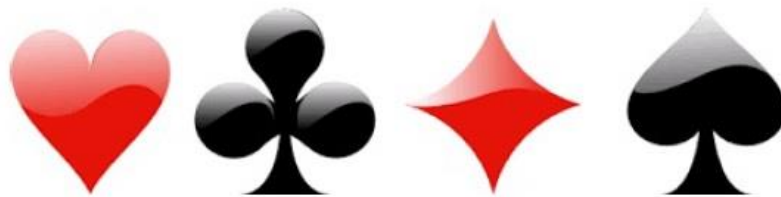


# *Table Talk*

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**Editors**

**Mark Oettinger**

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## **Editor's Musings (Mark Oettinger)**

On August 14, 2020, I took a hard fall while trail running in the hills of my home town in Central Vermont. I caught a toe while heading steeply downhill at high speed. I flipped over, ducked my head, and took the full impact on my right shoulder (my dominant arm). I dislocated my shoulder, and in the process, completely severed three tendons, which were surgically reattached 40 days later. As I write this, I am 30 days into a recovery that is predicted to last the better part of a year. This has been an effective distraction from Covid and the election, but what does it have to do with bridge?

My mental and physical health have a LOT to do with how well I play bridge. *Playing* well often reflects *being* well. Stated another way, being in what I call “a good head space” is a recipe for success at the table. How should we strive to “be well” at the bridge table? How can one set aside Covid, shoulder surgery, a busy law practice, and a bitter presidential election...and still play good bridge? Hydration, nutrition,

positive attitude, plenty of sleep, healthy posture, respect for your partner, courtesy to your opponents, steadfast adherence to ethics. Maybe a superstition. Lucky socks?

When I was a very new tournament bridge player, I had the pleasure of playing against Dorothy Truscott and Amalya Kearse at the Grossinger's Regional. It was 1973, and I was 18. When she was dummy, Mrs. Truscott read the New York Times, sections of which were scattered about her stationary seat. I doubt that she was reading the bridge column, of which her husband, Alan Truscott, was the author. Whatever gets you into the right "head space" to play well...access it.

Readers familiar with Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP) will think of embedding a trigger for the desired state. Identify an image that produces for you the right state of mind. For example, I imagine myself glade skiing to trigger a state of peace and tranquility. Those states may not be the right emotional backdrop for tournament bridge. At the table, perhaps one strives for patience, analytical thoroughness and stamina instead. What images invoke those states for you? Then practice accessing those images while simultaneously "anchoring" the process with a kinesthetic (tactile) trigger. I use a gentle squeeze of my first interosseous muscles in my hand...the fleshy part between my thumb and index finger. The dual anchors help trigger the desired state quickly and dependably, and once the process is embedded in your psyche, the desired state can be accessed by either trigger. Try it!

The famous Pakistani bridge player, Zia Mahmood, describes the ups and downs of competitive play as "heats." In Heat #1, you can do no wrong. In Heat #2, the "normal" condition, you feel like you have limited control over your fate, but you plod along, trying not to make

mistakes. In Heat #3, the Gods seem to be against you, and all of the decisions that you make are wrong. Read Zia's very enjoyable (although often sexist and salacious) 1994 book, *Bridge My Way*. He offers strategies for recognizing each heat, and for playing to make the most of each inevitable condition when you encounter it. Good advice, to be sure. My advice is narrower, yet perhaps useful in a different way. I propose that we spend more time in Heat #1.

ACBL; District 25 (New England); Unit 175 (Vermont)

When face-to-face bridge resumes (late 2021?), Districts will receive sanctions for far fewer Regionals per year. District 25 (New England), of which Vermont (Unit 175) is a member, will only be sanctioned for *two* Regionals per year. That's down from *six* per year as has been the case for decades. For those who have occasionally played in Regionals, this is a sad loss. The change in policy is a national-level ACBL board decision. That board is being consolidated, and a high percentage of its members are "large club owners" and purveyors (in one form or another) of online bridge. Regionals draw revenue away from clubs, and according to my sources, that's the reason behind this national trend.

I originally thought, "Why do we need the ACBL's assistance to run Regionals. We can do it ourselves." Au contraire. The ACBL will *forbid* us from running more Regionals. They will do so by denying us the additional sanctions. No sanction means no masterpoints, which in turn, means no attendees. It is not known whether there will be a similar reduction in sanctions for *Sectionals*. Unit 175 (Vermont) has been eligible for four Sectionals per year in recent memory. I don't see Sectionals threatening the financial well-being of "large club owners" in

Vermont, so perhaps Vermont's Sectionals will live on. Only time will tell.

I have floated an idea within the confines of the Executive Committee of the Unit 175 Board, and I will "out" it now. In order to fill the void left by the reduced number of Regionals, might we be on the threshold of a "Golden Age of Unit Games?" Let's say that the average tournament competitor would have played in four days each of two of the four Regionals that we are about to lose. That's eight tournament days lost, probably 16 sessions. What if Vermont hosted a monthly 2-session event, with a meal in between, at rotating locales around the State, hosted by our local club(s)? The travel would be manageable, and you would not absolutely need to stay overnight. I can't wait to get back to live bridge...regardless of the format!

Christmas Update: Our District 25 (New England) President, Jack Mahoney, has asked me to serve as Chair of the District Appellate Committee. It will likely be a long time, if ever, that I get called into service, but it has prompted me to review the 70-page ACBL Code of Disciplinary Regulations (CDR), and to get to know the former Chair of a related committee. He is a multiple national champion who was glad to share his experiences. ALSO, there is a glimmer of hope that the threat of drastically reduced numbers of Regionals *may* be subsiding a bit. Perhaps Jack Mahoney's strongly-worded letter to ACBL President Georgia Heth did some good. I *still* think that monthly Unit games are a great idea!

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The first hand of this issue is geared toward a “journeyman” audience...the up and comers. Your editors receive precious little feedback. We *really* want to hear from you. I did recently hear that our material (or some of it) was over the particular commentator’s head. We try to mix it up, and we take your comments to heart. Please keep those comments, letters and articles coming! Dick Tracy is our featured guest columnist in this issue. He just surpassed 2,500 masterpoints, and has thereby achieved the rank of Gold Life Master. Congratulations, Dick!

### **A Warm-Up Hand (Mark Oettinger)**

Dlr West

Both Vul

♠ -  
♥ Kxxx  
♦ AKQxx  
♣ KJxx

♠ Axxx  
♥ Axxxx  
♦ xxx  
♣ x

West, in 1<sup>st</sup> seat, opens 1♣. What should North bid? He has 16 HCP. With a void in Spades, he certainly doesn’t have the right shape for a Double. For the same reason, he doesn’t have a 1NT overcall, notwithstanding his 16 HCPs. He has opener’s suit well-stopped. He could overcall 1♦, but he’s worried about missing a Heart fit. Also, although 16 HCP is usually within the upper limit of most partnerships’ simple overcall range, this is a pretty chunky hand. Some would argue

that a simple overcall materially understates its value. North could Double initially, and then bid Diamonds over whatever partner bids. To do that, he would really like a 17th HCP and/or a 6th Diamond, but this hand really feels like more than a simple overcall in Diamonds.

Let's assume that North makes the "conservative" decision to overcall 1♦. East Passes. What should South bid now?

North/South have at least an 8-card fit. South has 8 HCP, and a singleton Club...10 Total Points. Opposite a maximum overcall, North/South could be able to make game. In assessing whether to invite, South should next conduct a loser count. South has 8 losers, which is characteristic of an invitational hand opposite a 1-level suit opener. If South is to invite, what games are envisioned, and what is the best bidding strategy? This has been the auction thus far:

S	W	N	E
	1♣	1♦	P
?			

South's position is that of "**advancer**," partner of the overcaller. A "**new suit by an unpassed advancer**" is generally played as **forcing** for one round. If this is the agreement of North/South, then South can explore for a Heart or Spade fit, knowing that he can always retreat to a non-forcing 3♦ bid next round. For these reasons, South bids 1♥, showing 5 Hearts. West now rebids 2♣. The auction has advanced as follows, with North to bid:

S	W	N	E
	1♣	1♦	P
1♥	2♣	?	

Here are the North/South hands again:

♠ -  
♥ KXXX  
♦ AKQXX  
♣ KJXX

♠ AXXX  
♥ AXXXX  
♦ XXX  
♣ X

With South having shown 5 Hearts, North knows that North/South have a 9-card Heart fit. Also, his Spade void is “working,” which brings his 16 HCP to 19 total points. North also has only 4 losers. Crediting South with at least an invitational/8-loser hand, loser count principles project 12 tricks ( $24 - (8+4) = 12$ ). While I am a faithful loser count adherent, I am dissuaded from exploring slam for several reasons. First, it’s rare to have a slam after an opponent has opened at the 1-level. Second, crediting opener with 12 HCP, that leaves us with 28 HCP at most. Small slam is said to require 33 “total” (i.e., HCP + “shortness”) points. North does have a near-ideal hand for the bidding thus far. He has 4-card support and a *void*. Some would add a 4th “shortness point” for that combination. But even after adding the additional 2 shortness points for South’s singleton Club, we still fall well short of 33 total points.

North's King of Clubs is a potential asset, as it is favorably positioned "over" West's presumed Ace of Clubs (after all, he bid them twice). However, a club-level field is unlikely to get to slam, since most pairs' slam bidding methods are significantly quantitative. i.e., HCP-based. This is arguably one of those "better is the enemy of good" situations. If you play in the right contract, and make all of your tricks, you should get a good score. It is painful to be the only pair getting to slam...with everyone making 11 tricks. So, here is the complete auction:

S	W	N	E
	1♣	1♦	P
1♥	2♣	4♥	P
P	P		

Let's look at the hand one last time to envision the play:

	♠ -
	♥ Kxxx
	♦ AKQxx
	♣ KJxx
Lead = ♠K	
	♠ Axxx
	♥ Axxxx
	♦ xxx
	♣ x

West leads the King of Spades. What's our plan? Digression: I was recently reviewing hands with a favorite "journeyman" partner after our session. As I explained my thinking process on a hand which I had



declared, partner asked, “You mean you have a plan for the entire hand...*before you play to the first trick?!*” Absolutely!

I’m an optimist by nature, so in the absence of strong bidding evidence to the contrary, I start by assuming that the defenders’ cards are arranged as I would like. In my utopia, trumps split 2-2 (a 41% chance), so I have 5 trump tricks in my hand. And Diamonds split 3-2 (a 68% chance), so I have 5 Diamond tricks. That’s 10 tricks. The Ace of Spades makes 11, and if I can engineer 2 Spade ruffs on the board, I’m up to 13! If this plan succeeds, the opponents will “go to bed” with their Ace of Clubs. Scandalous!

Problems that could arise: (a) trumps could be 3-1, or even 4-0; and (b) Diamonds could be 4-1, or even 5-0.

Question: do we draw trumps right away, or do we delay drawing trumps? This is a question that declarer should consider whenever embarking upon playing in a suit contract. As a general proposition, we want to draw trumps as soon as possible...as long as doing so does not undermine more important goals. One goal that often requires declarer to delay drawing trump is the need to develop one or more ruffing tricks first. Keep in mind that you can sometimes *partially* draw trumps before taking your ruffing tricks, thereby reducing (but not eliminating) the risk of the defense ruffing in.

So, let’s envision the play. We could win the Ace of Spades in the hand, pitching a small Club from the board, and next draw 2 rounds of trump. Let’s say they split 2-2. The position is now this:

♠ -  
♥ XX  
♦ AKQXX  
♣ KJX

♠ XXX  
♥ XXX  
♦ XXX  
♣ X

You next run Diamonds, finding that they split 3-2. That gives you 2 pitches, a Club and a Spade. With 5 cards left, you crossruff the rest of the tricks.

Of course, the opponents' distribution might be far less favorable, but your objective of getting Spade ruffs...and getting them as safely as possible...must be kept in mind regardless of the distribution of the other suits. So...rather than letting the opening lead come to the Ace in your hand, better to ruff on the board. Cash the King of Hearts, and then come back to the Ace of Hearts in your hand. Even if Hearts have not split, you can now ruff your second small Spade on the board, having minimized, to the greatest extent possible, the risk of an overruff.

### **Your bid! (Ingi Agnarsson)**

This will be short. In October, I offered four bidding problems and hoped for responses, in part to see if we actually have a readership. The number of answers may mean that no—we actually don't have a readership! This entry resulted in exactly 0 responses. Makes me wonder if the hard work of producing Table Talk is actually worth doing... You tell us!

## **Farewell forcing notrump? (Ingi Agnarsson)**

The 2/1 bidding system offers advantages over simpler (more primitive?) systems like “Standard American Yellow Card” (SAYC) or similar approaches. The critical improvement is being able to force to game in bid 1 with two-over-one. For example, in SAYC  $1\spadesuit - 2\clubsuit$  is something like 10+ it forces the bidding on, but is not game forcing. This causes ambiguity because while it is clear that we have the majority of the points, it will take at least another round to figure out strength and possible spade support, and one must tread carefully. On the other hand  $1\spadesuit - 2\clubsuit$  in 2/1 is simply gameforcing and now the bidding becomes effortless as you know you will not stop under a game. This is especially important in our efforts to locate the best game (e.g. looking for the 4-4 fit, see above) and, of course, seeking slams. The downside of 2/1 systems has long been thought of as a ‘necessary evil’ – the forcing NT. No, it isn’t really evil, but it is not pretty because 1) it is very very broad in its possible range AND distribution (could be 11 points and  $6\clubsuit$ , could be 6 points and  $5\heartsuit$ , could be 8 points balanced etc) and, 2) it is, as its name implies, forcing. So, it is impossible to play in 1NT. This latter point is probably more important. Partner opens a spade and you have  $Jx K10x QJxx xxxx$ . You really just want to play 1NT, but you can’t. Forcing notrump will most likely lead to playing  $2\spadesuit$  on 5-2 fit, or in a minor 7-8 card fit. Even if lucky finding 44 in minor, a matchpoint scoring will likely render 1NT a better contract.

So, we established that forcing notrump is not ‘evil’ but it’s highly flawed. What about the ‘necessary’ part of that ‘necessary evil’? Well, that’s why it was created, because it IS necessary. This was an obvious fact to the folks that developed 2/1 and has pretty much remained as an ‘obvious fact’ ever since. But, much like the ‘evil’ part has been revised,

can we at least explore the concept of ‘necessary’? I never really have. I always disliked forcing notrump, but it’s part of 2/1 which I much prefer to SAYC, hence, you just play it, right? Apparently, no. There is a growing trend in Europe, or at least in Scandinavia (I haven’t looked further), to simply forgo forcing notrump within 2/1 systems! And, strong players argue, that while the forcing notrump is certainly flawed, it is not necessary!! In short, the experience is that simply bidding 1NT non-forcing is a better long-term strategy. Sure, sometimes you miss fits on the second level, and can end up playing NT without any stoppers in more than one suit... but—critically—you are allowed to play 1NT! I have only recently started paying attention to this, but I’m eager to give it a try and give up my least favorite bid of all; forcing notrump. If you want to try something new, you might well try that too. Mixing up stuff without much risk is an easy way to keep the bidding game ‘fresh’.

### **Building Partnership Trust (Dick Tracy)**

One of the most critical – if not *THE* most critical - aspects of a successful partnership is trust. Among other things, we count on our partner – and he/she counts on us – to bid in accordance with our agreements, to remember those agreements and use them correctly, to observe and act on defensive signals, etc.

When we violate or forget our agreements and “go off the reservation,” so to speak, in one way or another, we undermine partnership trust. If we do that too often, one of two things will happen, neither of them good. One, partner might ask for a divorce, something that can be most disconcerting at best. Two, partner might follow our lead and start making bids which undermine our own trust in him/her. Ugh.

In the early stages of my duplicate experience, I heard few references to partnership trust, so few that I assumed it was a problem that happened to others. Though I made the requisite number of mistakes and had brain freezes which accompany the learning of new conventions, surely, I was not guilty of giving my partners a reason not to trust me at the table! Wrong again.

Then came learning moment #1732 in a club game. I opened 1♠ with a 10-point “Rule of 20” hand that was 5-5 in the black suits. My LHO overcalled 2♥, and my partner bid 3♦. Suddenly, my shapely hand appeared far more weak than strong. Fear of a horrible misfit overtook me and I passed. At least I had the Jx of Diamonds, I thought, so partner might not be in too much trouble, or so I told myself as I passed. I knew all was not well when the color drained from partner’s face, and I got a horrible sinking feeling because, as the hand played out, it became clear that partner had game-going values with Spade support. (NOTE: this happened before Limit Raise cue bids were added to my arsenal.)

Partner struggled to a two-trick set when we should have made 10 tricks in Spades. As she put her hand back in the board, she calmly asked: “Wasn’t my 3♦ bid forcing?” “But my hand got worse as the auction proceeded,” I feebly explained, “so I chickened out, hoping to cut our losses.” Today I know that was a lame excuse: Once an opening hand, always an opening hand.

As luck would have it, one of New Hampshire’s best players sat the other way at our table, and he asked for permission to make an observation. (Note that he *asked* for permission! Very classy.) “Dick,” he said, “you are building your judgment, and you should use your judgment, but when you pass a forcing bid, you *undermine partnership trust!*” I remember that moment and those words like it was yesterday. There are other good reasons not to pass a forcing bid, but perhaps the

most important is that you really don't want your partner to lose faith in you.

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Overbidding can certainly violate partnership trust. You want to be able to trust that bids made by your partnership are reliable regarding high card points promised. It can be very deflating to discover, for example, that you ended up too high when partner introduced a new suit at a new level with only 8 HCPs instead of the 10+ that he/she had promised. New suit, new level requires 5(cards) + 10(HCPs), right?

Along these lines, here is another example:

A couple of months ago, in first seat, I picked up this 19-point beauty.

♠ AK109  
♥ KQ  
♦ A109  
♣ K10982

Do 19 points ever get any better than that? My hand was loaded with premium cards and great spots that included three 10-9 combinations. I momentarily considered upgrading it to open 2NT, but thought better of it. Why? Because I did not want to mislead my partner.

[Ingi's editorial comment: I can't see how you might mislead partner with 2NT. You are misleading your partner by opening anything other than 2NT! However we want to 'count' high card points, it's just a method to evaluate hands. Your three 109 combinations are each worth at least a jack, so the hand easily evaluates at 22 points].

So, playing "better minor." I opened 1♣ and partner responded 1♥. Having faith that partner had *at least* 6 HCPs, I assumed that we had

ample values for game so I leaped to 3NT. Perhaps it would have been more correct to bid 2NT, promising 18-19, but I upgraded the hand due to the aforementioned surplus of nice features. Besides, partner had promised 6 HCPs (right?) so we must have at least 25 HCPs combined.

Down came dummy:

♠ 765  
♥ J7654  
♦ Q762  
♣ J

Yikes! Four high card points and no entries. It should come as no surprise that I went set.

[Ingi's comment: your partner had a bad hand, the bid of 1♥ is simply wrong.]

In the post mortem, partner defended his bid on the basis that he had a singleton in my suit and a 5-card major. The fly in that ointment was that his bid had promised 6 high card points, and I *believed* him.

In November, I seemed to encounter a pandemic of overbidding by my partners. In one instance, he made a vulnerable takeout double at the 3 level with only 10 high card points. I assumed he really had the full opener he promised so I bid to the game level where we went set. On another occasion, a partner made a limit raise with only 8 high card points and when I acted accordingly, we were again too high.

Then there was this auction. In first seat, I opened 1♥, Pass, Partner bid 1♠, RHO bid 2♣, and I used a Support Double. Partner then jumped to 3♠, which to me sounded like a hand with *at least* invitational values. With some partners, I have the agreement that when responder jumps to the 3 level in his own major, that it's a game force. I was at the high end

of my range with 14 HCPs, so I bid 4♠. Again, we were too high, down one for a lousy result. This was partner's hand:

♠ A109865  
♥ 95  
♦ A5  
♣ J98

Yes, it's a decent 6-card suit, but there are only *nine* high card points, and the doubleton in his partner's first bid suit is no bonus. IMHO, it's a stretch to call that a limit raise type hand. Add another Queen somewhere, or turn the Ace of Diamonds into the Ace of Clubs (creating 6-2-1-4 distribution), and his bid would have been more tenable, and we would very likely have made our game. But, with his scant 9 HCPs and two doubletons, there were just too many losers.

Therein lies the problem with overstating our values. Partner will *always* believe that we actually have what we promised. You DO believe your partner's bids, don't you? Don't we all?

By the way, does anyone else have partners who are eternal optimists? When we promise 6-9, do you have partners who tend to plan on the top of the range and overbid? Been there. Done that.

Then there's the corollary to overbidding: underbidding. *None* of us ever underbid, do we? Except when we do. In one instance, my partner passed in first seat with a flat 12 high card points that included two Aces and a King. The hand passed out and we scored 16% because we had 23 high card points between us, and several pairs our way either made part scores in Notrump or earned a plus score on defense. Out of 18 tables, that hand was passed out only one other time. In my view, any 12-point hand with 2 Aces is worth a bid, flat or not.



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It seems to me that partnership trust is also built on how well you follow the agreements found on your convention card. Your partner trusts that you will remember to use Drury as a passed hand, and not blithely bid your nice 5-card Club suit! Playing Bergen raises, you trust that, after you open 1 of a Major, that partner will remember that a jump to 3 Diamonds promises 4 pieces and 10-12 high card points. If you play them both, you trust that partner will not conflate the two and jump to 3 Clubs as a passed hand to show 4-card support for your 1 bid of a Major!

I play with so many partners that I sometimes forget that we don't all use the same gadgets. In one November auction, I opened 1♠ and partner jumped to 3NT. With just about everyone I play that jump as Jacoby 3NT, promising precisely 3-card support, a flat hand, and 13-15 high card points. I love that bid for its specificity.

I had this hand:

♠ KJ754  
♥ A5  
♦ AJ95  
♣ 63

Believing that my partner had the Jacoby 3NT-type of hand defined above, I corrected partner's 3NT to 4♠, expecting that my hand would play better in a suit contract because of the two doubletons. So, I played 4♠.

Down came dummy:

♠ 6  
♥ KQ72  
♦ K876  
♣ AK87

Yikes! Not good. Except for us, the entire field played 3NT. By some miracle I held it to down only one, but it was still a big fat Zero.

Now I looked at our Convention Card. Uh oh. This time the egg was on my face. That day's partner was not only one of the very few Life Masters I have met who does not use Jacoby 3NT, but he also had never *heard* of it. Oh, well. We have since got that ironed out. Learning moment #3429.

The obvious point is to know what's on the convention card. It only takes a minute or two to review the card prior to game time.

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Those are a few of the pitfalls that can undermine partnership trust. Avoid those pitfalls and your results will surely improve, as will your partner's level of trust in you.

### **Rules of Bridge: Finding fit and the Rule of 4 and 4 (Ingi Agnarsson)**

A lot of the effort we put into the bidding aims to find a fit. Generally, with a fit in the majors, it is preferable to play in the fit than, for example, in notrump. Exceptions to this may be very flat hands with 4-4 fit, and hands with a long and running major on one hand, where the total number of tricks is the same in the fit as in notrump. In general, playing in the fit is also beneficial in the minors. However, it becomes much more complicated because here as consideration of the scoring format (imps or mp's) and game bonuses (3NT vs 5 min) become more important. In a minor fit, you need TWO additional tricks to better a notrump part-score (e.g. 2NT is 120, while 3♦ is only 110—hence you

need to make 4♦ to better 2NT). With game bonus, you need THREE to extra tricks to best notrump score (3NT making 4 is 430 non vul, 5♦ making 6 is only 420, so you need to make 7—three extra tricks—to best the notrump score). So, at least in mp's, we tend to play notrump on a lot of minor fit hands. This is different in imps part-score. Here, you want the safest contract where differences between scoring between NT and minor are rather trivial.

Making a short story shorter, suit contracts with a fit are generally safer than NT contracts, but the ultimate choice depends on suit rank (majors vs minors), strength (parts-core vs game or slam) and game format (mp's vs imps)

So, we want to find a fit, and a major fit usually means a major contract. We find the fit, and bid to the right level, end of story! Well, is it? And what has this got to do with the rule of 4 and 4, and what the heck is the rule of 4 and 4 anyway!? The rule of 4 and 4 essentially claims that not all fits are equal! Finding a fit is NOT—necessarily—end of story. The rule of 4 and 4 emphasizes that it is usually better to play in the 4-4 fit rather than in a 5-3 or even 6-3 fit! In other words a balanced fit is better than unbalanced fit, even when you may have fewer total trumps in the balanced fit! This may sound surprising, but the reasoning is very simple presented in two salient points.

First, on a balanced fit you can make extra trick(s) ruffing on either side. Say you are in 4♠ and you have 9 top tricks. One ruff on either side will secure the contract. Instead, assume you are on a 5-3 fit with 9 top tricks. Now, ruffing on the long hand (the one with 5 trumps) doesn't do you any good at all. You are just ruffing with a natural trick and the total number of tricks doesn't change. The only way to add tricks is to trump

on the short hand (well, there is 'dummy reversal' but that's material for another entry).

Second, when you have both 4-4 and 5-3 fits in the same hand, playing in the balanced fit also means that you can throw away losers as you run the 5-3 fit! You can run that suit as you wish since it aint trump!

Conversely, if you play in the 5-3 fit, you don't get to throw any losers in your other good suit, as the 4-4 fit simply 'cancels out'.

So, there are two clear reasons why playing the more balanced fit is better and with that in mind, finding the first fit should NOT be end of story! This thought should affect the way you view the auction. For example when holding ♠AQ5 ♥KJ74 ♦A863 ♣62, and partner opens the bidding with 1♠, you are content, clearly there is a game and you've already found a fit, but make sure that you do not end the bidding before making sure partner hasn't got 4♥ as well, because if they do, that's where you want to play. Hence, on a hand like this, it is usually better to show values and explore partner's shape, before you support their opening suit. In this case, depending on your approach you would do well to first respond with 2♦ (forcing/gameforcing depending on system) instead of immediately raising partner in spades. I don't particularly like the 2♦ bid on a rather lousy 4 card suit, but you always have the 'retreat' to spades. In my opinion, the better of two imperfect bids would be to respond 2NT Jacoby on this hand. Yes, you want to have a 4 card support and that's what partner will expect, but you don't always get what you want! When no bid is perfect pick the least evil of the options. The benefits of 2NT are that it already implies fit and at least a strong game interest, and the bidding goes on and a second balanced fit can still be discovered. In either case, if partner at some point implies 4♥, or simply likes your 4♥ if/when you describe them,

the partnership will be able to find the preferable 4-4 split in hearts instead of the known 5-3 spade fit. This rule can certainly help you improve your scoring, so place it on your mind. It's simple enough: balanced fits trump unbalanced fits.

### **A Fun Hand To Play (Mark Oettinger)**

You are South. North deals. None vul. You have the following hand:

♠ A  
♥ AJ87  
♦ KQ96  
♣ A1093

Two Passes to you. 18 HCP and a 5-loser hand. When you are 4-4 in the Minors, which do you open? This question is the subject of an article in the April 2018 issue of *Table Talk*. On this hand, an opening bid of 1♦ seems clear-cut to me. LHO overcalls 1♠. Partner jumps to 3♦ (weak). RHO raises to 3♠. What do you do? Love the shape. Love the Aces. Partner's 3♦ bid shows "simple raise" strength with 5-card trump support. A simple raise is generally 6-9 HCP, and a 9-loser hand. Adding partner's assumed 9 losers to my 5 losers produces a total of 14 losers.  $24-14 = 10$ . Loser count therefore predicts that we will win 10 tricks. For that reason, I choose to bid 4♦, which ends the auction. The entire auction was as follows:

W	N	E	S
	P	P	1♦
1♠	3♦	3♠	4♦
P	P	P	

LHO led the King of Spades, and these were the hands:

♠ 32  
♥ 54  
♦ 75432  
♣ J875

♠ A  
♥ AJ87  
♦ KQ96  
♣ A1093

Partner's 3♦ bid sure was weak! That said, the hands do fit nicely. I won the Ace of Spades perforce. I wanted to arrange to ruff the board's small Spade in my hand (the short trump suit), but could I afford to at least *begin* drawing trump? When you cannot afford to draw *all* of the opponents' trumps before arranging for your own ruffs, it is often possible to mitigate the risk of the opponents "ruffing in," by taking one or more rounds of trump, without fully exhausting the opponents' trumps, and then turning to your ruffs, before finishing drawing trump. Think of it as "partially-delayed drawing of trump."

Consider the play of the hand. We have 9 trumps missing the AJ10x. If they split 2-2, we have 1 trump loser, and 4 trump winners “on length.” We can get a 5th trump trick by ruffing the small Spade in the hand. Note that we could *instead* get a total of 5 trump tricks by ruffing *two* Hearts on the board, a **dummy reversal**. However, the risk of overruffs by the defense is far greater if you try to ruff Hearts rather than the Spade, because you have 6 total Hearts, but only 3 Spades. By the time you get around to ruffing your second Heart, it will be the 4th round of the suit, so with 7 Hearts in the opponents’ hands, even if they split 4-3 (which occurs 62% of the time), one of your opponents will be out of Hearts when you take your second ruff, so if he still has a trump, and it’s bigger than yours, he will overruff. Without getting any more deeply into the probabilities, it should be clear that the Spade ruff in the hand is the far safer option.

So what of drawing trumps? Looks like we can at least afford to draw one round. Even if they split 4-0, we will still have plenty of time to arrange the Spade ruff. That said, how will you get to the board to lead the small Spade? One way to do so is by ruffing the third round of Hearts after all...not as a step on the road to a dummy reversal, but as an entry. Back to drawing trump. In a perfect world, you would lead toward the Diamond honors in your hand, but your single board entry

needs to be used to take the Spade ruff. So, you start by leading the Queen of Diamonds out of your hand. That brings the Jack of Diamonds from LHO.

This brings up the **Rule of Restricted Choice**, an oft-cited, but poorly understood principle. My edition of *The Encyclopedia of Bridge* (1984...hint, hint) starts its description of its *5-page* article on Restricted Choice (the importance/complexity of which is reflected in the significant space devoted to the topic) as follows: “The play of a card which may have been selected as a choice of equal plays increases the chance that the player started with a holding in which his choice was restricted.” The rule typically arises when declarer is missing the Queen and Jack of the suit in question. In the featured hand, we are missing the Jack and Ten. Does the rule still apply, and if so, what does it tell us about the likely location of the Ten of Diamonds?

The Rule seems to apply most commonly when we have 9 cards in the suit in question, and the opponents have the *Queen* and *Jack*. It *also* applies when we have 8 cards in the suit in question, and the opponents have the *Jack* and *Ten*. In our featured hand, we are fortunate enough to have 9 trumps, and we are only lacking the Jack and Ten. Declarer therefore has more time to preview the fall of the defenders’ cards, and the defenders have fewer small cards with which to camouflage the



position of their “working” cards. In other words, if declarer has the entries to start the second round of Diamonds from the board, RHO’s play to the trick will allow declarer to “get it right” when there’s a path to success. Observe how this works in the featured hand.

When in with the Ace of Diamonds, LHO returns a small Heart. I go up with the Ace of Hearts, and I then lead another Heart, losing to LHO’s Ten. LHO then leads the Queen of Spades, which I ruff in my hand. Having taken care of that detail (the Spade ruff), I ruff a Heart on the board, and can use my board entry to lead a trump back toward my hand. When LHO plays the 8 of Diamonds, I follow the Rule of Restricted Choice and finesse the 9, exhaling when it wins. That leaves this position:

	♠ -	
	♥ -	
	♦ 75	
	♣ J875	
♠ J98		♠ 107
♥ -		♥ K
♦ -		♦ 10
♣ K64		♣ Q2
	♠ -	
	♥ J	
	♦ K	
	♣ A1093	

I now lead my last Heart toward the board, and when LHO shows out, I ruff it knowing that LHO will have to follow. I now lead the Jack of Clubs from the table. LHO covers, and I win the Ace of Clubs, knowing that East can lead his last trump to cut down my cross ruff. I now lead a small Club from my hand, knowing that LHO cannot account for the 10 and 9 of Clubs, which are both in my (closed) hand. I thereby win the 7 of Clubs on the board, and then continue with another Club, which LHO has to win per force. It does RHO no good to ruff in, since I overruff and claim. When LHO is in at trick 12, all he has left is Spades, and he has to give me a sluff/ruff. When he does so, I am able to ruff small on the board, and my King of Diamonds smothers LHO's 10 of Diamonds at trick 13. 10 tricks made, for +130, and an unshared top. This was the whole hand:

	♠ 32	
	♥ 54	
	♦ 75432	
	♣ J875	
♠ KQJ984		♠ 10765
♥ Q109		♥ K632
♦ J		♦ A108
♣ K64		♣ Q2
	♠ A	
	♥ AJ87	
	♦ KQ96	
	♣ A1093	

## **BOLS bridge tips: “Don’t be a pleasant opponent, Bid!” Jon Baldursson (Ingi Agnarsson)**

For two decades (1974-1994) the BOLS company—a Dutch distillery producing fine liquors—sponsored an annual bridge tip competition. Elite players were invited each year to contribute a bridge tip, and among those a winner was chosen each year. Needless to say, asking top experts, every year, to contribute their best bridge tips, yielded very numerous excellent tips over two decades that we can all learn from. Hence, in this new series, “BOLS bridge tips”, I intend to select among the best of those to share with you, hoping to find inspiration for myself and for ‘all’ (see “Your bid!” above) of you that read our Table Talk. My first choice should come as no surprise for two reasons. First, it is

provided by the best Icelandic player of all times (Jon Baldursson) and second, it has very much been a guiding light for my own bridge career. Yes, some of you like to call it simply ‘overbidding’, but there is a method to the madness and Jon’s point is much deeper than ‘just bid’. It is profound and will make you a better player, and perhaps most importantly, a more unpleasant opponent!

The following text is, more or less, reproduced verbatim from [haroldschogger.com](http://www.haroldschogger.com) (<http://www.haroldschogger.com/BALDURSON.htm>). First an introduction to master Baldursson, and then his own account of the importance of the tip. I have made some wording changes and have a few comments within [].

JON BALDURSSON of Reykjavik is Iceland's most successful and well-known player. In 1991, the structure of the Bermuda Bowl was altered and for the first time Europe was to be represented by four countries rather than the previous two. Iceland crept into that final qualifying spot and from then on proved that they were a team of destiny as they went on to become one of the most popular Bermuda Bowl winners in the history of the game. It was the first time that Iceland had won a World Championship in any discipline, and they became national heroes. Indeed, Icelandair diverted a plane that was

scheduled from Honolulu to Tokyo to stop off at Yokohama to pay tribute to the new World Champions. In 1994, Jon further made his mark by winning the Second Generali World Masters Individual in Paris. In 1996, the Icelandic team lost in the finals of the World Team Olympiad. Having their sorrows in the bar, four of them, including Jon, joined forces with two Brits: Heather Dhondy and Liz McGowan in the Transnational World Mixed Teams. They won the qualifying Swiss tournament by a substantial margin and then went on to take the gold medal despite none of the pairs having played a board together before the event!!

And now, from Baldursson himself:

In most textbooks on competitive bidding we are advised not to bid without good reason. To bid with weak hands on bad suits, the theory says, will cost in the long run, misleading partner when we end up defending, and risking severe penalties otherwise.

This [bidding carefully] sounds like sensible advice likely to produce consistently fair results in intermediate competition. But, experience has taught me that exactly the opposite is needed to do well in top-class teams tournaments. It is better to bid at the first opportunity, even if the hands or the suits do not meet the standards the textbooks require.

Indeed, it can often be less dangerous to bid right away than to wait and hope to get a second chance. Contrary to what some may believe these tactics are not as effective at Pairs, where -200 is a terrible score. [Yet, you don't want to be a pleasant opponents in pair game either! So bid with ANY decent reason!]

[To highlight the importance of bidding at first opportunity] consider this example from the Bermuda Bowl in Yokohama:

Dealer West

N/S Vulnerable

	♠ 65	
	♥ A8432	
	♦ KJ10542	
	♣ -	
♠ KJ10932		♠ A874
♥ K109		♥ QJ765
♦ Q8		♦ 6
♣ 97		♣ KQ4
	♠ Q	
	♥ -	
	♦ A973	
	♣ AJ1086532	

This deal was played at sixteen tables and West usually opened a weak Two Spades or Multi Two Diamonds. Where North overcalled Three Diamonds, South had an easy Six Diamond bid, but where North passed,

as happened at some tables, North-South were in trouble and some played in Five or Six Clubs which couldn't be made.

Sometimes declining to overcall can have strange effects on the defense. This deal occurred in the Springgold, a top teams tournament in the USA.

North Dealer

Love All

	♠ - ♥ A432 ♦ AQ762 ♣ AK43		
♠ K109754 ♥ 65 ♦ J543 ♣ 9		♠ QJ8632 ♥ 98 ♦ - ♣ Q10865	
	♠ A ♥ KQJ107 ♦ K1098 ♣ J72		

W	N	E	S
Zia	Sontag	Rosenberg	Kantar
		NO	1♥
NO	5NT	NO	7♥
NO	NO	Double	all pass

East's Double was obviously lead-directing, showing a void somewhere. Not unreasonably, the great Zia Mahmood led his longest suit, a spade, so the grand slam made. If Rosenberg had opened Two Spades or if Zia had overcalled One or Two Spades, this problem would not have arisen. North-South would have had to deal with a high-level spade bid from East, and if the final contract were then Seven Hearts doubled by East, the diamond lead would be automatic.

It is standard practice that a one-level overcall promises a good suit so that partner knows what to lead if your side ends up defending. But if overcalling on a bad suit can be misleading for your partner, it can also be misleading for declarer, causing him to play the overcaller for missing honors in the suit he bid. There can also be negative inferences when a usually aggressive player does not overcall. If his partner is on lead against no-trumps, he knows that it is no use trying to find him with a suit he could have bid at the one level.

There is also a psychological advantage in being a busy bidder. We all know that it can be irritating when opponents are constantly entering the bidding, even if the intervention makes no difference in the end. We often find that opponents have been skating on thin ice, but managed to escape unharmed. This can allow them to gain a psychological edge and



affect your concentration, maybe resulting in a losing board later in the match.

Of course, they are right in the textbooks. You can help declarer to make contracts with light overcalls and you sometimes go for big numbers. But I am sure that in the long run you will gain more with this style than you lose, and when you lose, just smile and bide your time. The Icelandic team used this approach in the 1991 Bermuda Bowl and, to quote Eric Kokish from the World Championship book discussing the prospects for the final, “The Icelanders' busy competitive style had so far brought in lots of points. Would this style prove effective against the Poles who like to defend?” [It sure did! Iceland led the World Championship final from the very beginning and all the way to the end. The win was only in doubt for a while in the last 32 hand round, when the Polish pair Marten’s and Szymanowski put on a show. First, Marten started by congratulating Iceland for the win! After protest by the Icelandic pair, given that the game was far from over (even though Iceland led by 80 imps), Marten insisted ‘nonsense, it’s your tournament and we already long lost this final’. Then, as soon as the match began, Marten’s and Szymanowski started to take extraordinary action to try to turn the game around. It worked! (in a strange testament to Jon’s BOLS tip) At least for a while. They bid and made razor thin contracts, and interfered so much that the Icelanders missed several games (while on

the other table the other Polish pair just played their normal game – a typical tactic). After losing about 60 imps, the Icelanders finally were able to stabilize and finish the final match on a positive note, and secure the Bermuda Bowl!]

So my BOLS tip is:

*Don't just sit and watch your opponents.*

*Bid at the first opportunity.*

## **Upcoming Vermont Tournaments**

Face-to-face tournaments are cancelled through February 2021.  
Play local, national, regional and silver point tournaments online.  
Go to Bridge Base Online (BBO)

## **Vermont and Nearby Clubs**

Many, if not all, bricks & mortar clubs are closed due to Covid.  
Check websites and call or email first!

### **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.; Non-LM 0-500 MPs; stratified  
Tuesday; 6:30 p.m.; open; stratified (May-October only; call first)  
Wednesday; 9:15 a.m.; open; stratified  
Thursday; 12:30 p.m. 0-300 MPs; stratified  
Friday; 9:15 a.m.; open; stratified  
Sunday; 1:00 p.m.; open; stratified  
Website: [www.bridgewebs.com/burlingtonacademy/](http://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](mailto: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

### **Mad River Valley Bridge Club**

The Waitsfield Inn  
5267 Main St

**Waitsfield, VT 05673**

**Vickie Walluck; 802-590-3068**

**[VickieWalluck@gmail.com](mailto:VickieWalluck@gmail.com)**

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

**Call or email Vickie in advance if you need a partner**

## **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](http://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**

<b>Table Talk Online</b>	<a href="http://www.bridgequarterly.org">www.bridgequarterly.org</a>
<b>ACBL</b>	<a href="http://www.acbl.org">www.acbl.org</a>
<b>District 25</b>	<a href="http://www.nebridge.org">www.nebridge.org</a>
<b>Unit 175</b>	<a href="http://www.vermontbridge.org">www.vermontbridge.org</a>
<b>Bridge Base Online</b>	<a href="http://www.bridgebase.com">www.bridgebase.com</a>
<b>OKBridge</b>	<a href="http://www.okbridge.com">www.okbridge.com</a>
<b>Bridge Guys</b>	<a href="http://www.bridgeguys.com">www.bridgeguys.com</a>
<b>Pattaya Bridge Club</b>	<a href="http://www.pattayabridge.com">www.pattayabridge.com</a>
<b>Larry Cohen</b>	<a href="http://www.larryco.com">www.larryco.com</a>
<b>Mike Lawrence</b>	<a href="https://michaelslawrence.com/">https://michaelslawrence.com/</a>
<b>Marty Bergen</b>	<a href="http://www.martybergen.com">www.martybergen.com</a>
<b>Baron Barclay Bridge Supply</b>	<a href="http://www.baronbarclay.com">www.baronbarclay.com</a>
<b>Michael's Bridge Sanctuary</b>	<a href="http://www.mapiano.com/bridge.htm">www.mapiano.com/bridge.htm</a>
<b>Power Rankings</b>	<a href="http://www.coloradospringsbridge.com/PR_FILES/PR.HTM">www.coloradospringsbridge.com/PR_FILES/PR.HTM</a>