



# The Future Life Master

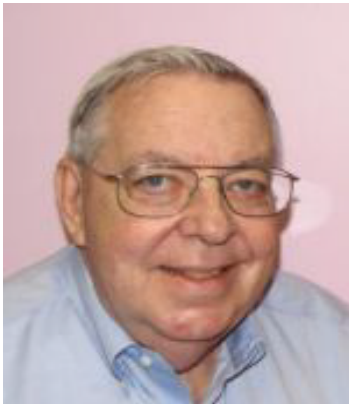


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## In for a Penny, In for a Pound



by **Tod Pontius**

Like many of us, I started my bridge journey long ago. Hopefully the ACBL will remember that I earned my first masterpoints in 1963 at a Regional at Trump Plaza in Atlantic City. It was exactly 1.0 red point, which I think I have discovered deep in the bowels of the ACBL rules qualifies me to be grandfathered into

Life-Masterhood with only 300 points total. I actually AM a grandfather, eleven times over, (so far five of my seven kids have married, etc.), but since I only re-entered the bridge world fifteen months ago, I fall under the new rules unless my first foray into bridge excellence is formally recognized.

After the summer of 1963, my brief partner moved away, and what with one thing and another, I did not return to duplicate bridge until last August. I was really surprised when one of the BCA directors told me in mid-February that I was number one in the country in the Mini-McKenney race, albeit it in the 20-50 point class. I didn't even know that the various annual competitions existed. How could one have come so far so fast? Well, it turns out that the secret is to play a LOT, and hopefully do well at least some of the time. I seem to have some talent, but a lot of the credit, goes to the players and directors at the BCA. Unit 207 has some GREAT clubs and the BCA is definitely one of them.

For this article, I looked back on the year, and I see that I have scratched with more than 60 players at the BCA, and roughly 30-40 more that I have picked up at partnership desks from Kerrville, Dallas, Houston, Atlanta, Baltimore, and Chicago. I've learned so much from every one of you. And the directors have been so supportive.

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## Beware the Misfit

*"It is a miracle to me that, in all the literature of bridge, there is not a single chapter on how to pass."* A noteworthy quote indeed...attributed to Ely Culbertson, expert bridge player in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and founder of the 'Bridge World' in 1929, the oldest continuously published magazine dealing with bridge. Every player knows it takes three passes to end an auction. Easily understood! But pulling out the **green card** can be challenging at times.

You hold ♠ J 5 4 ♥ A 7 6 5 2 ♦ void ♣ K 7 6 3 2. Partner opens 1D, you bid 1H partner continues with 1S...now what?

- Bid 1NT with a diamond void...ugh.
- Bid 2C...if you play 4<sup>th</sup> Suit Forcing one round this is a stretch, and if you play 4<sup>th</sup> Suit Forcing to game this is an extreme overbid.
- Rebid 2H on an inept suit.
- Raise partner to 2S on three-card support...distorting your spade support/length.
- Pass...dangerous! Partner could have as much as 18 HCP, even a three-card fit in either of your suits.

And how about this scenario:

You hold ♠ K 9 8 5 4 ♥ A J 5 4 2 ♦ 8 4 ♣ 7. Partner opens 1D, you bid 1S, partner continues with 2C...now what?

- Bid 2H...if you play 4<sup>th</sup> Suit Forcing one round this is a stretch, and if you play 4<sup>th</sup> Suit Forcing to game this is an extreme overbid.
- Bid 2S...bypassing a very playable 5-card heart suit.
- Bid 2D...taking a non-forcing preference in partner's suits.
- Bid 2NT...a gross overbid.
- Crying...There's No Crying In Bridge!

Distribution, systemic agreement and HCP's...all

## *In for a Penny (con't)*

Like everyone, I slam into the same learning curve that we all do when trying to learn a new, complex language. In some ways, bridge is even harder to learn 'right' than Japanese was. I think I have become fairly good, for my level, in the play of the hand, but bidding still turns me inside out and upside down fairly regularly. I am learning to overcome a tendency to bid as if I am the only player in the partnership, and to dialogue with my partners more carefully and thoroughly. My regular partners have been VERY patient with me, but every now and then remind me that bidding is like a dance: two left feet do not make for a pleasant experience on either end. Remembering to ponder "What am I telling my partner?" before pulling the bidding card out of the box has been crucial.

Laura asked me to write about my experiences as the number one guy in the 20-50 category. So far, there haven't been too many "experiences", except for looking at the monthly list around the 8th of each month. I've managed to stay on top for a 10-month run, but I think I need to do well at the Nationals in Seattle. There is a woman now only 18 points behind my 212 who has been coming at me ever since she cleaned up in Gatlinburg, so we will see how it goes.

When the ACBL president visited us last summer, he observed what a helpful and friendly club we have in Austin. Through the generous mentoring provided by each of the hard-working directors, classes, and partnership experiences with so many partners over the past 15 months, I discovered that bridge utterly fascinates me. With some trepidation, I took a deep breath starting last May and began to 'play up' with increasing frequency. Though I often emerge from these games without scratching, almost as often I discover that I can at least play against the big guys. That is, I can do so with a lot of help from my partners, and, importantly, with the existence of the "C" stratification.

I've learned that at the BCA, as long as you are willing to play up and make the effort to improve, there is just a ton of support and teaching available from our expert players. Not bad for a guy in his seventies! Who says an old dog can't be taught new tricks?

With just five weeks to go, the quest to stay number one in the country has become a real possibility. I watch with dread as the person just behind

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## **Beware the Misfit (con't)**

indicative of the problems presented in the hands above...contribute to a player's decision-making. Perhaps the hardest aspect in the game of bridge is dealing with bidding when "**misfits**" are a probability. Bridge players know the most exciting hands often turn into a misfit and a bidding nightmare. No matter how many conventions you have agreed with partner, there never seems to be a suitable bid available. The Wall Street slogan, as noted by Marty Bergen in his book Points Schmoits, certainly describes this dilemma..."**Sometimes the bulls win. Sometimes the bears win. But the hogs never win.**"

**The Hogs Never Win!** Trying to squeeze more out of a hand than is available, in the long run, will be the demise of many players and partnerships. Developing agreement to cover bidding sequences where misfits are present is essential for bettering partnerships. You must mentally shortlist the possible bids, and choose a starting point that passes the most useful message within your partnership. **Hand Evaluation** is central to this process. **High cards go UP in value if they're in your partnership's suits and DOWN in value if they're in your opponents' suits. A HAND goes UP in value if you find a fit with your partner, and DOWN if you don't.** This is the reason good players stop at low levels with misfit hands but bid like crazy with good fits: they know and remember this rule every time they bid.



You hold -- ♠ void ♥ AKJ986 ♦ K432 ♣ J52. Partner opens 1S, you bid 2H, partner continues with 2S, you bid 3H, partner bids 3S. Now what? Bergen suggests the following...**when you sense a misfit, stop bidding ASAP.** Remember the thought from above, **A HAND goes UP in value if you find a fit with your partner, and DOWN if you don't.**

In developing partnership agreements to handle hands with apparent misfits, be sure to consider certain principles (caveat...nothing is ever written in stone, they are only guidelines)...

- Try to avoid no-trump contracts when you have a singleton or void.

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## In for a Penny (con't)

me creeps up, closing the gap relentlessly. Does she go to more tournaments, play better, or more often than I do? In the effort to get better and stay up there, my primary partner dragged me kicking and screaming into a Two Over One course, and within a day, I got over my reluctance to change systems. Two Over One just gives us so many more options to dialogue and find our games and slams. I started using it about six weeks ago, and the change has produced some hiccups for sure, but I do believe it is a valuable additional tool. Will this shift, with the inevitable confusions, jeopardize my standing in the Mini-McKenney race? Or will it help me in the final push? Who knows? But I sure am having fun finding out.

And, thanks again!

...Tod

**Editor's note:** Here is a link to the National Mini-McKenney race:  
<http://web2.acbl.org/as400/mpraces/mpAwards/2011/minimck.htm>

## Go Tod, Go!

## Upcoming Tournaments and Events

**Unit 207 199er Sectional, BCA**  
**Saturday, December 3, 1:30 pm and Sunday, December 4, 1:30 pm.** Partnership Chair is Mark McAllister, 257.2320 or markmc888@gmail.com

**Unit 207 Christmas Party (199er and Open games)**  
**Saturday, December 10, 10:00 am and 1:30 pm.**  
**Pre-registration required.**

**BCA Holiday Party (199er and Open games)**  
**Friday, December 16, 6:00 pm potluck dinner, 7:00 pm game. Pre-registration required.**

**Austin Winter Sectional, Doubletree Hotel**  
**Thursday, January 6 - Sunday, January 10.**  
**199er and Open games at 10:00 am, 2:30 pm, and 7:00 pm. Swiss teams only on Sunday.** Partnership Chair is Martha Norman, 512.263.5074 (Home) or 512.917.3534 (Cell) normanj@austin.rr.com

## Beware the Misfit (con't)

- Good no-trump contracts require more than stoppers, they must also contain a source of tricks. **(Stoppers may prevent sudden death, but they will not ensure long life.)**
- Passing is right more than wrong, on marginal game values, when misfits are identified.

There are many considerations to mull over when misfits are present. Certainly it is difficult to pass when you hold 12-13 HCP's and partner has opened the bidding. It is equally as hard to bury long suits in a bidding sequence that will not allow its offering due to a shortage of HCP's. Communicating with partner(s) and reaching agreements for certain bidding sequences is a must in order to deal with hands, such as these, that are awkward. If not...Alfred Sheinwold's tongue-in-cheek comment might sum things up, "One advantage of bad bidding is that you get practice at playing atrocious contracts." Does not sound like fun...do you think? **Article by Tom Clark**



These players won first overall in the **Fall NLM Sectional:**

**Julie Valentine and Steve Hollahan** (Saturday am)

**Gilda Reynolds and Nancy Ring** (Saturday pm)

**Barbara Werth and Fiona Schuurman** (Sunday pm)

And kudos to Swiss Misses: **Laurene Jacob, Patty Webb, Robin Tucker, and Margaret Bennett**--winners of B,C,and D strata in the **Austin Fall Sectional** Swiss event.

## New Novice Game

Bridge Plus every Friday at the BCA, 11:00. Free lecture followed by 2.5 hours of supervised play. For players with under 50 master-points. Come join the fun!

"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](mailto:delhan@swbell.net)