

Table Talk

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Editors

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Editor's Musings

National-level news: In mid-February, ACBL President Georgia Heth announced that the Board's earlier threat of greatly reduced post-Covid Regionals has been retracted. Thus, we can expect District 25 (New England) to return to running (at *some* point) 5 or 6 Regionals per year, as has been its custom. Sectionals will also probably return to their pre-Covid cycle. For Vermont, that means four 3-day sectionals per year, and one 1-day Non-Life Master sectional.

We need to remember, however, that sectional and regional attendance has been weak in recent pre-Covid times. Tournaments are FUN! Spread the word! Good competition, great friends, perhaps an Airbnb, with a special dinner one night. Maybe even a romantic getaway.

The timing of our return to face-to-face competition is not fully known at this time. The ACBL is reportedly willing to entertain sectional sanction applications for as early as September, and regional sanction

applications for as early as October. Burlington is considering running its usual sectional on September 10-12, 2021, and Unit 175 is considering holding its usual sectional in late October. Whether this comes to fruition will depend on local Covid data, and will be subject to state and CDC constraints. Fingers crossed.

Unit 175 (Vermont) held its annual election recently. The following individuals were elected or appointed. Also included are Vermont's various representatives to District 25 (New England).

President: Phil Sharpsteen

Vice-President: Mark Oettinger

Treasurer: Ron Plante

Secretary: Vickie Walluck

Tournaments: Denny Lyster

Communications: Donna Griffin

Website: Steve Ackerman

U175 rep to D25 Executive Committee

Mark Oettinger

U175 members of D25 Board of Directors

Don & Sheila Sharp

Mark Oettinger

Alternate: Kim Likakis

D25 Disciplinary Appeal Committee Chair

Mark Oettinger

Fun Facts About Duplicate Bridge

The ACBL has 165,000 members

Vermont is Unit 175 of the ACBL

Unit 175 has 400 members

Units run Sectionals

Unit 175 generally runs 5 Sectionals per year

Four 3-day Sectionals, and one 1-day <500/NLM Sectional

Vermont is in ACBL District 25 (the New England Bridge Conference)

District 25 is comprised of:

Vermont;

New Hampshire;

Massachusetts;

Connecticut;

Maine; and

Rhode Island.

Districts run Regionals

District 25 runs approximately six 6-day Regionals per year

There are 10 sanctioned bridge clubs in Vermont:

Manchester (2);

Montpelier;

Newport Center;

Orleans;

Quechee;

Rutland;

St. Albans;

Waitsfield; and

Williston.

Nearby out-of-state clubs include:

Grantham, NH;
Hanover, NH;
Keene, NH;
Plattsburgh, NY; and
Ticonderoga, NY.

For details regarding nearby clubs, see the list at the end of every issue of *Table Talk*. If I've missed one or more, or if you have corrections or updates, let me know, and I will gratefully update the database.

Club Manager's Corner (Don Sharp)

It has now been over a year since we had to discontinue our in-person Bridge at our brick and mortar club in Williston. As Burlington Bridge Club manager and on behalf of our Board, I just want to look back at the year and give everyone an update on the club's status. First and foremost our club is in very good shape thanks to all of you who have participated in our online games. Our table count is at an all time yearly high. We certainly benefited from folks joining us from literally all over the world. People were playing from India, Sweden, Canada, and many other US states. We even had a couple who were trying to play online in a club in every state.

There were some fits and starts to get us going, but it really happened quite fast. We all need to thank our Directors for stepping in, especially Steve Ackerman. He trained all of our Directors, including myself. I have only served as a backup, but I can assure you that the online Director's job is a lonesome endeavor and actually a bit boring. You have to be there, but for the most part, there's not much to do while the game is going on. And you can't play in the game!

One of the big victims of the shut down was our teaching program. I had just submitted an article to the Bridge Bulletin about how our teaching program had significantly increased our membership and table count. All that went out the window quickly. It's incredibly sad that so very few of our students who were just learning the game were unable to join in with us online. This is my biggest personal disappointment for this year. We realize that the games we set up were in fact very high level games with a lot of A level players. We did try to set up a game for 299ers and under, but it has not found a significant following. I do want to thank all our intermediate level players that did not lose heart, and who continued to play in many of our games on a regular basis. Many of you are scoring quite well against some very stiff competition.

For those that have NOT played in our online games, we want you to know that we really miss you, and that we would really like to hear from you. Let us know you are OK, and hopefully let us know that you will try to join us again when we get back to face to face games. Please feel free to email me directly, or even give a call. I would love to reconnect. If you want to join our online games but need help getting started, please let me know. Maybe I can help.

So when will we be back at the physical club? That's the big question. Right now, our board still wants to wait to see that the vaccine is proven effective. We do not have a specific target date as yet, but it's unlikely to be before August at the earliest.

Our landlord is looking at ventilation and air filtering to new standards. The details of the upgrades are still TBD.

We have so much to be thankful for here in Vermont. First and foremost, I think we are all thankful for BRIDGE that gives us mental challenges and helps keep us busy in this time of isolation and loneliness. It

certainly helps to distract us from the political circus swirling all around us. And just maybe it keeps us from fueling the extreme divisiveness that has developed all around us.

There are so many people we need to thank that help to keep the club together and thriving and that made this particular year a success.

First and foremost, many thanks to Donna Griffin for her devotion and diligent hard work getting out all our communications to everyone. In this time of isolation communications are vital. This is probably the most difficult and time-consuming job in the whole club. She has to maintain and keep current email lists for over 500 people. She has had to deal with email systems that have limited distribution sizes, requiring her to break communications down into a large number of smaller chunks to keep everyone informed.

Thanks to Lynn Carew for handling the finances in this time, as the flow of money had to be set up with BBO and the ACBL. She worked quietly in her isolation to get this all set up, and has dealt with the monthly monetary transactions while selling her house and moving!

Thanks to Jim McGregor for directing two of our weekly games, and to Phil Sharpsteen for directing two others. And again, many, many thanks to Steve Ackerman for being a consistent and available Director and trainer for us all.

And thanks to all those who contributed cash to help us keep paying the bills, especially early on when we had no idea how it was going to go.

Thanks to our New Hampshire club brothers and sisters who have consistently played in our games and upped the competition level.

And my personal thanks to Unit 175's other club managers who supported us pooling into one virtual club. We have really enjoyed their members participating, and they have also elevated our competition levels significantly.

Let us not forget those who are no longer able to play with us, specifically Ralph McGregor, Judy Wizawaty, Gordon Johnson, Zander Ponzio, and undoubtedly others.

All of that said, I must admit that I am actually a bit worried about going back into the physical club. I/we will have to relearn all the equipment processes all over again, including dealing with the finicky dealing machine, dealing with the Bridgemates, and scoring changes which we can't do now. Then we will also have to once again deal with possible revokes, plays out of turn, and bids out of turns, all issues that the online system takes away. BUT....it will be soooooo great to commune with all of you again face to face!

* * *

Let me shift gears for the last segment of this article, sharing a few hints from a Pro to a Novice Player.

I have had the pleasure this past year of playing with some very experienced players. They have taught me a lot and put up with my still very unsophisticated play and bidding gaffes. For the benefit of other "novices" I want to impart some of these little general "reminders." I must credit and thank Jerry DiVincenzo. These little quips have helped me improve my play. Please note that these guidelines are general strategies that don't necessarily apply to all circumstances, but statistically, they work more often than not. Also, do not blindly let them take the place of proper logical thinking! So THANK YOU JERRY!

Jerry-ism #1: “NEVER waste a big card from dummy on the opening lead.” See what RHO plays...you may be surprised!

Jerry-ism #2: “If your partner invites to game and you have a singleton (or void), just GO!”

Jerry-ism #3: “You should OWN that suit!” That is, a suit with a lot of touching cards and only 1 or 2 honors missing. Recognize it and use it!

Lastly, one aspect of online play that I really like is that you can see your partner's hand when partner is declaring, unlike face-to-face play where, as dummy, you only see your partner's hand one card at a time. I use the time now as dummy to try to predict what my experienced partner will play. I'm rarely correct unfortunately but it does give me insight into their plan and I hope has helped to make me a better player.

So hang in there. We'll be back face-to-face before you can click 7NT!

Rules of Bridge: Rule of 20 (Ingi Agnarsson) – for beginning players to bridge masters!

This rule has popped up before in Table talk, but not as its own entry and I think it's worth bringing up again. It is among the first things I'd teach beginning players, as a part of the law of total tricks approach to modern bridge. And treating it as an article gives me a chance to introduce some of the most important subtleties.

The first thing you likely learned about bridge was how to count “points”. As soon as you mastered this apparently trivial task (1-2-3-4), you were told you needed at least 12(13) of these point thingies to “open” the bidding. This first lesson made sense and got engraved into

your bridge mind—this surely simply is how it is. Many many years of strict adherence later you probably then read, or heard about, Marty Bergen’s book “points schmoints”! Essentially, this was one of the top players in the world telling you that, after careful consideration and a career winning every tournament there is, mister Bergen has concluded that points are not what your grandmother/great uncle (or in my case, a friend’s grandmother) told you they were. Sounds a little confusing – and how many schmoints do you then need to open a hand anyway?

20 schmoints! Or so says Bergen. How does this rule work?

Essentially it is a rule that should guide you whether to open ‘marginal’ hands, in other words, hands that do not necessarily have 12 points, but do have 20 “schmoints” ☺. Mark and I have written several pieces in TT about hand evaluation. One of the points we have made a few times is that suits and suit length (and in general the shape of the hand) matters a lot. Shapely hands require fewer points. This is exactly what rule 20 is about. Here is the concise method:

If the number of points plus the number of cards in the two longest suits is 20 or more, open the hand

If the number is 19 or less, depending on your long suits, you may choose to open with a weak 2, but should not open at the 1st level. This rule, I find, is very useful, but as has been pointed out by many, it is *best to do this on ‘sharp’ hands*. Lack of aces and sources of ‘quick tricks’ is an issue for any hand. With most partners I play 15-17 notrump openings. But with a totally flat hand (3334) and a minimum 15 point count, I will downgrade the hand if it lacks an Ace. It takes tempo to chase out aces and marginal contracts very often depend on favorable

tempo (e.g. having time to break a suit before opponents break theirs or start shortening your trump suit). Similarly, with the rule of 20, you don't want to open just any hand that fits this simple criterion, you should have at least an Ace, or preferably about 1.5-2 'quick tricks'. A quick trick is an Ace, AK suited or two Aces are two quick tricks. A King is 0.5 quick tricks. *It is also important that the 'working cards', or the quick tricks, are actually 'working'*. Such cards work best if they are concentrated in your long suits. So, a more detailed and better functioning rule would be:

Precise rule of 20(21)

If the number of points + the number of cards in the two longest = 20 AND 20 + working quick tricks is >21, open the bidding.

Let's look at some marginal hands and apply this methodology to determine if we should open the bidding:

♠AKxxx
 ♥QJxxx
 ♦xx
 ♣x

10 hcp + 10 cards in two longest suits + two quick tricks = 22: open 1 ♠

♠AKxx
 ♥QJxxx
 ♦xx
 ♣xx

10 hcp + 9 cards in the longest suits + two quick.. NO, stop right there. You do not meet the rule of 20 so pass

♠Kxxxx

♥x

♦KJxxx

♣QJ

10 hcp + 10 cards in the longest suits + 1 quick tricks (K plus K, 0.5 + 0.5 = 1) = 21 (not >21). A marginal, marginal hand. You should pass (personally I'd open 2♠, but that's another story). On top of that, there is no telling if QJ in clubs has ANY value.

♠AQxxxx

♥Kxxxx

♦xx

♣-

9 hcp + 11 cards in the longest suits + 1.5 quick tricks = 21.5. Open 1♠.

♠AQxxxx

♥Qxxxxx

♦Jx

♣-

9 hcp + 11 cards in the longest suits + 1 quick tricks = 21 (not >21). Open 2S or another weak two opening showing both majors.

AKQxxx

x

xxxxx

x

9 hcp + 11 cards in the longest suits + 3 quick tricks = 23. Open 1♠.

Some of the >21 hands 'look' too weak to open at the first level, but both experience and statistics suggest that following the rule of 20(21) is

winning bridge—it succeeds more often than not. Of course, you are not obliged to open such hands, but the rule of 20 tells you when it should be safe... On that last hand some would open 2♠ and others possibly 3♠ or even 4♠. All are reasonable—the choice remains yours. *The rule of 20 simply tells you if a 1st level opening is a reasonable option.* One additional caveat (just because you have a rule doesn't mean you don't need to think!). It that the hands where the quick tricks are 'working' as outlined above, are always better. Hence:

♠Qxxxx
♥Jxxxx
♦AK
♣x

10 hcp + 10 cards in the longest suits + two quick tricks = 22 – everything appears dandy! However, the quick tricks are not in either of your long suits, so the recommendation would be to pass, and enter the bidding later if you get an opportunity. Two bad suits won't yield many tricks, unless your partner has a strong fit (which you will likely find out when they or you enter the bidding later). Opening 1♠ could lead to a very bad contract

Hopefully, you can use these pointers to determine when to open on marginal hands, and thereby make yourself 'not a pleasant opponent' (see BOLS tip from Baldursson in TT January 2021). A few additional tips on the rule from Bergen: 1) Vulnerability should not be an issue for rule of 20 hands any more than any other hand you'd open at the 1st level. 2) Always remember that there are logical exceptions to even the best of bridge rules (such as the concentration of 'working' cards)—not all 20's are created equal and every bridge player must learn to upgrade

attractive hands and downgrade ugly ones. 3) *Always*, when considering whether to or not to open the bidding, *be aware of the presence or absence of intermediate cards*.

QJ1098
109876
AK
X

With middle cards added to the previous hand, this hand is now worth opening 1♠. You have 22 ‘schmoints’ (10+10+2) and while your quick tricks are outside your longest suits, the middle cards mean you have max 2 losers in spades and a weak but solid side suit. Middle cards can make all the difference!

My Favorite Suit Combination (Frank Hacker)

My favorite suit combination is the Q10. It offers many opportunities for creative defense and play and the correct answer is nearly always counter-intuitive. Let’s dive right in.

1. You hold Q10x. Dummy holds KJx. Your Q is on side. Declarer finesses the J which wins. Declarer now plays dummy’s K. You must drop your Q. There is a good chance declarer had A9xx. You have a very good chance to make a trick with your 10. You had no chance for a trick with your Q. Declarer knows you have it. **When playing from equal cards, always play the one you're known to have.**

2. Declarer is playing in 4♠ after a transfer auction. Dummy has AJ9xxx. You have Q10 off side. Declarer leads the king from his hand. Partner and dummy both follow low. You should play the Q. You’re hoping that declarer started with Kx and that your false card will induce

him to conclude that partner started with 10xxx and that consequently he will finesse partner for the 10.

Wait a minute. What's the difference? Won't the 10 induce declarer to finesse partner for the Q? It shouldn't. Declarer should play for the drop of the Q. If partner has the Q, he will have Qxxx and declarer will have to lose to the Q even if the finesse wins. This type of play has a risk. You may be making a "\$5 play against a 10¢ opponent," who will miss the point of all this. Usually they say after they drop your 10, "that was the only way I could play it."

As a corollary to all this, if you have 10x, instead of Q10, you should play the 10 on the K in an attempt to protect partner's Q.

3. Declarer opens the bidding 1♠ and his partner raises to 4♠. Dummy has Jxxxx of trump. You have Q10x over the Jxxxx. Declarer wins the first trick in dummy and leads the J of spades. What do you play? Follow suit low and do it quickly. Partner is void. If you play the Q, declarer will go back to dummy to pick up your 10. Declarer led the J to test you. He never had any intention to run the J. He was just hoping for a mistake. If you duck, declarer will play one of his high honors.

I have on occasion asked people how they would play the suit AK9xx opposite Jxxxx. It amazes me that so few people see the point of leading the J from dummy. It never costs, and it sometimes wins.

4. Declarer's contract is 3N, Dummy contains AKJxxx of clubs and has no outside entry outside of the club suit. You have Q10 on side. Declarer leads low toward dummy. It looks like declarer has 6 easy club tricks. You may be able to steal a trick for your side by playing the Q. This may lead declarer to conclude that you had a singleton Q and that

partner has 10xxx. Declarer may duck to make sure of 5 club tricks. This works well if you don't have the 10, as long as your partner has it.

5. Once again, declarer is playing 3N, this time with plenty of transportation between hands, Dummy has AJ9xx of spades. You have Q10x in front of the AJ9xx. Declarer leads low toward the dummy. You should play the Q. If you duck, declarer's correct play is to finesse the 9. That will fetch partner's K. Later on, declarer will pick up your Q and score 4 tricks in the suit. The play of the Q is an attempt to talk him out of the correct play, by creating the impression that you have KQx. The hope is that declarer will win the A and later on play the J losing to partner's K. Then your 10 will also be a winner. As a corollary to this, if you have KQx, you should duck to give declarer a chance to lose to partner's 10.

6. The contract is 4♥. You have Q109x of trump in front of dummy. Dummy's holding is Jxx. Declarer leads the K of hearts. You should drop the 10. What's the point? Declarer has a trump suit where he probably has 1 loser, but if the Q drops, he will have no losers. Your mission is to create the impression that the Q will drop. Declarer has 2 possible lines of play. He can lead low toward the J, or he can play his other high honor. If he greedily does the latter, you will get 2 trump tricks.

7. Declarer is playing 4♠. The dummy has J9xx of trump and you have Q10 in front of dummy. At trick 2 declarer leads a low trump toward dummy. What's going on here?

There is a good chance declarer has Axxx of trump, His best chance to play this suit for 1 loser is for next hand (you) to play the Q. Later he can lead the J off dummy, crashing your 10. Your best chance is to play the 10. Partner will win the K. You hope that declarer will later lead the

J off dummy finessing partner for the Q. He is very unlikely to guess that you ducked with Q10 doubleton. Of course, ducking is fraught with peril. You may be wrong about declarer's trump holding. For example, if it happens to be K9xx, partner may be unsympathetic to your explanation why you didn't win the trick with your Q.

8. Let's switch to declarer play. You play 3N after right hand opponent overcalls 1♠. The opening lead is the 7 of spades and dummy's spade holding is Q10x opposite your Kxx. Unfortunately you have to knock out an outside A to come to 9 tricks. What do you play from dummy. If you play low, opponent's 9 will force your K. If you play the 10, the J will do the same. Then you'll have to decide whether to win the first trick or to duck the first trick. The correct answer depends on who has the missing ace.

Wait a minute. This is all nonsense. Most people wouldn't think of it, but the correct play at trick 1 is the Q. Righty has to win it to prevent you from getting 2 spade tricks. Then, since he can't profitably lead away from the J, he'll have to switch suits. Problem solved.

9 and 10 are both safety plays. Most match point players don't take safety plays, since it seldom pays to sacrifice your opportunity to make the maximum number of tricks. It only pays if your contract is outstanding and is one that no one else will reach. Good luck with that!

9. Suppose your holding in a critical suit is Axx in hand and KJxx in dummy. How do you play this suit to give yourself the best chance for 3 tricks in the suit. You need to lead the K first followed by low to the A, then up to the J. This sacrifices your chance for 4 tricks (Qxx on side), but prevents the loss of a trick to the doubleton Q off side.

10. Suppose that the critical suit is KJxx in dummy and A9xx in hand and suppose you need 3 tricks in the suit. The play for the maximum number of tricks would be A from hand, then toward the KJxx, Qxx on side will do the trick. This will not guarantee 3 tricks since there may be Q10xx over the KJxx. Amazingly enough, there is a way to guarantee 3 tricks. First lead the K. If either opponent shows out, it will be obvious how to play for 3 tricks. If both follow, lead low toward the A9x. If the hand in front of the A9x follows, play the 9 or the A if the Q pops, This will guarantee 3 tricks even if the next hand shows out. Finally, if the hand in front of the A9 shows out, simply win the A and lead up to the J.

Editor's Historical Note: Frank Hacker, author of the above article, is well-known to many of our readers. He is an actuary who spent many years living, working and playing bridge in central Vermont. He recently crossed the 15,000 masterpoint plateau, and now lives in Florida. Frank's late wife, Marilyn, was also an expert bridge player. Frank edited Table Talk over two stretches, for a total of 12 years, a record that still stands. Frank still plays regularly in Burlington's online games, and is always a cheerful, gregarious and fearsome opponent. My favorite Marilyn memory was when, as a newer player, I walked past the "home table" at which she, Frank and their teammates were sitting right before the start of a team game. I vividly remember overhearing her cautioning their teammates, "Don't come back to compare with a -500 on a part score hand." I have tried to follow that guidance in every team game in which I have ever played.

FOUR-FOR-FOUR (Dick Tracy)

As I recall, in the *Bridge Bulletin* of May, 2012, Marty Bergen wrote that the significance of the ninth trump is one of the least understood concepts in bridge, or words to that effect. I had begun playing duplicate bridge in earnest only a few months earlier, so I was among those who did not understand, but I found that idea to be striking. It wasn't long thereafter that I was introduced to the Law of Total Tricks. Then came a "Dawn breaks on Katahdin" moment.

It would be fun to say that I resisted, that “I fought the Law and the Law won,” but nothing could be further from the truth. I was quickly hooked on that principle and remain so to this day. If part scores are the lifeblood of matchpoint scoring, then “the Law” is the lifeblood of competitive bidding. Few things in bridge feed my competitive spirit as much as competing in the auction. Thus, “the Law” and I were destined to become great friends.

It is not the purpose of this commentary to explain the intricacies and mathematical principles which are the foundation of “the Law.” There are plenty of works – short and long – on the subject, not the least of which is Larry Cohen’s classic *To Bid or Not to Bid*. Rather, I ask the reader to indulge me as I review what I think of as the four-legged stool of bidding gadgets available to responder as a means by which to show 4-card support for partner’s One-of-a-Major opening bid.

There are Four relatively common bidding gadgets which allow responder to immediately reveal four-card support: **Bergen Raises**, **Jacoby 2NT**, **Splinters**, and **Two-Way Drury**. All require an alert, of course.

Bergen Raises: This is the first leg of my four-legged stool, and of the four cited gadgets, Bergen Raises come up by far the most often. These bids allow an unpassed responder to immediately communicate to partner the glad tidings of four-card support, as well as point range. I say unpassed only because for passed hands, God gave us Drury.

It is an oft-cited recommendation that we should arrive at our best contract level as quickly as possible, that level being the one indicated by “the Law.” Bergen Raises do precisely that.

There are variations, but these are the point ranges with which I am both most familiar and most comfortable. After partner opens One Heart or One Spade in first or second seat and we have four-card support, we can describe our hand very well with one bid by jumping to:

3♣ with 6-9 dummy points;

3♦ with 10-12 dummy points; and
3 of our Major with 0-5 dummy points.

At the fringes of those ranges, we allow for judgment about good-or-bad 10 counts, and maybe good-or-bad 6 counts. That's up to the partnership.

Some readers may be aghast at the notion of jumping to the Three Level with zero high card points. All I can tell you is that for every apparent disaster to befall me there have been ample offsetting good results derived from arriving at the level indicated by the combined number of trumps. Your partnership can modify the weakest bid in deference to unfavorable vulnerability, or you may want to quantify the jump to three of opener's Major as promising at least a Queen.

I should disclose that there are strong players who dislike Bergen Raises for their own reasons, some of which are based upon the feeling that those bids "rely too much" on "the Law of Total Tricks." To each his own.

Lest there be any doubt, by dummy points I mean to include the value of shortness as well as high card points. Voids and singletons become even more powerful when accompanied by the ninth (or tenth) trump. The reverse is also true. Four trumps in a holding lacking shape features (four-triple-three) promise to produce zero extra tricks.

My preference is not to get too excited about a couple of doubletons. That opinion is grounded in the unpleasant experience of having landed in a few bad contracts when partner has added one point each for a pair of doubletons, thereby stretching 9 high card points into 11 (or 8 into 10!), and thus stretched to bid 3 Diamonds. For me, responder's bid of 3 Diamonds is sweet music indeed. Just as Homer and his men were lured by the enchanting music of the Sirens into a shipwreck, I too have plunged into rough waters when enticed by an over-valued 3♦ Bergen response!

By partnership agreement, Bergen Raises (and all 4 legs of the stool) may be "on" or "off" in competition. In my view these conventions should still be in use over Takeout Doubles (since they take up no bidding room), but not over other

interference. In competitive auctions we can always use cue bids of the opponents' suit to show limit raises. I will still jump to Three of opener's Major when weak with four pieces. I don't want to give up that preemptive weapon!

It should be noted that some fine players have chosen to tweak Marty Bergen's idea. Some play the so-called "modified Bergen" in which the jump to 3 Clubs is a 3-card limit raise, and 3 Diamonds remains 4 pieces. Others play "reverse" Bergen in which (I think) the above cited meanings of Clubs and Diamonds are swapped. Still others use Bergen Raises even when a passed hand. There may come a time when the theoretical advantages of those variations become known to me, but to date I have been so happy with Standard Bergen Raises that I have had little curiosity about such tweaks.

Splinters: Leg number two. Larry Cohen has written that "a Splinter Bid is a convention whereby a double-jump bid in a side-suit indicates a trump fit and a singleton or void in the suit bid. It can be made by either the opener or the responder. It can be made on any round of the bidding." For example, partner opens 1 Heart, and the next player passes. You hold:

♠A97
♥KJT2
♦5
♣KT942

With 11 high card points, good spots, 4-card trump support and a singleton, clearly you have enough values to insist on a game contract in partner's suit. Some might even add a point or two for the trump honors. Why dub around? Give partner the good news by jumping to 4 Diamonds!

How strong should one's hand be to use a splinter bid? Writes Larry Cohen: "It depends on the auction. The Splinter Bidder shows enough for game, but not enough for slam." The ACBL Bidding Toolkit states only that the splinter bidder should have "game-going values." [Ingi's comment: a good rule of thumb from some world champs is that the hand contains 3-5 controls – so, a 'sharp' hand]

If you feel the need to put a cap on Splinter bids, go ahead. One of my regular partners thinks of Splinter bids as having a top end of 16 dummy points. My own taste is that with a hand that good, I prefer Jacoby 2NT.

Note that the Splinter bidder is not necessarily disinterested in slam, but partner is put on notice that slam is unlikely unless partner has the right hand.

Note that Splinters can also be used by the opening bidder, albeit rarely, usually with a hand that was just a shade light for a Two Club opening. For example, suppose you opened the following 19-point hand 1 Diamond and partner responded 1 Spade.

♠AKJ2
♥-
♦KQ753
♣AQ98

Even if responder had only 6 high card points, clearly you belong in game. But what if responder had some extras? Such as:

♠QT93
♥864
♦A852
♣KJ

If opener now splintered by bidding 4♥, what beautiful music that would be for the responder! All of responder's high cards are known to be working, and those three ratty little Hearts are suddenly of no consequence! Essentially your partnership is playing with a 30-point deck and a grand slam is virtually cold.

If the reader has not as yet been moved to consider adopting use of splinter bids, consider that in his *Advanced Bridge Bidding for the 21st Century* Max Hardy extolled the virtues of splinter bids on page one of Chapter One!

When one partner splinters, the information conveyed allows complete evaluation of the hand across the table. *Partner knows that honor cards facing the announced shortness lose value, but that honor cards in all other suits will combine with honor cards in partner's hand to produce tricks.* Splinter bids have revolutionized the entire process of hand evaluation. (emphasis added – DT)

Jacoby 2NT: Leg #3. If Splinter bids are somewhat limited to the notion of “game-going values,” Jacoby Two No-Trump bids as commonly played suffer no such limitations. After partner opens One of a Major, a bid of Two No Trump announces at least 13 hcp with 4-card trump support and is 100% forcing to game. I emphasize 13 hcp because opener may have only 12, or even less if having opened a Rule of 20-type hand.

After hearing that response, the opener has 2nd call options in this order of priority:

- 1) With a 2nd decent 5-card suit, opener must bid that suit at the 4 level, after which the responder should explore slam (4NT), cue bid an Ace, or sign off at 4 of the Major.
- 2) In the absence of that feature, opener's next obligation is to cue bid a singleton or void, after which responder should cue bid an Ace, explore slam, or sign off.
- 3) In the absence of either a 2nd suit, or extreme shortness, opener can either limit his/her hand by bidding 4 of the Major, or show extra values by bidding the Major at the 3 level, after which the quality of responder's hand dictates whether or not to sign off.

The above is the Cliff Notes version. There are plenty of resources which provide more detail and plenty of sample hands.

Jacoby 2NT can be a bit of a memory hog and it won't come up all that often. That said, we all know that there are many good conventions which are used infrequently. What I can tell you is that when you have the right kind of hand, it feels wonderful to be armed with the right tool for the job! Besides, most of your

competition will have this convention on their card, and they will find slams that you will miss if you haven't adopted it.

Two-Way Drury: The final leg of the four-legged stool is Two-Way Drury. This is used only by a passed hand when partner has opened 1 of a Major in 3rd or 4th seat. Not everybody uses Drury in 4th seat, but I don't see why not. I suppose somebody somewhere must have a reason because many players limit Drury to 3rd seat only.

In the original Drury there was no differentiation between 3- or 4-card support. In my view Two-Way Drury is an improvement because responder can show support with either 3 or 4 pieces. A response of 2 Clubs shows 3-card support and limit raise values. With 4-card support and a limit raise, responder bids 2 Diamonds. It's that easy.

Because a third seat opener could be light, my preference is to have a solid 10+ high card points for my Drury responses. Maybe with a singleton or void I would shade down to 9 points in high cards but there could be sharks in those waters! This is NOT true opposite a fourth suit opener when partner is supposed to have "the goods."

I have heard it said that Drury is an "asking" bid. I suppose it could be. By my reckoning, it is the opener – not the responder – who needs to know what's what in the other hand. The two-way version provides the most complete info so the opener can place the contract.

Warning: Above I wrote "it's that easy." In function it is easy, but remembering is something else again.

By the way, I have heard it said that Drury is the most widely forgotten and/or unrecognized bid in bridge. How many times as a passed hand did I show my partner my nice 5-card minor suit when 2 Clubs and 2 Diamonds were reserved for Drury? I shudder to consider such *faux pas* but I take comfort in the fact that I have lots of company. Suffice to say that one should be prepared to stub one's toe a few times before becoming fully fluent in the use of this gadget. [Ingi's

comment: I find that a reasonable alternative is simple Drury plus using Bergen on passed hands. A comparison of those two approaches would be interesting]

Summary: The above are Four common and very do-able ways by which to show Four-card support for our partner's 1-of-a-Major opening bid. If you are an aspiring player and haven't added them to your bidding tool kit, I urge you to do so. I think you will find that 4-legged stool to be very comfortable!

So You Want To Get Better (Mark Oettinger)

I have a soft spot for motivated journeyman players. You know the type. Or maybe you *are* the type. Here's an avatar. 200 masterpoints. He has played duplicate for 2 or 3 years, and plays at the club level weekly. He attends the occasional Sectional and/or Regional, has the stamina and drive to play 2 sessions in a single day, and has placed in above-club under-300 masterpoint events. Our hero is willing to read the occasional bridge book, or at least short monographs on particular conventions and other bridge topics. Are you this person? If so, this may be an article for you. Even if you are a more experienced player, you may have a vested interest in helping bring someone along...perhaps a promising potential partner. Even a spouse...which introduces other nuance

So...if you want to progress, or to help someone else do so, what strategies might you employ? Here are a few ideas:

Study your results. This starts with "keeping a convention card." By that, I don't mean the side which discloses your bidding agreements. Yes, you need to fill that out too. I mean keeping a hand-by-hand record of the contract, the declarer, the lead, and the result. You can estimate how many matchpoints you expect. That serves a couple of purposes.

First, it familiarizes you somewhat with how duplicate bridge is scored. It also allows you to study the accuracy of your predictions. If you thought that a particular outcome was good, and you ended up with a poor matchpoint score, find out why. This process often teaches you a lot.

It should go without saying that you need to have a fully-filled-out card, and that's true for both face-to-face and online bridge. I have to admit that failure of online players to post a convention card is one of my pet peeves. Yes, online bridge is still fairly new, but it will almost certainly occupy a significant role in competitive bridge, even when face-to-face bridge resumes. The rules require that you disclose full names and bidding agreements. This both ensures fair competition and promotes friendly interaction while you wait for the round to be called.

Discuss your results with your partner as soon as possible after the session. This can be challenging. You may feel guilty about mistakes you believe you made. You may be less than pleased with how your partner performed. You may be tired. You may have pressing things to attend to after spending 2-4 hours away from work and family responsibilities. Talking later, or the next day, is an option, but review is always best when the round is still fresh in your mind. The value of these discussions is, of course, greatly enhanced if you have good records of your round. Another good reason to “keep a card.” By that, I mean fill out the back side of your convention card, hand by hand, as the round progresses, including notes, being mindful not to slow the tempo of the game. With online bridge, as soon as the session is over, you can review the auction, and the trick-by-trick play of the cards, and you can see how other tables bid, played and defended the hand. This is a

universe of heretofore unavailable resources. If you have the initiative, the available learning tools are essentially unlimited.

Create, keep and discuss the convention card for each partner you play with. It takes effort to fill out your card for the first time with a new partner. That said, your bidding system is the cornerstone of your game. For those of us who started playing bridge many years ago, I think it's fair to say that the sophistication of bidding methods generally has grown more than any other aspect of bridge in recent decades. Declarer play is an individual skill set that doesn't change over time. The art and mechanics of winning and losing tricks is eternal. Defense is essentially hard work. Discussing your "carding agreements" (leads and signals) is just as important as discussing your bidding agreements. Fill out the Leads and Defensive Carding section of your convention card completely, and discuss these agreements with your partner in detail. Knowing that you signal attitude to partner's lead is important. Also, knowing whether your attitude signals are "right-side-up" or "upside down" is equally important. Imagine that you are defending a 4♠ contract and partner leads the King of a side suit. Aside: do you lead the Ace or the King of a side suit when you have both? That's just another example of something you need to have understood and accurately documented. Regardless...imagine that the board comes down with a singleton in the suit that you partner led...and 4 trumps. In other words, you and your partner clearly do not want a continuation of the same suit at trick 2. Most strong players treat this situation as changing the meaning of your signal. Instead of "attitude" (which is clear from the context..."DON'T continue the suit..."), you should now show suit preference instead. So again, if the contract is 4♠, and your partner's lead was the King of Hearts, and there's a singleton Heart on the board, you can now play a high Heart asking for the higher of the

two remaining suits (Diamonds), or a low Heart suggesting a Club switch. All of this can feel a little complicated, but it's very clear after a little practice, and after sufficient discussion with partner.

More Complicated Isn't Necessarily Better. I love the intellectual challenges of conventions. Of all the elements of bridge, bidding is the one that has come the furthest in recent years. Even so, there's a lot to be said for simple bidding systems. There's less to forget. You might go an entire session and only have conventions come up a handful of times. Each time, if you use the convention right, you might have a small chance of getting to a better contract through use of your esoteric convention, and that may gain you a few matchpoints here and there. One big "systemic" mistake, on the other hand, can easily cost you a full board, thereby disgorging all of the gains that you so carefully squirreled away in the other hands of the session. Long story short, there are two strategies to avoid bidding misunderstandings: (1) keep things relatively simple; and (2) document your understandings. The latter is usually accomplished through filling out your convention card, but if you're intent on taking your systems to the next level, consider augmenting your written understandings through the development of system notes.

Developing system notes. Do you ever feel that the convention card doesn't allow you enough space to fully document all of your understandings? The obvious solution is system notes. For example, let's say you've heard from more experienced players that Lebensohl is a useful convention. Simply marking it on your card doesn't ensure that you will use it accurately. After all, Ron Anderson has written a whole book on the topic. Why not mark it on your card, and then add detail in your system notes? For example, a common Lebensohl question arises when partner opens 1NT and RHO overcalls. Is Lebensohl on over the

overcall? If the overcall is 2♣, Double is often agreed to be Stayman. That can be marked on a standard convection card. What if the overcall is 2♦ or above. Typically, Lebensohl is on, but some people attribute different meanings to responder's bid depending on what the overcall showed. Many people who interfere over an opponent's opening 1NT are showing 2 suits. You may have heard of Cappelletti...or DONT...or Deas. Does your response take on different meanings when the opponents' 2♦ overcall shows "Majors" (Cappelletti), as opposed to "Diamonds and a high suit" (DONT), or (4+ Diamonds and an unspecified 5-card Major (Deas)? Eventually, your Lebensohl responses will probably differ depending upon the meaning of your opponent's overcall, but it's also acceptable to play that your responses do NOT differ under those circumstances. Either way, including these "sub-rules" in your system notes is a great way to learn the subtleties of the convention, and to refine your partnership understandings.

Read bridge books and online synopses of bidding conventions. I'm a vociferous bridge reader. I enjoy it. You might be surprised how many bridge books are available. Certainly hundreds. Probably thousands. And they tend to be available at extremely low prices through outlets such as Amazon and Ebay. I just checked. Watson's *Play of the Hand*, a must read on the subject of declarer play for every aspiring bridge player, can be had, lightly used and in good condition, for \$5. Don't get me wrong, not all bridge books are worthwhile, but serious students of the game develop favorite authors. Mine include Mike Lawrence, Marty Bergen and Larry Cohen.

The internet has, of course, greatly increased the availability of bridge resources. One of the easiest ways to locate a succinct explanation of a convention is to go to the website of one of the authors listed in the

previous paragraph, where you will almost certainly find a short “monograph” about any convention that interests you. Or you can just Google the name of the convention. You will quickly find sources that you like and trust. Other resources include the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL), Bridge Base Online (BBO), BridgeWinners, and BridgeGuys, to name a few.

Play up. By this, I actually mean two different things. First, try and find the opportunity to play with players who are better than you are. Some “experts” won’t deign to play with lesser talents, but in my experience, they are the exception to the rule. Many experts relish playing with journeyman players. It makes the expert feel important and appreciated, and it affords the expert a sense of “giving back” to the game. After the round, go over the hands with the expert if he or she will allow you that additional indulgence.

Ask an expert to give you a Zoom-augmented “over the shoulder” experience on BBO. You will learn a LOT! For example, I have had “students” watch me play in a “daylong” tournament. Since these events are essentially not time-limited, I can discuss the merits of one bid over another. I can then discuss my thought process as I formulate a plan as declarer. We can also discuss how various defensive carding agreements would dictate the play of the cards. (BBO’s software is still quite weak in the area of defensive signaling).

The second type of “playing up” that I have in mind is best accessed at Regionals. At those large tournaments, a player with 200 masterpoints can play in a “299 game” (which is limited to players with fewer than 300 masterpoints). What is sometimes not understood, however, is that you can choose to play in the “gold rush game” (limited to players under

750 masterpoints), or in the Midflight (which may have an upper limit of 2,500 or 3,000 masterpoints), or even in the Open Pairs (which is unlimited). Will you do well in the tougher field? Probably not, but you will have the opportunity to play with a consistent flow of strong players, and you will learn an immense amount in the process. Bridge is often touted as the only game in which a rank and file player can play against a world champion. If you're a competitive tennis player, on the other hand, chances are that you will never have the opportunity to play against Roger Federer.

Take Lessons. Some clubs offer lessons. A common format is an hour of lecture followed by an hour of predealt hands. Each table of students has a kibitzing "expert" to enrich the students' experience with the practice hands. Materials can be distributed to students to help them follow the lecture portion, and the kibitzing experts can also be given the "teacher's edition" analysis of the practice hands. Because of Covid, there has been a huge upturn in online bridge. That includes online lessons. Some charge a fee, but many do not. Two video-based bridge teachers whose teaching style I like, and whose content is generally free, are Gavin Wolpert and Pete Hollands. Check it out!

Ask an expert. After the round, consider sidling up to someone whose opinion you trust, and ask them, "What did you do on Board 3?" Or..."I see that you bid and made 6♠ on Board 11. How did you judge to bid it, and what was your thought process in planning the play of the hand?" Most experienced players will be flattered to be asked for advice. Of course, it is not always easy for a newer player to judge exactly "who is an expert," and who isn't. Find someone whose opinion you trust (perhaps the director), and ask for suggestions of players who are both qualified and approachable. Also, try asking different experts

(separately) the same question. You might be surprised to get different answers. Those answers will probably not be *markedly* different, but they may well shed different light on the subject. That's one of the beauties of the game. Reasonable minds can differ, and there are many roads to a good matchpoint result...and many rationales for choosing the right road. It's like the parable of the three blind men and the elephant. Each examines the elephant. One grabs hold of the trunk and concludes that the animal is a lot like a hose. The second grabs a tusk and concludes that it's a lot like a spear. The third examines a leg and concludes that the pachyderm is a lot like a tree trunk. Each of these perspectives is different. Yet each is true. And each teaches us something different, and helpful, about the subject at hand.

Develop mentors. By this, I mean more than just asking an expert an occasional question. I'm talking about finding one or more qualified individuals who are willing to take on a more in-depth role in your bridge development. I have had many mentors during my 50 years of playing bridge. There was the lady who introduced me to the game, the college friend who got me started with duplicate, the many strong players I have played with over the years, and the world champions whom I've played against at regionals. It's an eclectic mix of some of the smartest and nicest people I've ever met! What a game!

Hire a Pro. This suggestion isn't for everyone. Golfers (I am not one) can probably relate. They sometimes hire a pro to give them a lesson...or to play a round with them and discuss things like proper swing mechanics, or chipping, or putting. Similarly, skiers will hire a ski instructor to spend time skiing with them, and in the process, improving their technique. Bridge is no different. In some ways, hiring a pro is similar to taking a bridge lesson in a group/classroom setting,

but the benefit of having the undivided attention of an instructor for a full 24-board session can be substantial. I have to share a related anecdote. Not that long ago, I was asked by a local player if I was a pro. The questioner seemed reluctant to ask, seemingly thinking that I might be offended by the question. I wasn't offended, but I have to admit that I was surprised. The answer was, "No, I have never played as a pro," but I know people who have. I have also never hired a pro, but again, many do.

BOLS bridge tips: "Roll over Houdini—when they don't cover, they don't have it!" Zia Mahmood (Ingi Agnarsson)

Our second BOLS tip in this ongoing series comes from non-other than Master Zia Mahmood, arguably one of the best players ever to play the game, and certainly one of the most creative and flamboyant players the game has seen. I enjoy watching world-class bridge, and it is certainly an education to see how top players solve problems that you have tried and will continue trying to solve all your bridge career. Beyond an education, watching good bridge can be good fun. But if you want to guarantee fun and fascination, there is no better player to watch at the table—in my mind—than Zia Mahmood. While capable of technical flawlessness, he often chooses to do unexpected and inspired things at the table, that sacrifice technical precision for some level of 'magic' – sometimes achieving the impossible. Like most other 'magic tricks' some of Zia's magic is usually based on very simple 'mind tricks'.

This BOLS tip is EXCELLENT and simple: pay attention to it!

Playing on BBO has allowed me to keep better track of bridge hands and look at my play in retrospect. For a few months I've had an eye out specifically regarding Zia's tip. And I have to say, the man/magician is right! There are so many hands where almost all of us would, as declarers, take a routine finesse, where Zia would not. I've now changed my general approach to finesses to match Zia's tip, and have started to make some 'unmakable' contracts and overtricks. You can play by the percentages (with 5 to the Q missing, e.g. you always finesse...), or you can use a bit of magic and pick up a lot of Qx behind your AK at very low risk. Do Try This At Home! As always, nothing works every time, but *keeping this tip in mind will increase your success at the table* without a doubt!

The following text is, more or less, reproduced verbatim from [haroldschogger.com](http://www.haroldschogger.com) (<http://www.haroldschogger.com/ZIAMAHOOD.htm>), in turn mostly Zia's own account of the importance of the tip. I have made some wording changes and clarifications. Let's give Zia the word:

It's rare that bridge players receive complaints -- but when they do come, the one that strokes my ego the most is the word "magician". You can keep your praises for error-free bridge or the accolades given to the so-called purity of computer-like relay bids - they don't do anything for me. No, I suppose it's something in my character that has always made me thrilled by the razzle dazzle of the spectacular and excited by the flamboyant and extraordinary. Yet, the world of bridge magic, like stage magic is often no more than illusion, much simpler to perform than it appears to the watcher. Allow me to take you into that world:

Assume you are East, sitting over the dummy, North, after the bidding has gone 1NT by South on your left, 3NT on your right. Isolating one suit (let's say diamonds), you will see the dummy has:
either J2 while you have Q4 or J32 while you have Q54 or Q654

Declarer plays the Jack from dummy. What would you do? Cover, you say? Correct. With Q4 and Q54 you would cover all the time. With Q654, you would cover somewhere between usually to always.

Good! What if the bidding was 1♥ on your left, 4♥ on your right, and dummy had in a side suit:

Q2 while you had K4 or Q32 while you had K65 or K654

Declarer played the queen from dummy. Again, what would you do? Again, the answer is easy. With K4 and K54 you would cover all the time and with K654 you would cover somewhere between usually and always.

In both examples, you would have defended correctly, following one of bridge's oldest rules, "Cover an honor with an honor". Bear with me a moment longer and change seats -- becoming declarer needing as many tricks as possible (don't we always?). How would you play these suits?

J 2	or	Q 3 2
A K 10 9 8		A J 10 9 8

Run the J, run the Q? That's normal; you would be following the simple, basic rule taught to every beginner about the finesse. But hold it for a moment. Something's wrong. How can both these plays be right [from the perspective of defender AND that of the declarer]? If in the first

example we saw that the defender over the dummy would nearly always (correctly) cover the honor played, when he had it, how can it be right to finesse that honor, when we know that East (RHO) almost never has it? The Q in the first example, and the K in the second are almost surely in the West hand (Mal Place as the French say) and **SOMETIMES UNPROTECTED**. My **BOLS TIP**, therefore (and I certainly have taken my time to get there) is as simple as this:

WHEN THEY DON'T COVER - THEY DON'T HAVE IT

and declarer should place or drop the relevant card offside, even when this is hugely anti-percentage. Before the critics jump, I must add a few obvious provisos.

1. The length must be in the concealed hand.
2. The declarer should not be known to have special length or strength in the suit.
3. The honor in dummy should not be touching, i.e. J10 - QJ, etc.
4. The pips in the suit should be solid enough to afford overtaking your honor without costing a trick when the suit breaks badly.

I know this TIP is going to revolutionize the simple fundamentals of the every-day finesse, but although it comes with no guarantees, I can assure you that it is nearly always effective and deadly. Here are two examples - both from actual play.



The great Zia! Like a lot of experts, he's practically always friendly and kind... and then, with a smile, will ruthlessly destroy you at the table.

You sit South and declare

Deal 1

♠K Q 3 2

♥A 4 3

♦J 2

♣K J 6 5

♠A 4

♥6 5 2

♦A K 10 9 8 6

♣10 7

Deal 2

♠Q 2

♥5 3

♦10 9 4

♣A K 10 9 7 2

♠A J 10

♥K 2

♦A K Q 3

♣Q 6 5 3

Deal 1. You declare 3NT after opening a slightly offbeat weak NT (if you weren't offbeat you wouldn't still be reading this). West leads a Heart and you win the 3rd Heart with the Ace and lead the ♦J - East plays low. He didn't cover! He doesn't have it! Drop the Q offside! Magic – at least you might have thought so, before you read this article.

Deal 2. Finally, you reach 6♣ from the right side (well bid) and receive a trump lead. How would you play?

The scientists would carefully look at this hand and see that the percentage line would be to draw trumps and play ♦AKQ - if the Diamonds were 3-3 or the J came down, they would discard a heart from dummy. Now they could play up to the ♥K and if they lost finally try the finesse in Spades. Not bad, you say? True, but the greatest illusionist of all times, Harry Houdini, would have rejected this line. Instead he would have played the ♠Q at the second trick. No EAST living in the 20th Century would fail to cover the K if he had it. (declarer might have AJ2, for example) - If East played low, Houdini would "know" the ♠K

was in the West hand and win with the Ace. He would now draw trumps and play on diamonds. If they weren't good, he too would play a heart up, but if they were good, he would discard a spade, not a heart from dummy and take a ruffing finesse against West's ♠K, setting up the ♠10 for a heart discard to make his contract with both finesses wrong. If at that time the kibitzers burst into applause and the deep-throated voice of Ella Fitzgerald singing that "Old Black Magic" could be heard in the distance, don't be surprised.

WHEN THEY DON'T COVER - THEY DON'T HAVE IT

Changes in Alert Procedures (Jim Thomas and Mark Oettinger)

In January, ACBL Tournament Director and part-time Rutland resident, Jim Thomas, brought to my attention that the ACBL has just released substantial changes to the Alert Procedures. I had heard nothing of the changes then, and I have heard very little since, but the scope of the changes is sweeping. Jim forwarded me the following press release from his Florida bridge club, Citrus Bridge, located in Hernando, Florida:

ACBL Rule Changes

There have been several important rule changes by the ACBL that took effect on January 1, 2021. These apply for all club face-to-face games as well as the games on BBO.

A quick summary of the major rule changes is the following:

- In an uncontested auction, no jump shift (weak, strong or intermediate) needs to be alerted

- A direct cue bid that is not Michaels needs to be Alerted
- Support doubles and redoubles no longer require an Alert
- An opening 2♣ bid that does not meet the definition of very strong needs to be Alerted (this applies to hands that have very good playing strength but lack the required HCP)
- The announcement for Transfers is now the suit being transferred to (1NT – 2♥ would not require the announcement of “transfer” but rather the announcement of “spades”)
- Instead of announcing “could be short” for a non-forcing minor suit opening that could contain fewer than three cards, you must say the minimum number of cards agreed upon by your partnership (ex. “could be one”)
- If your agreement routinely bypasses a four-card spade suit to bid a forcing or semi-forcing 1NT over a 1H opening, then you must add “could have 4 spades” to the “forcing” or “semi-forcing” announcement. (this mostly applies to pairs playing Flannery)
- At the end of the auction, the declaring side needs to explain any Delayed Alerts and point out any control bids made during the auction without the opposing side needing to ask about them

To see all of the rule changes and explanations, go to acbl.org and click on the Tournament tab. Look for the green Alert Procedures tab.

There will be a period of time for everyone to adjust to these new rules. The directors understand, but please try to implement these changes into your play as soon as possible.

* * *

If you have any questions about these rule changes, you can contact Jim Thomas at mftjet@aol.com. Jim and I had a related email exchange, which was roughly as follows:

Jim: The new alert system went into effect on Jan 1. There was no advance warning, even for directors. Among *many* things, It changes the rules regarding announcements of transfers over 1NT and 2NT openers. I suspect that most players are not aware of these changes.

Here's a link to the 13-page *ACBL Alert Procedure* effective January 1, 2021:

<https://web2.acbl.org/documentLibrary/play/AlertProcedures2.pdf>

Mark: Thanks for the heads up. I had indeed not seen this. Perhaps you could comment on the new alert procedures from the director's perspective. By the way, I think that compliance with other online rules should be strengthened, including the requirement that all players have convention cards, and that they list their full names in their BBO "biography boxes." I also think that online directors need to be encouraged to make "tough rulings" where circumstances indicate. Avg/Avg is all too often an easy cop-out. I know that this

is a fraught area, and that substantial training is undoubtedly implicated. Slow play is a particular problem as well, and in the online context, it's a different problem than in the live environment. One would think that BBO could easily keep track of (and make available to the director in real time) how much time each side has used during the auction and play. Armed with that information, score adjustments could almost be automatic...and based on an algorithm. For example, if a table is late in finishing, and the outcome of the unplayed hand is not fairly "inferable" from the play prior to the expiration of time, the offending side could be given average minus, and the non-offending side could be given the higher of average plus and their session score.

Jim: There's a lot to like online. I love that the hand disappears when time runs out. Gone is the argument, "They came late to the table."

The director has a lot of tools to use. BBO times every transaction, including chats. There is a summary of time used by each player on each board. There is also a summary of the round. On hesitations, I can tell how much time the player used (to hundredths of second) and if part of the time was waiting for explanation of a bid.

The computer (GIB) plays out hands when obvious. It assigns Avg/Avg when there are too many cards to go. The director can (and should) override that decision. You can call up the hand, review the bidding, and the card-by-card play up to time being called. Then you finish "playing" the hand and assign an adjusted score. If you are getting a lot of Avg/Avg results, it may mean that the director does not know how to adjust the scores.

Convention cards and names are a different problem. There is no penalty for not having a fully filled out convention card. At recent online "regionals," enforcement has been spotty.

Mark: In another universe, I would love to learn how to direct online. Maybe someday. I don't think that our directors lack the *ability* to adjust scores. I wonder if they don't want to be perceived as being too tough.

Jim: I don't look at it as being tough. I look at it as protecting the rest of the field. Players who are always late should not be guaranteed to get an average board. The good but ethically challenged players who are in a bad contract can just procrastinate and assume they will get an average. Not in a game I am directing.

Vermont's Virtual Games

Burlington

Monday, 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday, 10:15 a.m.

Friday, 10:15 a.m.

Sunday, 1:15 p.m.

Barton/Dorey/Harfang

Monday, 1:30 p.m. (Dorey)

Wednesday, 1:30 p.m. (Dorey)

Friday, 1:30 p.m. (Barton)

Sunday 4:00 p.m. (Harfang)

Call Denny Lyster at (802) 744-6839

Or call Eric McCann; (802) 988-4773

Or call R. James Macdougall (450) 292-3762

Upcoming Vermont Tournaments

Face-to-face tournaments are cancelled through Fall 2021.

Sectionals *may* occur:

September 10-12, 2021, in Burlington; and
October, 29-31, 2021, also in Burlington.

Play local, national, regional and silver point tournaments online.
Go to Bridge Base Online (BBO).

Vermont and Nearby Clubs

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

Manchester Equinox Village Open

49 Maple Street

Manchester, Vermont 05254

Elizabeth VonRiesenfelder; (802) 362-5304

Tuesday; 1:00 p.m.; 0-200 MPs

Tuesday; 1:00 p.m.; open, stratified

Sunday; 2:00 p.m.; February, March; open; stratified

Multiple sites; call first; reservations requested

Taconic Card Club (change pending - call first)

6025 Main Street

Manchester, Vermont 05255

Kim Likakis; (802) 379-1867

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

Apollo Bridge Club

115 Main Street

Montpelier, Vermont 05602

Wayne Hersey; (802) 223-3922

Friday; 6:30 p.m.; open

Arthur Aiken Bridge Club

34 School Street

Orleans, Vermont 05860

Monday; 12:30 p.m.; open; stratified (face-to-face returning in July?)

Rutland Duplicate Bridge Club

66 South Main Street

Christ the King Church

Rutland, Vermont 05701

Raymond Lopes; (802) 779-2538

Monday, 12:00 Noon; open; stratified

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

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

Multiple sites - call first for locations

St. Albans DBC

75 Messenger Street

St. Albans, Vermont 05478

Marsha Anstey; (802) 524-3653

Monday; 7:00 p.m.; open

Burlington Bridge Club

600 Blair Park Road

Williston, Vermont 05495

Club Phone; (802) 872-5722

Don Sharp; (802) 985-9199

Phil Sharpsteen; (802) 899-2080

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

Tuesday; 6:30 p.m.; open; stratified (May-October only; call first)

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

Thursday; 12:30 p.m. 0-300 MPs; stratified

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

Sunday; 1:00 p.m.; open; stratified

Website: www.bridgewebs.com/burlingtonacademy/

Norwich DBC

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

Quechee Duplicate Bridge Club

**Quechee Club
3268 Quechee Main Street
Quechee, Vermont 05059
Dick Tracy; (802) 384-0461; gmbuy51@gmail.com
Monday; 1:00 p.m.; open; stratified; weekly; year-round
1st Thursday of each month; 6:30 p.m.; *monthly*; year-round**

Mad River Valley Bridge Club

**The Waitsfield Inn
5267 Main St
Waitsfield, VT 05673
Vickie Walluck; 802-590-3068
VickieWalluck@gmail.com
Monday; 12:30 p.m.; open
Call or email Vickie in advance if you need a partner**

Eastman Bridge Club

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

Keene DBC

**Elks Lodge
81 Roxbury Street
Keene, New Hampshire 03431
Anne McCune; (603) 352-2751**

Monday; 12:00 Noon; open; stratified (partner available)
Thursday; 12:00 Noon; open; stratified (no partner guaranteed)

Ticonderoga (New York) DBC

109 Champlain Avenue
Ticonderoga, New York 12883
Michael Rogers; (518) 585-3322
Monday; 12:30 p.m.; open; stratified; reservations requested
Thursday; 12:30 p.m.; open; stratified; reservations requested

Plattsburgh (New York) DBC

5139 North Catherine Street
Plattsburgh, New York 12901
George Cantin; (518) 563-6639
Tuesday; 6:45 p.m.; open; handicap
Thursday; 6:45 p.m.; open
Friday; 12:30 p.m.; open

Useful & Fun Links

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