Table Talk

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Editor's Message (Mark Oettinger)

Lynn Carew recently gave us seven heretofore undiscovered issues of *Table Talk* dating back to 1986, 1987 and 1988, starting with Vol. 1, #1 (Jan. 24, 1986), demonstrating that there have been more than 70 issues to date...probably a LOT more. Further review of the January 2011 issue that threw me off, discloses that it was then-Editor Frank Hacker's list, starting in July 1991, of the issues that included a "Featured Personality." Mea culpa for understating the body of work that is represented by almost one-third of a century of collective effort by Vermont's bridge community. And I again solicit from readers suggestions for individuals who should be featured in future issues.

With this issue of *Table Talk*, we introduce our new website:

www.bridgequarterly.org

There, we will archive as many of the past issues of *Table Talk* as we can find. As we produce new issues, they will be posted, and our plan is to add and populate topical subpages, on subjects such as declarer play, defense, interesting bidding ideas, convention cards, club management, the laws of duplicate bridge, online bridge, and much, much more. If you have a past issue of *Table Talk* that does not appear on the website, please forward it to me, and we will post it. Likewise, if you have articles of interest, please submit them. We already have received two articles from Unit 175 members, and will post them prior to publication of the July 1, 2018 issue.

I Like Those Odds! (Ingi Agnarsson)

Last time, in "I Like Those Odds," (October 1, 2017) we discussed some probabilities of hand distributions. Among other things, we concluded that balanced hands are the most common ones, and that you should not expect a void or a seven-card suit every session. Similar probabilities can also be used to justify your frustrations! For example, if you do get dealt a Yarborough (a hand with no card higher than a 9), you are justified in being a bit miffed about your luck, since that happens only once in every 1827 hands. In other words, if you play a 'modest' amount of bridge - say just one club game per week, and perhaps a few sectionals - then you can expect to be dealt about one Yarborough per year.

Bridge odds, however, are most practical when you apply them to the distribution of missing cards, for example, when trying to land a challenging contract. Here are two typical and closely-related questions:

1. What are the odds of dropping the Jack when holding:

   KQ109 opposite Ax?

2. And what about:

   KQ109 opposite Axx?

And how do the odds of the two finessing positions differ? In sum, how is it best to play these combinations, percentage-wise?

Or, a problem presented in the last issue, with declarer faced with trying to make 6♥ with the following hands:

♠63
♥AJ10542
♦8
♣AQ74

♠AJ1094
♥Q96
♦AQ9
♣K9

After a ♠ lead, declarer has a ♠ loser if the opponents gain the lead before the ♠ loser is eliminated. How can declarer best combine his chances, and how likely is he to succeed?

Or, a simpler example: your contract is 7♠, and you are only missing the ♠Qxxx. Should you play for the drop or finesse?

We can calculate the probabilities of missing cards using a "relatively" simple formula; the ${}_nC_t$ formula. This is what I did in the last issue to come up with the total number of kinds of bridge hands, which is ${}_{52}C_{13}$ (combination of 52 'things' dealt out 13 at the time), which translates to last issue's fraction:

$$\frac{52x51x50x49x48x47x46x45x44x43x42x41x40}{13x12x11x10x9x8x7x6x5x4x3x2x1}$$

Don't get worried about formulas, or about math that looks complicated. If you want, you can use this formula at the bridge table to calculate any probabilities of interest in a given hand. However, after the first 25 minutes of calculations, the opponents would likely consider summoning the Sharpsteen. And who wants all that extra work anyway!? Luckily, it gets simpler as fewer cards are missing, and most or all of the math can be replaced by simply committing to memory a few

statistical facts; probabilities of most commonly encountered distributions (as many people before us have already calculated almost anything of interest using the ${}_nC_t$ formula). Let's look at a summary of the most relevant probabilities, and then focus on odds that practical players should more-or-less have engraved in their memories. First the more detailed table:

#Cards	Split	Probability	#combs	each comb.
2	1 - 1	0.52	2	0.26
	2 - 0	0.48	2	0.24
3	2 - 1	0.78	6	0.13
	3 - 0	0.22	2	0.11
4	2 - 2	0.40	6	0.068
	3 - 1	0.50	8	0.062
	4 - 0	0.10	2	0.048
5	3 - 2	0.68	20	0.034
	4 - 1	0.28	10	0.028
	5 - 0	0.04	2	0.020
6	3 - 3	0.36	20	0.018
	4 - 2	0.48	30	0.016
	5 - 1	0.15	12	0.012
	6 - 0	0.01	2	0.007
7	4 - 3	0.62	70	0.009
	5 - 2	0.31	42	0.007
	6 - 1	0.07	14	0.005
	7 - 0	0.01	2	0.003
8	4 - 4	0.33	70	0.005
	5 - 3	0.47	112	0.004
	6 - 2	0.17	56	0.003
	7 - 1	0.03	16	0.002
	8 - 0	0.00	2	0.001

This requires some explanation. The table lists all possible splits for 2-8 missing cards, their probabilities, and number of possible combinations of cards within any given split (#combs). For example, in a 5-0 split (4% of the time), there are only two possible combinations, half the time your LHO has the 5 cards (2%), and half the time your RHO does (2%). In contrast, the most likely split with 5 missing cards is 3-2 (68%), but there are many different combinations of the five cards split this way; 20 to be exact. Each specific combination occurs about 3.4% of the time. Let's say you're missing Q9876. Odds strongly favor finessing, but what are the odds the Q is doubleton behind declarer's AK? The Q could be there

in 4 different combinations (Q9, Q8, Q7, Q6), each occurs 3.4% of the time for a combined probability of 13.6%.

This table is useful, but too large to memorize. Here instead, is a summary of the most important data points, about the minimum you should aim to commit to memory. These represent the most frequent issues faced by declarer when opponents have 2-6 cards in the suit being played, and often we are concerned with not only the break, but also with picking up an outlying honor:

#Cards	Split	Probability	Notes
2	**1 - 1**	**52%**	**Top - slightly better than finesse for a king**
	2 - 0	**48%**	**Finesse for a 'swing' score at low risk!**
3	**2 - 1**	**78%**	**Finesse - Dropping a stiff offside king: 13%**
	3 - 0	**22%**	
4	**2 - 2**	**40%**	**Top to find Q - slightly better than finesse**
	3 - 1	**50%**	**Dropping a stiff offside king: 6.2%**
	4 - 0	**10%**	
5	**3 - 2**	**68%**	**Finesse - Catching Qx offside: 14%**
	4 - 1	**28%**	**Dropping a stiff offside honor: 2.8%**
	5 - 0	**4%**	
6	**3 - 3**	**36%**	**Top to pick up J, finesse for K or Q**
	4 - 2	**48%**	**Catching Qx offside: 11.2%**
	5 - 1	**15%**	**Dropping a stiff offside honor: 1.2%**
	6 - 0	**1%**	

Let's put these stats to use to analyze the problems laid out above.

First the simplest example: you are missing only Qxxx with AK on the same side. Should you finesse or take AK? First, of course, if you have enough communication between the hands you take the A or K, and you only then play toward the other honor, taking care of the stiff Q on either side (12.4%), or possibly a 4-0 break (5% onside that you may be able to handle). In most hands, both follow suit, and you have to decide whether to finesse or take the K. Which is better? Playing the K slightly but significantly better: a good rule of thumb is "8 ever, 9 never." This means that you finesse with an 8-card fit, and you play the K with 9. Playing the A first and then the K wins every time Q is stiff, or Qx - a total of 53%. If you can handle the 4-0 onside split, you are at 58%. Taking the A and finessing wins whenever Q is stiff, and when the Qx and Qxx are onside - a total of 51%. And, if you can handle it, when the Qxxx is onside - for a total of 56%.

These probabilities are close**, however, and perhaps the saying should go "8 often, 9 not as often." It's not elegant, but it's closer to the truth. What if you're missing the Qxxxx? Now the probabilities of dropping the stiff Q or Qx are dramatically reduced (about 34%, see table), while the finesse (axiomatically) is never under 50%!

****A point on strategy**. The two approaches are close in percentages. If you're in the last round in a matchpoint tournament, and feel that you need a good board to clinch it, FINESSE! Taking AK will likely get you an average, whereas finessing will be playing against the field for a potentially very good score at relatively low risk. Sure, if it doesn't work you will score poorly, but "you gotta risk to win," especially at matchpoints.

How likely are you to drop the jack with KQ109 opposite Ax versus Axx? Or, simply, how likely are you to get 4 tricks and what approach gives you the best chance? Well, in the former case, you are missing seven cards and the most likely split is 4-3 (62%). An immediate finesse gives you 50%, but that would be silly - better to take the A first even though the chances of dropping the J singleton are less than 1% (see the odds of any given 6-1 break). You then play small towards KQ10 and your best chance is the finesse with total odds just a bit above 50%. Playing small to the K and Q wins whenever: (1) the J is stiff (1%); (2) the J is doubleton (the probability of Jx is 8.2%, the sum of all 12 combinations of the J with one of the six other cards with either LHO or RHO); and (3) you find Jxx on either side (27%), for a combined probability of 36.2%. On the other hand, with KQ109 opposite Axx, there are only six cards missing and this changes things significantly. Obviously, you want to start by taking the K and then the A, to lead towards the Q10. This takes care of all situations where the J is stiff (2.4%) or doubleton (22.4%). Also, the lead of the third card will reveal Jxx in front of Q10 18% of the time, and playing the Q adds another 18% for the Jxx offside. We can add all these together for a total of 60.8%. Finessing the 10 on trick 3 is slightly worse (59%, another opportunity for a MP swing!), the simplest way to think about that is because at that time there are only 2 cards missing, and they are (slightly) more likely to be 1-1 rather than 2-0.

As for how to play the 6♥, you cannot afford to lose a trick because of the pending ♠ loser, and you'd like to finesse both ♥ and ♦. If you could finesse both, the chances that at least one wins are ~75%, if you were lucky enough not to get a spade lead. But, as it is, you can afford to take only one finesse (if **both** need to work, your odds are only 25%). Each finesse is close to 50%, but the best play comes from considering the finesse that you **reject**. Rejecting the ♦ finesse gives

you an extra trick when the ♦K is stiff (once in a lifetime with 9 missing cards!), whereas rejecting the ♥ finesse gives you an extra trick when the ♥K is stiff; with only 4 cards missing, a sizable 6.2% extra chance. So, you take the ♥A, and then finesse in ♦, for a combined probability of over 56%, and on the actual board, you make your slam (♥K drops).

OK, now what? Well, I suggest you study those basic odds and apply them in your play. Why suffer a stressful 'guess' when you can be assured to take the action most probable to succeed? If for nothing else, it makes for an easier postmortem. It's a good start, but in the next issues, we will look at other factors that play a role in percentage play and reveal ways in which you can seemingly play 'against the odds' for a great score!

Should I Open This Hand? (Mark Oettinger)
(Suggested for Less Experienced Players)

How many points do you need to open the bidding? The traditional view is 13. And that's *high card* points (HCPs). What about distribution? Traditional thinking recommends adding an additional 1 point for a doubleton, 2 points for a singleton, and 3 points for a void.

Chestnut #1: **Don't count your distribution points unless and until you've found a fit**.

Would you open the following hand in 1st seat?

♠AKxxx ♥x ♦Kxxx ♣xxx

This is only a 10 HCP hand. Yes, the honors are "prime" (Aces and Kings are great), and the fact that the ♠A and ♠K are "touching" is also a plus, but don't add 2 points for the singleton ♥ unless and until you've found a fit. If a fit is found, the singleton is "working" (i.e., it will be useful in stopping the run of the ♥ suit if you win the auction and end up declaring a ♠ contract). Note, however, that it's not likely a ruffing *overtrick* value, since the shortness is in the hand of the longer trumps. Let's change the hand a bit.

♠AKxxx ♥x ♦Kxxx ♣QJx

Now you have 13 HCPs, a clear opener. If partner responds 2♠ (showing 6-9 "points"), you can now add 2 points for your singleton ♥, thereby upgrading your hand to 15 "points." Note also that responder may have included distribution points in valuing his hand, in concluding that it is worth 6-9 "dummy points." He might have something like this:

♠Qxx ♥KJxxx ♦Qxx ♣xx

This hand has 8 HCPs plus 1 distribution point for the doubleton ♣. Responder counts the distribution point because an 8-card ♠ fit has been found, and his hand is on the high end of his 1♠-2♠ "simple raise." Let's look at the hands as a pair:

♠AK654
♥4
♦K543
♣QJ4

♠Q32
♥KJ765
♦Q76
♣32

The auction has gone:

N	E	S	W
1♠	P	2♠	P
?			

Does Opener bid again? Is he interested in exploring the possibility of game? I would say "no." After all, he has 15 points after adding 2 points for the ♥ singleton. Partner has shown 6-9 points. If partner has the maximum for his bid (9 points), the partnership has a combined total of 24 points. That's close to the traditional 26 points that is generally required for game...but it falls short...if you are a strict point-counter. And if partner has a minimum 6 points, the partnership

has a total of only 21 combined points, and may well down even in 3♠. The better part of valor would appear to be for opener to pass. And looking at the hands from declarer's perspective, making even 8 tricks isn't a sure thing. But...this isn't an article about declarer play, and we digress.

Chestnut #2: **Use the Rule of 20 to open shapely hands with fewer than 13 HCPs**.

The Rule of 20 says that you should open a hand if your HCP count, *plus* the combined number of cards in your two longest suits, is 20 or more, ***if*** you also have two or more "quick tricks." An Ace is 1 quick trick; a touching Ace-King is 2 quick tricks; an Ace-Queen "tenace" is 1.5 quick tricks; and a King is 1 quick trick. Consider the following hand:

♠AKxxxx ♥xx ♦x ♣Kxxx

You have 10 HCPs, plus 10 cards in the ♠ and ♣ suits combined, plus 2.5 quick tricks. The Rule of 20 therefore dictates that you open this hand 1♠. Prime honors, an extra 0.5 quick tricks, and the ♠ suit to boot. And everybody loves the "master suit," right? It's not even close. Also, keep in mind that once you have opened a hand such as this, you cannot have "buyer's remorse," or at least, you cannot show it in the bidding. So...if partner responds a game-forcing 2♦ (your least favorite gf response), you simply have to rebid 2♠ without flinching. And if partner persists with 3♦ (arghh!), you probably have to choose quite unhappily between 3♠ and 4♣. The former preserves the possibility of 3N, but the latter is a better description of your hand.

Chestnut #2A: It's a game of probabilities, and everyone is facing the same tough choices (and/or bad breaks) that you are.

Less experienced players often lose concentration when they discover a bad split or some other unfortunate lie of the cards. They get frustrated, and as a result, often play the remainder of the hand carelessly. Think about it. If your contract is a standard contract, every declarer will face the same challenge. Your goal is to do the best you can with the distribution that you confront. The moment that you discover the bad news, you have just as good a chance of achieving a good score on the hand as when the dummy initially came down. If you're doomed to go

down, ask yourself, “How can I hold it to down 1?” If you do, and everyone else is down 2, you’ve just earned yourself a top.

Chestnut #3: Open Light in Third Seat.

How light? I commend Mike Lawrence’s book *Passed Hand Bidding* to you. It addresses this question and many more related topics. Believe it or not, he advises opening third hand, under some circumstances, with as few as 9 points! There are a lot of caveats (Lawrence calls them “factors”), and there is a wealth of information is this book, but whatever your partnership’s opening bid style is, it’s clearly a winning strategy to open light in third seat, especially when holding a 5-card major suit.

Footnote 1: it can be easy to get too high after partner opens 1♥ or 1♥ in 3rd seat on a sub-standard opening hand. Consider the following hand:

♠AQ1062
♥KJ5
♦432
♣75

♠J84
♥Q97
♦KQ65
♣K86

S	W	N	E
P	P	1♠	P
?			

South has a hand that wants to invite to game opposite a full opener, but knows that North may have a sub-opening hand because he opened in 3rd seat. Let’s say that you play limit raises (a little old-fashioned...but a lot of people do). If South bids 3♠, North will pass, and depending on the lie of the cards, you have anywhere from 3-6 losers. To cater to this exact situation, there’s a handy convention called

Drury. In its simplest form, 2♣ is a limit raise in opener's major. With more than a minimum opening hand (let's say 15 HCP), opener can jump straight to game. With a sub-minimum opener (like the one above), he can subside comfortably in 2 of the major. With a standard opener (like 13 HCP), he can initiate some sort of a game try (for example, a help-suit sequence, or whatever else you have by way of major suit game exploration sequences)

Footnote 2: Some partnerships use **2-Way Drury,** where 2♣ shows a limit raise with *three*-card support, and 2♦ shows a limit raise with *four*-card support, arguing that it informs subsequent competitive bidding decisions under Law of Total Tricks principles. In my view, using 2♦ for this purpose is unnecessary because, when responder has four-card support, he can subsequently compete to the 3 level if needed (since he knows that the partnership has a 9-card fit). On the flipside, preserving a natural response of 2♦ (showing 10+ HCP and 5+ Diamonds) can come in handy.

Chestnut #4: Use the Rule of 15 When Deciding Whether to Open in 4th Seat.

This rule recommends opening in 4th seat when the total of your HCPs and the number of ♠ in your hand meets or exceeds 15. Keep in mind that you can assure a non-negative score by passing out the hand, so you only want to open if you think that there is a greater than 50% chance of ending up with a positive score...either by your side bidding and making a contract, or by setting the opponents. Remember the "master suit?" Having a ♠ fit is always a significant advantage, and having one when the HCPs are distributed evenly around the table is the logic that underpins the Rule of 15.

Chestnut #5: 12 is the New 13.

Bidding seems to be becoming more aggressive. Bidders are doing things that now that once required more strength. Many strong players practice what I call "early action" (of various sorts). "Get in and get out," they sometimes say. When was the last time you passed on a chance to open a 12 HCP hand? Why did you do so? Aceless? To many "Quacks?" 8+ losers? Problems anticipated with your second bid? Some people never pass 12 HCP. Readership input is welcome.

Chestnut #6: Duplicate Games Are Often Won or Lost on the Partscore Battlefield.

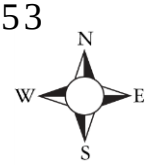
Getting a high percentage of the partscore bidding decisions right is worth a *lot* of matchpoints. Accurate hand evaluation is an absolute cornerstone of success in competitive bridge. If you haven't read Marty Bergen's *Points Schmoints*, you should. It illuminates the many ways in which point count must be tempered with consideration of distribution, suit quality, intermediates, and the like. As far as partscores are concerned, the Law of Total Tricks is extremely helpful. In its simplest form, "The Law" says that we are "safe" playing at the level of which we have trumps. In other words, if we have 9 trumps, we should be safe playing at the 3 level...10 trumps at the 4 level, and so on. Another simplistic but arguably useful principle is that, when contesting for a partscore, you should bid "3 over 2" but not "3 over 3." This is a topic that deserves, and will eventually be afforded, its own article.

January 2018 District 25 STAC **(Ingi Agnarsson)**

STAC's (sectional tournaments at clubs), are an interesting variation of your normal club game because every participating club plays the same hands and you get 'stac-ed' against a lot of players from other clubs**.** The week of January 8-14 was STAC week in New England, with three games at the Burlington Bridge club, January 10, 12 and 14. I had the chance to play all three, since school was still out, and I got to play with three different partners. We had a lot of fun, and some success. Here are a couple of interesting boards from the STAC games, including, of course, a Sunday game - my personal favorite.

Choices, Choices, Too Many Choices

At a recent STAC game, the following hand came up. It presented interesting dilemmas in both bidding and play.

♠K6 ♥Q10763 ♦A82 ♣A105 ♠AQ853 ♠- ♥K98  ♥AJ542 ♦95 ♦QJ764 ♣Q94 ♣862 ♠J109742 ♥- ♦K103 ♣KJ73	Dealer East : All vulnerable ***West*** ***North*** ***East*** ***South*** Pass 2NT Pass 3♣ Pass 4♠ All Pass At our club, this hand was always played at the 2-level, except at our table. The most common contract was 2♥, presumably after P-P-1♠-2♥-P-P-P. Not a nice contract for N/S. At other tables, 2♠ was the opening bid by S, and became the final contract (one time doubled), making 4 once, 3 once, and going down three once. We were a bit more aggressive.

Partner chose to open 2♠, clearly—in my opinion—superior to passing. Sure, you have only J high in spades, but you have excellent distribution, solid support of the J (1097), and nice features in the minors. After a Pass by W, I decided that I had enough to explore with 2N. I know that we don't have much more than half the points, but we have an eight-card fit, and I have many controls and potential sources of tricks. Partner also had opened second hand vulnerable, indicating a better-than-minimum hand. Partner played along, showing a feature (and interest) with 3♣ and, given a positive response and my helpful club holding, I 'justified' my 2N bid by raising to 4♠. After two passes, W offered a confident double - which sounded like big trouble at a small bridge club.

In general, this seems like a reasonable contract where, with a normal lie, you have chances by finding the ♣Q to make, a favorable lead, a favorable trump break, and some other options too (see below). But, the 5-0 trump lie is unfavorable. After the double, it seems likely that W has at least 4 ♠, perhaps all five. In the latter case, if you initiate play of the ♠, you give up 3 ♠ tricks, as the 8 becomes a trick, and at the right moment, the opponents can possibly force ruffs in ♥ to create a 4th ♠ trick. All that before you have located the ♣Q. At our table, after South won the opening ♦ lead, he simply (and quite reasonably) hoped for a better ♠ break, attacked trump, and ended up down 2 after a losing ♣ finesse.

On further reflection, there is an interesting line that makes the contract, even with the 5-0 ♠ break, **if** the ♣Q is favorably located, and **if** the minor suits don't break terribly. Sometimes you have to make some assumptions in order to

design a winning play. If you assume, based on the ***confident*** double (you are allowed to use your 'table presence' to help with your play), that the ♠ lie badly, you must assume that the other suits lie favorably. You know that the partnership has 'overbid' a bit, and that going down doubled in 4♠ will be bad. It doesn't matter much if it's down 1 or 5. Before looking - can you spot the winning line?

The answer is not intuitively obvious, with ***trump*** being the only shortness in dummy: **crossruff!** Declarer takes the ♦ lead in dummy and trumps a ♥, leads a ♣ to the 10 (the ♣Q has to be in the West for this line to work, and declarer must assume a favorable lie outside the ♠ suit). Declarer trumps another ♥, leads a ♣ to the Ace, and trumps the third ♥. Now declarer takes the ♣K, and once both opponents follow (or if West has 4 ♣ and 5 ♠), declarer takes the ♦A. The contract is now basically made.

Declarer leads the 4th ♣ and ruffs (or overruffs) in dummy with the ♠K (West does not gain by ruffing with the ♠A, you discard a ♦ in dummy and trump a ♦ later). Count the tricks. Declarer has three ♥ ruffs, three ♣ tricks, two ♦, a ♣ ruff in dummy (or ♦ if west inserts the ♠A), for 9 tricks. At this point, declarer still has ♠J109, inevitably giving him his 10th trick. This line makes, but is it the best one? Well, the contract always relies on finding the ♣Q, and your chances are quite decent if it sits in the West, whereas if you find the ♣Q in the East, you are still a long way from making the contract. This line also works if the trumps are more favorable, and given West's double, the line seems quite reasonable to counter the expected bad ♠ lie...especially double dummy with 20/20 hindsight!

The Jettison

Jettisoning a high card - giving up a potential trick - for the potential gain of two or more tricks, is a spectacular "coup" that I've found very successful in presenting the opponents with an unmakeable contract. It is generally not advisable to throw away tricks, and spotting the right moment for a jettison is "tricky." But, when it is right, it is incredibly satisfying and, somehow, you quickly forget all of the times that it cost the contract.

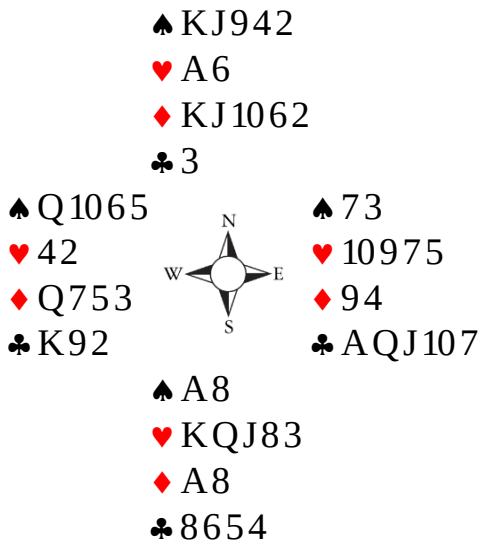
West
♠Q1065
♥42
♦Q753
♣K92

At the Friday January 12 STAC game, I sat W and held this hand, and the bidding at our table proceeded as follows after my initial pass:

W	N	E	S
P	1♠	P	2♥
P	3♦	P	3♥
P	P	P	

I was worried about suffering in defense. The bidding was a bit unorthodox, and I expected that most pairs would be in game. All the more reason to focus on defense. I held both the dummy's suits (♠ and ♦), plus the ♣K, all of which might need protection. A productive lead will be needed, and I expected to be discarding uncomfortably as declarer drew trump.

Let's start with the lead. What should one lead from this collection? And why? Leading one of dummy's suits seem very dangerous and would, in fact, likely give away more than one trick. Surely, I could find partner with some club holding, but more importantly, we've heard North describing two suits and then supporting his partner. North **must** be short in ♣, and instead of attacking them now, it's much better to try to reduce declarers chances of ruffing ♣. Hence, a lead of trump, ♥2, seems natural. As soon as dummy appeared, I was content with my choice of lead. This was the whole hand:



As I had feared, I was responsible for guarding both of dummy's suits, and dummy has short ♣. Declarer took the lead in dummy, and led the 3♣. Prospects brightened as partner showed up with the ♣A, and returned a second ♥. There was to be no ruffing of ♣ losers! Good start. Now declarer pulled the last trump, and I had to discard. What should I throw on the third ♥? ♠ or ♦ seemed very bad to me, if I get down to 3 of either, declarer can easily set up the suit that I discard, even without a finesse. So I resolve to discard a ♣...but which one? If I throw a small one, declarer will be hard pressed to go wrong. Declarer wishes to avoid a finesse given that there are 3 outstanding club losers, so she would likely play the ♦A, then small to ♦K, and then the ♦J. If she discards low ♣ on the ♦J, West is in, can take one ♣ trick, but must then lead a ♠ or a ♦, and declarer makes 4 with the extra ♦ tricks. So...you must jettison the ♣K! You don't know that partner has ♣QJ, but you know that throwing a small ♣ is hopeless.

Declarer has to discard in dummy, and throws a ♠. This is your cue to throw a ♠ on the 4th trump, as does declarer. Again, you are in luck, as partner does indeed have ♣QJ, and in this case declarer doesn't find a winning line. Naturally, she takes the ♦AK, hoping trump it out (or trump finesse the ♦J) but ♦ do not cooperate. Now, even with the ♠ finesse, only one ♣ can be discarded. Eventually, West gains the lead, and can now lead a small ♣ to partner's QJ, and we hold the contract to 3, when most of the other pairs made 4, many bidding the game. The game of bridge is interesting this way. It was the declarer's hand, and the contract can certainly make, but by making a series of rational choices on defense, we put the pressure on declarer, and eventually, the defense got the best of this one. Keep the pressure on!

Earlier in the same round, attempting to keep declarer to 9 tricks in his NT contract, I also jettisoned a ♦A, followed by a small ♦, to give the declarer the impression that I had foreseen his endplay and prevented it. I'm not sure it was well thought out, maybe keeping my ♦A would have been a simpler defense. In any case, this one was not as successful. The declarer (expert Jerry DiVincenzo), was unimpressed, and without hesitation, put me in with my ♦K and endplayed me just the same. Probably the jettison didn't cost a trick, but it was risky and did not gain anything. Thinking back, on many occasions, I have jettisoned an honor only to find that by doing so, I had freed declarer's side suit. It looks good when it works, and sometimes it's essential, but jettisoning an honor is something one should do sparingly, and only with plenty of good reasons!

The Rule of Two Defects (Mark Oettinger)

With a mere 15 words to choose from as we fashion our bidding sequences, we often have to choose the "least bad bid" from among a variety of choices. We look at a particular hand, at a particular stage of an auction, and we realize that none of our possible bids describes our hand accurately if we are to be true to our bidding partnership agreements. What to do?

In a sense, this is a *good* problem to have, because it indicates that you *have* agreements. But...when do you deviate from them? Here is a series of examples:

In first seat, sitting South, vulnerable against not, you hold:

(A) ♠QJx ♥xx ♦x ♣KQ10xxxx

7 ♣ (with 2 of the top 3, and 3 of the top 5, honors) and 8 HCPs. A classic 3♣ opener. What about the next hand?

(B) ♠x ♥x ♦QJxx ♣KQ10xxxx

Same Clubs and same HCPs, but this time you have a "defect…" a 4-card side suit. Do you still open the hand 3♣?

(C) ♠QJxx ♥x ♦x ♣KQ10xxxx

Again, same ♣ and same HCPs, but this time you have *two* "defects…" a 4-card side suit, *and* it's a *major*. What about this hand:

(D) ♠xx ♥QJx ♦xx ♣KQ10xxx

One defect. 6 ♣ instead of 7. And finally:

(E) ♠Kx ♥QJx ♦xx ♣K10xxxx

Two defects. Did you spot them? Only 6 ♣ *and* the ♣ suit lacks 2 of the top 3 and 3 of the top 5. Most would identify the texture of this ♣ suit as substandard when vulnerable.

Following the Rule of Two Defects, Hands (A) (no defects), (B) (one defect), and (D) (one defect) can be opened 3♣. Hands (C) and (E) (each with 2 defects) should be passed *initially*, understanding that you may be able to re-enter the auction at a later opportunity. For example, let's say the auction starts as follows:

S	W	N	E
P	1♥	P	1♠
3♣…			

Your jump overcall should generally show 7 ♣ and 5-10 HCPs, just like an opening 3♣ bid. North is therefore left to wonder why you didn't open 3♣ in the first place. The obvious conclusion is that you have a weak hand with 6 or 7 ♣ that violates the two-defect rule. From the auction, I would say that there's a decent chance that you have Hand (B), above. After all, with Hand (C) (holding 4 decent ♠), you might well prefer to lurk, suspecting that the opponents may be in for a misfit.

The "Shotgun" and the "Rifle" (Ingi Agnarsson)

The second amendment has long been a core element of the US constitution and, one could say, has been a bit of a hot topic recently. This, however, is no place for politics. Whatever your stance may be on the topic, I think most bridge players agree that in order to be successful at the table, you must have the right to bear some arms - effective conventions for clear partnership communication, and

to keep your opponents at bay. Many would argue, and I do agree to a considerable extent, that when it comes to conventions, "less is more." Conventions should not be overused. Rare and/or complicated conventions tend to be more of a hazard than a crutch to all but the most avid players. Professionals and others who play very frequently can gain from complicated conventions, but even those that have low absolute frequency. For the rest of us, infrequent use leads to accidents; it helps to keep things relatively simple.

Nonetheless, every player can benefit from clearly defined conventions that effectively deal with the most common bidding sequences in bridge. Among those sequences must be one minor-one major-1NT. Typically, this shows a 12-14 HCP balanced hand, which we can easily show is among the most common opening hands in bridge (see "*I Like Those Odds*" in this issue and in the *Table Talk* issue of October 1, 2017). Also, the sequence one minor-one major-2NT is very common and has similar challenges. In these situations, many players use "Checkback Stayman" and/or "New Minor Forcing." These are perfectly respectable conventions, and are quite effective, although perhaps not the best. XYZ (what a terrible name!) refers to 3 successive different-suit partnership bids beneath the 2 level, and is a convention that improves upon Checkback Stayman and New Minor Forcing. What I present below is, dare I say, a *better-named* and particularly effective version of XYZ.

The only hunting I do is at the bridge table (for points), and for these bridge situations, I prefer particular variations of XYZ-like treatments that I refer to as "Shotgun" and "Rifle." It's what I grew up with in Iceland. Shotgun is a direct translation of the Icelandic word *tvíhleypan* (a double-barreled gun), while Rifle is my choice for the Icelandic *einhleypan* (a single-barreled gun). But this is more than nostalgia. These are very effective, yet quite intuitive and not highly complex. The versions summarized here are based on the writings of Icelandic world champion Guðmundur Páll Arnarsson (GPA). Let's take a looksee:

Shotgun

The core elements of the Shotgun are its two artificial bids (the two "barrels" of the weapon), 2♣ and 2♦. In sum, after one minor-one major-1NT (e.g. 1♣-1♠-1NT, 1♦-1♥-1NT), *and*, more generally, after *any* 1X-1Y-1Z:

2♣ = invitational, (almost) any distribution

2♦ = game forcing

This allows the partnership plenty of space to deal with invitational hands (for opener to show minimum or maximum, etc.), and it establishes a game-forcing sequence at a very low level with abundant space to find the best game, or to explore slam. The other major benefit of these artificial bids is that (almost) **all other suit bids are natural and clearly defined**. Notrump rebids can be used as you want. Certainly, 4NT should be quantitative, 3NT is to play, and 2NT is available for whatever you feel you need (since NT invitations can go through 2♣). I offer two variations of Shotgun, one simple and one advanced, for players at different levels and/or frequency of play.

NOTE 1: In the variations offered here, **Shotgun is off as soon as opponents interfere** (see future issues of *Table Talk* for how to turn the opponents' pesky interference against them); and

NOTE 2: You can (and should) use Shotgun in any situation where three suits have been bid by the partnership below the 2-level, just like in XYZ. For example, after 1♣-1♦-1♠, Shotgun is **ON**.

In its simplest form, you use Shotgun to show most invitational hands by rebidding 2♣, and force to game by rebidding 2♦ This leaves **all other bids as natural and non-forcing**, (including non-forcing game bids such as 3NT and 4NT), which is very simple and easy to remember.

Basic Shotgun: The version of Shotgun that I recommend to beginning/intermediate players, or infrequently playing partnerships, could look something like this:

Opener	***Responder***
1♦	1♠
1NT	2♣ = 8-12 HCP, invitational other than as outlined below
	2♦ = (11)12+HCP, game forcing, any distribution

ALL other bids are natural and non-forcing!

2♥ = weak with 5♠ + 4♥
2♣ = weak to play
2NT = balanced invitation to 3NT
3♣ = to play, longer ♣ than ♠*
3♦ = invitation with at least 5♠ + 5♦
3♥= invitation with at least 5♠ + 5♥
3♠ = invitation with good ♠ suit (e.g. AKxxxx, AQJxxx)
3NT = to play

***** The only way to play part score in ♣

After 2♣ invitational and 2♦ game forcing, opener and responder bid naturally. In the latter case, obviously, the bidding cannot stop before a game has been reached.

Advanced Shotgun: This is the version of Shotgun that I recommend for advanced/expert players. It is only one possible structure. There are other variations, and there is plenty of flexibility to tailor your particular version of Shotgun to suit your own preferences:

Opener	***Responder***
1♦	1♠
1NT	2♣ = 8-12 HCP, invitational, **demands 2♦** by opener*****
	2♦ = (11)12+ HCP, game forcing hands other than those defined below
	2♥ = weak, with 5♠ + 4♥
	2♠ = to play
	2NT = game forcing, 4-4-4-1, and possibly some 5-4-4-0 shapes******
	3♣ = to play, longer ♣ than ♠*******
	3♦ = game forcing, with 5♠ + 5♦
	3♥ = game forcing, with 5♠ + 5♥
	3♠ = game forcing, with good ♠ suit (at least AKQxxx/AQJ1098)
	3NT = to play

***** Responder passes for a part-score in ♦

****** Since balanced invitations go through 2♣, 2NT is available for other uses. It is convenient to use it for three-suited hands that are otherwise difficult to describe.

Opener asks about partner's shortness with 3♣. In response, 3♦ = singleton ♦; 3♥ = singleton ♥; and 3♠ (responder's first suit) = singleton ♣. If you include 5-4-4-0 hands in 2NT, subsequent jumps to 4 can be used to show voids, typically with a 5-card minor (e.g., 1♦-1♠-1NT-2NT-3♣-4♥ shows 4=0=4=5)]. Another different idea is to use 2NT here as Blackwood or RCK in opener's suit! This allows exceptional room for slam exploration.

*** The only way to play part score in clubs
Bidding following 1 minor-1 major-1NT-2♣-2♦, and 1 minor-1 major-1NT-2♦ are natural and invitational, or game forcing, respectively.

Rifle

After 1 minor-1 major-2NT, opener has typically shown 18-19(20) points and balanced distribution. Here, there is insufficient space for Shotgun, nor is it necessary. Instead, we use an artificial/multipurpose 3♣ relay bid (the single barrel of the Rifle); **all other bids are natural and game forcing**. The Rifle is a version of Wolff sign-off bids. The following is an example in which opener bids 1♣:

Opener	***Responder***
1♣	1♥
2NT	3♣ = relay, **demands 3♦** by opener *
	3♦ = 5+♥ + 4+♦, game forcing
	3♥ = 5+♥, game forcing
	3♠ = 5+♥ 4+♠, game forcing
	3NT = to play
	4♣ = RKC in ♣
	4NT = In this sequence, direct jump to 4NT should be quantitative

* Responder could have various different goals by first bidding 3♣:

a) To look for 4-4 fit in majors with 4♠ and 4♥
b) To stop in a part-score
c) To invite to a ♣ slam
d) To prepare for Blackwood

The goal of responder is clarified in the next bid:

Opener	*Responder*
1♣	1♥
2NT	3♣
3♦ (*forced*)	Pass = Weak hand with long ♦ suit (e.g. 2=4=6=1)
	3♥ = Weak hand with ♥, opener should pass
	3♠ = 4-4 in the majors, game forcing
	3NT = Slam invitation in ♣ (opener can pass lacking such interest)
	4♣ = To play, only way to stop in a part-score ♣ contract
	4NT = Blackwood (no trump suit)

These weapons are offered free of charge, and no license is necessary! However, it's best to properly understand how to use them before starting a gunfight at the table. Use at your own risk!

You're 4-4 in the Minors. Which One Do You Open? (Mark Oettinger)

This topic was brought to my attention by a short piece by Bryant Jones in an old *Table Talk*. It's worth revisiting. His advice was to open the minor that you would prefer partner to lead. He did not say whether he had partner's *opening* lead in mind, but it seemed implicit in his article. That got me thinking. It is probably just as useful to suggest a lead by partner *later in the hand* after *you* have made the opening lead. Let's say that you have the following hand in 1st seat:

♠xx ♥Axx ♦Kxxx ♣AQxx

Using Bry's principle, you decide to open 1♣, and the auction proceeds as follows:

S	W	N	E
1♣	1♠	P	2♠
P	3♣*	P	3♠
P	P	P	

* Game try showing Club values

It's your opening lead. This is not a very pleasant hand from which to lead, as pretty much anything could end up giving away a trick. On hands like this, one should select a lead by means of elimination.

Underleading an Ace against a suit contract is almost never a good idea, Even in the rare case where it turns out not to give anything away, you can be sure that partner will never figure out what you've done, and often, will misdefend after assuming that the missing Ace is in declarer's hand. Outcomes like that tend to be very bad for partnership morale, so don't "mastermind." Anyway, that leaves a trump or a low ♦ as options for your opening lead. You have 13 HCPs, and the opponents are at the 3 level. That doesn't leave many HCPs for partner, so underleading your ♦K will give the opponents a trick more often than not. That leaves a trump lead, and although you're a little concerned about "finding the queen" for declarer, he has the longer (and probably stronger) trumps and if he's missing 5 trumps, he's most likely going to finesse your partner anyway.

Back to the subject of the article. If partner does get in, he'll be inclined to lead back a ♣ based on your opening bid, which should work fine. And if the auction had been different, and he had been on opening lead, a Club lead would likely also have been beneficial.

For the first several decades of my bridge career, my take on "the 4-4 minor question," was a bit different. I would generally abide by the principle that you should plan your second bid (and possibly even beyond) before you make your first bid. This principle sometimes attributed to Edgar Kaplan (1925-1997), one of the unquestioned doyens of the game. Using this approach on the hand above, there's an argument for opening 1♦, so that you can bid 2♣ if partner responds 1H. After all, if you open 1♣, and partner responds 1♥, it's a distortion to rebid 1N with a small doubleton ♠ (Ingi's comment: 2♣ and 2♥ are also distortions. No available bid shows what you have. I would rebid 1N, to show shape and strength, personally preferring this lie over others). If you rebid 2♥, partner will base the rest of the auction on the assumption that you have 4 ♥.

So...which view is right? I raised the issue offhandedly with Ingi Agnarsson and Jay Friedenson at the club, and much to my surprise, and without hesitation or opportunity for consultation, they expressed agreement on a *third* view. They believe that one should consider opening the minor that you *don't* want led. Can these two seemingly inconsistent "lead-inducing" and "lead inhibiting" views be harmonized? I would say, "Yes," and here's how…

You want to encourage partner to lead your better minor when you are playing *defense*, but you want to discourage your left hand opponent from leading your weaker minor when you are *declaring*. As we sit there deciding which minor

to open, is there a way for us to predict whether we are going to be defending or declaring a particular hand? This is a better question for the bridge statisticians and actuaries among us (Ingi?...Frank?), but my intuition is as follows. Aren't we *least* likely to declare when we open a minor in 3rd seat, and have a weak opener ourselves? After all, partner has already shown fewer than 12 HCP, and most competitive players will open third hand with as little as 10 HCPs. Marty Bergen even recommends opening some 9-pointers. Keeping in mind that we are talking about weak 3rd hand openers without a 5-card major, the chances of getting outbid, and being on defense seem high, and so, my new modified thesis is…

When opening a hand with 4-4 in the minors...Rule 1: open the better minor (as a lead inducer) when opening in 3rd seat with less than full opening strength. Otherwise...Rule 2: open the worse minor (as a lead inhibitor) in 1st, 2nd or 4th seat, and in 3rd seat with a full opener. And in all cases...Rule 3: make sure that you have a suitable rebid, as Rule 3 trumps Rules 1 and 2. (Ingi's comment: I often open weaker minor with a strong hand, e.g. expecting to play in 2-6NT. I tend to open stronger minor when I expect to be defending. Also keep in mind that if you are fighting for a partscore contract, opening 1♦ has the advantage of being able to possibly reenter the bidding with ♣. In sum, you have a lot of options and your choice might depend on what you hold)

Again, I solicit reactions from readers, both on a theoretical level, and if you try this approach, from your results.

An Introduction to a "Simple" Form of Lebensohl (Mark Oettinger)

Most tournament players are familiar with the "3 basic positions of Lebensohl."

The lynchpin of Lebensohl is a response of 2N, forcing opener to bid (i.e., "relay to") 3♣, so that responder can differentiate between a *direct* bid and an *indirect* bid after interposing the 2NT-3♣ relay.

The three basic positions of Lebensohl are:

(1) **Lebensohl Position #1**. When the opponents overcall partner's 1N opener with a 2-level overcall higher than X or 2♣.

Note: most Vermont players that I know who use Lebensohl play "systems on" when RHO doubles or bids 2♣ over partner's 1NT opener. Using this approach,

RHO's double is deemed to be "transparent," and is ignored. Over RHO's double, 2♣ is Stayman, 2♦ is a transfer to ♥, and 2♥ is a transfer to ♠. Over RHO's 2♣, a double is Stayman, 2♦ is a transfer to ♥, and 2♥ is a transfer to ♠. Let's assume that approach, and that Lebensohl Position #1 therefore only applies to RHO's overcall of 2♦ or 2♥ or 2♠ over partner's 1NT opener. [3-level overcalls are a subject for a different day. I *told* you that this was going to be a discussion of a *simple* form of Lebensohl.]

So...in the following auction:

W	N	E	S
	1N	2♥...	

X by South is for penalty.

2♠ by South is to play.

2N by South requires opener to "relay" to 3♣, after which,
South can pass (suggesting 6 ♣ and non-game-going values), or
South can correct to 3♦...also to play, and analogous to passing 3♣, or
South can make a delayed 3♥ cuebid...Stayman *with* a ♥ stopper.

A direct 3-level suit bid by South *below* the level of the overcall (i.e., 3♣ or 3♦) is constructive but *non*-forcing.

A direct cuebid of 3♥ by South is Stayman (i.e., 4 ♠) *without* a ♥ stopper.

A suit bid by South above the next level of the overcall (such as 3♠ in the above auction) shows 5+ length in the suit bid, and is forcing

(2) **Lebensohl Position #2**. When partner doubles the opponents' weak two opener.

So...in the following auction:

W	N	E	S
2♥	X	P...	

A direct 3-level suit bid by South *below* the level of the overcall (i.e., 3♣ or 3♦) is constructive but *non*-forcing.

2N by South requires opener to "relay" to 3♣, after which,
South can pass (suggesting 6 ♣ and non-game-going values), or
South can correct to 3♦...also to play, and analogous to passing 3♣, or
South can make a delayed 3♥ cuebid...Stayman *with* a ♥ stopper.

A direct cuebid of 3♥ by South is Stayman (i.e., 4 ♠) *without* a ♥ stopper.

A suit bid by South above the next level of the overcall (such as 3♠ in the above auction) shows 5+ length in the suit bid, and is forcing

(3) **Lebensohl Position #3**. After we open and reverse.

So...in the following auction:

W	N	E	S
P	1♦	P	1♠
P	2♥	P...	

2N by South requires opener to "relay" to 3♣, after which,
South can pass (suggesting 6 ♣ and non-game-going values), or
South corrects to a 3-level contract to play opposite a minimum reverse.

Any other bid by responder is natural and shows sufficient values for game.

Note #1: Reverses tend to have a wide range...a really good 16 to 21. If opener is on the high end of the reverse range (19-21), he refuses to accept the 3♣ relay, thereby committing the partnership to game.

Note #2. In the context of "Lebensohl after opener reverses," there's an exception. If the reverse is a "minor reverse," i.e.:

W	N	E	S
P	1♣	P	1♥
P	2♦...		

Responder initiates Lebensohl via “the other major,” as opposed to 2NT. Don’t ask why. That’s for a later issue (maybe), and the relay is still 3♣. Try it!

OK, I can’t resist. Here’s..

(4) **Lebensohl Position #4**. OBAR Lebensohl.

<table>
<tr>
<td>
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<tr><td></td><td>♠8
♥KQ1043
♦J432
♣K85</td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>♠653
♥AJ8
♦Q106
♣J1043</td><td> </td><td>♠AQJ97
♥97
♦AK9
♣962</td></tr>
<tr><td></td><td>♠K1042
♥652
♦875
♣AQ7</td><td></td></tr>
</table>
</td>
<td>
Board 2 : Dealer East : NS vulnerable
<table>
<tr><th>West</th><th>North</th><th>East</th><th>South</th></tr>
<tr><td></td><td></td><td>1♠</td><td>Pass</td></tr>
<tr><td>2♠</td><td>2NT</td><td>Pass</td><td>3♥</td></tr>
<tr><td>3♠</td><td>Pass</td><td>Pass</td><td>Dbl</td></tr>
<tr><td>All Pass</td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr>
</table>
</td>
</tr>
</table>

Had I relayed as requested on the above hand, partner would have bid 3♥ setting the final contract. My bid of 3♥, on the other hand, declining to “accept the relay,” and showed “values,” typically 8 or more HCP. Partscores are hard-fought at matchpoints. Partner was happy to pass, and I was happy to double 3♠ with what seemed like 2 trump tricks.

I chose the ♥5 as my opening lead. We play “attitude leads.” This approach calls for the lead of “second high from worthless,” i.e., xxx, or xxxx, or xxxxx. In the case of xxx, when playing standard count, the second time the suit is played, I would play my highest ♥, showing an odd number, and on the third round of the suit, I would (perforce) play low, completing a “Middle-Up-Down” or “MUD” sequence...just as many of us were taught decades ago.

Declarer played a low ♥ from dummy, and partner won his ♥10. Partner returned the ♣, and declarer played the ♣6 from her hand, carefully concealing the ♣2. I won the ♣Q, and being unsure where the ♣K was, I led another ♥. Declarer won the ♥A on the board, and led a small ♠, finessing the ♠Q. I won the ♠K, and knowing (for her opening bid) that East has 5 ♠, I led the ♥6 (MUD). Declarer

takes all of her ♦, and tries a ♣ from the board. I win the ♣Q, take ♣A and get out with another ♣to partner's ♣K. I must win another ♠ for down 2 and +300. This result would not have been possible without the inferences made possible through our use of Lebensohl.

The definitive work on Lebensohl is by Ron Andersen, and is called *The Lebensohl Convention Complete in Contract Bridge*. One of my partners would call it "a memory hog," but if you're willing to put in the work, it seems to come up once a session, and when it does, it's often good for a board. And who can't use an extra 4%?

Online Bridge (Mark Oettinger)

I don't know how many of you currently play bridge online, but I predict that online bridge will play a greater and greater goal in the years to come. Bridge Base Online is the dominant "player" in the field. It can be found at www.bridgebase.com. If you haven't explored it yet, I strongly suggest that you do. It's a universe unto itself, with a myriad of formats, and getting the most from it, and figuring out how it best suits your needs, can take a while. Joining is free, and I don't have the impression that they sell your data.

When I first got involved with "BBO," I played in the free "open room," generally opting to be partnered with the first available partner at the first available table. At any given time, there are thousands of people from all corners of the world playing. Playing in the open room allows you to get the feel for the mechanics, but random partners are of highly variable quality, and can sometimes play painstakingly slowly. Also, there is a "chat room" component, and some players can be incredibly rude. So...after a few weeks or months of playing in the open room, I moved on the the more competitive parts of the website.

One can actually earn masterpoints on BBO. These come in two types...traditional ACBL masterpoints (which count toward your ACBL rank advancements), and BBO masterpoints (which do not). Masterpoint-awarding tournaments cost money. ACBL tournaments cost $1.25 for a 12-board session, and you can play in "individual" events with random partners and opponents, playing 4 rounds of 3 boards each, with a different partner and opponents each round. Because the other players are also paying for the privilege, they tend to be more serious and polite than the players in the free open room, but their skill levels also vary. The BBO

masterpoint holding of all players is shown on their profiles, so you know whether your partners and opponents are the BBO equivalent of Junior Masters or Grand Life Masters...or something in between. Each player also has a profile which reflects his or her individual convention card, so one can generally figure out what their bids are intended to mean.

An improvement on the competitive system with random partners are the "speedball pairs" events. In this format, you again play four 3-board rounds over a 12-board session, with a partner of your choice against other human pairs. It's great to be able to play with a favorite partner who happens to live in a far-off part of the country...or even halfway around the world. ACBL masterpoint awards for these stratified event can be as much as 2.40 MPs for a good-sized event...perhaps 100 or 200 "tables."

For my taste, the best part of BBO is playing in "day-long" events. Every day, there are four such 8-board events, each costing 25¢. Three of the four daily games are scored in matchpoint format, and one is scored in IMPs. You play with a robot partner, and against robot opponents. All of the other human competitors, of which there are typically 1,000-1,500, sit South, with the same arrangement of a robot partner and robot opponents. You have to complete your 8 boards within 24 hours, and you can leave the game and return at your leisure. With a field of 1,000 or more "tables," the "BBO masterpoint awards" are substantial, and the field can be extremely strong, as many of the world's strongest players are regularly competing online. Interestingly, you are always dealt at least 11HCP (which creates some interesting strategies), and as a result, you end up declaring a LOT of the hands. I have found it an absolutely fantastic way to sharpen my declarer play skills.

If readers of Table Talk are interested in sharing their BBO usernames, along with other forms of communication (such as email addresses and/or phone numbers), we will publish a list of local BBO participants for the purpose of promoting online bridge opportunities between and among *Table Talk* readers. We will publish additional information about the BBO "community" in future issues of *Table Talk*.

Let me leave the subject of online bridge by pointing out that BBO has hosted multi-day online sessions at the last two ACBL Nationals, and that local clubs are using BBO to fill out half tables at local club games. This article has only scratched the surface of online bridge, and we are happy to provide further guidance for anyone who is interested.

Letters

A *Table Talk* reader submitted the following:

Dear *Table Talk* Editors:

I'm reading the Larry Cohen article on Page 49 of the October *Bridge Bulletin*. In that article, he writes that after opener calls one diamond, responder may bid two clubs to show a game going hand, and that doing so does NOT deny a four card major! I did not know this. Is that your understanding of standard practice?

Sincerely, Hating to Slight a Major!

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Dear Reader:

Thank you for your service. I strive to bid as naturally as possible, and I generally believe that I (and my partners) can rather reliably tell the difference between a forcing and a non-forcing sequence (although it's not always easy). Consider holding Larry's postulated ♠KQxx ♥Ax ♦xx ♣AKxxx hand opposite partner's 1♦ opener. Bidding 2♣ first has the benefit of getting the "game-force" issue out of the way. Do you agree that opener's hypothetical rebid of 2♥ would NOT show extras, i.e., that would not be it's NOT a "reverse" in the traditional sense? It would just show 4 ♥, right? If so, responder can now bid 2♠ (up the line) to show 4 ♠ (clearly implying 5 ♣ as well, I would think...since responding 2♣ initially with something like 4=3=2=4 seems like an unnecessary distortion). That way, I don't think you can lose the 4-4 major suit fit if you have one.

Looking at it the other way, let's say that you instead start by responding 1♠. When choosing a bid, always ask yourself, "What will my next bid be if partner bids __?" So...what's my next bid if partner bids 1N? If 2♣ is natural, can it be passed, or is a "new suit by an unpassed hand" forcing for one round? Have you and your partners discussed this? Do so! I'd say it can be passed, but if you're playing with me, don't forget my "Bidding Rule #1." If I can misconstrue your bid, I probably will...SO BID SOMETHING ELSE. (Ingi's comment: I would usually rebid 1♠; for an excellent solution to continue after a 1NT rebid by partner see 'shotgun', above).

For a lot of partnerships, 2♣ would be “New Minor Forcing” (a wonderful treatment), and as for Larry Cohen's column...it's for "newer players," and therefore probably doesn't envision NMF. In my view, the takeaway from all of this is that basic sequences such as this need to be thoroughly discussed.

Thanks for the question, Your Faithful Editors

Upcoming Unit and Nearby Events

Unit 175 President’s Cup
Burlington Bridge Club
600 Blair Park Road
Williston, VT
May 12, 2018

Vermont Spring Sectional
Battenkill Eagles
2282 Depot Street
Manchester VT
May 25, 26 & 27, 2018

Vermont Sectional
Burlington Bridge Club
600 Blair Park Road
Williston, VT
July 13, 14 & 15, 2018

Vermont Sectional
Burlington Bridge Club
600 Blair Park Road
Williston, VT
September 14, 15 & 16, 2018

Vermont Sectional
Quechee Base Lodge
3277 Quechee Main Street
White River Junction, VT
October 26, 27 & 28, 2018