt, partner is in charge and takes responsibility for all sacrifices.
- 2.6.19** When partner, a preemptive bidder, doubles an eventual contract (usually a slam), it is almost always to show a side suit void. Do not lead his suit or a trump!
- 2.6.20** Partner's double of LHO overcall of your 2-level preempt is for penalty!

2.7 Specific Tips for Overcalling/Doubling Bids

- 2.7.1** The ideal distribution for a take-out double is 4-4-4-1, with a singleton in the opening bidder's suit. This bid can be made with 11+ HCP, or even with 10 HCP as a passed hand. Note: a take-out double can be made with any shape hand provided that it has a strong 17+ HCP.
- 2.7.2** Never make a balancing takeout double with 4+cards in LHO's suit.

- 2.7.3** When partner makes a non-jump response to your takeout double, assume she has 4-5 HCP (the middle of the indicated 0-8 HCP range).
- 2.7.4** With a 4-4-4-1 pattern, it is normal to pass if your RHO opens in one of your 4-card suits, and then double later if they find a fit in that suit or bid your singleton suit.
- 2.7.5** It is risky to double an opening bid holding a small doubleton in an unbid major, particularly in spades. To do this, you must have a hand with 19+ HCP.
- 2.7.6** With a singleton in opener's suit, and some 5-4-3-1 distribution, you need 15+ HCP to double and then bid your 5-card suit.
- 2.7.7** Be aggressive defensively with a singleton or void in the opponents preempt suit. You can make a takeout double with as few as 12-14 HCP if you have the magic 4-4-4-1 distribution. With only 3-card support for an unbid major, you need 15 HCP minimum.
- 2.7.8** If your LHO opens 3C or 3D, and partner cuebids 4 of that suit, she is showing at least 5-5 in the majors and an opening hand.
- 2.7.9** If your RHO opens 3 of a major and you bid 4 of that suit, you are showing a good hand (14+ HCP) with at least 5-5 in the other major and a minor; partner bids 4NT to ask for the minor.
- 2.7.10** A bid of 4NT over a 4H or 4S opening by the opponents shows at least 5-5 in the minors and a strong opening hand, or at least 5-5 in two of the unbid suits, depending on partnership agreement. A strong intermediate partnership should have a bidding convention that deals with all 4-level preemptive bids by the opponents.
- 2.7.11** You can make a 1NT overcall of RHO minor suit opening without a stopper, provided you have 4+ cards in the suit.
- 2.7.12** You should have good suit quality and at least 11+ HCP to overcall at the 2-level. The more HCP you hold, the more you can give up a bit on the suit quality, but it still must be a decent 5+ card suit.
- 2.7.13** After partner passes and RHO opens, it is usually right to jump to the 4-level with a long, strong suit and a very distributional hand with 5 or less losers.
- 2.7.14** Don't be afraid to overcall 1NT with the opponents' suit stopped only one time.

2.8 Specific Tips for Responder Bids

- 2.8.1** As responder, with 5 cards in a minor and 4 in a major, with 10+ HCP bid the minor first, then the major; otherwise bid the major suit first.
- 2.8.2** As responder, holding a good hand (13+ HCP), do NOT bid a weak 4-card major suit as this will often lead to trouble. Among other calamities, it might encourage partner to bid 3NT with shortness and/or weakness in that suit.
- 2.8.3** With 4-4 in the majors, respond 1H to partner's opening bid of 1C or 1D; with 5-5, respond 1S, regardless of the strength of the two suits.
- 2.8.4** A 1NT response to partner's opening major suit bid shows a hand with 6-9 HCP, which may contain a long minor (or long hearts if partner opened 1S), but insufficient strength to bid at the 2-level. If playing the "forcing" NT response, in the two-over-one bidding system, to partner's opening of one of a major, that shows 6-12 HCP and a hand which may contain either a long suit which could not be bid at the 2-level, or an invitational hand with exactly 3-card trump support.
- 2.8.5** When partner opens 1H and you have 5 spades and 3 hearts, raise to 2H with 6-9 HCP; with 10-12 HCP, respond 1S then bid 3H next.

- 2.8.6** In the sequence 1H-1S, 2C-2H, the 2H preference bid shows exactly 2 hearts.
- 2.8.7** After partner opens 1H or 1S and there is an intervening overcall, a jump cuebid by responder shows at least 4-card support, a singleton or void in the opponent's suit, and a hand containing a minimum of 14-15 support points. It is a mild slam try.
- 2.8.8** A jump cue-bid after partner's minor suit opening and RHO's overcall also shows a singleton or void in the jump suit, but this promises 5 or 6 card support for partner, and denies a 4-card major.
- 2.8.9** After a 2-level response and a new suit bid by opener at the 3-level, a leap to 4NT is *natural* and invitational to slam.
- 2.8.10** After the 4th suit is bid within a partnership, a leap to 4NT is *natural* and invitational to slam.
- 2.8.11** After a natural opening bid of 1C or 1D and 2nd hand overcalls 4H or 4S, 4NT by responder is a 3-suited takeout bid (some 5-4-4 distribution), NOT Blackwood!
- 2.8.12** When partner bids 2 suits and you have an equal number of cards in each, take her back to the first suit, even if it means increasing the level of the bid!
- 2.8.13** A direct raise of partner's second bid suit promises 4+ card support IN BLOOD!
- 2.8.14** After partner opens the bidding and RHO overcalls 1NT, double for penalty with 9+ HCP. Bidding a suit denies the strength to double.
- 2.8.15** In a bidding sequence where opener's second bid is 1NT (12-14 HCP), responder uses the new minor force (NMF) convention with 11+ HCP. This is a bid of the cheapest (or unbid) minor suit at the 2-level to show interest in game. It asks opener to further describe her hand, particularly to show 3-card support for the major suit responder perhaps bid with 5 cards.
- 2.8.16** Responder can use the rule of 17 after partner makes a 2-level preempt: add HCP to the number of cards in partner's suit; if the result is 17 or more, there is a good chance for game. With a strong hand (16+ HCP), responder can bid his own good 5+ card suit, or bid a forcing 2NT, to ask for an outside entry (feature). Otherwise, responder raises to the 3-level with 3-card support or the 4-level with 4+ card support (Law of Total Tricks) as a sacrifice bid.
- 2.8.17** When your partner opens in a suit and RHO overcalls in a suit where you have a "stack" (5+ cards with 2 or 3 honors in that suit) and a decent hand with no support for partner's suit, your proper course of action is a "trap pass". If LHO passes, the onus is on your partner to bend over backwards to make a reopening double holding a singleton or void in the overcaller's suit. When opener has 3 or more cards in the overcaller's suit, a trap pass is very unlikely, so she needs a bit extra to make the reopening double (for take-out).
- 2.8.18** Make sure your partnership has a system to handle interference over your side's opening bid of 1NT or 2NT. Have a clear understanding of which bids are natural and sign-offs, and which are transfers. Where possible, the opening hand should end up as declarer.
- 2.8.19** Playing 2/1 with a forcing 1NT response to a major suit opening, when partner bids 1 of a major, RHO passes, and you have less than 3-card support, a good 6 card suit of your own, but only 6-9 HCP, bid 1NT, then bid your suit next *to play*. If partner shows a hand big enough for game on his second bid, you can bid game either in NT, his suit with 2-card support, or your good long suit. Also, for the same situation with RHO overcalling, you should pass initially with less than 10 HCP, then bid your suit at the next opportunity unless you can support partner after he rebids his suit showing 6+ cards. Bidding in this manner shows a weak-mediocre hand

with a good 6-card suit. If you had 7 or more in the suit and a weak hand, you might consider jump-shifting after RHO's overcall.

2.9 Specific Tips for Advancer (partner of the over-caller or doubler) Bids

- 2.9.1 After partner doubles LHO's opening bid, respond at the cheapest level in your best suit with 0-8 HCP. Make a single jump response with 9-11 HCP. Cue bid the opponent's suit with 12+ HCP. One exception: you can cuebid with fewer than 12 HCP when partner doubles a minor suit opening and you have both 4-card majors and 9-11 *support* points. One extra point can be added for an unbid 4-card major, two extra points for an unbid 5-card major, and three extra points for any unbid 6-card suit. Do not count any HCP for Q's or J's in any suit bid by the opponents.
- 2.9.2 A 2NT response to a takeout double shows 10-12 HCP and is not forcing. A 1NT response shows 6-9 HCP. Both bids show at least one stopper in the opponents' suit.
- 2.9.3 When your partner doubles a freely bid slam contract, he is asking you for an unusual lead – usually the first bid suit of your LHO. This is called a *Lightner* double.
- 2.9.4 If partner doubles the opponents' contract for penalty, you can still take it out with a hand that is good for offense but worthless at defense.

3. Bidding Systems and Conventions

3.1 Basic System: The basic modern-day system is Standard American (5-card major openings). A copy of the most basic Yellow Card system can be obtained from several bridge websites.

3.2 Intermediate SA and 2/1 Conventions: The most popular intermediate player system is currently two-over-one (2/1) with negative doubles, Stayman and garbage Stayman, Jacoby transfers, Roman Key Card Blackwood (RKC), reverse one or two-way Drury, Jacoby 2NT response to 1 of a major openings, splinter bids, "reverse" bids, opponent suit cue-bid limit+ raises, jump-shift bids (both strong and weak), Smolen, unusual NT, Michaels, control bids, and modified DONT (Disturb Opponents' NT opening) and/or Cappelletti-Hamilton. Complete descriptions of all these bids can be looked up via Google.

3.3 Advanced 2/1 Conventions: these include both support and responsive doubles, Puppet Stayman, Inverted Minors, help-suit game tries, Bergen major suit raises, Grand-Slam Force, Western Cue, Minorwood, Leaping Michaels, RKC Queen ask, and a response system to opponent 4-level preempt openings.

3.4 Precision/Strong Club System: still popular with some advanced players, this system has seen decreased usage since the advent of 2/1. It is a highly precise system of describing both opener and responder hands in terms of HCP and distribution [shape]. It requires a very good memory to fully implement.

4. Declarer Play Tips

- 4.1. Before playing to the first trick, review the bidding, make sure you remember the opening lead. Count your fast winners and those you need to develop in NT. Count your losers in suit contracts. Look for potential transportation problems and make an initial plan for playing the hand. Have a back-up plan in case of unfavorable trump or side-suit splits. There is nothing more important than counting your *sure* tricks before you begin play; that tells you how many tricks you have to *develop* to make the contract.

- 4.2.** Your most important decision in a suit contract will be whether or not to draw trumps at the first opportunity. In general, trumps should be pulled unless: (1) you need to ruff losers in dummy, or in hand with a dummy reversal (if there are 4+ trumps in dummy, it will probably be OK to pull some or all of the missing trumps first), (2) You need to make every trump count by cross-ruffing - in this case, it is imperative to cash side-suit winners first to avoid an opponent sluffing losers and then ruffing your winners, or (3) you can cash 2-3 winners in a side-suit opposite a singleton or void, allowing you to pitch other side-suit losers before the opponents can get in with a trump winner.
- 4.3.** Pay attention (during bidding and play) to clues re points and distribution in both opponent's hands. If one has made an opening bid, you can easily estimate the few HCP in the other's hand, playing the strong defender for key missing honors. If both opponents are passed hands, assume neither holds 12 or more points; if one turns up with 10 HCP early on, plan to play the other for any missing Q, K, or A.
- 4.4.** in a suit contract, come up with a plan to eliminate as many losers as possible. The 3 most common ways are: (1) ruffing losers from hand with dummy's trumps, (2) taking an unavoidable finesse when there is no other option (such as an end-play), and (3) setting up a long suit in dummy on which to throw off losers from your hand, AFTER you have drawn trump.
- 4.5.** At NT, count your sure tricks outside of the suit you plan to establish; this tells you how many tricks you need from your long suit, and you can plan accordingly.
- 4.6.** To the best of your ability, keep track of all honors played, down to the 10 (and 9).
- 4.7.** There are only two situations where you should attempt to finesse a missing K by leading your Q towards the A. One is where you have the J (and preferably the 10) behind it, and the other is when you have exactly Q-10-9-8 opposite A-x-x-x. For the latter case, the best way to score three winners is to lead the Q – the optimal double-finesse play. Otherwise, it is always a losing play regardless of where the K is.
- 4.8.** Give the opponents a chance to make a mistake. At some point, usually after trumps have been pulled, give them a trick you can't avoid losing and hope they either break a new suit for you or give you a ruff and sluff.
- 4.9.** Do not lead from dummy and ruff in your hand unless one of the following four situations exist: (1) you must get to your hand and there is no other entry, (2) you have a long side suit in dummy that still needs to be set up by ruffing losers in your hand, when you are void in that suit, (3) you are not going to pull trump because you will be cross-ruffing, and (4) you are in a "dummy reversal" situation (you started with more trumps in dummy than in your hand) and you need to ruff one or more losers from dummy with your hand's shorter trump holding. The latter often happens when you open 1NT and partner transfers you into the trump suit.
- 4.10.** When you can take a trick with one of two or more equal honors, take the trick with the higher one; it can prove very deceptive to the opponents. Note that this is the opposite of your play as a defender.
- 4.11.** When possible, withhold any spot card lower than the one that has been led by a defender or lower than the one played by your RHO. This has great potential for misleading the opponents regarding either count or honor card location. One easy rule to remember for successful deceptive play is to pretend you are a defender. If you want the suit led again, play a high card; if you don't want it led again, play a low card.
- 4.12.** When leading from dummy to take a finesse with a number of equal honors in your hand, finesse with the higher or highest equal, to conceal the remainder of your holding.

- 4.13.** When you have all the tricks but one in a trump contract, play off every single one of your trumps before you play any remaining side-suit cards – make the opponents guess what cards to keep.
- 4.14.** At a suit contract holding A-x-x facing x-x-x and the suit is led, it is usually right to duck and win the second round of the suit. If one opponent has only 2 cards in the suit, you cut communication between the two hands.
- 4.15.** Play the cards you are known to hold from the lead and 3rd hand's play. Say the Q is led, dummy has x-x-x-x, and you have K-J doubleton; if 3rd hand plays the A, your K and J are now equals, and you should play the K, which 3rd hand already knows you have from his partner's lead. He doesn't know where the J is, but may well assume partner has it, having led from Q-J-x-x.
- 4.16.** Pay attention to the play of your small trump cards – they may need to be conserved for entry purposes.
- 4.17.** Be very careful to unblock running suits, or a great source of tricks may be irretrievably lost.
- 4.18.** If you have a number of equal honors and you want LHO to cover, lead your highest honor, otherwise lead the lowest one – it works!
- 4.19.** When you have drawn all trumps but one, and it is a master, it is almost always correct to leave it out, rather than giving up 2 of yours to clear it. The sole exception is when you have a single entry to a long running side suit, which you cannot allow to be trumped.
- 4.20.** If you have short suits with top tricks that can be taken at any time, plan to use these as entries to get back and forth between your hand and dummy's. If you don't need them for entries, plan on cashing them last.
- 4.21.** Especially in NT contracts, plan to set up winners in 5+ card suits with few honors. You may need to duck as many as 3 or even 4 times to establish the 1 or 2 winners needed to make the contract.
- 4.22.** With 8 cards missing the Q, the odds favor trying the finesse rather than playing for the drop, unless there is strong evidence otherwise. When you have an 8-card 2-way finesse situation, take it through the opponent who is most likely to have the missing K or Q. With 9 cards, missing only the Q, the odds slightly favor playing for the drop, unless there is some evidence otherwise, such as one opponent having shown a 6+ card suit. In that case, finesse the other opponent for the Q.
- 4.23.** With x-x-x opposite A-Q-10-x, absent other information, finesse first with the 10, then the Q to maximize the chances for 2 winners. The same play applies opposite K-J-10-x.
- 4.24.** In the play of the hand, be very careful to keep the dangerous opponent off the lead; if a finesse can be taken either way, play it so that if it loses, the player who can't hurt you is on lead.
- 4.25.** In general, an odd number of missing cards will tend to break as evenly as possible. An even number of missing cards tend to break unevenly, but as close to even as possible. Missing 6: 3-3: 36%, 4-2: 48%, 5-1: 15%, 6-0: 1%. Missing 5: 3-2: 68%, 4-1: 28%, 5-0: 4%. Missing 4: 2-2: 40%, 3-1: 50%, 4-0: 10%. Missing 3: 2-1: 78%, 3-0: 22%.
- 4.26.** In a 3NT contract where you have two long minor suits, say A-K-10 opposite J-9-x-x-x, and A-Q-10-x vs. J-9-x, and you need to play them for a combined total of at least 5 tricks before giving up the lead (or the opponents will set you in their long running suit where you had to expend your only stopper early on), your best percentage play is to first cash the A-K of your 8-carder, hoping the missing Q is singleton or doubleton (about 38% of the time), then if the Q does not drop, try the finesse in the 7-card suit (50% success rate), for a combined success rate of nearly 70%. The optimum play here is to start with the 9 and play low if it is not covered. If it wins, next lead the J and play the 10 if it is not covered.

- 4.27.** When a trump is the opening lead, assume the leader does not have a missing K or Q of trumps.
- 4.28.** Conceal your distribution by playing the highest immaterial card you can when an opponent shows out.
- 4.29.** In a NT contract, with a choice of 2 finesses and only one stopper remaining in your weakest suit, ask yourself which finesse, if it loses, leaves you with the most *remaining* tricks.
- 4.30.** When you have a concealed running suit, try to steal your contract-making trick early – before the opponents can count your tricks. Knowing about this running suit could well force them into the only line of play to defeat the contract.
- 4.31.** If there is only one lay of the cards for a contract to be made, declarer must play for it.
- 4.32.** Before playing against another pair, make sure you know their system of carding signals.
- 4.33.** Make sure you do not get stuck leading AWAY from honor combinations such as K-J-x-x.
- 4.34.** Try to cut defenders' communications as early as possible.
- 4.35.** When appropriate, make use of the often-invaluable loser-on-loser play.
- 4.36.** Look for strip-and-throw-in plays (also called end-plays) to avoid taking unnecessary finesses.
- 4.37.** Know when to use "safety", "hold-up", and "duck" plays to your advantage.
- 4.38.** In NT contracts, lose tricks early to set up tricks at the end.
- 4.39.** Recognize *combination plays in two different suits* to maximize your chances of making the contract. For example, needing 5 tricks with 3 top winners in one suit with 4 cards opposite 3 and an available finesse for a missing K *in another suit*, play off the top winners first. If you get a lucky 3-3 split, you are home free; if not, you can then try the finesse for the 5th trick.
- 4.40.** When you discover a bad trump split, do your best to avoid losing trump control.
- 4.41.** Employ the *ruffing finesse* when appropriate. The opportunity for this occurs when declarer holds an honor sequence (preferably three) in one hand, a void and at least one trump in the other, and the single missing highest honor in that suit is expected to be held by the opponent to the left of the sequence being led. If LHO covers with her higher honor, declarer ruffs, gets back to the hand with the now promoted honors and cashes them, discarding losers from the ruffing hand. If LHO holds up, a loser is discarded and the next honor is led with the same effect. Should RHO unexpectedly show up with the higher honor, a loser is still discarded and the remaining honors in the sequence are now set up for additional discards.
- 4.42.** To the best of your ability, COUNT the hand, especially trumps, your longest side suit, and opponent discards.
- 4.43.** Sluff cards you do not want to lead and always keep a safe "out-card".
- 4.44.** Use the principle of *restricted choice* to your advantage – with 5 missing trumps including the Q and J, playing the A before leading to the K-10-x-x and seeing RHO drop either Q or J, play LHO for the other missing honor.
- 4.45.** If you can count all the tricks you need to make the contract but one, and you have something like K-J-10-x in dummy opposite, say, x-x, lead towards the K at the earliest opportunity in an attempt to "steal" the making trick.
- 4.46.** When appropriate, attempt to "squeeze" your opponents by playing off a long running suit, possibly trumps, so your opponents have painful discard choices which you may be able to exploit.
- 4.47.** When planning and executing your play, take into account your opponents' skill level. You will be more successful with misleading/deceptive plays against less experienced partnerships.

- 4.48.** When one opponent has most or all of the missing trumps, and the suit is “frozen” (whoever leads the suit gives up an extra trick), clear out the side suits by cashing winners and ruffing to reduce your number of trumps to that of the opponent. Then throw that opponent in with a non-trump loser. He will then be forced to lead a trump, giving you the extra trick.
- 4.49.** When an opponent’s bidding has shown 5-4 distribution in two suits, the odds of a 3-1 split in the other 2 suits is 49%, vs. 40% for a 2-2 split; therefore, when that player leads one of these short suits, assume it is a singleton and capture it immediately if you can to prevent his partner winning the trick and giving him a subsequent ruff.
- 4.50.** Judiciously plan the *timing* of your play in both NT and suit contracts. In NT contracts, the priority is to set up your long suits first – give up your losers early to set up winners later. In suit contracts, once trumps have been drawn, decide which side suits should be attacked next and in what order to maximize your chances of success.
- 4.51.** Become familiar with the different types of finesses: simple, reverse, double, deep, ruffing, and internal.

5. Defensive Play Tips

5.1. Opening Leads

- 5.1.1.** The choice of your opening lead, or the correct interpretation of partner’s opening lead, can be of critical importance for setting the contract or holding declarer to a minimum number of tricks.
- 5.1.2.** Before any opening (or non-opening) lead, the defensive partnership needs to decide whether an active or passive style defense is called for, based on the bidding and subsequent view of dummy. An *active* defense is one where the defenders try to cash or establish tricks early or their potential winners may disappear as declarer sluffs off her losers in one suit on winners in another. The biggest threat here is when declarer has a long running side suit in a trump contract, or *any* long running suit in a NT contract. In other words, a new suit is attacked despite the risk of giving declarer an undeserved trick. Examples of active defense leads are 4th from longest and strongest, leading low from an honor, and leading A from A-(x). A *passive* defense means making a safe lead in a suit where the declarer is known to hold the top cards. The intent is to force declarer to break new suits to his disadvantage, giving the defenders tricks they could not have taken on their own. Examples of passive defense include leading top of nothing (or middle-up-down), leading a trump from x-x or x-x-x, and leading to a singleton natural winner in dummy. Leading top of a perfect or near-perfect sequence is both active and passive, as it does not give up an “undeserved” trick while at the same time establishing a potential trick for the defense. According to computer simulation results obtained by bridge expert and author David Bird, leading away from a J is less dangerous than leading away from a Q, which is less dangerous than leading away from a K when an active defense is called for. Easy rule to remember: defend passively if your side-suit tricks cannot get away; defend actively if they can.
- 5.1.3.** Against NT contracts, it is generally correct to lead the 4th highest of your longest suit (preferably 5+ cards). You will not want to do this, however, if: (1) you have either a run of cards such as Q-J-10-8 or a running interior sequence such as K-10-9-8-4 – in which case you lead the top of the sequence, (2) your best long suit is K-x-x-x or Q-x-x-x, allowing declarer to win cheaply while being tipped off on the location of the honor card, (3) leading partner’s bid suit appears to be the best option, or (4) leading the unbid suit appears to be best. Lacking any good lead, it is generally best to lead “top of nothing” or through dummy’s second bid suit. With a very weak

hand having no entries, it is often right to lead the suit where partner has the best chance of being long.

- 5.1.4.** Against suit contracts, it is often right to lead a trump to reduce declarer's ability to ruff losers in dummy and/or cut down on his cross-ruff potential. This tactic is more valuable at 2-level contracts, especially when the bidding indicates dummy only has 2 trumps.
- 5.1.5.** If you have 4 or more trumps, lead your longest and strongest suit (the forcing game). If you can make declarer ruff 2 or more times, you will eventually have more trumps and declarer will have lost control of the hand.
- 5.1.6.** Attacking leads may be singletons or doubletons (much less effective than singletons), setting up for a ruff or two. Attacking leads like A or K from K-Q should usually be made against slam contracts, unless (1) partner has doubled a conventional bid for a lead in that suit or (2) she has doubled (*Lightner*) a freely bid slam for an unusual lead (generally the first suit bid by your LHO). This works best when one holds the A or K-x of trumps, providing 2 ruffing opportunities.
- 5.1.7.** When leading a suit partner has bid *and* you have supported, lead your highest card with 3 or 4 small ones; if you have *not* supported, lead the lowest card to show a count of 3 or more. The high spot card denies an honor. If you haven't supported her suit, the lead of a high card shows a singleton or doubleton. If you have A-x-(x), K-x, Q-x, or J-x in partner's suit, lead the honor card. If you have an honor (other than the A) and 2 small cards in her suit, lead the smallest card.
- 5.1.8.** With A-K-(x) in partner's suit and defending against suit contracts, lead the A. Also, lead the top card of partner's suit with 4 or more headed by 2 adjacent honors.
- 5.1.9.** To lead the top of a sequence vs. a NT contract, the suit should have 3 adjacent honors (perfect sequence); however, the 3rd card in the sequence can be missing by one place (e.g. K-Q-10-x-(x)). If the third card is off by more than one place, lead 4th highest.
- 5.1.10.** Only 2 adjacent honors are required to lead the top honor vs. suit contracts.
- 5.1.11.** In general, the lead of a low card shows strength and the lead of a high spot card shows weakness. However, the lead of a low card when it can't be from strength (e.g. partner leads low in a suit where you can clearly see all honors in dummy and your hand) indicates a singleton and begs for a ruff at the first opportunity.
- 5.1.12.** Against 6NT avoid leading from an honor unless you have a sequence!
- 5.1.13.** The best time to lead a short suit is with trump control (such as A-x-(x) or K-x-(x)). However, if ruffing will cause you to lose a natural trump trick, leads from shortness with trump holdings such as J-10-x-x, Q-J-9-x, or K-Q-9-x are counter-productive.
- 5.1.14.** Avoid trump leads when the opponents are mis-fitted or when you have a singleton trump.
- 5.1.15.** If partner is marked with a singleton trump, do not lead a trump from K-x-x, as neither of you will be able to continue the suit. Try another lead and hope partner finds the trump switch if he gets in early.
- 5.1.16.** Deceptive leads in the trump suit include the 9 from 10-9-x and the J from Q-J doubleton.
- 5.1.17.** When it appears that dummy has a long side suit and trump support, a trump lead is desirable ONLY if you have the long suit well stopped. Otherwise it is the worst lead possible!
- 5.1.18.** Do not lead a singleton vs. a voluntarily bid [trump] small slam if you have an A, unless you also have a trump stack with good chances for a ruff later. However, a singleton lead when

you don't have an A has a much better chance of succeeding. With a little luck, partner will have the A in that suit and can give you a ruff before declarer can draw trump.

5.1.19. When playing the second card in a suit you have led, give current count, i.e., the 3 from 7-4-3.

5.1.20. When partner doubles a slam contract after having bid a suit, do NOT lead his suit. He usually has a void or an outside AK and it is your job to figure out which and make the killing lead.

5.1.21. When leading an unbid suit at NT with 4 cards not headed by an honor, lead your highest or next-highest card. If your highest card is an 8 or lower, lead high, otherwise lead 2nd high.

5.1.22. If partner does NOT lead your bid suit, assume that one of the following situations applies: (1) she is void in your suit, (2) she is leading a singleton, (3) she is leading top of a sequence, (4) she has the A and fears declarer has the K, which would then be promoted into a winner (particularly true if she has supported your suit).

5.1.23. Almost NEVER lead from K-J-x-(x)!

5.1.24. When it most likely can't hurt you, it is often advantageous to lead a winning honor at the first trick to get a look at dummy before deciding on your line of defensive play.

5.1.25. Defending a 6NT contract, make a passive lead rather than one from an honor.

5.1.26. When partner makes a penalty double against a suit contract, assume she is short in your long suit, cash any top winners in that suit, and try to give her a ruff or two.

5.1.27. With a terribly weak hand and having supported partner's suit with K-x-x-(x) or Q-x-x-(x), lead the honor in case you need to switch to another suit. If you lead low, you may never get in again.

5.1.28. With the A and any length in partner's suit, lead the A unless you need to get partner in at once to give you a ruff, or if the dummy has bid NT indicating possession of the guarded K. Underleads of aces generally do not work out well.

5.1.29. With 10-x-x, J-x-x, or Q-x-x of partner's suit, lead low unless dummy has bid NT, then lead high.

5.1.30. Leading a suit partner has overcalled is usually safer than leading a suit he has opened. However, leading partner's 3rd hand opening bid is generally right as one purpose of a light 3rd-seat opener is often to encourage the lead of that suit.

5.1.31. If partner has passed your low-level takeout double, a trump lead is almost mandatory. She must have a very strong trump holding and can obliterate most of declarer's ruffing potential.

5.1.32. With a strong sequence in trumps, a trump lead is generally best.

5.1.33. When dummy is expected to have a long strong side suit in a suit contract, and there are 2 unbid suits, lead from the stronger, unless it is headed by the unsupported A, then lead the other suit.

5.2. Non-Opening Leads

5.2.1. Lead up to known weakness in dummy or declarer's hand. Lead through strength otherwise if there is no better option.

5.2.2. Avoid breaking a new suit for declarer unless there is a good chance that it will be to your advantage.

5.2.3. Leads to avoid include: (1) free finesses for declarer, (2) those that give him a ruff and sluff play, (3) those that set up a long suit for declarer, and (4) leads up to strength.

5.2.4. Favorable leads to make include those that: (1) are in a suit partner bid, (2) set up your side's long suit, (3) give partner a ruff, (4) remove ruffing power from dummy, (5) remove declarer's

transportation to dummy, (6) give declarer winners he had anyway, and (7) are neutral, giving declarer no advantage.

5.3. General Defensive Play Tips

- 5.3.1.** Never forget that you are playing in a partnership. Consider what things may look like from partner's point of view, particularly when you are privy to information she is not.
- 5.3.2.** You cannot defend properly unless: (1) you remember the bidding, (2) you know what carding system the opponents are playing, (3) you watch the cards, particularly the small spots, (4) you count the hand to the best of your ability, and (5) you properly interpret partner's carding signals. It is imperative that you construct the best picture you can, in terms of points and distribution, of all four hands.
- 5.3.3.** Form the best plan you can envision to defeat the contract; if there is only one way the cards can lay to set the opponents, you must assume that is the case and play accordingly.
- 5.3.4.** Don't compound a crime. If you or partner make an error, do not lose your cool. Many contracts can still be beaten after one defensive error, seldom after two.
- 5.3.5.** If declarer's play slows to a crawl, he has a problem. Quite often this indicates a 4-3 trump fit; it could also be a suit he can't lead except to his disadvantage, such as Q-x-x in dummy and J-x-x in hand. Note that it is ethical to take advantage of declarer's "going in the tank", but not partner's similar action.
- 5.3.6.** When two possible defenses present themselves to defeat a contract, both equally likely, select the simpler approach.
- 5.3.7.** If you can see the winning defense, take charge before it is too late; this keeps undue pressure off your partner.
- 5.3.8.** Keep partner's skill level in mind and avoid confusing him with leads or carding signals he may misunderstand.
- 5.3.9.** When you can see that there are no possible defensive tricks coming from the side suits, it is best to give declarer a ruff (even with a sluff). This often promotes a defensive trump trick.
- 5.3.10.** When declarer bids 2 suits, particularly when the first is a major, a tentative count of his hand is available. Using that count, along with partner's lead and seeing the dummy, allows you to compose a pretty good picture of all four hands.
- 5.3.11.** Always take defensive tricks with the lowest of equals. Note that this is the opposite of your play as declarer.
- 5.3.12.** When signaling encouragement with equal spot cards, signal with the higher equal, assuming you are playing standard, not upside-down, attitude.
- 5.3.13.** When playing third hand to a trick, play high unless you have good reason not to. For instance, you would duck to deny declarer later entry to dummy, to prevent declarer from being able to run a long suit in dummy, or to give partner a ruff on the third round of the suit if you suspect he has led a doubleton and you hold the A and an early trump entry.
- 5.3.14.** You should normally consider leading back the suit that partner led at your first opportunity, unless you have a better reason to switch (e.g., to lead through declarer's trumps or to show strength in your own hand).
- 5.3.15.** Standard carding for attitude, count, and suit preference is best for advanced beginners and many intermediate players. For more advanced intermediate players, two alternative defensive carding systems are Upside-Down (first discard only), and Laventhal discards

- defending a NT contract. The latter allows you to tell partner which suit to lead once she gets in. Odd-even discards (first discard only) are also used by some intermediate players.
- 5.3.16.** When partner leads low from length and dummy comes down with an honor and you have a higher and a lower honor, play the lower one if dummy plays low.
- 5.3.17.** If partner leads a low card in one suit, gets in and shifts to a low card in another suit, he wants a return in the second suit. If he shifts to a high card in the second suit, he is asking for a return in the first suit.
- 5.3.18.** At NT, it is important to keep communication with partner's hand. If she leads what looks like the top of a doubleton and you have something like A-K-x-x-x(x) with no outside entry, it's usually a good idea to duck the first trick. Let partner keep that second card so that, when she gets in, he can return the suit for you to run.
- 5.3.19.** When declarer ignores a long, strong suit in dummy lacking one key honor, assume he has that honor in hand. If he didn't have it, that would be the first suit he would lead.
- 5.3.20.** When there is a short side suit in dummy and declarer draws all of dummy's trumps, the inference is that he does not have any losers in that suit to ruff. Translation: it is safe to discard in that suit.
- 5.3.21.** When discarding, keep length parity with the dummy. If dummy has 4 cards and you also have 4 in that suit, one of which could take a trick, do not discard from that suit!
- 5.3.22.** It is important to count declarer's tricks as the play progresses. If you are on lead and can see that declarer has sufficient tricks in 3 suits to make the contract, shift to the 4th suit – some chance is better than none!
- 5.3.23.** In general, do not play your ace without taking a K or Q with it. Exceptions are: (1) it is the setting trick and you are not sure declarer has any more cards in that suit, (2) you know partner is void in that suit so you can take your ace and then give him a ruff, (3) you see the K and Q on the board behind you – you will never capture either one unless declarer leads one from the dummy, (4) you are leading A-doubleton hoping to see a high signal from partner showing the K; you can then lead to her K and hope for a third round ruff. If declarer has the K and Q, you have just set them up and given him an extra trick; however, if it works, you will probably get a high board.
- 5.3.24.** When the dummy has a long suit with no outside entry in a NT contract, and you have one sure stopper, hold off until you are sure declarer has no more entries in his hand. Partner can help in this situation by giving you a count in that suit (with standard signals, low-high equals an odd number, high-low equals an even number).
- 5.3.25.** When in doubt as to the opening lead when defending a NT contract, lead a major, even if you do not have a very good one. In this case, lead your shorter one, hoping to catch partner with 5+ in the suit.
- 5.3.26.** When your partner leads against a NT contract, play your highest card in 3rd position. If you win the trick, lead back your highest card in that suit. If you lose the trick and get back in later, lead the highest of partner's original suit lead unless dummy's holdings indicates that it is hopeless (in that case, your partner probably did not have a good opening lead).
- 5.3.27.** Very often it is a good strategy, after you have won a trick, to just lead something that gets you out of the lead with no damage (a passive lead). Try to make declarer lead to you or partner.

- 5.3.28.** When leading for an expected ruff by partner, lead a low card to ask for his return in the lower side suit, or a high card for a return in the higher side suit.
- 5.3.29.** When neither attitude nor count applies, signal partner with a suit preference card.
- 5.3.30.** When you are behind dummy, keep honors that are over dummy's honors; this hampers declarer's ability to set up those potential tricks.
- 5.3.31.** When discarding, try to get rid of losers you don't want to lead; do your best to keep a safe "out-card" or two.
- 5.3.32.** When partner shows length in a suit, particularly vs. a NT contract, your main concern is to unblock that suit by playing your high cards first.
- 5.3.33.** Take every opportunity to mislead and confuse declarer with leads, plays, and false-cards.
- 5.3.34.** Analyze the best order of play when you can either (1) cash a winner and then give partner a ruff or (2) give partner a ruff with a suit preference card allowing you to get in with that winner to give him a second ruff if possible.
- 5.3.35.** Cover an honor played by declarer when it promotes a trick in that suit; otherwise, you should hold off playing your honor until it must be played to cut declarer's transportation.
- 5.3.36.** Do not cover an honor if the lead is from 2 touching honors, as it will save declarer a guess in a finessing situation.
- 5.3.37.** If you have an entry to your hand, be sure to save a card in the suit partner has led; with no entries, the low cards in his suit are safe discards, being careful to give present count.
- 5.3.38.** When discarding from an honor sequence, discard the top card as a signal to partner.
- 5.3.39.** Prefer a negative carding signal over a positive one when the latter may give information to declarer that results in an advantage he would otherwise not have had. Also, use a negative discard when partner can't help but see what he should lead, or to keep him from leading up to weakness when you are even weaker in that suit.
- 5.3.40.** When possible, try to set up a trump promotion for partner by forcing declarer to ruff high in front of her.
- 5.3.41.** When declarer is trying to set up a long suit in dummy with no other entries, subtract the number of cards you hold in that suit from 7 – this tells you the number of times you must hold up a winner to cut declarer's communication in that suit.
- 5.3.42.** After partner plays a semi-low card in a suit, if there are 2 or more cards unaccounted for that are lower than his card, assume it is an *encouraging* signal.
- 5.3.43.** When partner leads a Q, signal high if you have the K or 10; when he leads a K, signal high if you have the A or J.
- 5.3.44.** When dummy wins a trick with the Q or lower, signal *count* to your partner.
- 5.3.45.** A good defensive player always *plans ahead* so that when declarer makes a lead in a suit where it puts her to a guess as to which card to play, she has already made that decision; even the slightest hesitation tips off declarer to his best line of play.
- 5.3.46.** When partner leads a suit vs. a NT contract and subsequently discards from that suit, he does not want that suit returned.
- 5.3.47.** When discarding vs. a NT contract, or even a trump contract where getting a ruff is not an option, avoid discarding from short suits, particularly short suits where you cannot see the Q in dummy. You may be exposing partner's Q to a finesse in an otherwise 2-way finessing situation where declarer is on a guess. Much better is to discard from unimportant length.

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Ventura Bridge Unit 547

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