

---

# **99er Lessons**

*Release 1.0*

**Paul F. Dubois**

**Jan 04, 2022**

# CONTENTS

<b>1 Preliminaries</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>2 Playing At A Duplicate Club</b>	<b>2</b>
2.1 Partners . . . . .	2
2.2 Procedures . . . . .	2
2.3 Director Etiquette . . . . .	2
2.3.1 When should I call the director? . . . . .	2
2.3.2 How should I call the director? . . . . .	3
2.3.3 What do I tell the director? . . . . .	3
2.3.4 What if the director doesn't seem to believe me? . . . . .	3
<b>3 Claiming</b>	<b>4</b>
3.1 Laws . . . . .	4
3.2 Ethics . . . . .	4
3.3 Courtesies . . . . .	4
<b>4 Which Suit To Bid</b>	<b>5</b>
4.1 Opening With No Five-Card Suit . . . . .	5
4.2 Why Opening Marginal Hands Can Be Marginal . . . . .	5
<b>5 Lie About Your Shape?</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>6 Common Bidding Mistakes</b>	<b>8</b>
6.1 Not Getting To Game When You Should . . . . .	8
6.2 Getting to Game The Wrong Way . . . . .	8
6.3 Bidding The Same Values Twice . . . . .	8
6.4 Saving Misfits . . . . .	9
<b>7 Overcalls</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>8 Listening to The Bidding</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>9 Help-Suit Game Tries</b>	<b>13</b>
9.1 Answering The Try . . . . .	13
<b>10 Misfits and Rescuing</b>	<b>14</b>
10.1 Partner Bids Your Void . . . . .	14

10.2	Misfit . . . . .	14
10.3	Void Opposite A Preempt . . . . .	15
10.4	They Double Us . . . . .	15
10.5	Notrump Is Not The Answer . . . . .	15
10.6	Avoid Trump Avoidance . . . . .	15
<b>11</b>	<b>Drop Dead, Partner</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>ESP, or the Rule of Seven</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Know The Whole Convention</b>	<b>18</b>
13.1	Secret Annex To The Minor Relay . . . . .	18
13.2	Asking For The Queen . . . . .	19
13.3	Handling Interference After a Major Transfer . . . . .	19
13.4	Stayman Has Several Parts . . . . .	20
<b>14</b>	<b>When Not To Ask For Aces / Keycards</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>Slam Bidding: Examples</b>	<b>22</b>
15.1	Hand 1 . . . . .	22
15.1.1	Without Jacoby 2N . . . . .	22
15.1.2	With Jacoby 2N . . . . .	23
15.2	Hand 2 . . . . .	23
15.2.1	Without 2/1 . . . . .	23
15.2.2	With 2/1 . . . . .	24
<b>16</b>	<b>Introduction to Cue Bids</b>	<b>25</b>
16.1	Limit Raise . . . . .	25
16.2	Western Cue . . . . .	25
16.3	Michael's Cue Bid . . . . .	25
16.4	Powerful Hand . . . . .	25
<b>17</b>	<b>Bidding Controls</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>Defensive Basics</b>	<b>27</b>
18.1	Key Ideas . . . . .	27
18.2	Signals . . . . .	28
<b>19</b>	<b>The Dummy is on LSD?</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Interfering With Their Notrump</b>	<b>30</b>
20.1	Meckwell . . . . .	30
20.2	What About Weak NT? . . . . .	30
20.3	In Fourth Seat . . . . .	30
<b>21</b>	<b>Leads</b>	<b>31</b>
21.1	Standard Opening Leads . . . . .	31
21.1.1	Lead The Queen? Really? . . . . .	31
<b>22</b>	<b>Signals</b>	<b>32</b>

22.1	Upside-Down Signals . . . . .	33
22.2	Reading Signals As The Declarer . . . . .	33
<b>23</b>	<b>Count, count, count</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>Leading Aces</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>25</b>	<b>The Laws</b>	<b>36</b>
25.1	Barring Only Sounds Like Fun . . . . .	36
25.2	Interference With Your Conventions . . . . .	36
	<b>Index</b>	<b>38</b>

## PRELIMINARIES

This book is one of a series. It is free, and you can give it to your friends. See the copyright description in the first book, *Bidding Notes*, and a description of the other books in the series, and how to contribute corrections and new material.

All the books are available at <http://pfdubois.com>.

This book is designed for newcomers to duplicate bridge, as a supplement to *BiddingNotes*. This book has small lessons on a diverse set of topics. If you do not know a term, such as “a reverse”, read about it in *Bidding Notes*, which has a Glossary as well.

## PLAYING AT A DUPLICATE CLUB

### 2.1 Partners

Contact the manager or partnership chair at a club to help find a partner if you need one. The ACBL has a club finder at [acbl.org](http://acbl.org), and contact information and the web site for each club is described. You can phone them for help.

In most clubs, you just show up, but it is helpful to the management to know you're coming. Some clubs are not open to the public, such as ones in senior retirement communities, so be sure to check.

After each round of two to four hands, some or all of the players at the table will move to another table, and the boards containing the hands will move. Just ask if you don't know what to do.

It is a bit scary at first, but you'll have fun. You can also get started online at [bridgebase.com](http://bridgebase.com).

### 2.2 Procedures

When it is your lead, make your lead first before writing anything in your score sheet. Everybody is waiting for you.

When there are two minutes or less left in the round, and you have finished, leave your seats so the next people can get started. Don't stay in your seat until your landing spot is clear. Move to the side or get a snack, and don't talk while people nearby are playing.

Don't discuss the hands. If you say "Wow, makes six!" in a loud voice, the next pair to play that board may take advantage of it. Even the best case is bad: they are ethical, report the fact to the Director, and have to skip the board.

Don't start a board when there are less than two minutes left. Call the Director and ask if you should take a "no-play". A no-play DOES NOT CHANGE YOUR SCORE. It just makes sure everyone can begin the next round in a timely manner.

The rules require you and your partner to have two identical convention cards. There are "Standard American" pre-printed cards available. Most clubs will accept one card. There is a series on the ACBL web site that explains how to fill out a card.

### 2.3 Director Etiquette

Remember Dubois' Rule: Never mistake incompetence for ill intention. There is a lot more of the former than the latter in the world. Try to assume your opponents have not intentionally broken the rules.

#### 2.3.1 When should I call the director?

Call the director whenever there is an irregularity. You aren't being mean — often you are protecting everyone else in the room.

If your side has made an improper explanation of a bid, call the director at the end of the auction if your side is declaring, and at the end of the hand if you're on defense.

If, on the other hand, you made a bid that your partner explained correctly according to your agreement, but that you made in error, then you just goofed, and no explanation is needed. If asked, you can say, "My partner's explanation of our agreement was correct."

After an opponent seriously hesitates ("breaks tempo") in a competitive auction, especially if they

then pass, you may call the director before that opponent's partner bids. The issue is, the pause told his partner that he had something to think about. The Director can explain to that partner that his choices are constrained by that knowledge. At the very least, seek agreement that there was a long hesitation right then. When in doubt, call immediately. This is not a big issue in newcomer games – we're all hesitating! But as you move on it will matter.

If you notice a revoke by the opponents, call the Director at the end of the hand. Say "Please leave your cards on the table, I think there was a revoke", as the last trick is played, and call the director. **DO NOT TURN OVER ANY QUITTED TRICKS.** When you see a revoke, just make a mental note of which trick, and which hand won the trick; do not interrupt play. For purposes of the ruling, the director needs to know if the revoking hand won that trick by trumping, or not. Extra credit for remembering that for him.

DUMMY cannot be the person who points out an irregularity or calls the director until the hand is over. Dummy can call the director after someone else points it out.

Do not call if you made the wrong bid and suddenly realize it. You're allowed to mess up, but you are not allowed to enlighten your partner about the mistake.

### 2.3.2 How should I call the director?

Raise your hand, keep it raised, and say "Director, please" in a normal tone. Don't forget the please. Other methods are not so good:

- Using the director's name can raise a concern that he's a friend of yours and won't be impartial.
- Using a loud voice similar to yelling "Fire" or "Stop Thief". The director's job is to deal with irregularities. Anger is inappropriate.
- Leaving the table and asking to speak to the director privately is not proper.

### 2.3.3 What do I tell the director?

The person who called should go first, stating **FIRST** the reason for the call: "Lead out of turn"; "Insufficient bid."; "I inadvertently used the wrong bid card". The director may ask for some context, like reviewing the bidding (it is harder than it looks to accurately look at all those cards on the table). The director may ask to speak to you or others in private. Otherwise, do not leave the table or ask to speak privately.

The director will give others at the table a chance to explain what they saw or said. Wait your turn to speak. The Director will not want to see your hand.

### 2.3.4 What if the director doesn't seem to believe me?

The director has instructions from the ACBL about being skeptical in certain common situations, or even instructions to not allow certain things. It may also be true that what you said is true but doesn't affect the ruling.

Directors do make errors; a polite question citing the law you think applies is o.k.; arguing a judgement call is rude. As in baseball: point out the umpire forgot the infield fly rule; don't argue a called strike.

## CLAIMING

One of the components of playing quickly is to claim once you are sure how many tricks you're going to make. There are, however, laws, ethics, and courtesies connected with it.

Lots of good players do not know those rules or think they know them but are wrong. Do not allow another player to make the decision. If someone tries to bully you into continuing, tell the Director that too.

### 3.1 Laws

To claim, you face your hand and state how many tricks you will take. State your line of play, that is, how the remaining cards will be played ("I'll draw the last trump, cross to the Ace of Diamonds and throw my Heart loser on the good Club.")

While anyone can make a claim at any time, I strongly recommend you only do it in these circumstances:

- You are declaring, not defending. Exception: you're in NT, you have all high cards and are taking the current trick.
- You have the lead in your hand or the dummy.
- Your opponents have no trump left.
- You have the statement of play in mind.
- You are utterly sure. It isn't going to save time if you're wrong.

The laws used to say that once someone made a claim, play stops. If someone said they didn't think the claim was right, you could not play it out. You had to call the Director. Now you can play it out if you wish and everyone agrees. However, although there will be some social pressure to the contrary, I recommend you do not agree if you are on defense. You've just told the Declarer he has a problem, which may enable him to succeed in getting around it.

If you think a claim is not valid, call the Director. The rules about evaluating claims are complicated.

### 3.2 Ethics

You cannot claim a trick you won't win, but you also cannot claim too few tricks. Everyone should cooperate on getting it right, since in duplicate your score affects everyone in the game, not just your table.

### 3.3 Courtesies

When you make a claim, try to make one that is not too complicated for the other pair's skill level. You can play a few more cards before you claim in order to make it obvious.

If the opponents do not understand your claim, say it again more slowly and above all do not act annoyed. If they still don't get it, call the Director, and say, "Let me call the Director so we can be sure I am not making a mistake."

As a newcomer, this caution is more directed toward the experienced players who are playing against you, and you may well have occasion to feel insulted by their impatience. That's on them. A *really* good player knows better. The ACBL policy of Zero Tolerance includes no tolerance for intimidation. Call the Director for repeat offenders. The first time, just say, "Sorry, I'm a newbie, I don't get it."

If you claim with a trump out and don't mention it or how you intend to pull it, there is no automatic penalty and you must let the Director decide, but you're in danger of losing a trick or more.



## WHICH SUIT TO BID

When choosing a suit to bid, these are [almost] the rules. More about the [almost] below.

First, make sure you do not have 15-17 points (or 20-21) and a balanced hand (shape 4333, 4432, or 5322). In that case bid no-trump. With 18-19 balanced, open a suit (using the rules below) then jump in notrump. E.g., 1♦ - 1♠ - 2N.

While you can evaluate hand strength using any of the methods outlined in *Bidding Notes*, you should subtract a point for a 4333 shape, and subtract a point for no Aces when considering a marginal notrump opener.

If you have one suit longer than the others, and it is five or more cards long, bid it.

If you have two suits of the same length and that length is five or more, bid the highest ranking one. For example, 5 spades and 5 hearts, bid the spades.

With no five-card suit, see below.

### 4.1 Opening With No Five-Card Suit

Without a five-card suit or the right hand for opening notrump:

- When you are exactly 4=4=3=2 (spades, hearts, diamonds, clubs) then open a diamond.
- When you are exactly 4=4=2=3 or (43)=3=3, open a club.
- With a 4441 hand, open a diamond, or if that's the singleton, a club.
- There is a big controversy about what to open when you have four diamonds and five clubs and not enough to reverse. If you open 1♣ and

your partner bids a major, a bid of 2♦ needs at least 16 points. So you are going to have to rebid 2♣. While you are a 99er, I recommend opening a diamond unless your clubs are great and you would be willing to rebid 2♣. See *Lying About Your Shape* (page 7) for further discussion. There is a section in my "Bidding Notes" explaining reverses. You do play reverses. Do not submit to partners who say, "I don't do reverses yet." There is no point in learning everything incorrectly.

That said, reverse auctions are very difficult even for experienced players. That's why I recommend playing this way for now, and then switching to opening 1♣ when you have more experience. You will hear good players say they don't open a diamond usually because they "do not want to distort the shape of my hand". When you really understand why they feel that way, it is time to switch.

- Opening 1♣ with a 4=4=3=2 distribution is called the "short club". Do not use this agreement; it is mathematically unsound. The argument for a short club is that 1♦ openings then promise four diamonds, but they do that 95% of the time anyway. When partner opens 1♦, assume four.

### 4.2 Why Opening Marginal Hands Can Be Marginal

Modern theory and practice has led to weaker and weaker openings. Charles Goren is probably spinning in his grave. He wanted 13 HCP and two quick-tricks! But the down side is that bidding yourself makes it easier for your opponents to bid.

If you open a sketchy 1♦, for example, the next player can overcall 1♥ or 1♠ with a mere 8 HCP. He would have needed 12 HCP otherwise to bid. You may have enabled your opponents to find their major fit.

If your suit is spades, they'd still need a near-opener to bid at the 2-level, so you aren't giving them so much.

Therefore, the lower-ranking your suit is, the less anxious you should be to open it. While I'm all for sub-par one-level openings in 3rd and 4th seat, it has to be a major.

## LIE ABOUT YOUR SHAPE?

Suppose you pick up a hand like this:

♠J9732 ♥A7 ♦4 ♣AKJT3

You definitely want to open this hand, with its 13 HCP and two five-card suits.

But, one of those suits is much better than the other. Should you open 1♣? You know the rule is that with two five card suits you open the higher-ranked one, but with this big a difference, should you lie?

You have three choices with this hand. You can open 1♠; you can open 1♦; or you can open 1♣. It isn't how good, it is how many.

Suppose we make the hand better so that it is good enough to reverse, by adding the ♥K or ♦A. Should we lie now?

Answer: no.

The problem is, once you open 1♣, if you later bid 1♠, your partner will never understand that you have five spades. Best case, you get a chance to bid spades twice, which will convince partner you have SIX clubs and five spades. Lying about your shape is a bad idea.

The danger is real, too. With our original hand, after 1♣ partner may answer 1N, even though he has three spades. You have no decent second bid and will have to bid 2♣, losing your spade fit, or lie again by bidding 1N without a balanced hand, in which case that whistling sound will be a diamond lead blowing through your dummy.

The one case where a case can be made for lying is a 12-15 point opener with four diamonds and five clubs, such as:

♠K84 ♥5 ♦KQ54 ♣AQ985 or  
♠K8 ♥95 ♦KQ54 ♣AQ985

If you open 1♣ there is a high chance that partner will bid a major or 1N and you will be unable to mention your diamonds because to do so is a reverse. You don't have enough points to reverse. And in the hand with a singleton, you can't bid 1N even if you somehow convinced yourself it is a good idea. You'll have to bid 2♣ with just five of them.

Some players will open that hand with 1♦ so they can bid 2♣ next if necessary. The lie is not extreme, either, as you would open 1♦ with a (23)44 hand as well, so partner will not assume you have five diamonds for sure.

Many experts say they won't lie about their shape even in that case. Your call. You can also do both, choosing the better suit. As mentioned previously, I recommend opening 1♣ when you have enough experience and your partner has discussed it with you.

## COMMON BIDDING MISTAKES

Here are four of the most common bidding mistakes.

### 6.1 Not Getting To Game When You Should

Partner opens one of a major and you have 13 or more points. You need to make sure the auction ends in game. To that end, you must never make a bid partner can pass until you get there. It's that simple. Whenever you bid a new suit as an unpassed responder, it is forcing. No-trump isn't.

What do we mean by "game"? Your goal is 3N or 4 of a major. Your goal is not five of a minor, although sometimes fate will dictate stopping at four or five of the minor.

A reason to go past 3N when you have a minor suit fit is either that you are POSITIVE (not merely fearful) that they have a suit we can't stop, or that you have strong interest in a minor suit slam. If you go past a making 3N out of fear and end up stopping in five of a minor, you'll get a bad score at matchpoints.

So, for example, suppose you have a game forcing hand and your partner opens 1♥, you bid 2♣ and he rebids 2♦. If you can't support hearts or diamonds, the issue is, do you have a spade stopper? If you do, you cannot bid 2N — partner could pass. You must jump to 3N. If you do not, you can't say, "These are really good clubs" by bidding 3♣. That's just an invitational bid and partner could pass.

Fourth suit forcing (2♠! here) forces to game, but implies you do NOT have the spade stopper. If you did, you'd just bid 3N, in most cases. An exception might be an extremely distributional hand.

Some 99ers do not want to play fourth suit forcing out of fear of not recognizing it. But you really

must. If you are not playing it you are in a bit of a fix with no stopper. Opener might have four spades (4=5=3=1 or 4=5=4=0 say). So if you bid 2♠ with less than four spades, you may find yourself in four spades.

### 6.2 Getting to Game The Wrong Way

Partner opens one of a major and you have 13 or more points AND you have 3 of partner's suit. You must not immediately bid four of his major. You think that's where we are going but maybe he has a big hand, or a void or something juicy, and there is now slam potential, but we're too high to talk about it. Solution: bid a new suit, a 3-card minor if you have to, and then show support on the next bid. You won't miss so many slams that way.

### 6.3 Bidding The Same Values Twice

You open a Heart, and this is the auction:

1♥ - (1♠) - 2♥ - (2♠)

It's your turn. Do you bid 3♥?

Answer: only if you have something significant to tell your partner about YOUR hand that you haven't already told her. You've promised five hearts and 12-13 points or more. Do you have more?

How much extra above the 12-13 HCP you already promised would you need to conclude that you had not told your story? The three level takes about 23 points between you, so subtracting the six you've been promised, you'll need about 17 to be sure. Extra

trump or shortness counts — you might enjoy reading about hand evaluation in my Bidding Notes.

It is partner's job to bid 3♥ if they have significantly more than the 3 trump and 8-10 points she has promised so far (counting distribution). A fourth trump alone is enough to make it relatively safe. At matchpoints, letting them play two of a major they agree on is usually a bad idea. Still, as opener you have done your job by passing — your partner makes the decision with pretty accurate information, knowing you don't have extras.

## 6.4 Saving Misfits

They deal and open 1♣, and your partner makes a weak jump overcall, say 2♥. She has a weak hand and six hearts. You look at your hand and of course you see that you have only one heart and ten points. You have six Spades. They aren't fabulous, but you do have six of them. Should you bid 2 Spades and hope to "save" partner?

No: Your side has less than twenty total points and you're in over your heads. Don't make it worse by groping in the dark for a better suit and ending higher.

Something often forgotten is that a new suit by responder is forcing. If partner opens 2♥ then if you bid 2♠ immediately it is forcing. Prepare to hear 3♥!

If you pass, and they double, then you can consider bidding your six spades if it passes around to you.

## OVERCALLS

Contract Law is one of the most important creations of our civilization. Contract Bridge centers about the contract in which a declarer promises to take a certain number of tricks in return for being able to name the trump suit. But in fact, the game is one giant series of contracts between partners when played correctly.

What goes into making a contract, in general? The key point is that it is an agreement between two parties with this special property:

- Both sides have benefits
- Both sides have responsibilities

If you have responsibilities but no benefits you're a slave. If you have benefits but no responsibilities you are receiving a gift.

Say I overcall a suit at the one level, not vulnerable. I promise my partner 8-16 points and a decent suit (Qxxxx or better). (If vulnerable, a better suit is desired.)

My responsibility to my partner is to have my bid as promised. Since we are a team we have a shared benefit:

- Partner will know when it is safe to raise me or to compete.
- Partner will know what suit to lead if he ends up on lead.

Partner's responsibility is to act accordingly.

Suppose my RHO opens a club, and I bid a heart with 9 points, and five hearts to the Jack.

I'm not keeping my promise to have a Queen or better, and while I might get away with a hedge on that part if I had a near max on points, I am essentially minimal.

If my partner ends up on lead he'll lead my suit. Meanwhile, the natural lead he would have made if I had just shut up doesn't get made, and Declarer probably gets an extra trick in hearts.

Or, on another day, it gets passed around and the opener reopens with a double. His partner with AKQxx in hearts leaves it in. Chalk up a bottom. Or, the auction gets competitive and my partner raises, thinking that his four little hearts are a big asset. They double and we lose three heart tricks off the top on our way to the basement again.

One of the problems with learning bridge is that against beginners you will not get doubled for penalty enough. You will note the disruptive joy of making an overcall and start making them on garbage hands. When you get into this habit, you'll soon be off to the school of hard knocks as you play against better players.

When you made an overcall, you were taking a risk. The benefit was partly to get the suit led when partner gets on lead. If your partner forgets the auction and just leads what looks good in his hand, that risk was for nothing. He doesn't have to lead your suit, but he has to remember that you have it.

The other problem that arises if you do not have your bids, partner will misinterpret the play early on. He puts good cards in a suit in your hand, and that limits what he expects elsewhere.

## LISTENING TO THE BIDDING

The bidding speaks to you. Be sure to listen. Listen to what happened and what did not happen.

Suppose the auction begins with you opening a diamond, and partner bidding a spade:

1♦ – 1♠

What do we know after 1♠?

- Partner has at least four Spades.
- If Partner has four or more Hearts, he has more Spades than Hearts. If he had four of each, he would have bid 1♥.
- Partner has a good five to six or more points.
- You, the opener, have three (more probably 4 or more) diamonds and 12-21 HCP. (You didn't open 2♣).

If you (Opener) also have four Spades, we have an eight-card or greater fit. You can revalue your hand and raise Spades immediately by an appropriate amount:

- Bid 2♠, with an ordinary opener; or
- Bid 3♠ if 16-18, or
- Bid 4♠ if 19+.

We raise to 2♠ even with 12 points because partner's hand could get bigger once a fit is established, so that 6-9 could turn into 12-14. We have to give Partner a chance to revalue, too. **DO NOT BE CHEAP.** Besides, it keeps them out of the auction.

If you can't raise Spades it is possible partner has five or more so you should not yet conclude that we don't have a fit if you have three of them. What do you do in the meantime? Let's assume you do not have a big hand, just 12-14 points.

- If you have a singleton or a void, you cannot bid 1N. This is a big point: when responder bids 1N over your opener, it says they don't have a four-card suit above your opening bid but does not promise a balanced shape. When you REBID 1N, it does promise a balanced shape.

That matters: for example, if responder had SIX spades, over your 1N rebid he knows he has at least a 6-2 fit. He can revalue.

- If not balanced, bid your second suit, if you can, or repeat the diamonds. You need about 16 points to bid hearts (a reverse, see *Bidding Notes*). You can't jump shift into your second suit without a good 18 HCP. Let's assume you don't.

Assume we've started 1♦ - 1♠ - 2♦. If Partner bids 2♠ next, it shows five or more Spades and a minimum 6-9 point hand. This bid is what we call "drop dead" – the opener should pass. With only four Spades and a minimum, Partner can pass or make a suit preference back to diamonds.

So now assume Partner is invitational or better and we've bid 1♦ – 1♠ – 1N. If Partner had six Spades and they were pretty good ones, Partner could declare spades trump by bidding 3 Spades (invitational) or 4 Spades (game). But with just five, what to do?

The answer is, bid a new suit. A new suit by an unpassed responder is 100% forcing. Opener must never, never, ever pass it. If Partner bids 2N it shows a balanced invitational hand and that can be passed, which is ok if that is what they have. With four Diamonds it would be ok to raise Diamonds, and if with four Hearts we can show Hearts, and otherwise it would have to be 2 Clubs or 2N and none of those promises five Spades.

So, is there a way for Partner to show five Spades? Sadly, no, not if we stick to natural bids. So most players will early-on want to learn New Minor Forcing (NMF). Many conventions are not really worth learning, but New Minor Forcing is essential.

With NMF, 2♣ (alert!) becomes a purely artificial bid telling opener that responder has invitational or better values, and either five Spades or four Hearts or both. It doesn't promise Clubs although sometimes that's the case. Things work in a similar way when Responder has bid 1 Heart rather than One Spade, but opener would bid 1S if they had four spades.

We heard a lot when we listened, didn't we?



## HELP-SUIT GAME TRIES

Suppose you open a heart, and partner raises you to two hearts. We now know partner has at least 3 hearts, and 6-9 or a bad ten points.

First, we re-evaluate our hand. Now we can count shortness. We can add for extra trump length. Methods of evaluating hands vary, but whichever method you use, now's the time to remember to use it!

**“When you find a fit, stop and smell the roses.”**  
– Mike Moss, my teacher

Having stopped to revalue our hand, we know if bidding 4♥ is possible or not depending on partner's hand. It takes roughly 25-26 points for a major game. So:

- Subtract the six partner has for sure, and we see that we need around 19 to bid game.
- If partner has 8-9 points, or even a bad 10, then we might need only 16-17 points.
- If partner has less than that, we probably don't have a game.

It is hard to be strict about this, since many things matter: do you have lots of 9s and 10s? are your honors together or scattered? are your points where they will help set up tricks or are they in a short suit? Perhaps you can use an advanced technique, Losing Trick Count, to get a clue.

So, we might know the answer is yes, I can bid game, or we might know it is no, I cannot. But what if the answer is “Maybe?” For example, you hold:

♠A3 ♥AKJ54 ♦432 ♣KT9

You're up to 16 declarer points, but those three small diamonds are a big worry. If partner has three small diamonds too, that could be three losers off the top, making the heart game quite a problem. We need to ask partner for help in making the decision.

Answer: bid 3♦. This is called a help-suit game try. Diamonds are the “help-suit”. You usually have at least three of this suit, but they don't all have to be small cards.

### 9.1 Answering The Try

Help is defined as having the Ace, the King, a singleton, a void, or five cards in the help-suit.

Your partner should answer your question as follows:

- With a minimum, do not bid game. Stop at the three-level.
- With a maximum, bid game, even with no help in the help-suit.
- Otherwise, bid game if you have help in the help-suit.

In a different situation it is also ok to bid a suit between the “help-suit” and trump. This means, “Partner, I don't have a maximum and I don't have a minimum and I can't help you in your Help-Suit, but I could help you in this other suit.”

For example, you have raised 1♠ to 2♠ and partner makes a help suit try with 3♣. You can bid 3♥ to say, I can't help you in Clubs, but we might have a game if help in Hearts is useful to you. We're still below 3♠ so opener can stop.

Note that some people also extend help-suit game tries to trump itself: raising responder to 3♥ says, partner, we might have game, but my trumps are poor. Can you help me there?

## MISFITS AND RESCUING

At the risk of being offensive to devout people, let me suggest a motto:

Only Jesus Saves

Saving partner is not your job unless you can do it safely.

Your partner opens a Spade, and you don't have any. You open a diamond, partner says a spade, and your shape is 1=4=5=3. Partner opens 2 Diamonds, and you're looking at a void. What to do?

Ask yourself these questions:

- **“How many points do we have for sure?”**  
The answer will determine if you should try for game or not. If there is no prospect of a game, your goal is to find a place to stop.
- What do my various bid choices mean? Which ones are forcing?

### 10.1 Partner Bids Your Void

Partner opens a spade, and you don't have any. How many points do we have?

- If you have less than six, Pass. That's the right bid. Don't worry that partner is going to be stuck there. Either he has a big hand and / or the opponents will bid.

If you make any normal bid, it is forcing.

If you have agreed on weak jump shifts, and have 4 or 5 points in a good six card major, you might be able to bid over a minor opener, but not over 1♠. A cheap drop-dead bid at the two level is the most you could venture.

- If you have six or more points, you must bid. But unless you have ten points or more your only choice is 1N. Over a major that may be forcing, if you are playing 2/1. Remember, a response of 1N does not promise a balanced or semi-balanced hand. (A rebid of 1N by the opener does!). The 1N bid is there precisely to say, 6 to a bad 10 HCP, no fit for your suit, no higher suit at the one level.

### 10.2 Misfit

The auction begins with your bid of one diamond, partner says one spade. You have a 1=4=5=3 shape with 13 HCP:

♠4 ♥KQ32 ♦AK965 ♣J72

Game is possible. But we can't bid 2♥ because that would show 16 HCP+ (it is a reverse). We cannot rebid 1N because that promises a balanced hand.

Should we lie about that? It is dangerous. If your partner has six Spades, for example, and 12 points, you may well hear a 4♠ bid. Partner thinks we have an 8-card Spade fit so is entitled to revalue his hand. It might take a miracle to make it.

So, since we cannot lie to partner about our points or shape, we can choose between 2♣ or 2♦. Partner should be aware that your Club bid could be only 3 cards and with a weakish hand bid 2♦ if his diamonds are better than his clubs. That's called “correcting” and you will Pass. The 2♣ bid confirms four diamonds at least. (You could be 1=4=4=4).

## 10.3 Void Opposite A Preempt

Partner opens 2♦. You have a minimal opening hand but no diamonds.

Do not try to rescue him! He's got six of them; he'll live. Any bid you make except 3♦ is forcing. If you force him, and partner has nothing else to say, he will answer 3♦; you will be sad.

If I have one or two cards in partner's suit, I use the rule of 17: add how many HCP you have and how many of partner's suit together, and if it is 17 or more you might have a 3N game.

You'll need the other 3 suits well stopped, of course. But the main problem is that with zero or one in partner's suit, you may not be able to get to his winners. That is one reason the "feature-asking" 2N reply is popular. You can find out if the preempting hand has an outside entry.

## 10.4 They Double Us

Usually, their double is for takeout. Should the partner of the doubler pass, however, we know the reason: there is a bad trump split. Should we rescue now?

If the double was from the fourth seat after you passed your partner's opener, and two passes takes the auction back to you, something has changed: your bids are no longer forcing or telling partner a lie about your points. So if you had a good suit you could consider bidding it. But you have no assurance that partner has any more of your suit than you do of his.

If the double was from the direct seat, the opener can redouble to ask you for a rescue. The old meaning of redouble was to redouble the stakes in a money game. In duplicate, if you can make the doubled game you are already going to get a good score, so the vast majority of the time, a "redouble is for rescue".

When asked for a rescue, if you don't have a good suit, bid your cheapest four-card suit. Your partner may crawl up if that is bad for him. Both of you are

anxious to pass. Maybe it is only a 4-2 fit, but that's likely better than a 6-0 fit with 5-2 against you.

## 10.5 Notrump Is Not The Answer

If you find yourself in a misfit, it is not a reason to bid notrump. Notrump bids need more HCP than suit bids, and misfits guarantee communication problems compared to suit bids. A bad fit is not the end of the world.

## 10.6 Avoid Trump Avoidance

When you do have to play in a bad fit, be sure to beware of what my teacher calls, "Trump Avoidance". Trump Avoidance is not playing the trump suit because yours is awful. If you can get in a ruff in the short hand, great, otherwise it is important to draw trump because you'll be pulling two of theirs for every one of yours. If they get a cross-ruff going with all those trump they have, that's when you go down four or five.

One way to make do is to discover that you did have a side suit after all. If you can play winners in that suit after drawing some trump, you may be able to force them to ruff a time or two until you do have more trump left than they do and are back in control.

## DROP DEAD, PARTNER

It is vitally important to learn when bids are forcing. It is also important to learn when a bid virtually forces partner to pass. Such a bid is called a “drop dead” bid.

Even after you make a discouraging reply to your partner’s opening, they may bid again because they have a big hand. Opener may bid a second suit, for example. It is a weakness of the standard system that after two suit bids, the point range of the opener is very wide, up to 21 points, in auctions such as:

1♦ - 1♥ - 2♣

1♠ - 1N - 2♣

1♣ - 1♥ - 1N

What can a responder with a minimum hand do to stop this train before it leaves the realm of reasonable contracts? The answer is to place the contract with a “drop dead” bid.

Having support for the first suit and a minimum hand, you would have given a minimum raise. But suppose you don’t like the second suit but have 2 cards in the first suit. You can rebid 2 of that suit. For example, 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♦ - 2♥. That is called a suit preference and it tells partner to pass. The opener did not have enough to jump to 3♦, so doesn’t have 19 HCP. We just want off this bus.

Having 3 or more of the second suit but a dead minimum, you can pass. That is a very effective drop dead bid! However, be careful about passing if you have a real raise with four cards in a major suit, such as 1♠ - 1N - 2♥ when you have four hearts. Partner cannot revalue his hand until he knows about the fit.

If you bid a five-card or longer suit the first time, in a context that only showed four cards, you can bid

it again to suggest a drop dead. The opener did not raise you, so he does not have four of your suit. In a lot of cases partner might even raise you with just three of them if he has an outside singleton.

Yet, playing in your suit may be right. In some ways it is the same scenario as when partner opened 1N and you would transfer to your major and pass with a bad hand. You’re putting the contract in your suit because your hand is worthless unless that is the trump suit.

An example is 1♦ - 1♥ - 1N - 2♥, or 1♣ - 1♥ - 1♠ - 2♥. When he sees a bid like that, an alarm bell should go off in opener’s brain. He already told his partner he does not like hearts; in the second case might even have something like six clubs and four spades and hence not many hearts at all. Yet partner insists on repeating his suit and he is not jumping and not using a forcing bid. Time to pass.

An opener who is asked to pass can disobey with some unrevealed power but is on notice about the situation.

## ESP, OR THE RULE OF SEVEN

ESP stands for “Expect Seven Points”. It is a great guideline to help you decide what to do, or what to expect from partner, in the face of an opponent’s preemptive 2- or 3-level bid.

Mike Lawrence explains this principle in his article, “Bidding Over Preempts”. You may be able to find this article in pamphlet form or online at [fifthchair.org](http://fifthchair.org). Since it is out of print, we summarize it here.

Your LHO opens 2♦, and your partner bids 2♥. RHO passes. Your partner should have a good opening hand (not a minimum) and of course at least five hearts. When he makes this bid, he should expect that you have about seven points, ESP.

Lawrence gives these three hands to consider:

1. ♠Q8763 ♥62 ♦Q72 ♣T94
2. ♠873 ♥J43 ♦J3 ♣KQ763
3. ♠A7543 ♥T94 ♦A7 ♣JT4

Hand 1 has less than the seven points partner expected.

Hand 2 is about what partner expected. Hand 3 has more than partner expected, nine points plus support, so you can add a point for the doubleton to get 10 points.

The Rule of Seven says that you should base your bidding on whether you meet or exceed the expectation that you’ll have seven points.

With #1 you should pass. You’re under expectation. Just hope your partner has extras or the opponents enter the auction.

With #2 you should also pass, but you can expect 2♥ ought to make.

With #3 you should raise to 3♥. If partner is at the top of his bid you have enough for game, and if not you should still be in the “around 23 points” safe zone for the three level.

ESP also works the other way, helping you decide about making an overcall or takeout double.

Suppose your RHO opens 2♥ and you have:

♠KT84 ♥83 ♦AJ8 ♣AQ98

You have a 14 points. If partner has seven you can feel reasonably safe in 2♠, 3♣, or 3♦. You cannot bid 2N without good heart stoppers, and you can’t bid a suit, but you do have the right shape to make a takeout double.

Suppose we change the hand to take away one of the spades and add a diamond. Should you still double? Lawrence says, yes:

“Look at the good things that can happen. Your partner may have a five card Spade suit. He may have four good ones. He may bid Clubs, Diamonds, or Notrump. Perhaps if the opponents compete, your partner can double them.

At the least, your side may be able to push them one trick too high. Look for reasons to bid, not reasons to pass.”

## KNOW THE WHOLE CONVENTION

In *Bidding Notes*, I introduce a large number of conventions, but first I mention that learning too many conventions too soon is a bad idea. Here, I'd like emphasize that you should not agree to play just part of a convention, or say that you do play it when there are parts of it you're not sure about. What follows are some examples.

### 13.1 Secret Annex To The Minor Relay

The Minor Relay goes like this: Over 1N, bid 2♠! to show a SIX card or longer minor and a hand not good enough for game. Opener must reply 3♣!, and you then either pass or bid 3♦, which partner must pass. This is one of the first conventions you learned after Stayman and Jacoby transfers. But did you really learn it?

---

**Note:** 2♠! is alerted; you don't say transfer. A transfer is a bid that promises a definite suit, while a relay promises SOME suit, or even just asks a question.

---

You probably have some agreement about how to show such a suit with an invitational hand. With a game-going hand you have to do something stronger, such as bidding 3N or doing Stayman and then 3 of your minor. Agreements about these things vary. The standard is that just bidding 3 of the minor is invitational, but Stayman first makes it game forcing.

But what about a really good hand, like this one:

♠2 ♥KQ ♦T84 ♣AQJT742

When partner opens 1N, a club slam is a real possibility. We have probably six or seven tricks in clubs

alone, and partner must have at least 12 points in the other 3 suits. However, we are nowhere near the 33 HCP we'd want for 6N. If there is a slam here, 6♣ is the place to be.

You should not go beyond 3N unless you think a slam is a good possibility. 5♣ will probably score badly. Here 6♣ clearly is possible.

So what do you do over 1N? These bids won't do:

- 3♣? Nope, that is invitational and can be passed.
- 4♣? Nope, that's Gerber.
- 5♣? Nope, that's to play.
- 4N? Nope, that's quantitative.

What we need is to know the rest of the convention. After the relay, and opener bids 3♣!(forced):

- 3♥! is a slam try in clubs.
- 3♠! is a slam try in diamonds.

Surprising but logical! If you really had 5 hearts or spades, you would have transferred to them first; and if you had 4 of them you would have used Stayman first. So these bids must be artificial, and we correspond the lower one (hearts) to the lower minor (clubs) and the higher one (spades) to diamonds.

Opener can bid 3N or 4♣ or 6♣, or show a suit for example. 4♣ would express interest in the slam but concern about Aces; responder should cue-bid. Then we can stop at 5♣ if missing one we need. For example, with ♠AKJ5 ♥A986 ♦87 ♣K96, we could find out if responder had A♦.

## 13.2 Asking For The Queen

You've learned Roman Keycard Blackwood. You ask partner for Aces, and partner replies with one of the minor suits, showing either zero or three keycards, or one or four keycards. You may find that you have a slam if partner has the trump Queen. Or perhaps you're even looking for a Grand Slam in that case. Unfortunately, only a holding of two keycards gives partner the chance to affirm or deny the trump Queen.

Did you learn the whole convention? Such as how to answer with a useful void, or how to ask for the Queen?

Here's a deal from a club game where I had a chance to use the Queen Ask. I held:

♠AKJ83 ♥KQ ♦A ♣AKQ63

26 HCP! I started 2♣ of course. My partner bid 2♦ waiting, and I rebid 2♠, and my partner raised me to 3♠. Partner probably has extras or he would have just bid 4♠. Do we have slam? Or maybe we have a Grand? Maybe we can find out about the Heart Ace and the trump Queen.

First step: I *cue bid* (page 25) 4♣ to show the Ace of Clubs. I know partner won't be able to cue-bid the Ace of Diamonds but maybe he shows the Ace of Hearts.

4♥ hits the table! We have an 8 card fit so the Queen of Spades is a big concern.

Here's an odd twist: you can ask for keycards **EVEN THOUGH YOU ALREADY KNOW THE ANSWER!** Doing this is useful when you plan to ask for Kings, too.

We're playing 1430 so my 4N gets the expected 5♣, which I already know is the heart Ace.

Now I ask for the Queen: I bid up one step, 5♦ here. (You can't ask for the Queen if the next step up is trump, such as after a 5♦ response when Hearts are trump.) That says, partner, do you have the trump Queen? And your partner answers as follows:

- 5 trump — no Queen, sorry. You can pass or bid 6, depending on the situation, but never 7.

- 6 of a suit below trump: yes, and I also have this King, which is my lowest King below 6 trump.
- 6 trump — yes, Queen, but no additional kings below trump.

A funny case: your partner can say "yes" even though the real answer is "no" if he is positive you have a ten card fit between you, such as when you open and he had five card support. Chances are pretty good of a drop or a marked finesse.

In this case, partner bid 6♠, yes I have it, and I bid 7♠ with some confidence. Only two of the club's 10 pairs that day bid 7♠. The other successful bidder confirmed, "Yes, the Queen Ask. Wasn't that great?"

## 13.3 Handling Interference After a Major Transfer

I was watching an expert game and saw this auction:

1N - (P) - 2♦(transfer) - (X)

2♥ - (P) - 4N

Is that 4N bid Ace-asking, or is it quantitative, asking for 6N if opener is at a maximum?

First we should clarify that without the double, 4N is 100% quantitative. No suit has been agreed upon. The opener might have only two hearts.

What does the double mean, anyway? It is called a "lead-directing" double. The person in fourth seat wants a diamond lead, assuming the 1N bidder ends up as declarer.

You'll also see a double of 2♣ Stayman asking for a club lead, or the double of an artificial reply to an Ace-asking bid. These are part of a general rule.

---

**Note:** A double of any artificial bid is lead-directing.

---

What should the opener do after the double? Here are the choices:

- Pass with only two hearts.
- Accept with 2♥ the transfer with three or more hearts.
- Redouble with a penalty holding in diamonds (five good ones, because responder might not have any points or any diamonds). This is rare.

Hence, in the expert auction I saw, 4N was Ace-asking with Hearts as trump. By completing the transfer, opener has confirmed holding 3 or more hearts, and hearts is agreed as trump. The lead-directing double helped the defense communicate, but it also game the offense more ways to communicate.

You might wonder what happens if the double is passed back to the responder:

1N - (P) - 2♦ - (X)  
Pass - Pass - ?

There are these choices:

- Responder redoubles asking opener to complete the transfer anyway, if he has either a six card suit or a weak hand.
- Responder can bid the transfer suit again to show game values, exactly five hearts, and asking for a bid of 3N if opener has a diamond stopper.
- Any other bid is natural, describing hand shape, and not a weak hand.

## 13.4 Stayman Has Several Parts

Here is a quiz: You open 1N, and partner bids 2♣. What do you know about his hand?

Here is one possible answer: invitational or better, has a four-card major, but not a five-card major.

The buzzer goes off! Wrong!

Uh, ok, that no five-card major part isn't right. If partner is 5-4 in the majors and weak, yes, he would

transfer; but if he is invitational or better, he will do Stayman first.

OK, let's change our answer: invitational or better, has a four-card major.

Darn, there goes that buzzer again. Wrong!

Partner might have this hand: ♠8732 ♥8732 ♦9873 ♣2

Whatever answer you make, partner plans to pass. Stayman promises nothing about points. If partner bids a second time, then yes, he's invitational or better.

Let's try again: partner has a four-card major.

The buzzer isn't quite so loud this time, but yes, there is a case where even this is wrong. Suppose your partner has a game-forcing but not slam-going hand dominated by a six- or seven-card diamond suit, but no four-card major. Using standard methods, 3♦ is invitational, and partner cannot stand the idea that you might pass.

A solution is to do Stayman and then bid 3♦. That's game forcing. A bid of 3♣ can be used in the same way for clubs.

This awkward case is one of the reasons people use Four Way Transfers instead of the Minor Relay. Another way out is just to blast out 3N and hope you don't have an open major. They should always try to lead a major after a 1N - 3N auction, so having some help in the majors is important, even if not full stoppers.



## WHEN NOT TO ASK FOR ACES / KEYCARDS

Blackwood, or its more sophisticated cousin Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKC), is frequently overused. It is a tool to keep us out of BAD slams, not a tool that discovers slams for us. Here is when NOT to explore for slam at all:

- You do not have enough points. If you do not think we have 33 or more points, the only reason to explore for slam is if you have a highly distributional hand and have found a suit fit. If you have an affirmative misfit even 33 HCP may not be enough for 6N; you need a source of tricks.
- If you'd need the "perfect" cards in partner's hand.
- You only have an 8 card fit but no overwhelming HCP strength.

Specifically, here are two cases in which not to ask for Aces / keycards using Blackwood or RKC:

1. If the "wrong" answer will leave you too high. This is OFTEN the case in the minor suits — think of the possible answers one at a time, and ascertain you're going to be safe with each one.

If you usually play RKC 1430, you'll need to switch to 0314 when clubs is trump. We cannot stand having the answer "zero" be too high!

2. You hold a side suit with two "fast" losers, such as a small doubleton, you usually can't use RKC. "Fast" means the opponents can win two tricks in that suit on the opening lead unless partner has the right cards.

The problem is, you're needing a certain Ace, not just the number of Aces. For example, you open 1♥ and partner bids 3♥ (limit raise or

better). You hold:

♠62 ♥AKQJT ♦AKQJT ♣8

The hand evaluates to at least 24 declarer points so with 10+ from partner we're golden. But notice the two little spades. If you bid 4N and partner shows one Ace, you don't know which one. If it is ♠A, you have a good chance for slam. If it is the ♣A, however, slam might be down one off the top. For example, partner might hold:

♠QJ5 ♥8765 ♦94 ♣AQJ5.

See *Bidding Controls* (page 25) for the cure.

## SLAM BIDDING: EXAMPLES

This chapter puts together a lot of material and might be best read again over time as you learn. It concerns two actual deals; I'll show just two hands.

### 15.1 Hand 1

Both vulnerable, East Dealer.

North (15)	South (14)
♠ AJ543	♠ Q6
♥ KQT9	♥ A87652
♦ J63	♦ A7
♣ A	♣ KJ2

This makes 7♥ if the spade finesse works and spades split no worse than 4-2, which was the case. The fifth spade can be used to discard South's diamond loser. Otherwise it makes six. One should not spend a moment's thought about whether NS should have found a way to bid 7♥. There is no long-term percentage in bidding grand slams when you cannot really be confident of 13 tricks, much less hands with less than 30 points between them.

When the other side competes strongly and we have a stiff or void in their suit, so that all our points come from the other three suits, you get in a situation called a "thirty point deck". In that case, miracles sometimes happen. If we have almost all the points that matter, we may take all the tricks. It is good to aware of this idea, that it is best if we have no "wasted values", whether for slam or game bidding.

That is why it is a good thing when you have four little cards in a suit they have bid and raised. Our partner has a stiff or void, and is more likely to have extra trump length, than otherwise, leaving us with no wasted values. Three little cards, on the other hand,

is not good. It may mean we have two losers in that suit.

Now to our sample hand. East passes, and after South opens 1♥, the North hand re-evaluates to about 17-18 points. The value of the A♣ is unclear, since the Ace may not be contributing to setting up any long tricks, but at least it promises no club losers. Using Losing Trick Count, the LTC is 6. That is not as thrilling as 18 points sounds. The problem, of course, is those three diamond losers. Certainly we have game and must be careful not to make a bid that can be passed. The question is, how do we look for a slam without going too high?

#### 15.1.1 Without Jacoby 2N

Those who do not play Jacoby 2N will have to settle for a 1♠ reply, and South will bid 2♥. The problem now will be that 3♥ is not forcing, and 4♥ will lose any chance for slam exploration. 4N is out of the question: if the answer would be one key-card, we would not know if that was the Ace of Diamonds or the Ace of Hearts. We could even be down at 5♥.

1♥ - 4♣! would be a "splinter" in support of hearts, showing zero or one clubs. South can cue bid 4♦ to show the diamond Ace (or void), and thus alleviated of the fast-loser problem in diamonds, 4N can now be used to learn that South has both missing key-cards. The bid 5♥ shows those two Aces and denies the heart Queen, but North knows about that.

It is good technique to ask for Kings to show South that our side has all the key-cards, but when South shows just one King it seems best to stop at 6♥.

Note that without 2N being a forcing raise, things are very awkward, as you cannot show promptly that you have support.

Another alternative is to jump-shift to 2♠. That shows 19 HCP and five spades. This hand is not quite enough for it. Opener might bid 2N or 3♥.

### 15.1.2 With Jacoby 2N

The normal second bid for North is 2N!, Jacoby 2NT (J2NT), showing 13+ HCP and a four-card raise. This is game forcing.

If opener has a purely minimal hand, he bids 4 of the major, in this case 4♥. Otherwise, with something extra (say a King's worth or so):

- If opener has a singleton or a void then he usually bids that suit at the three level.
- If however he has another good five-card suit he bids that at the four level. The second five-card suit means he also has shortness somewhere, so the decision is based on how good the second suit is.
- With no shortness but with extras, opener chooses between 3♥ (if the trump suit is good) or 3N! (balanced or semi-balanced, not minimal). 3N is not forcing.

In this case, South probably should choose 3♥ or 3N – he has extras, there is no shortness; the suit is not great but it has a extra card. That means that we may not need to worry so much about the Q♥ since we have a ten-card fit. The hand looks a little too good for 4♥. I'd lean toward 3♥.

After either 3♥ or 3N, 4♣! starts cue-bidding, and hearing 4♦! from opener means that North need no longer fear two fast losers in diamonds, so can bid 4N. South should answer 5♠ (two keycards AND the trump Queen) because he has a sixth trump, which means we have a 10-card fit. North will know that South has six trump because he has the Queen already. North should bid 5N first to show that our side has all the key cards, but the resulting 6♣ is not good enough to bid the grand slam, so he will settle for 6♥.

There is another way to continue after 4♦ which is to cue-bid 4♠; then 5♣ (club King or singleton). But, it is really the trump Ace that North needs to know

about so keycard-asking is better. On another hand, continuing cue-bidding might be better. You have to imagine the possible answers.

One note: J2NT is a HCP bid. You need 13 HCP, not counting distribution. The purpose is exploring for slam, so you want real points.

## 15.2 Hand 2

West (21)	East (12)
♠ KQJ3	♠ A9764
♥ K	♥ AT542
♦ AKJ107	♦
♣ AT9	♣ Q43

East dealt, both vulnerable, and opened 1♠. This is a Rule of 20 opener.

Even though you have game-forcing values and four trump, J2NT can be a mistake. A very strong responder hand, as this one is, should not bid J2NT so as to leave more room for slam exploration. Just be sure every bid is forcing.

Most of the time, if we bid J2NT as West, we're going to hear 4♠, as we will on this hand. We would like to know more before we get so high. Let's say we make a forcing bid of 2♦. Partner says 2♥.

We are a bit disappointed to be short in partner's heart suit. Still, we have to bid at least a game, so whatever we do next, we cannot make a bid my partner can pass!

In SAYC, that rules out 2♠, 3♠. 4♠, 2N, 3N, or 3♦. If we are playing 2/1, we are in a game forcing auction which changes everything.

### 15.2.1 Without 2/1

If not playing 2/1, 3♣ is forcing since it is a new suit by responder. If playing Fourth Suit Forcing to game, it would be forcing but not promise a club stopper and partner would still think we have no fit. As it happens, partner will bid 3♥ showing 5-5 in the majors, and the auction is awkward. If we can bid 3♠ and have it be forcing, we're ok.

## 15.2.2 With 2/1

If we were playing that  $2\heartsuit$  was game forcing, we bid  $2\spadesuit$  next. That agrees on spade as trumps;  $2\spadesuit$  is the strongest slam try we can make. Once we are in a game forcing auction, the stronger you are, the slower you go:

- $2\spadesuit$  strong slam try, a grand slam not ruled out;
- $3\spadesuit$  would be a mild slam try,
- $4\spadesuit$  would intend to end the auction.

The mnemonic for this is, “Slow Shows” – Shows strength, that is.

Note the difference with an auction like  $1\heartsuit - 1\spadesuit - 2\diamondsuit - 2\heartsuit$ . That is a weak “suit preference” bid and is intended to be passed usually. It might be just two hearts. The difference is that this auction is not game forcing.

After partner heard a slam try his obligation is to control-bid first round controls up the line. In that case a bid of  $3\diamondsuit!$  would tell us partner has a first-round diamond control but no first round control in clubs.

We have the  $A\diamondsuit$  so we know he has a void. Our hand feels a little worse. At this point we have to bid  $4N$ , and the reply is  $5\heartsuit$ . (Yes, he has a void, but it is not a “useful void”, since it is in our suit; so he does not make one of the bids showing a void.)

Since we have all keycards we should bid  $5N$  to tell partner that fact. That gives partner a chance to show Kings or jump to  $7\spadesuit$  if he knows we have the right stuff. He’ll show no Kings and with potential problems in clubs and diamonds we want to stop at  $6\spadesuit$ .

Some partners will feel that cue-bidding  $3\diamondsuit$  is not called for and just bid  $4\spadesuit$ , feeling that with a void in partner’s suit, which is not a plus, and having opened with only 10 HCP, that they should try to get partner to stop. However, I think West would still want to ask for key-cards.

This is another hand that made seven as the cards lay, but nobody bid it.

## INTRODUCTION TO CUE BIDS

To make your life miserable, the expression “cue bid” is used in two different ways:

- A bid of the same suit as an opponent bid.
- A bid of a suit showing you have first round control in that suit, when trying for slam. In this usage, the opponents may or may not have bid that suit. I suggest using the more modern phrase “control bid” or “control-showing” bid for these.

Cue bids are ALWAYS forcing, and rarely alertable because it is obvious you do not mean it as a natural suit bid. Here are some of the purposes of bidding their suit.

### 16.1 Limit Raise

You open, your left hand opponent overcalls, and your partner bids their suit. This is the most important and frequent case.

For example,  $1\heartsuit - (1\spadesuit) - 2\spadesuit$  shows a limit raise or better in hearts (10+ points, 3+ hearts)

### 16.2 Western Cue

The second most common use of a cue bid is to bid their suit (usually at the 3-level), saying to partner that we ought to be in a notrump game, but you have no stopper, so partner should bid 3N if he has one.

### 16.3 Michael’s Cue Bid

If your RHO opens a suit and you immediately bid 2 of their suit, you are showing a two-suited hand.

In a minor, it shows 5-5 or better in the majors. In a major, it shows 5 of the OTHER major and a minor.

Your partner bids 2N to ask you to name that minor because he hates the other major.

Be aware: advanced players have variations that are not Michael’s Cue Bid, and they do not have to alert it because it is a cue bid. You can ask them about their agreement either right away, if you might bid, or at the end of the auction.

### 16.4 Powerful Hand

A cue bid can be the most powerful bid you can make. When every bid you can think of is an underbid, bid their suit. Perhaps the most frequent case is when you make what looks like a takeout double, but you are actually doubling because you have too many points to overcall (a good 17+). After partner bids, a cue bid shows a huge hand:

$(1\heartsuit) - X - (P) - 2\clubsuit$   
 $(P) - 2\spadesuit$  big hand with spades

vs.

$(1\heartsuit) - X - (P) - 2\clubsuit$   
 $(P) - 2\heartsuit$  huge hand

Doubling and bidding again is big; doubling and then cue bidding is huge.

## BIDDING CONTROLS

When we've agreed on trump at the 3-level, a new suit shows a first-round control, and that that suit is the cheapest such suit to bid. It suggests the possibility of slam. For example:

1♠ - 3♠ (limit raise)  
4♦

This 4♦ bid shows an Ace or void in diamonds, and denies such control in the suit or suits skipped over, in this case clubs. It cannot be a *help-suit game try* (page 12) because it is past the point of no return for that, 3♠.

Responder should just bid trump if he has no control in a suit that was skipped over. Making a bid in a non-trump suit promises a control in every suit that was skipped, plus the suit named.

Responder should take a control-bid to mean, "We may have enough points for a slam, perhaps, but I have a suit with two fast losers or I have some other problem, such as a void, and knowing how MANY Aces you have doesn't help me by itself."

If there is a suit where the partnership has already established first-round control, bidding it again shows a second-round control. Bidding no-trump shows no more controls, but control of any suit that was skipped, and extras enough that you have slam interest.

Example, South opens the bidding with 1♥ and North makes a limit raise with 3♥. South holds:

♠KQ5 ♥AKQ764 ♦A ♣89

Suppose South bids 4N and learns that North has one Ace. If it is the Ace of Clubs, 6♥ seems like a great bet. If it is the Ace of Spades, there are possibly two fast losers in clubs. Asking for Aces doesn't work if you have a suit with two fast losers, unless those are your only losers.

If, however, South control-bids 4♦ after 3♥, he simultaneously lets North know he is interested in slam, is missing a first round control in spades and in clubs, but has one in diamonds.

If North now replies 5♣ it would show the club Ace or a void but no Ace of Spades. On the other hand, if North replies 4♠, it does not deny a control in clubs.

South can ask for Aces if the bidding has not passed 4N. It is often useful to cue bid and then ask for Aces. In our case, if North replies 4♠, asking for Aces will find out if he has the other one.

## DEFENSIVE BASICS

You will defend half of the time. You will declare only a quarter of the time — but books about declarer play are a lot more popular than books about defense. Yet, as any good player will tell you, games are won and lost mostly on defense, especially at matchpoints.

### 18.1 Key Ideas

Here are some things you can do to play good defense:

- Count, count, count. Your goal (eventually, I haven't gotten there yet!) is to count:
  - The shape of each hand
  - The points in each hand
  - The number of tricks the Declarer has to cash if he gets the chance

Start by being sure you make an estimate of Declarer's shape and points from the bidding. Make sure you count trumps accurately. As you get better, pick what other suit you think will be important and count that one.

- Take the setting trick. You have to be aware of how many tricks you have so far.
- Guess how many points partner may have. You have some idea about the opponents' holdings from their bidding. You can see yours. Subtract yours plus theirs from 40 and that gives you some idea of what partner may have. The more the opponents seemed to get all excited about their shape, the fewer high-card points they may have, but you can estimate. When partner has played high cards you'll have a

pretty good idea if he does or does not have some key missing honor.

- Learn which card to lead from a given holding. There is a table of them on the convention card.
- If you never lead their suit, you'll be much better off. Even if you think partner can ruff it, setting their suit up will usually cost tricks. (But of course, take the setting trick, right?)
- Identify the kind of dummy you have, or expect to see, using the *LSD method* (page 28). Plan your defense accordingly.
- Don't break new suits without a reason. Being the first to lead a suit often costs a trick. You have to decide if you're in a hurry or not. If not, you can always just give the Declarer tricks he's going to win anyway.
- Try to take your tricks before Declarer can set up and run a long suit in the dummy, but don't be too anxious to take them before that.

Here's an example of the last point. The dummy has a ♠K52 and Declarer leads a small one past your Ace in a heart contract. Do you take the Ace?

You don't want to take a little card with your Ace. You'd like to wait until he leads back and catch his Queen with it. Are you worried that the little one is a singleton? Even if you know it for a fact, realize you may not gain a trick by taking the Ace. After you take the Ace, Declarer will go to the dummy in another suit, play that King, and throw a loser in another suit on it.

One reason to take it right away is if it is the setting trick. Another is that you are aware that he can take enough tricks to make the contract without leading the suit again. For example, there is a ♦AQJT98 in

the dummy and you have  $\diamond K6$ . You know the finesse is going to work. Declarer will draw trump, make his finesse(s) and run that long suit, and his spade losers will disappear as discards. It is time to take what you can get.

## 18.2 Signals

- Signal attitude on partner's lead. When partner leads a suit, and you are not needing to play high, you can choose a higher spot card to tell partner you want to continue that suit, or a low one show you don't.

Making a discouraging signal, especially on opening lead, does not deny some honor in the suit led. It is simply telling partner that you want to switch to a different suit, such as when your AQ is behind dummy's KJ.

After the first lead of the suit, if you've had a chance to show your "attitude" (like / don't like) then next you show your count — high for an even number REMAINING, low for an odd number.

If your attitude is already clear you can signal suit preference. A high card indicates you want a lead of a higher suit, a low card, a lower suit.

- If declarer leads a suit, you give count rather than attitude. If the declarer wants to play the suit, you don't, usually. Believe partner's signals — but with a grain of salt. Keep in mind that sometimes people have no suitable signal card, or they don't want to scream, "Hey, Declarer, you can finesse me!".

I recommend that you do not try to play anything like Lavinthal or Odd / Even at first. Just get good at normal signals, and knowing when it is count and when it is attitude or suit preference.

Signals are just indications to partner. They still have to use their judgement.



## THE DUMMY IS ON LSD?

When you see the dummy, either literally or in your mind's eye before the opening lead, it will be either Long, Short, or Dead. LSD!

*Long* means the dummy has a long suit that is dangerous, either in and of itself or because you know finesses will work and it will run. We must be aggressive and take tricks or set them up quickly. Break suits to take tricks or set them up.

*Short* means the dummy is short in a suit and declarer will be trumping those. Lead trump if you can cut the ruffing power. Or perhaps you know a cross-ruff is coming, time to get our tricks if we can't strip some trump. And finally,

*Dead* means the dummy has only HCP to contribute, and we can be patient and wait for our tricks. Play passively. Don't idly switch suits.

Classify the dummy and decide your strategy accordingly.

## INTERFERING WITH THEIR NOTRUMP

When they open 1N, they will get to a good contract a great deal of the time if left to their own devices. The reason we say “systems on” is that it is indeed a *system*. It is a machine designed to work very precisely. We need to throw some sand in their gears.

In *Bidding Notes* and *Defensive Bidding* I give a great number of choices for interfering conventions and that’s out of an even greater number that exist! If you want to learn one of the more standard defenses, D.O.N.T is what I would recommend, because it is oriented toward interference as often as possible, which is what 99ers need to learn to do, and is not excessively complicated.

The requirements to bid are pretty much the same for all these methods. You should have 8+ HCP concentrated in your suit(s), or maybe 10 HCP if vulnerable. There are no hard and fast rules, but better shape is an excuse for more bidding. They have the high cards, you need the shape. For two-suited bids, 5-5 is best, and six cards for one-suiters. Depending on the intermediate cards, concentration of honors, vulnerability (in short, all the usual suspects), you can go to 5-4 for two-suited and 5 cards for long suits.

### 20.1 Meckwell

A slightly more difficult version of D.O.N.T. is “Meckwell”. This is what I recommend you work towards with a regular partner. Also learn Cappelletti so that you know what it is when people use it against you. These are covered in *Defensive Bidding*.

### 20.2 What About Weak NT?

If they are playing an opening NT weaker than 15-17, you simply up your aggression level. The double means a hand as good as theirs; and you can also lighten up on your shape requirements, perhaps considering two good four-card suits as worth bidding. It is now much less likely that this is their hand than when they open 15-17.

Advancer must adjust his behavior after a double. Partner no longer is promising a big hand. If he has a bigger one than promised, he can bid on.

### 20.3 In Fourth Seat

If they opened 1N and your partner in second seat was unable to interfere, then it takes a little extra for you to come in because the big hand is behind you. However, it is often possible to double an artificial response to the 1N, such as a transfer. This double is lead-directing so you want to do it when you want the lead in the suit bid. You have to have a good enough hand and especially good enough suit so that you could survive it if opener decides to sit for the double. You don’t have to make, but you’d want to be close. Most of the time the opponents are going to go on, but your partner will know what to lead.

Remember, and double of an artificial bid is lead-directing. The same applies to artificial replies to Ace-asking bids, for example.

## LEADS

There are some pretty hard and fast rules for deciding what card to lead from a suit. Which suit to lead from is, however, a matter of judgment. The factors you have to consider in choosing a suit include the auction (and what you learned from it) and then the availability or not of an attractive card to lead in the suits you are considering.

Sometimes you do not have a good lead. Some times you have a good lead but it isn't one you'd be likely to choose. Sometimes you have what look like two good leads and one is great and the other one not great. Nobody is going to make a good lead every time.

Before we get into opening leads we should note that these suggestions for opening lead do not carry as much weight later in the hand. The most dramatic of these cases is mentioned in the section on leading Aces: you never underlead an Ace in a suit contract on opening lead, but it is quite common to do so later in the hand.

### 21.1 Standard Opening Leads

There is a table on your convention card in the bottom left that shows the card to lead from a variety of honor combinations. You should memorize these. As an example of how to read the chart, under "versus Suits" one line says **K T 9** x. The bold T means, from a holding of King, Ten, Nine, and one or more small cards, lead the Ten.

If you and your partner agree to have a different lead from this holding, say the Nine, then you circle the Nine on your cards.

#### 21.1.1 Lead The Queen? Really?

Under "versus Notrump", there is one very odd entry. It says to lead the Queen from KQT9. Why lead the Queen? (Before you do, remember you need the 9.)

Let's say your partner leads a Queen against notrump. It is likely from a suit headed by the QJT or QJ9.

But say you look at your hand and find you are holding the Jack! How could he lead the Queen without the Jack? It must be that weird lead from KQT9. What do you do?

Without a moment's thought, play your Jack under the Queen. That's the whole purpose of leading Q from KQT9: it asks partner to drop the Jack if he has it. Let's say you have J653.

Suppose you mistakenly play the 6 (high to show you have an equal honor to his). Declarer plays low.

Now partner does not dare lead another card in this suit. For all he knows, Declarer has the Ace and the Jack. Leading again will make the Jack good. Declarer's ducking the first trick is a famous play called the Bath Coup. If the suit is continued he gets two tricks instead of one. Lay out the cards and try it.

If, however, you play the Jack under Queen on trick one, your partner knows he can continue the suit until declarer takes his ace, and thanks to his 9 he has three tricks in the suit, maybe more if he has a fifth card.

Once in a while you have the Ace, in which case you play it, and if you have both the Ace and the Jack your partner has made a desperation lead from Qx, I'd bet. He is hoping you're long in that suit.

## SIGNALS

We are on defense half the time. When we are on defense, we are at a disadvantage. The declarer can see 26 cards, while each of us can see only 13. We have to use a combination of looking at the dummy, remembering the auction, and using signals to each other, to help form a picture of the hands so that we can choose the proper defense.

Properly done, defense relies on:

- Making a good opening lead (not always possible)
- Estimating how many points partner and declarer have, and how many we know they have shown so far.
- Counting the suits in order to know the shape.
- Signaling to show both shape and our attitude in various suits.

Signals are of three types:

- Attitude — do I want this suit continued, or not. We give attitude when partner leads a suit the first time, or when discarding a suit the first time. Some times you have to play third hand high but can clarify attitude on a subsequent trick.
- Count — do I have an odd number or even number of cards remaining in this suit? We give count when the declarer leads the suit or in a suit where our attitude is known. You may wish to signal this again on a subsequent lead, to make it clear.
- Suit preference — to which suit do I wish partner to switch. If the declarer is running a long suit and we're going to have to come up with discards, you can play your cards in the suit top down or bottom up, to show which of the remaining suits you plan to keep. There are

some other suit preference opportunities: if attitude is clear and count looks irrelevant, then it can be suit preference. You'll hear even well established partners disagreeing about whether a discard should have been, or been recognized as, suit preference; but it is better to be mistaken than to not try to convey information.

Standard signals are:

- Attitude: a high card shows a positive attitude to that suit; a low card is a negative attitude.
- Count: a high card shows an even number, a low card an odd number. The number is the CURRENT count (before you play the signal card) of cards you currently hold in that suit, NOT the number you had to start with.
- Suit preference is given when it is obvious we are not going to want to play this suit. For example, defending against 4 Spades, partner leads a small heart and the dummy plays the Queen from Qx. You can't beat the Queen. Clearly Declarer has the Ace. On the lead, we can play a high Heart to mean, "Diamonds preferred" and a lower one to mean, "Clubs preferred!".

On defense, play the lower of touching cards to a trick. Say you hold the QJ53, and partner leads the 2 covered by the 9. Play the Jack not the Queen. Your card DENIES the one above it. (Remember not to do this when declarer, however; the declarer would play the Queen to leave in doubt who has the Jack.)

Note that a signal is sometimes hard to come up with. For example, with K32 in a suit, not wanting to throw the King away, the 3 is "high". Sometimes partner can figure it out since he can't see the 2, but not usually. A smart declarer will not automatically discard his lowest card. And of course, you do not want to

waste something too valuable on a signal.

A signal that will always get partner's attention is a really big card. Declarer is playing a spade contract and when he draws trump you have to make a discard. You have ♣KQJ542. Seeing a 10x in the dummy, throw the KING. That tells partner that not only is that the suit you want, you have a top sequence (so you're not setting up the 10). If you throw the 5, partner may or may not read you.

## 22.1 Upside-Down Signals

It is possible to play upside signals, reversing the meaning of high and low. A famous professional pair even play their suit preference upside-down, figuring I guess that consistency is a virtue. Granting that whatever method you use, you may not have a suitable card, there is something you should know about upside-down attitude, even if not playing it yourself.

When a player makes the opening lead of an Ace in a suit contract, his partner's attitude will reflect whether or not he wishes the suit continued and in particular usually shows whether that player has control of the third round in the suit by virtue of having the Queen or having a doubleton to start with.

When having a doubleton or Qxx, then, playing upside-down attitude, third hand will play the smallest card he has in the suit. In particular, then, with a doubleton, he will end up playing low-high. Although that is logical, it seems to bother people trained to signal high-low with a doubleton that they play the low card whether it is from xx or Qxx.

Remember, though, we're really telling partner if he should continue the suit he lead or not. Maybe you want a switch, to get a lead through the KJ on the board in another suit, into your juicy AQ. You win and can get back to partner in the led suit.

The flip side is when you've led your Ace from Ace-King, and partner makes a discouraging signal. You should listen. You should see if you can figure out what he might want. Sometimes, though, he does not mean it – particularly when his holding is short-ish, he just might not have had a good card to signal with.

## 22.2 Reading Signals As The Declarer

Do you believe their signals? The early ones tend to be the truth. However, they may try their best to convince you a finesse will fail when it will work, and vice-versa. I also tend to believe early count signals, but not in trump. Check if they are using special trump signals of some sort. There is a section on the convention card.

The time I really tend to believe them is when, early on, one partner has shown interest in ruffing and then he leads a low card trying to get to his partner for the ruff. If I have a holding like AQJ53 in that suit, I will not want to take the finesse because if it loses I'm going to give them that ruff also.

A canny defender holding K42 may therefore lead the 2 knowing I will feel pressure to put up the Ace, rather than letting me draw trump and finesse him out of his King later. Sometimes bridge is like poker. Having listened to the bidding, and inferred the location of some high cards already from the play, I might know if he could have the King or not. And, I might also know that if the finesse doesn't work I'm going down anyway. At IMPS, making the contract is paramount. But then if it is matchpoints, is playing for down 1 instead of down 2 good bridge? The mind boggles.

## COUNT, COUNT, COUNT

If there is one single thing that will improve your bridge, it is to count. Some people are born with counters in their heads, but I wasn't. When I first started I could not count trump. If you're like me, counting trump is your first goal. Then move on to try to count what looks like the important side suit.

When on defense, the first rule is to defend against what you can see. If the dummy has a four-card suit, and you have four or five of those, you are "responsible" for defending that suit. Likewise for a suit the declarer bid; you can't literally see it, but you must see it in your mind. If this means having to throw some valuables in another suit, try to make it obvious to partner that you can't keep that other suit. You won't always get it right. One way to avoid the "squeeze" is to play high, even second hand, so that you no longer have the thing you would need to protect.

Counting can start with the auction. You hear the opponents bid 1♠ - 2♣ - 2♥ - 3N. You know a lot already! Opener has five spades, at least four hearts. Responder, now the declarer, probably has five or more clubs, does not have 3 spades, and does not have four hearts. So say five clubs. At most 2 spades and 3 hearts. That leaves 3 diamonds at least. On the other hand, he bid clubs not diamonds so probably not five diamonds. And he did go to notrump, which probably means 2 in each major (although maybe not in spades). As the play progresses you can improve your "count" on declarer's hand. At the end, you won't be so in the dark about what cards to keep.

You can also count some points: Opener has at least 12. Responder has an opening hand too — he didn't bother with 2N. Call it 26 for them put together. You have 9. Partner takes your opening lead with an Ace. That's it for partner, he can't have more than a Jack or Queen left. Don't switch suits trying to "hit" a

partner that has nothing to help you with.

It is better to count what you can rather than just beat yourself up because you can't do it all yet. I can't either.

I strongly recommend the two software packages from Mike Lawrence on counting. As opposed to reading a book, this gives you the chance to actually practice it.

## LEADING ACES

About leading Aces: Just don't lead an Ace if you don't have the King. Such an Ace is called an *unsupported* Ace. The most common error in bridge is getting overly anxious to cash an Ace when you don't have the King, especially early in the hand.

That said, there is a worse error.

**Warning:** Never underlead an Ace in a suit contract on opening lead

Note that does not say "try not to" or "prefer not to". There is a weird case where it is right. It comes up once every five years, and you're better off not knowing it. Never means never.

So, you can lead the Ace without the King if the only alternative would be to lead a low one in a suit contract. In notrump it is not only ok it is common to underlead an Ace. You're investing in some long-suit tricks later. In a suit contract, those tricks are unlikely to cash.

Later in the hand, this rule does not apply. It is sometimes right to underlead an Ace. For example, you need to get the lead in your partner's hand and believe he might have the King.

So, back to leading unsupported Aces. Just don't do it.

Don't do it even if your side bid the suit. I swear to God the King will be in the dummy and the declarer will be void. He ruffs it, gets to the dummy, and pitches a loser on the King. On another day, Declarer has Qxx and you just gave him a trick later. Don't lead that Ace and you will find Declarer has the King or Queen and you'll capture it with your Ace later.

Aces are meant to capture honors, not small cards.

The time to cash an Ace is when it is "trick taking time". I regret there is no big neon sign announcing that it is trick-taking time, but when you see or know that the declarer is ready to run a long suit, and will be able to toss the losers in your Ace's suit, the bell rings and you start cashing.

In a slam contract it can be right to cash an Ace on opening lead. It can be horribly wrong. Don't ask me for help. They don't have TWO fast losers in your suit. Listen to the bidding. If it sounds like dummy has a long, strong suit, maybe this is the time to cash that outside Ace first.

Cash the setting trick, disregarding all other rules.

## THE LAWS

When your opponent makes an irregularity, call the Director. Many 99ers hesitate to do that when they should, feeling that it is mean or tough-minded to do so, and that a nice player doesn't do it. This is not correct: as the Godfather said, "It isn't personal, it's just business."

Unlike the Godfather, however, when the Director makes you an offer, you often can refuse it. Particularly, the player after the offender often (BUT NOT ALWAYS) has the opportunity to accept the action taken and let the auction or play proceed normally. Examples are:

- A call out of turn.
- A lead out of turn.
- An insufficient bid unless the director rules it inadvertent.

For example, you are the dealer but before you can bid, your RHO opens 1♥. The director will ask you if you want to accept this bid. If so, it will be your turn to bid and there is no further penalty. If you don't accept it, the bid will be taken off the table, and it will be your bid. The director will explain that if you do this, your LHO must pass for the rest of the auction. (The penalty is different when the person is the LHO of the correct bidder, and different when it is a pass not a bid out of turn.)

Causing the offender's partner to be forced to pass is called "barring" them.

One case when this choice is not available: You open 1♥, LHO doubles, your partner passes, and RHO doubles. Oops. The director cannot let you accept this, it has to be removed.

### 25.1 Barring Only Sounds Like Fun

Anne Lindl was playing a hand when she opened 1N. Unfortunately her LHO was the dealer, not Anne.

Anne's LHO, excited by the chance to bar Anne's partner, refused to accept the bid, so, the 1N was picked up, and the bid reverted to him.

He passed. Anne's partner passed, perforce. Third hand passed. Back to Anne. Anne bid 3N!

This is actually a good idea. If she has 16 HCP, the average for the other 3 players is eight points each. The fact that both opponents passed must up that a little. There is a very decent chance that partner has some points. And if not, they may have a good partscore or game.

Anne made 3N.

That's the problem with barring. It sounds like fun, but really you are putting their back up against the wall and they may lash out – a top score for them can be a possibility, as well as a bottom score.

If, on the other hand, you accept an action out of turn, it is much more likely to turn out "normally". It is the same hand as everyone else plays but with a different dealer, and many times that will make no difference.

### 25.2 Interference With Your Conventions

On another day, Anne barred her partner again!

Anne's RHO opened 1N with a weak range, 10-12 HCP. Anne passed and the responder bid Stayman, 2♣. I was Anne's partner and I doubled – I had five



good clubs and some points, and the double of an artificial bid asks for a lead of that suit. Since it was a weak NT, I could be more aggressive than usual.

The opener passed, and Anne doubled me! The director of course had to tell her that she had to take that back, bid anything she liked, and that I would be barred.

Anne passed. After all, when I doubled the Stayman bid, I knew having to play  $2\clubsuit X$  was a possibility. She had to trust me, and she didn't have any obvious suit of her own.

Now the responder had a problem. Like most of us, He and his partner had never discussed what to do if someone doubled Stayman. He probably guessed that if opener had a major she would have bid it, and that passing meant she wanted to actually play it there. He passed.

Unfortunately, Anne had doubled me out of enthusiasm for her five good clubs. They went down 5, minus 1100.

If you play a convention, you need to agree what to do about doubles of artificial bids. If the opponents ask, you should be able to explain your agreement.

Do you remember what to do if your partner transfers and that bid is doubled? Pass shows you only have two in the suit; completing the transfer shows three or more. Redouble means you think you can beat it, typically because you have five quite good trump. (Remember, partner has promised zero or more points). If you pass, partner must take action if it gets to him. He can bid the suit, re-transfer, or do something else.

The same idea can apply to Stayman. Make a normal Stayman response with a four-card major, redouble if you think you can beat  $2\clubsuit$ , and pass if, in addition to no four-card major, you have five diamonds. That lets responder decide what to do. If you're  $3=3=3=4$ , for example, you'd bid  $2\diamond$ . The pass would be more like a  $3=3=5=2$  or  $3=2=5=3$ .

One more thought: when your partner makes a lead-directing double, they are taking a chance. They could get nailed with that redouble and have no way out. So in a way they are investing with that risk in

order to get the lead they want. If you don't lead it, they took that risk for nothing.

## Symbols

1N opener  
defense, 30

## A

attitude  
signals, 26

## C

control bid  
control-showing bid cue-bid, 25  
control-showing bid  
cue-bid control bid, 25  
convention  
Meckwell, 30  
count  
signals, 26  
cue-bid  
control bid, control-showing bid,  
25

## D

defense  
1N opener, 30  
leading, 26  
signals, 26  
switching, 26  
dummy types  
LSD, 28

## L

leading  
defense, 26  
LSD  
dummy types, 28

## M

Meckwell

convention, 30

## O

opening lead, 28

## S

signals  
attitude, 26  
count, 26  
defense, 26  
suit preference, 26  
suit preference  
signals, 26  
switching  
defense, 26