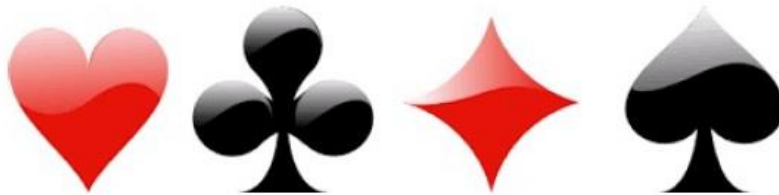


Table Talk

The Quarterly

January 2020



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Happy New Year dear readers!

Editor's Musings

2019 has been a year of bridge exploration for me. I played in all four Vermont Sectionals, and in half a dozen Regionals in New England, New York and Montreal. I played with a variety of different partners, all very capable, and I have dipped my toe back into bridge administration for the first time since the mid 1980s. Ingi and I have continued to publish *Table Talk*, this being our 10th quarterly issue spanning 2.5 years. Our website, bridgequarterly.org is long up and running, although the platform is not yet as editor-friendly as I would like.

I had the opportunity to attend two District 25 (New England) administrative meetings at the Mansfield Regional. The D25 administrators are an impressive and committed bunch, although significantly at odds with the ACBL National Board. They run very good Regionals, but are up against shrinking demographic forces. Player development requires diligent and coordinated work at all levels...Clubs, Sectionals and Regionals. There are some very energetic player development programs taking place in and around Vermont (Unit 175). Kudos to their organizers. And to each and every one of you...

**GO FORTH
AND
PROMOTE BRIDGE!**

Calculating Odds in Real Time at the Table. (Mark Oettinger)

South Deals
None Vul
Matchpoints

You pick up the following collection in 1st seat:

♠AKQ864
♥K2
♦A
♣AKQ9

25 HCP, and even more incredibly, *a 1-loser hand*.

You open 2♣, and partner responds 2♥, showing one King and no Aces.

Bidding Note: This system of responses to partner's opening 2♣ bid is referred to as "**Control Step Responses**" where an Ace is 2 controls, and a King is 1 control. 1st step (2♦) shows 0 controls (no Ace or King); 2nd step (2♥) shows 1 control (1 King); 3rd step (2♠) shows 2 controls (either 1 Ace or 2 Kings); *skip 2NT* (lest we "wrong-side" the contract); 4th step (3♣) shows 3 controls (either an Ace and a King, or three Kings), etc.

So...partner has the ♦K, but not the ♥A. You rebid 2♠, and partner raises to 3♠ (showing at least 3-card Spade support). It's matchpoints, so you give some consideration to 6NT, but you decide to settle for the safer (albeit less remunerative) 6♠. Either way, you will become declarer, thereby shielding your ♥K from the opening lead.

This has been the auction:

South	West	North	East
2♣	P	2♥	P
2♠	P	3♠	P
6♠	P	P	P

West leads the ♠10, and you get a somewhat disappointing dummy:

♠J73

♥9763

♦K62

♣873

♠AKQ864

♥K2

♦A

♣AKQ9

What's your plan? You have 11 obvious tricks (6 Spades, 2 Diamonds, and 3 Clubs). A 12th trick will emerge if the Spades split 2-2 as the fourth Club can be ruffed in dummy and a Heart discarded on the ♦K. Even in a worse trump break, the 12th trick can come either from a favorable Club position or the ♥A being in the East. Your only entry to the board is the ♠J.

You win in your hand, unblock the ♦A, and lead a second Spade toward the board. LHO shows out, discarding the ♦7 – so much for ruffing a Club. This is your one and only visit to the board. If you're going to take the Heart finesse, you have to do it now (after you cash your ♦K, of course). Speaking of cashing the ♦K, what will you pitch? The answer to that question depends upon whether you decide to play for the ♥A to be onside, or whether you will try to take 4 Clubs. You can't do both, and you can't delay the decision. Which line of play is better...and why?

The finesse is a straight 50% proposition. If you choose that approach, be sure to pitch your ♣9 on the ♦K *before* leading toward your ♥K. The second possible approach is to hope to make 4 Club tricks, and to

therefore pitch the ♥2 on the ♦K, limiting yourself to a single Heart loser, even if the ♥A is offside.


What are the chances of winning 4 Club tricks? To begin with, they could split 3-3, which occurs 36% of the time.

Remember: an *odd* number of cards in the opponents' hands will usually split as evenly as possible (for example, 7 cards will divide 4-3 62% of the time, and 5 cards divide 3-2 68% of the time), whereas an *even* number of cards in the opponents' hands will usually *not* split as evenly as possible (6 cards divide 3-3 only 36% of the time, and 4 cards divide 2-2 only 40% of the time).

In addition to a 3-3 Club split, you will also make 4 Club tricks if you find the ♣J and ♣10 doubleton in either hand. How likely is that? By my calculation that's $1/6 \times 1/5 \times 2 = 2/30 = 6.66\%$. So...the combined total of finding the Clubs 3-3, or finding the doubleton ♣J and ♣10 on either hand, is 42.66%. That appears to make the 50% finesse a clear favorite. Is that the end of the analysis?

No. Or at least that's what I thought, as I weighed one further factor. There is an additional possibility that Clubs won't split, but that the opponent who holds length in Clubs won't appreciate the value of his Jxxx or 10xxx...and will pitch one. Does that get us an additional 8% or more? Put another way, would one (or more) out of twelve opponents make such a mistake? I decided yes, so I pitched the ♥2 and led a Heart toward my now singleton King. RHO went up with the Ace. Arghhh, the finesse would have worked!

Here's the whole hand:

♠ J73				Board 11 : Dealer South : Love all
♥ 9763				<i>West</i> <i>North</i> <i>East</i> <i>South</i>
♦ K62				
♣ 873				2♣
♠ 10		♠ 952		Pass 2♥ Pass 2♠
♥ J85		♥ A Q 104		Pass 3♠ Pass 6♠
♦ QJ743		♦ 10985		All Pass
♣ 10654		♣ J2		
	♠ AKQ864			
	♥ K2			
	♦ A			
	♣ AKQ9			

As you can see, the Clubs didn't split, and the ♣J and ♣10 were in different hands. To add insult to injury, West discarded correctly, preserving his ♣10xxx to the bitter end, and capturing my ♣9 with his ♣10 at trick 13. Down 1. [Ingi's comment: perhaps it is good to take the ♣AK right away before entering dummy in Spades. If ♣J10 emerge, the contract is made. If not, the Heart play dominates the odds making the choice easier].

One can do the math in one's head at the table. It's not that hard, and you should aspire to do the same. With a few simple data points committed to memory, and a little basic math, you can make decisions that will be right more often than not. With the benefit of hindsight, I fear that I convinced myself to take a losing line of play, knowing that the odds favored the opposite approach. Some sarcastically refer to this type of poor decision-making as "masterminding."

I should also have considered that I knew my LHO as a strong player from prior tournaments. Furthermore, we were playing in the district final of a national event, so the field was strong. I did not know my RHO, but I could have inferred that she was probably a strong player as well...comparable to her partner. They might have been a pro/client partnership, but even if so, playing in this event, she was still odds-on to be a solid player. I could also have looked at their convention card, to see how sophisticated a system they were using. A simple card would have suggested a lesser player.

**TIP: A QUICK LOOK AT SOMEONE'S CONVENTION CARD
WILL TELL YOU A LOT ABOUT THEM AS A PLAYER.**

When the hand was over, I congratulated LHO on not unguarding his Clubs. He was gracious, but added, "It was pretty obvious." Looking at the play from his point of view, that is true. He knew my exact hand. Once I pitched a Heart on the ♦K, and then played the ♥K under East's ♥A, the only cards that he could possibly need to keep were his Clubs.
Rats! Foiled again!

Rules of Bridge: Hamman's Rule (Ingi Agnarsson)

Starting a new year - indeed a new decade - it is appropriate to take on something new. It is my intention to start, with this issue, a regular column in *Table Talk* on Bridge Rules. Examples include the Rule of 11, the Rule of 20, and Second Hand Low, to name but a few. These maxims can be very useful for improving your bridge game. I will start this series with one of my favorites: Hamman's Rule.

Robert David Hamman, better known as Bob Hamman, is undoubtedly one of the greatest bridge players the game has ever seen. His successes at the bridge table are too numerous to detail here, as he has won practically every title available to a (male) bridge player, most of them multiple times. One of the many legacies of Bob Hamman is the (in)famous “Hamman’s Rule” or “Hamman’s law” that states: If you have a choice of reasonable bids and one of them is 3NT, bid 3NT. It should not surprise any player who knows me, especially my partners, that I am a firm believer in Hamman’s Rule. I should add that there is no contract that I more enjoy declaring (aside, perhaps, from some exciting slams).

Here is an example. Let’s say your RHO opens 3♠ and you hold:

♠AQ5
♥AJ10
♦AQ7
♣10632

What would you do? Are you thinking about passing? Think again! 3NT is certainly one of the bidding options. More than that, you have a *responsibility* to yourself, your partner, and your teammates! Of course, you may sometimes end up in a hopeless contract and go down, with the opponents receiving some telephone number in their column. However, time, experience, and simulations, have shown that with such hands, when 3NT is an option, it is simply the correct action. As the Hideous Hog once said: "Just because I had a difficult hand to bid, I was not going to shirk my duty." Hamman agrees. Don’t fear the occasional bad

results, just do your duty. You can hardly get advice from a better player than Bob Hamman.

Here is another example that also requires a very interesting, and quite advanced (or at least ‘out of the box thinking’) play. Sitting South, you hold:

♠AK
♥KJ5
♦A96
♣AK1042

and East opens 3♥. What to do? You have a monster hand, and a slam is certainly possible. However, it will be hard to bid anything sensible. A Double will no doubt produce 3♠ from partner, and you will have made little advance. You could now bid 4♣, but you are really wandering in the dark at this point, and taking a great risk. The clean bid, following Hamman’s rule, is 3NT. This get’s passed out and the ♦K is led. Here is your challenge:

♠QJ1052
♥Q62
♦754
♣86

♠AK
♥KJ5
♦A96
♣AK1042

How do you play? Try to come up with a solution before reading further – with the obvious issue being accessing the Spades in dummy.

Your only possible entry to dummy is the ♥Q, unless you can get the opponents to play Spades, but that seems highly unlikely. So how do you make use of the ♥Q? It would be simplistic, and indeed an insult to East, to try to play the ♥KJ, hoping for East to win one of the first two Heart tricks, thereby giving you an entry with the ♥Q. With East holding seven Hearts, and West none, ducking twice is child's play for East. The solution is difficult to spot, but it's remarkably simple once it is shown to you. You duck first two Diamonds to cut communication, and E throws a Heart in the third D (so East started with 7♥ and 2♦). You now unblock the ♠AK and once E follows in both spades, your contract is made!! How? Well, East can have a maximum of 2 Clubs and you can eliminate these. You catch the ♣AK to do so and now... you play the ♥5 to dummy's ♥6! East is in and must play Hearts, thereby giving dummy an entry. East does best to play the ♥A, but you, of course, unblock the ♥K and East has no option but to let dummy in on the ♥Q. Note that if East started with 3 Spades, this line also works, only that East can choose between two miserable options, giving you an entry in Spades or in Hearts. The contract is down if East has a 3 card suit in either minor, but after the first 5 tricks, you know that he doesn't and you just have to see the curious importance of the little Heart spots!

Employ Hamman's rule at the table to your benefit!

A Few Interesting Conventions I Came Across This Year (Mark Oettinger)

I played several sessions this year with someone whom I got to know at regionals over the past 18 months. Let's call him Alphonse. He's a very strong player, but he lives far away. He also loves to play extensively-defined continuations of all the latest cutting-edge "2 over 1" gadgets. Don't get me wrong. I prefer a high level of bidding complexity myself. But, it's hard to put in the necessary partnership work when you live so far apart.

I consider myself a pretty voracious student of bridge literature, including bidding theory and conventions. Nonetheless, several of his favorite treatments were new to me. Here's a small sampling:

Spiral

How often have you held this hand?

♠Jxx
♥AKxx
♦xx
♣KQxx

You open 1♣ and partner responds 1♠. What's your rebid? 1NT lacks a Diamond stopper. 2♠ lacks a trump, but your hand looks like Spades could easily play a trick better than Notrump, even if partner only has 4 Spades. And, in that case, you can "take the Diamond tap" in the short suit, gaining a trump trick, and not shortening declarer (thereby decreasing the risk of losing control). Spiral offers a way to bid 2♠ with

this hand, and to avoid a 4-3 “Moysian” fit. If Responder wants to explore game, he asks about opener’s Spade length, and his overall strength, as follows. Responder bids “next step” (2NT over opener’s 2♠ bid, or 2♠ over opener’s 2♥ bid) asking opener to clarify via the following “Ogust-like” structure:

S	W	N	E
1♣	P	1♠	P
2♠	P	2N	P
?			

South’s second rebid would be chosen from among the following options:

- 3♣ = 3-card support; minimum opener;
- 3♦ = 3-card support with extras;
- 3♥ = 4-card support; minimum opener; and
- 3♠ = 4-card support with extras.

I am a bit equivocal about Spiral, since I favor a system for being able to explore game after South’s 2♠ bid which allows responder to invite game needing help in *one* of the three non-trump suits (a traditional Help Suit Game Try) or *two* of the three non-trump suits. [Ingi’s comment: I agree and I think that 3 card raises have too low frequency to justify forgoing the one-or-two suited game tries]. Spiral usurps the latter treatment, but it is occasionally nice to be able to raise partner’s likely 4-card Major with only 3-card support, and for when you do, to have a way to accurately place both the level and the denomination of the final contract.

Very Weak 2s (3-9 HCPs, and can be 5-card suit non-vul) with Transfer McCabe

An increasing number of strong players will open 2♥ or 2♠ holding only a 5-card suit. Some of them play a variant in which opener must have a side 4-card Minor. Others don't do it when vulnerable. I have become fond of the "not when vulnerable" school, but I have to admit being tempted to bid 2♥ with 2=5=3=3, even when vulnerable. Would that be a 2-defect violation? Yes. And, if one did open 2♥ under those circumstances, one would probably come to regret it.

Anyway...the person with whom I played advocates 3-9 HCP Weak 2s. It follows that: ♠xx ♥AKxxxx ♦xxx ♣Kx has to be opened 1♥. Note that it's a 7-loser hand. In other words, it has the trick-taking potential of a full opening hand. The more I play, the more I appreciate the value of loser count in deciding whether to invite, accept or decline.

The rationale for **Very Weak 2s** is the principle that getting in the first bid—especially non-vul, and preempting as often as possible—is correlated with good results. There's a school of thought, however, that advises caution when preempting in 2nd seat, since you stand a 50/50 chance of discomforting LHO or partner, whereas the odds are 2-1 of discomforting an opponent when you preempt in 1st seat, and 100% when you preempt in 3rd seat.

For the adventurous, consider adding **Transfer McCabe** to your Very Weak 2s. Transfer McCabe is on after partner opens a Weak 2, and RHO either Doubles or Passes. If you (the responder) bid a suit (without jumping), you are requiring partner (the Weak 2 opener) to complete the transfer by bidding the next highest (i.e., touching) suit. You (responder

have one of two hands: (1) a better suit than opener (and you plan to pass after opener completes the transfer); or (2) a 3- or 4-card non-game-forcing raise of opener's suit, and an Ace or a King in the suit into which you are transferring. In the latter case, you will correct to 3 of opener's suit after opener completes the transfer, thereby clarifying your hand and suggesting a lead if opener becomes the opening leader.

Here are the 6 possible auction starts, assuming that you play Very Weak 2s in Diamonds, Hearts, and Spades. The proposed responses are one structure. Other structures are possible, and I will be happy to hear of improvements:

West	North	East	South
	2♦	P	2♥ = transfer to Spades 2♠ = transfer to Clubs 2N = Ogust or Feature (your usual) 3♣ = raise; no outside Ace or King 3♦ = raise; Heart Ace or King

West	North	East	South
	2♦	X	XX = Ace or King of Diamonds 2♥ = transfer to Spades 2♠ = transfer to Clubs 2N = Ogust or Feature (your usual) 3♣ = raise; no outside Ace or King 3♦ = raise; Heart Ace or King

West	North	East	South
	2♥	P	2♠ = transfer to Clubs 2N = Ogust or Feature (your usual) 3♣ = transfer to Diamonds 3♦ = raise; no outside Ace or King 3♥ = raise; Spade Ace or King

West	North	East	South
	2♥	X	XX = Ace or King of Hearts 2♠ = transfer to Clubs 2N = Ogust or Feature (your usual) 3♣ = transfer to Diamonds 3♦ = raise; no outside Ace or King 3♥ = raise; Spade Ace or King

West	North	East	South
	2♠	P	2N = Ogust or Feature (your usual) 3♣ = transfer to Diamonds 3♦ = transfer to Hearts 3♥ = raise; no outside Ace or King 3♠ = raise; Club Ace or King

West	North	East	South
	2♠	X	XX = Ace or King of Spades 2N = Ogust or Feature (your usual) 3♣ = transfer to Diamonds 3♦ = transfer to Hearts 3♥ = raise; no outside Ace or King 3♠ = raise; Club Ace or King

You will rarely have the “longer suit than opener” hand. When you do, you will Pass after opener completes the transfer. Most of the time, you will have a 3-card or 4-card raise, and are intending to correct to 3 of partner’s opening suit after partner completes the transfer. Now, if partner ends up on lead, he will have a much better chance of finding the best lead. Not infrequently, partner leads to your outside Ace or King, and you return the suit of his opening preempt. This will defeat a lot of 3NT contracts which will make against defenders at other tables with less information.

Snapdragon Double

After LHO opens, and partner overcalls in a *different* suit, and RHO responds in a third *suit*, your Double shows five cards in the *fourth* suit *and* “tolerance” for the suit in which partner overcalled. Usually, your tolerance for partner’s suit will be something like “honor doubleton” (e.g., Qx), as you might have raised with three of partner’s suit. You may catch partner with 3-card support for your suit, or he may have a six-card suit of his own, or you may find a playable 7-card fit at a low level, or you may push the opponents to an unmakeable level. In other words, there are a number of ways to win. The higher the level of RHO’s bid, the more you must have in order to Double, since you have to consider the level to which you are committing your partnership. Your Double is presumptively forcing for one round, and overcaller’s rebids are natural.

My first reaction to this convention was that “it’s just bridge.” In other words, it seems intuitive to me that I should have tolerance for partner’s suit when I enter the auction in this manner, since partner may have very

few or none of my suit. If I were to have extreme length (e.g., 7 cards) in the “fourth suit,” I would probably just bid it, and if necessary, bid it again, expecting partner to let me play there.

The Last Hand of the Tournament (Mark Oettinger)

In the team game of the November 2019 Latham NY Sectional, we played 6 rounds of 7 boards, with a quick catered lunch break, allowing for an 11 a.m. start and a 5 p.m. finish...good for those of us with a long and rainy drive home and early work commitments the following morning. With one round to go, our team was sitting 3rd in a field of 16 teams, and in the final round, we were matched against the eventual winners. The first five boards were hard-fought standard results, which all turned out to be “pushes.” In the sixth board, the opponents got to an overly optimistic 3♣ contract that lay badly for them. We defended accurately, and put them down 4. Unfortunately, they were non-vulnerable, but because the other table had passed the hand out, +200 got us 5 IMPs.

Then came the last hand of the 3-day tournament. I picked up the following non-descript collection:

♠Q10xx

♥A10xx

♦J10xx

♣K

Partner opened 1♣ in 1st seat. RHO passed. I have 10 HCP, and three 10s. 4-4-4-1 distribution always catches my attention, since it’s a very

promising holding, and since I love playing Mini-Roman (see my article in the July 2019 issue of *Table Talk*). Of course, since partner opened 1♣, there's already some evidence of a misfit and wasted values, but let's keep an open mind. What to respond?

There are two options that immediately come to my mind. I can bid 1♦ (“up the line”), or I can “bypass 4 Diamonds,” and bid 1♥. Which approach is better? It is sometimes said that one should “bypass 4 Diamonds” if one has a “one bid hand.” This term implies a hand that is close to the minimum for a “one-over-one” response...i.e., only 6 HCP or a bit more. I have more than that, so I don't feel pressured to bypass my 4 Diamonds for that reason. Another benefit of bidding 1♦ is that partner will be the first to bid a 4-card Major, if he has one. Since he has the greater number of HCPs, it is likely better to have the lead come up to his hand, so I infer that bidding 1♦ is also more likely to “right-side” the contract. Finally, I don't envision any action by the opponents that will cause us to miss a Major suit fit if we have one...so I choose to “temporize” by bidding 1♦. LHO now bids 1♥, and partner rebids 2♠. Here's the auction so far:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	P	1♦
1♥	2♠...		

It sounds like partner has 5+ Clubs, 4+ Spades, and 18-20 HCPs.

A digression, however. **As an adjunct to your hand evaluation, always count your losers.** Previous discussion of loser count can be found in the July 2019 issue of *Table Talk*. In my view, it's an under-discussed topic in the literature. I find it particularly helpful in making

decisions whether to invite to game, or whether to accept or decline a game invitation. It is sometimes said that you should not engage in loser count analysis until you have found a fit, but I find it useful in many other situations as well...often early in the auction, just to get a “second opinion” regarding the potential of the hand.

When doing your loser count, consider the following rough “loser count expectancy chart:”

HCPs	Expected Losers
6-8	9
9-11	8
12-14	7
15-17	6
18-20	5
21-23	4

If your HCPs and your expected loser count do *not* “match,” I recommend using the loser count to “break the tie.” Bid on with fewer losers than expected, but stay low with more losers than expected.

Remember the basic loser count rule:

**COUNT THE LOSERS IN YOUR HAND;
ADD PARTNER'S ASSUMED LOSERS;
TAKE THE TOTAL AWAY FROM 24; AND
THAT'S HOW MANY TRICKS YOU WILL TAKE.**

My hand contains 10 HCPs...and the 8 losers that one would expect. Based upon partner's jump shift, I would expect him to have 5 losers. $24 - (8 + 5) = 11$. Loser trick analysis therefore suggests that we will make only 11 tricks if partner's loser count is consistent with the HCP range that his bid is assumed to show. I am therefore not feeling overly pressed to initiate slam exploration. If partner has a better-playing hand than he has implied, he should know to start slam exploration. That said, all I have promised him is 6 HCPs...likely a 9-loser hand. In fact, I have 10 HCPs and an 8-loser hand. Hence, if there's a bid available to imply both support and extras, I owe it to partner to employ it here.

My obvious bid is therefore 3♥, showing 4-card Spade support and extra values. After all, opposite partner's presumed 18-20 HCPs, I would have enough to bid game even if I had a minimum 6 HCPs, and under the **Principle of Fast Arrival**, with a minimum, I would be expected to bid 4♠ immediately (since fast arrival denies extras), so the cue bid shows extras. The auction has now been as follows:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	P	1♦
1♥	2♠	P	3♥...

As we continue analyzing the hand, let's see what partner (North) actually holds, Here are our combined assets:

♠AKJxx
 ♥Kx
 ♦-
 ♣AJ10xxx

 ♠Q10xx
 ♥A10xx
 ♦J10xx
 ♣K

Sure enough, partner has a 4-loser hand...one that rates to play a trick better than his point count suggests. As such, he is thrilled to hear of extras...and of my implied slam interest. The initiation of **KeyCard Blackwood (KCB)** seems in order for North, but since he has a void, my responses will be hard for him to read. He is very interested in the ♥A, but less interested in the ♦A. On further consideration, from North's perspective, if I have *either* red Ace, it's helpful, since *he* will be declaring the hand. If I have the ♥A, great, but even if I have the ♦A instead, the location of the ♥Kx in the North hand protects that suit from producing 2 quick losers. If the opening lead is a Heart, my ♥K affords me second-round control of the suit. And, even if we do not get a Heart lead, after drawing trump, partner can pitch his small Heart on my ♦A, thereby holding our Heart losers to one. On the strength of this logic, North uses KCB, to produce the following auction:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	P	1♦
1♥	2♠	P	3♥

P	4NT	P	5♣
P	6♠	P	P
P			

Using **KCB 1430**, South's 5♣ showed 1 key card which, given North's possession of the ♠K, was clearly one of the red Aces. Since either Ace was enough to pretty much guarantee slam opposite even 4 *small* Spades in the South hand, North simply bid 6♠ directly over 5♣. Note that North could have used **Queen Ask** before committing to slam, in which case, the auction would have been as follows:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	P	1♦
1♥	2♠	P	3♥
P	4NT	P	5♣
P	5♦	P	6♣
P	6♠	P	P
P			

5♦ asks whether partner has the Queen of trumps. 5♠ would say, "No." 6♣ says, "Yes, and I also have the ♣K (but not the ♥K)." If this seems complicated, think of it this way. In responding to Queen Ask, when we have the Queen, we bid the suit of our cheapest non-trump King. If we have the Queen but lack a non-trump King below the 6-level of our agreed trump suit, we simply bid the small slam directly.

Finally, let's envision an even more nuanced slam bidding structure, and in doing so, let's roll back the auction to this point:

West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	P	1 ♦
1 ♥	2 ♠	P	3 ♥...

Through South's cue bid, the Spade suit has been agreed upon as trump. South is implying extras...at least an intermediate hand...not a bare minimum 6 HCP...maybe 10 HCP, North should take note of the fact that South could have bid 3 ♠ or 4 ♠, either of which is less forward-going. On top of South's extras, North has a 4-loser hand, so North is clearly thinking about slam...maybe even *grand* slam.

So, before we rush into KCB, we may as well take advantage of the fact that we are still at the 3-level, and exchange some potentially helpful information by cue bidding below the level of 4NT. KCB can wait! I like to play a style of cue bidding known as "Italian," wherein a cue bid implies either 1st-round *or* 2nd-round controls (i.e., an Ace, *or* a King, *or* a singleton, *or* a void) up the line. The primary goal of this style of cue bidding is to identify a suit in which neither of us has first or second round control...i.e., we have 2 losers in that suit...and to thereby avoid carrying on to slam.

On the subject hand, North now bids 4 ♣, showing a Club control. South then bids 4 ♥, showing a Heart control, and *denying* a Diamond control. Here's the auction to this point:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	P	1♦
1♥	2♠	P	3♥
P	4♣	P	4♥...

North now uses Key Card Blackwood, not so much to identify South's key cards, since he can be quite sure that South has the ♥As and *not* the ♦A, but to determine whether South has the ♠Q, and if so, whether he also has the ♣K. Here's the complete auction:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	P	1♦
1♥	2♠	P	3♥
P	4♣	P	4♥
P	4NT	P	5♣
P	5♦	P	6♣
P	7♠	P	P
P			

Playing 1430, 5♣ shows 1 or 4 key cards with Spades as the key suit. 5♦ asks whether South has the ♠Q. 6♣ says "Yes, and the ♣K as well, but not the ♥K." What more does North need to bid the grand slam?

Here's the hand one more time:

♠AKJxx
♥Kx
♦-
♣AJ10xxx

♠Q10xx
♥A10xx
♦J10xx
♣K

Lead: ♦K

What's the best line of play? And how do you rate your chances?

My instinct is to:

Ruff small;
Small Club to the King;
Small Heart to the King;
Ruff a small Club with a *small* trump;
Small trump to the *Jack*;
Ruff a small Club with a *big* trump; and
Finish drawing trump, and claim.

This approach caters to both 3-3 and 4-2 Club splits, which combine for 84% of the ways that 6 cards can split. I don't think that declarer can manage a 5-1 (or 6-0) Club split, but I will be glad to be proven wrong.

Bidding the Grand (Dick Tracy)

As one might we imagine, bidding and making a Grand Slam is one of the rarest of feats in bridge. The Bridge Fates have smiled on me in 2019 to such an extent that my partners and I have bid *three* Grand Slams this year, all in tournament competition no less. All remain etched in my memory, lo these many weeks and months later. Here they are in chronological order.

The first Grand Slam of the year came with Mark Oettinger at the Albany (NY) Regional on June 15. We were in the afternoon session of Open Pairs, and as luck would have it, we were at the table with Vermont Sectional regulars Mike Rogers and Peter Allen, for Board 7:

Dealer South
Both Vul.

♠7
♥752
♦KQ8752
♣1054

♠KQJ
♥Q63
♦J43
♣AQ86

♠A10862
♥AKJ98
♦A
♣K7

♠9543
♥104
♦1096
♣J932

After South passed, Mark opened 1NT with his flat 15 HCP. Although some advocate deducting a point for 3-3-3-4 shape, I am inclined to open 1NT in spite of that defect, as long as I have at least one Ace. As it happened, Mark's opening 1NT bid was critical to the auction. With my 19-count opposite his 15-17 HCP 1NT opener, the only question was to decide in which slam we should land!

Although it is more common to show the higher ranking of two 5-card suits, I reasoned that whether or not he had the ♥Q was likely to be critical, and I would be able to find that out via the Roman Key Card "Queen Ask" device, so I bid 2♦ (Jacoby Transfer) and Mark dutifully bid 2H. Note that I did not really care about his Heart support other than the Queen, as I was angling for a notrump slam the whole way.

Next I jumped to 4NT, to which Mark responded 5♣ (using 1430 = 1 key card). So far, so good. Now I bid 5♦ (Queen Ask) and Mark responded 5♠, telling me he had both the ♥Q AND the ♠K. Wonderful news! I continued with 5NT which we play asks for the lowest-ranking Specific King, and he bid 6♥, denying any Kings other than the ♠K.

I asked myself, "Where are his high card points?" I knew that he had 9 HCPs in the ♣A, the ♠K, and the ♥Q, and I knew he did NOT have the ♦K. I concluded that in order to be able to open 1NT, he must have held both black Queens, as well as a couple of stray Jacks.

It was time to count tricks. I knew we had 5 Hearts off the top, and if he had the ♠KQx, then there must be 5 tricks in that suit as well. Add those winners to the ♦A and the ♣AKQ and 7NT must be cold! So, I bid it (albeit with some trepidation), and when I put down my hand, Mark's biggest challenge was to remain stoic.

That hand was worth all of the matchpoints because nobody else in the field bid a Grand Slam in any strain.

The second Grand Slam came on Saturday morning at the Quechee Gorge Sectional on October 26, where 88-year-old Dave Donovan (New London, New Hampshire) and I were attempting to satisfy his silver point requirement on the road to his earning Life Master status. (He later crossed the finish line at the Mansfield Regional.) We were sitting North-South against our good friends Bayle Drubel and Phil Webber (who are regulars at both the clubs of Quechee (Vermont) and Eastman (Grantham & Hanover, New Hampshire)). Along came Board 8:

Dealer West

None Vul.

♠AQJ952

♥AJ3

♦KQJ

♦2

♠1043

♥8542

♦97632

♣10

♠7

♥Q106

♦1085

♣Q98754

♠K86

♥K97

♦A4

♣AKJ63

I held the North hand in 2nd seat and decided to open 2♣ with my shapely 18-count that had 4.5 losers: one each in Clubs and Diamonds, two in Hearts, and half a loser in Spades.

Dave and I use “control” responses to opening 2♣ bids (King = 1 control; Ace = 2 controls), so I was stunned (and suspicious) when Dave bid 3♠!! In other words, he was telling me he had SEVEN controls, which, if true, meant that we held all the Aces and Kings in the deck! As I said, I was suspicious. Maybe Dave counted wrong, or forgot our system, or made a mechanical error and meant to bid 2♠. How could he possibly have all seven of the missing controls? Anyway, I chose to go slow by bidding 4♠, after which it took Dave barely more than a millisecond to jump to 7NT, which was 100% cold, with 13 tricks right off the top.

It was not the most scientific auction ever, but very satisfying nonetheless, and every bit as satisfying today as it was at the time. Perhaps a bit more so, since good memories have a way of becoming better over time!

The third of the Grand Slams was the only one I got to declare. I was playing with Art Young (my most regular partner from Hanover, New Hampshire) in the second match of the Mid-flight Swiss at the New England Harvest Regional. I picked up this very nice hand:

♠A
♥A10962
♦AQ3
♣K1093

I opened 1♥. In spite of the Singleton Ace, the rules now allow us to open this 17-point hand 1NT, but I have learned from harsh experience that partner will sometimes transfer me to the suit where I hold a singleton, and then pass. I am not fond of declaring with a 5-1 fit! These days, if I am going to open 1NT with a singleton Ace, King or Queen, that feature will be in a MINOR!

Art responded 2NT (Jacoby 2NT) which as most readers will know promises 4-card support for opener's Major and *at least* a full opening hand. Opposite my shapely 17-count, partner's response was very good news indeed.

My next decision was a less than obvious choice. As I understand it, showing extreme shortness (singleton or void) is not considered to be proper when that singleton is an Ace or King. However, I reasoned that what I really wanted to know was if partner had the ♣A, and if I cue bid shortness in Spades, he should cue bid the ♣A. So, I broke the "rules" and bid 3♠, and as luck would have it, Art showed the ♣A.

Now it was 4NT followed by 5♠: 2 Key cards with the Queen! What more could I hope for? How about the ♦K? I continued with the 5NT "King Ask," and Art showed the ♦K! I said to myself: "Self, does it get any better than this?"

All I had to do now was to muster the courage to bid the Grand. "A Faint Heart never won the Fair Lady," or so they say, so I deployed the 7♥ card. After the opening lead, I declared out loud: "As Desi said to Lucy (Arnaz), "If this doesn't work, I've got a lot of 'splainin' to do."

Down came the dummy, and it could scarcely have been better. This was my hand and dummy:

♠Qxxx

♥KQJx

♦Kxx

♣Ax

♠A

♥A10962

♦AQ3

♣K1093

I drew two rounds of trumps, ruffed my two losing Clubs, and claimed.

It would be fun to be able to report that there was some drama attached to this hand. As things happened, even though we picked up 13 IMPS on the deal (at the other table they stopped in 6♥), it did not matter one iota, because our opponents had a rough time of it on the other 6 hands, so we had them blitzed anyway!

Honoring June Dorion and Wayne Hersey

Editor's Note: At the Quechee Gorge Sectional, in October 2019, two of Vermont's very finest bridge players...and very finest human beings...were honored for the way in which they play and represent the game. If we all strive to emulate the example that they set, the game will be far better for it. June is familiar to regular *Table Talk* readers, as she has contributed articles in the past. She has almost 4,000 masterpoints, and Wayne has over 5,650...a remarkable feat for individuals who live so far from the urban centers which invariably host the masterpoint-rich regional and national tournaments. Karen Randle

prepared the following introductory remarks that preceded the start of the event that was named in June and Wayne's honor.

Welcome! I'm Karen Randle, co-chair of the Quechee Gorge tournament. The Vermont Bridge Association is excited to host this sectional and we appreciate your coming - some of you from far away.

Our welcome includes a special recognition of an aspect of bridge we are all familiar with - having to do with partnerships. The Vermont Unit has been so lucky to have a significant pair within our membership, for many years, who exemplify all the attributes that we could wish for in a bridge partner.

Our partnership honorees are June Dorion and Wayne Hersey, and the VBA is designating today's tournament game, "The June Dorion-Wayne Hersey Open Pairs," in recognition of their extraordinary partnership.

A few remarks:

The game means so much to June and Wayne. Their partnership over 14 plus years has been truly amazing...

They are both different in many ways...

June is outgoing ...loves to talk...socialize...go to nice restaurants...drink Manhattans...

Wayne is quiet...reserved...would rather drink water and have a cup of soup in his hotel room...

In some ways, their differences worked to provide balance for each of them...

The biggest thing that they have in common is their love of the game...the strategy...the competition...and, yes...the winning!

As we play over the weekend - whether one session or all sessions, find a moment to thank the person across from you for playing, in the manner of June Dorion and Wayne Hersey. We may even play better, although there are no guarantees in this game - and we will certainly have more fun.

And if you are wondering - yes, June and Wayne both know that we are honoring them today, although they are not able to be here. And, the commentary on their partnership largely comes from Heather Hersey - from her personal observations from years of travel with June and Wayne on the many tournament circuits they have played.

So – we hope you and your partner enjoy the day playing in the “June Dorion - Wayne Hersey Open Pairs,” and thanks again for coming.

A Letter to the Editor!

Hello Mark,

At the expert session on Friday in Quechee, you mentioned the “**Rule of Two Defects**,” for when to interfere over a weak NT. Could you either tell me more about that, or point me to an on-line source?

Thank you,
Margaret Fanning

+ + + + +

Hi Margaret:

The Rule of *Two* Defects states that you can take a bid with a hand whose structure violates *one* of the characteristics that the bid is agreed to show...but not *two* (or more). Assume that you are playing Brozel. RHO opens 1NT (15-17). You hold:

♠AJ10xx

♥KJxxx

♦xx

♣x

You have a clear 2♥ bid, (or whatever other bid you use to show majors) showing 5-5 in the Majors.

What about this hand?

♠AJ10xx

♥KJxx

♦xx

♣xx

You are 5=4, instead of the generally assumed 5=5. Is that a disqualifier? I would say no, if you are non-vulnerable. Single defect. If you are vulnerable, on the other hand, that's a second defect, and you should not use Brozel. Note: you still bid 1♠.

The Rule of *Two* Defects has *many* applications. Here's another. You are in 1st seat, with the following hand:

♠XX
♥XX
♦AQ10xxx
♣xxx

If you play weak 2s, it's clear that you should open 2♦. Let's say you use 2♦ as Mini Roman, however. Should you open 3♦? You are a card short, but don't you want to make it as tough as possible for the opponents to find their likely Major suit fit? The lack of a seventh Diamond is one defect. If you are non-vulnerable, I would say bid 3♦. If you are vulnerable...a second defect...I would say no.

More discussion of the Rule of Two Defects can be found starting at Page 17 of the April 2018 *Table Talk*:

http://www.bridgequarterly.org/uploads/6/6/8/0/6680387/table_talk_-_april_1_2018_publishedcorr.pdf

And on Page 6 of the January 2019 *Table Talk*:

http://www.bridgequarterly.org/uploads/6/6/8/0/6680387/table_talk_-_january_2019_final2.pdf

I find it a wonderful tool for competing actively while mitigating risk.

Best,
Mark

+++++

Upcoming Vermont Tournaments

0-500 MPs; Non-Life Master Sectional

Burlington Bridge Club

600 Blair Park Road

Williston, VT

January 25, 2020

Vermont Sectional

Burlington Bridge Club

600 Blair Park Road

Williston, Vermont

May 15, 16 & 17, 2020

Vermont Sectional

Battenkill Eagles

2282 Depot Street

Manchester, Vermont

July 10, 11 & 12, 2020

President's Cup

Location TBD

August 16, 2020 (tentative)

Vermont Sectional

Burlington Bridge Club

600 Blair Park Road

Williston, Vermont

September 11, 12 & 13, 2020

Vermont Sectional

Quechee Base Lodge

3277 Quechee Main Street

Quechee, Vermont

October 30, 31 & November 1, 2020

Vermont and Nearby Clubs

Lyndonville Bridge Club

Cobleigh Library
14 Depot Street
Lyndonville, Vermont 05851
Jeanie Clermont; (802) 684-2156
Saturday, 1:00 p.m.; semi-monthly; stratified

Manchester Equinox Village Open

49 Maple Street
Manchester, Vermont 05254
Elizabeth VonRiesenfelder; (802) 362-5304
Tuesday; 1:00 p.m.; 0-200 MPs
Tuesday; 1:00 p.m.; open, stratified
Sunday; 2:00 p.m.; February, March; open; stratified
Multiple sites; call first; reservations requested

Taconic Card Club

6025 Main Street
Manchester, Vermont 05255
Kim Likakis; (802) 379-1867
Thursday; 12:30 p.m.; open; reservations requested

Apollo Bridge Club

115 Main Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05602
Wayne Hersey; (802) 223-3922
Friday; 6:30 p.m.; open

Newport Club

84 Fyfe Street

Newport Center, Vermont 05855

Eric McCann; (802) 988-4773

Wednesday; 1:00 p.m.; exc. Jan, May, Oct, Nov, Dec; open; stratified

Barton Bridge Club

34 School Street

Orleans, Vermont 05860

Linda Aiken; (802) 525-4617

Monday; 12:30 p.m.; open; stratified

Rutland Duplicate Bridge Club

66 South Main Street

Christ the King Church

Rutland, Vermont 05701

Raymond Lopes; (802) 779-2538

Monday, 12:00 Noon; open; stratified

Tuesday; 6:00 p.m.; open; stratified

Thursday; 6:00 or 6:30 p.m. (*time changes seasonally...call first*); open; stratified

Multiple sites - call first for locations

St. Albans DBC

75 Messenger Street

St. Albans, Vermont 05478

Marsha Anstey; (802) 524-3653

Monday; 7:00 p.m.; open

Burlington Bridge Club

600 Blair Park Road

Williston, Vermont 05495

Phil Sharpsteen; (802) 999-7767

Monday; 6:30 p.m.; 0-500 MPs; stratified

Tuesday; 7:00 p.m.; open; stratified (call first November-April)

Wednesday; 9:15 a.m.; open; stratified

Wednesday; 1:30 p.m. 0-20 MPs; strat'd; *may resume Fall; pre-reg. & part. req'd*

Friday; 9:15 a.m.; open; stratified

Sunday; 1PM; open; semi-mo. exc. May, June, July, Aug; strat.; *call/check web*
Website: www.bridgewebs.com/burlingtonacademy/

Norwich DBC

43 Lebanon Street
Hanover, New Hampshire 03755
Paul Hoisington; (802) 249-0839
hoise430@gmail.com
Tuesday; 6:30 p.m.; open; stratified

Quechee Duplicate Bridge Club

Quechee Club
3268 Quechee Main Street
Quechee, Vermont 05059
Dick Tracy; (802) 384-0461; gmboy51@gmail.com
Monday; 1:00 p.m.; open; stratified; weekly; year-round
1st Thursday of each month; 6:30 p.m.; *monthly*; year-round

Eastman Bridge Club

48 Lebanon Street Street, Hanover, NH (Wednesday at 1:00 + Friday at 1:00)
6 Club House Lane, Grantham, NH (Tuesday at 12:30)
Jane Verdrager; (603) 865-5508
Website: www.eastmanbridgeclub.com

Keene DBC

Elks Lodge
81 Roxbury Street
Keene, New Hampshire 03431
Anne McCune; (603) 352-2751
Monday; 12:00 Noon; open; stratified (partner available)
Thursday; 12:00 Noon; open; stratified (no partner guaranteed)

Ticonderoga (New York) DBC

109 Champlain Avenue

Ticonderoga, New York 12883

Michael Rogers; (518) 585-3322

Monday; 12:30 p.m.; open; stratified; reservations requested

Thursday; 12:30 p.m.; open; stratified; reservations requested

Plattsburgh (New York) DBC

5139 North Catherine Street

Plattsburgh, New York 12901

George Cantin; (518) 563-6639

Tuesday; 6:45 p.m.; open; handicap

Thursday; 6:45 p.m.; open

Friday; 12:30 p.m.; open

Useful & Fun Links

ACBL

www.acbl.org

District 25

www.nebridge.org

Unit 175

www.vermontbridge.org

Bridge Base Online

www.bridgebase.com

OKBridge

www.okbridge.com

Bridge Guys

www.bridgeguys.com

Pattaya Bridge Club

www.pattayabridge.com

Larry Cohen

www.larryco.com

Mike Lawrence

<https://michaelslawrence.com/>

Marty Bergen

www.martybergen.com

Baron Barclay Bridge Supply

www.baronbarclay.com

Michael's Bridge Sanctuary

www.mapiano.com/bridge.htm

Power Rankings

www.coloradospringsbridge.com/PR_FILES/PR.HTM