



The Future Life Master



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Bridge Fever: The Agony and Ecstasy of a Novice

As a card carrying shrink I inhabit the strata of feelings: exhilaration, challenge, curiosity, mortification, panic, confusion, dread, embarrassment, disappointment, anxiety, humiliation.... Although the duplicate bridge community is a



by Kate Adams

world comprised of theoretical structures, rules and complex ideas, the novice experiences scant shelter in the realms of the mind. Bouncing between success and failure is confusing and disheartening. For the first year or so, one risks 'falling through the ice' as private disasters are rendered public. Innermost fears and insecurities become reified: "I am stupid;" "This is too hard;" "I disappoint my partner;" "I don't know what to do;" "It's all my fault."

When 'playing up' away from the insulation of the novice game, opponents can appear all-knowing, serene and unflappable. Yet a fair number of these 'together' opponents will confess that in their novice days they, too, used to crawl home after an open game to nurse their wounds, beaten and bloodied by the duplicate experience. After a run of bad boards, harsh director calls for my thinking too long or playing too slowly, or too many ridiculous mistakes, my confidence can evaporate and my composure shatter. Sometimes I can laugh it off and accept the gifts of knowledge hard-won; other times, I renounce bridge and all its challenges 'forever' (at least until the next day's game).

A working partnership is a garden of riches which will bear much fruit if properly tended. According to our very own Mildred Breed, the most important factor in winning at bridge is choosing a good partner. Augie Boehm says: "The way an expert must simultaneously dominate the opponents and nurture partner requires a rare degree of sensitivity and awareness." Just once did I snap at my novice partner during a tournament – only to see her freeze in

Making a Safety Play Should I or Shouldn't I?

It is common for young children to go to a playground to release their ever growing energy...seeking dizzying satisfaction so to speak. So many items are available that momentary distractions are prevalent. What should I play on? Which will be more fun? Questions Questions Questions? Ain't life fun!

That inner drive for dizzying satisfaction is what keeps us young. When "once upon a time" was a playground...today, for many of us, it is the bridge table. The momentary distractions...they are still there. What should I bid? What should I lead? How should I play the hand? Still true...ain't life fun!

A playground and the bridge table...one commonality is a teeter totter. On the playground you are jamming your legs into the ground and thrusting your playmate and yourself into thrill and laughter. In bridge, the fulcrum point on which to teeter or to totter is the scoring method. All bridge players, relatively new to the game or those vastly experienced, should learn and understand the scoring method, both truth and consequence...

- Matchpoints...take risks; hero or zero.
- IMPS...slippery slope; caution ahead.

In a **matchpoint (pairs)** game, where "comparative scoring" is used, overtricks are very important. Matchpoints scoring is a "swing for the fences" Babe Ruth approach to the game. As each pair is compared to all other pairs in the scoring, going for the gusto with an overtrick can pay large dividends. It can also be a disaster...a zero rather than a hero.



Agony and Ecstasy (con't)

shock and embarrassment, and then lose her characteristic confidence. We now know we need to support each other to make the partnership sturdy and resilient, while talking frankly together about patterns that are not useful. My expert partner has his hands full managing my ups and downs. When he expects me to play at a level beyond my abilities, I rise to the occasion when I can and break under the pressure when I can't. He makes jokes about a bid he calls the 'blame transfer': I figure fair is fair while I'm a novice and he's an expert.

In conclusion I offer some personal memories of life as a novice:

-Declaring a 7 S bid in 7 NT, not realizing I could ask what the contract was, and going down 8 while my opponents mysteriously appropriated all the tricks.

-Getting confused about Jacoby 2 NT and splinter bids while playing against George Pisk for the first time. When he was my bridge teacher 40 years ago, we were all terrified of him. When encountering him as an opponent earlier this year, I discovered that my dread was misplaced. Recognizing my novice status, George could not have been more generous or patient with me: "Take your time, change your bid, whatever you need: don't rush, it's OK. You're learning and that's what counts." Thank you, George.

-Recurring dreams about my partner bidding "One best suit" and not knowing what to say.

Postscript: Professionally I am at the top of my field, rarely encountering a colleague who excites me with new knowledge. At the club, pretty much everyone knows more than I do, and it's a joy to be learning again. Duplicate bridge offers pathways to intellectual and personal growth that are unparalleled, and for these I am profoundly grateful.

Just don't double me or call the director in a mean voice the next time you play against me, ok?



Making a Safety Play (con't)

In an **IMPS (team)** game, where "quantitative scoring" is used (converting a numeric score/result into IMPS and Victory Points) the primary concern is to fulfill the contract. IMPS scoring is more of a keep the ball in play approach to the game. Therefore, overtricks are of secondary importance. The contract is viewed as if a slippery slope and caution is an important part of declarer strategy. Make the contract if possible. Worry about all else is an after-the-fact mentality.

"Caution is not cowardly...Carelessness is not courage" aptly describes the difference noted between matchpoints and IMPS. The bridge tool used to separate the mentality of the two is the **SAFETY PLAY...should I or should I not proposition**. The term safety play is difficult to define. The Bridge World glossary defines safety play as "the surest line to make the contract, disregarding extra tricks that might be made in some other way." Stated differently, bridge writer Marshall Miles has defined it as "playing in such a way as to lose a trick with average breaks in order to avoid losing additional tricks with bad breaks."

Here is a typical hand that depicts the difference between matchpoints and IMPS...

South plays 6NT...West leads the ♠10...

North

♠ A Q
♥ A K Q
♦ Q 10 6
♣ A K 4 3 2

South

♠ K 4
♥ 10 7 3
♦ A K 4 2
♣ J 8 7 6

• **Count the sure winners:** 2 spades, 3 hearts, 3 diamonds, 2 clubs = 10 sure winners.

• **Search for a source of winners:** 1 in diamonds, 3 in clubs = 4 possible additional winners.

Making a Safety Play (con't)

- **Ask yourself:** if you need four additional winners...NO! Only two in order to make 6NT.
- **Your thought process:** even if the diamond suit produced 1 additional winner, you would still need to attack clubs to make the contract.
- **Conclusion:** play on clubs, not diamonds. The losing (fourth) diamond can be discarded on the fifth club.
- **Result:** 2 spades, 3 hearts, 3 diamonds, 4 or 5 clubs depending on the suit performance = 12/13 tricks.
- **Did you make the contract?**

Maybe or maybe not. If you were playing match-points (hero or zero bridge), on this particular deal you just went down. On the other hand, making an IMPS safety play, the other side of the fulcrum as it teeters-totters, you are smiling! Here is the full deal...

♠ A Q
♥ A K Q
♦ Q 10 6
♣ A K 4 3 2

♠ 10 9 8 3

♥ 9 6 2

♦ 5 3

♣ Q 10 9 5

♠ J 7 6 5 2

♥ J 8 5 4

♦ J 9 8 7

♣ void

♠ K 4

♥ 10 7 3

♦ A K 4 2

♣ J 8 7 6

The **matchpoint player** will win the opening lead with the ♠ Q and **lead the ♣ A at trick two. This is the correct play in a matchpoint game.** If clubs divide 2-2, 3-1, or 4-0 when East has the 4 clubs, the contract is unbeatable. The matchpoint player hopes for a 2-2 break in clubs or a singleton queen. If so, there are 13 tricks for the taking and this pair will compare

well with other pairs in the scoring. What was hoped for by throwing caution to the wind imploded at trick two.

In an IMPS game this contract cannot be beaten if **declarer employs a safety play.** The IMPS player will win the opening lead with the ♠ A (preserving an entry to her hand) and **lead the ♣ 2 at trick two.** The contract is now ironclad. Whether a 2-2, 3-1, or 4-0 breaks in clubs in either hand, at least four club tricks are there for the taking.

- If East has the four clubs, declarer will simply cover the card played by East. As a result declarer will get four tricks. Work it out for yourself.
- If West has the four clubs, declarer will play a club of her choosing. West will win, but declarer has the entries to her hand and the spot cards to finesse the remaining clubs in the West hand without losing another club. Try it. You'll like it!

Understanding the difference between these two styles of scoring could improve your results when you play Matchpoints v. IMPS. Even so, be mindful that there always exceptions to the rule, especially in matchpoint play. **When in doubt, let prudence be your guide**

Article by Tom Clark, BCA Club Manager



Kudos to these First Overall Winners from the **Unit 207 Fall Sectional**, 199er games:

Tod Pontius and Joe Bindo (Thursday morning)

Gilda Reynolds and Nancy Ring (Thursday afternoon)

Tom Sopko and Anita Albert tied with Gilda Reynolds and Nancy Ring (Friday morning)

Kay Dierks and Robert Auvenshine (Friday afternoon)

Julie Valentine and Steve Hollahan (Saturday morning)

Marty Bergen's 21 Rules of Being a Good Partner

Half the battle of winning is being a good partner. Always observe the following:

1. Do not give lessons, unless you are being paid to do so. According to an evening paper, there are only five real authorities on bridge in this country. Odd how often one gets one of them as a partner.
2. Never say anything to your partner unless you would want him to say the same to you. If you are unsure whether your partner would want you to say something, don't.
3. Never "result" (criticize your partner for a normal action just because it did not work this time).
4. Unless your intent is to clear up a misunderstanding, avoid discussing the hand just played. If you cannot resist, be discreet.
5. Remember -- you and your partner are on the same side.
6. Do not forget that your partner wants to win as much as you do.
7. If you feel the urge to be nasty, sarcastic, critical or loud, excuse yourself and take a walk.
8. When there is time between hands, do not discuss bridge.
9. When you want to consult another player about a disaster, ask about your hand, not your partner's.
10. Do not ever criticize or embarrass your partner in front of others.
11. Remember that bridge is only a card game.
12. Have a good time, and make sure that your partner does also. "Bridge is for fun. You should play the game for no other reason. You should not play bridge to make money, to show how smart you are, or show how stupid your partner is... or to prove any of the several hundred other things bridge players are so often trying to prove." Bridge legend Charles Goren.
13. Trust your partner; do not assume he has made a mistake.
14. Although it may be unfashionable, it really is okay to be pleasant to a partner with whom you also happen to live.
15. Remember: "The worst analysts and the biggest talkers are often one and the same." Bridge columnist Frank Stewart.

16. When you voluntarily choose to play bridge with someone, it is not fair to get upset when partner does not play any better than usual.
17. Never side with an opponent against your partner. If you cannot support your partner, say nothing.
18. If you think you are too good for a partner, and do not enjoy playing bridge with him, do everyone a favor and play with someone else. That is clearly much better than being a martyr. However, be careful before burning bridges -- another player's grass may not be greener.
19. Learn your partner's style, regardless of how you feel about it. Do not expect your partner to bid exactly as you would. When partner makes a bid, consider what he will have, not what you would have.
20. Try to picture problems from partner's point of view. Seek the bid or play that will make his life easiest.
21. Sympathize with partner if he makes a mistake. Let your partner know that you like him, and always root for him 100%.

Upcoming Special Games and Tournaments

Non-Life Master Sectional, BCA Saturday, November 13 and Sunday, November 14. Details will be posted on the Unit website: www.austinbridge.org

199er Team Game, BCA Saturday, November 20, 1:30 pm. Partnership chair: Laura Delfeld, 917.5036

299er Potluck Brunch and Game, BCA Monday, November 29, 10:30 a.m. Expert post-game analysis provided by Tom Clark. Extra masterpoints. Partners are guaranteed.

Play of the Hand Class

Using the Diamond book, starts November 2, 6:30-8:30 pm, Westlake High School. Sally Sekac, Instructor. Call 732.9020 or email eerickson@eanesisd.net for more information.

"**The Future Life Master**" is a semimonthly publication of ACBL Unit 207. Laura Delfeld, editor. Please forward information regarding Newcomer/Novice games or lessons to delhan@swbell.net.