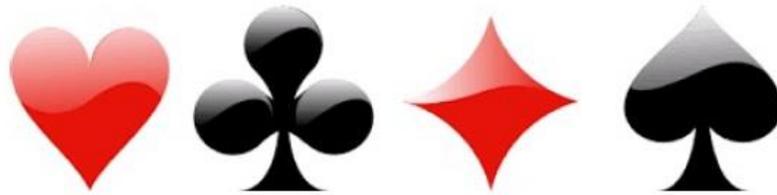


Table Talk

The Quarterly

October 2019



Editors

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Editor's Musings (Mark Oettinger)

The July 12-14, 2019 sectional was held in Manchester, Vermont. The space is fun, with 20-foot ceilings affording good light and acoustics. Jim Thomas directed, and did his usual efficient and friendly job. For someone from Burlington, the distance (2.5 hours by car) is daunting, and I had to pay for (and endure) hotel accommodations. Attendance was up from the year before, because July is a better time of year from the Manchester-area snowbirds. I was left wondering whether it might be possible to draw more competitors from the Albany area, and from Western Massachusetts.

I also attended the Albany Regional, which was smallish by regional standards, but well run. The facility has ample free parking (an additional inducement that was negotiated from the hotel as a part of the big picture), breakfast treats, daylong coffee, and an on-site a la carte lunch buffet at reasonable cost. My partner and I stayed at a chain hotel about 20 minutes from the playing site that was inexpensive and adequate. The annual Capital District regional used to be quite a bit bigger when it was in Saratoga. My sense is that sectionals and regionals are in decline generally, both due to the aging of our demographic, and to the proliferation of online bridge.

Clearly, the solution is recruitment through publicity, lessons, and other inducements for new players. Examples of these types of development efforts can be found at the Burlington and Quechee clubs, among others, and I renew my call for submissions from readers of unsung efforts from elsewhere within our bridge catchment area.

I had quite an experience playing at the Montreal Regional in mid-August. I was recruited to fill out a team with roughly 45,000 masterpoints, when one of its players developed a conflict. I played the *entire* tournament...*seven straight days!* We had a reasonable amount of success, especially considering the fact that I was playing with a new partner, and since we had to play in the top stratum of every event that we entered. We played 2 days of pairs, and 5 days of teams. The pair games were 2-session play-throughs, which I like for the emphasis that they place on consistency and stamina. One of the pair days was an IMP Pairs, where your score on each board is a function of how far your score deviates from the mid-point of all of the other scores on the board. In that respect, it's like the scoring in team games. One stretches to bid and make one's vulnerable games, and one tries not to "go for a number," since a single significantly bad result can outweigh an otherwise well-played round of "flatter" hands.

The Montreal Regional had consistent large attendance, and the quality of play was high-level. A highlight for me was winning a 7-board round against the recently-crowned Canadian champions, who were headed for the world championships in China the following month. We played well, but I have to admit that one of my opponents allowed me to escape from what would probably have been quite a bad result on the last hand. His partner, the team's captain, was none too happy, but was gracious when I returned to their home table, which was by then encircled with coaches, kibitzers and hangers-on, all trying to understand how they had just lost a round to a team of relative unknowns. "Us by 2?" I inquired, offering the reporting slip that, by tradition, is prepared and submitted by the victorious side. "Yes, well played," was the gracious reply. That exchange, which came on the last day of the tournament, made the whole grueling week worthwhile. We ended up 5th that day, out of a large and strong field, earning 11.12 gold points. Much more from this tournament features in the articles of this issue.

At the August 18, 2019 President's Cup, I was elected Vice-President of the Vermont Unit of the ACBL, Unit 175. I served as Unit President in the mid 1980s, during which time I published a quarterly letter. It is worth noting that the primary issue of that era (new player recruitment) remains an even more urgent priority today...35 years later. Interestingly, the phasing out of smoking was also a big deal back then. I look forward to serving once again in the Unit 175 administration.

Playing an Opening 2D bid as Mini-Roman (Mark Oettinger)

Some of you will remember an article that I published a few issues back in which I sang the praises of bids that show 2 suits. Unusual Notrump, Brozel, and Michaels are just a few examples, and the complete list is quite long. At the end of that article, I briefly mentioned a bid that shows *three* suits...Mini-Roman.

An opening bid of 2D shows 11-15 HCP,
and either 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0.

A point about notation: when describing the distribution of a hand, bridge writers use hyphens (-) and equal signs (=) to differentiate general as opposed to specific suit distributions.

4-4-4-1 means a hand with a singleton in any of the four suits, and with four cards in each of the other suits.

4=1=4=4, on the other hand, means a hand with a singleton Heart and 4 cards in each of the other suits.

So, back to Mini-Roman. Some partnerships do not use it with a 5-card Major, but I have found that it works remarkably well for *any* 3-suited hand, including those containing 5-card Majors.

If responder has a non-game-going hand, he simply bids his cheapest 4-card suit, and opener passes with support, or corrects to the next higher level if responder's attempted sign-off was in opener's short suit.

Responder now knows opener's shape, and secure in that knowledge, is well-positioned to set the final contract. Here's a typical set of hands that fall within these parameters:

South Deals

All Vulnerable

♠ J654
♥ 75
♦ KJ43
♣ Q75



♠ A732
♥ K1098
♦ 2
♣ AJ84

South, with 4=4=1=4 shape and 12 HCP, opens 2♦. North, with 9 HCP, knows that the partnership doesn't have a game, even if opener has a maximum 15 HCP. North therefore bids 2♠, his cheapest 4-card suit. On this hand, since opener has 4 Spades, he is happy to pass.

In an uncontested auction, responder bids 2NT to ask opener for his shortness. So:

2♦ 2NT

3♥ ...

...shows shortness in Hearts, i.e., 4=1=4=4, 5=0=4=4. 4=0=5=4, or 4=0=4=5.

How much strength does responder need to bid 2NT? If I have to offer a quantitative answer, I would say that responder should have at least 11 HCP. The better answer, however, is to envision how the auction will proceed, which depends on where opener's shortness is located. If responder bids 2NT with 11 HCP, and if opener has a minimum of 11 HCP, we will be at the three level with 22 HCP. Keep in mind, however, that with one hand having at least 4-card support for three suits, the chances of an 8-card combined trump fit are extremely high, and if one is found, opener's singleton or void constitute 2 or 3 additional "total points" for their ruffing potential.

How does one deal with interference? I like to treat Doubles as "transparent." We therefore bid as if the doubler had passed. 2NT by responder still asks for opener's shortness. A non-jump new suit by responder is "Pass or Correct." When the interference over our 2♦ opener is an *overcall*, however, responder can Double, Bid, or Pass. I strongly favor treating Double as penalty-oriented. In my experience, it is remarkable how often one can severely punish opponents who venture into a Roman auction. 4th seat interference, such as:

S	W	N	E
2♦	X	2N	3♥
?			

...also needs to be discussed with partner. I favor opener Doubling with 4 (or 5) Hearts (again penalty-oriented) and Passing with shortness in Hearts. Responder can now almost certainly judge exactly what to do.

It is said that one should always lead trumps against opponents' 2♦ opener. You know that at least one of their hands has shortness. Often both hands will have shortness, almost always in different suits. The defenders' goal is to cut down on declarer's ruffing tricks.

Dealing With Interference Over 1NT - The Modern Lebensohl Approach (Ingi Agnarsson)

As bridge theory advances, it has become increasingly clear that interfering with your opponents' 1NT opening is important and profitable. Hence, almost every pair has some agreed-upon method to interfere over 1NT, such as Cappelletti, DONT, Brozel, Meckwell, Deas, etc. This has an obvious implication for all bridge players: countermeasures are needed to deal with the opponents' insistent interference over our 1NT!

Many people use lebensohl as a cornerstone of this necessary arsenal. The lebensohl convention has a long history, dating back to the 1960s. The origin of the method is not clear, but the overall design is generally attributed to George Boehm, who provided the first clear description under the name 'lebensohl.' The convention was at first mistakenly attributed to Kenneth Lebensold, who denies any part in its development. This is why lebensohl is spelled with a small-case "l." Ron Andersen, in 1987, then dedicated an entire book to the subject; a book that is considered the main reference on the convention in its original form. Boehm's and Andersen's ideas were so clear, useful, and

well-articulated, that lebensohl became a permanent tool in almost all competitive bridge players' toolboxes.

Many of the original lebensohl ideas have remained unchanged, despite vast advances in bidding theory in recent years. Others have yielded, or are yielding to methods found more practical in the long run. Hence, while most play the fundamentals in the same way (2NT asking for 3♣ to describe a weak hand, or to describe a game-going hand with a stopper in the interference suit; and 3-level bids as constructive/forcing), today, playing lebensohl can indicate different things to different people. Here, I introduce the approach recommended by renowned bridge theorist Larry Cohen, for advanced (or advancing!) players. This approach utilizes lebensohl at its core, but with modern touches.

General Approach Over 1NT

1NT – X - you

It is generally recommended that one ignore RHO's Double. Your bids therefore remain the same as if RHO had passed. Some refer to this treatment as, "systems on." Others would say that RHO's Double is "transparent" in this bidding sequence. That leaves in question what a redouble would mean. I suggest that it simply mean "business," in other words, that you have "cards," i.e. "values," and want to either go to game, or to punish the pesky opponents. Usually, this would be done on a relatively balanced hand.

1NT - 2♣ - you

Again, Cohen's recommendation is to simply ignore the 2♣ overcall to the extent that you can. All *available* bids therefore maintain their original meaning, and you use a Double of 2♣ as Stayman. Some refer to this last bidding treatment as "stolen bid." For advanced players, the

only exception would be when 2♣ promises *both* majors – a topic dealt with below.

1NT – 2♦/♥/♠ - you

With the exception of any of these bids implying *both* majors (see below), use the following structure:

- 1) New suit on the second level (2♥/♠) is natural and non-forcing;
- 2) Other bids in either a suit or NT are lebensohl such that:

- a) 2NT: asks partner to bid 3♣ (always) to either show a weak single-suited hand, or a game-going hand with a stopper in the overcalled suit. You can then pass 3♣, correct to your suit, or, with game-going hands, bid: 1) 3NT (with stopper), or 2) now bid the opponents suit on the 3rd level as Stayman (with stopper);
- b) 3♣/♦/♥/♠, other than the opponents' suit, show a stronger hand with the bid suit. These bids are forcing (and will generally be game-going);
- c) 3 of the opponents' suit: Stayman *without* a stopper (generally game forcing); and
- d) 3NT: game strength but *lacking* a stopper in the opponents' suit;

3) Fourth level: whatever these bids would have meant without interference. 4♣ could, e.g. be Gerber, if that's a convention you use, 4♦/♥ could be Texas Transfers (or natural if that's what you normally use over 1NT), 4NT could be Blackwood or Quantitative, and so on. Fourth level bids generally ignore the opponents' interference, though you could decide to do something special with bidding or transferring to the opponents suit...

Note: one new development in this area is “**transfer lebensohl**,” which accommodates game invitations and makes the stronger hand (the 1NT opener) declarer, thereby “right-siding” the contract more often than not. Look up Larry’s online article on the subject if you want an improved version of lebensohl!

Doubling their Overcall

Let’s give Larry the word:

“If their interference is anything else [other than ‘both majors’] (on any level), use X as cards/negative. It doesn't "promise" the other major(s), but you try your best. Think of double as just saying, "partner, I have values to act, but no suit to bid and nothing else fits." For example, let's say partner opens 1NT, and RHO bids 2♦ to show Diamonds and one of the Majors. I would Double with each of these hands:

♠AQ52 ♥1097 ♦62 ♣J653

♠A52 ♥A97 ♦62 ♣65432

♠J52 ♥K1097 ♦2 ♣Q6532

Again, pass and then double is just a lightish takeout, competing. I'd use these "negative doubles" over natural overcalls as well as conventional overcalls. If you have a true penalty pass of their known suit, you can pass and hope partner reopens with a double.”

This is the major modern change to lebensohl were doubles were originally for penalty. However, the frequency of hands where you wish to penalize the opponents in their suit is considerably lower than the frequency of hands where you just want to compete. Hence,

advanced/expert players increasingly use doubles as negative, along with the fundamental lebensohl bids.

What if interference promises *both* majors?

Larry recommends: "... let's say they promise *both* Majors. I like to use DOUBLE as penalty-oriented. It says you can double at least one of their suits, and give partner a chance to double as well. It sets up a force. If you pass and then DOUBLE, that should be a lightish takeout."

For example: 1NT - 2♣ (showing *both* majors) - you

Double is penalty-oriented. If you double again after the opponents pick their Major, that is now a clear penalty.

Passing at your first opportunity, followed by a later Double of the opponents' chosen Major, is takeout.

In general, if the interference promising both majors is 2♦ or lower, Larry suggests:

2♥ = game force in Clubs;

2♠ = game force in Diamonds;

2NT = relay to 3♣;

3 of a Minor = natural, invitational;

3 of a Major = game force. Shortness (0 or 1) in that Major; and

3NT = to play, with neither Major stopped.

Use the 2NT mechanism to show stoppers - after partner's relay to 3♣, 3 of a Major shows only that Major stopped; 3NT shows both Majors

stopped. Relaying to 2NT also lets you sign off in 3 of a Minor (you either pass partner's relay to 3♣, or you correct with or sign-off in another suit).

Note: Using this method, when the opponents show Majors, you can show either Minor (Weak, Invitational, or Forcing) and can show which Major(s) you have stopped, and also can show both Minors and shortness in a Major.

Against opponents whose "overcall of 2♥ shows Majors," you can use the same structure, except that 2♠ would be game forcing in either Minor.

What about lebensohl in other situations?

Many use lebensohl only after a 1NT opener, but this excellent convention is useful in a variety of circumstances when you need to respond over a second level bid by the opponents. Let's look at some simple examples:

2♠ - X - pass - you:

Here you should employ lebensohl much as if this was an overcall over 1NT. The difference is that your partner is not limited and unlike after 1NT her range could be wide. Hence it is better to consider 3rd level bids as constructive rather than GF.

1♠ - X - 2♠ - you:

This is a non-forcing situation and I originally learned to deal with these sequences by using a convention called Rubinsohl. This convention, however, seems to have "bitten the dust." Hence, treat as above, except here you can also double, which should be negative/cards, usually

lacking a 4-card Heart suit where the correct path forward is unclear. This implies some meat in the Spade suit and could be converted to penalty by partner.

1♠ - P - 2♠ - X - P - you:

As above.

1♥ - 1♠ - P - 2♥ - X - P - you:

As above.

2♦ - X - P - you:

2♥/♠ should be to play, but 2NT and 3 level bids follow the lebensohl pattern.

1♦ - 2♠ - you:

X is negative, and the rest should be lebensohl.

In sum, use lebensohl in general to respond to partner's doubles over 2nd level interference, or 1x-2x by opponents. Also employ after a 2nd level direct overcall over partner's opening.

Second negative: after partner opens and reverses, use lebensohl. For example:

1♣ - P - 1♠ - P - 2♠ - P - you.

Partner has a strong hand. All bids are forcing to game, except 2NT lebensohl forcing 3♣ typically to stop in a part score. You could also agree to bid 2NT and respond to partner's 3♣ with 3NT to indicate a stop in the unbid suit, while a direct 3NT bid would deny it.

6♠ by Heart Endplay (Mark Oettinger)

This hand came up at the Montreal Regional. The form of scoring was matchpoint pairs. I played all week with a new partner, who just went over 10,000 masterpoints. I had been drafted to fill the shoes of a very strong player who had a conflict with the scheduling of this year's tournament. Ellie Hanlon and Mary Savko were our teammates. On this particular day, Ellie and I both sat South, so after each session, we were able to compare experiences...each of us having held the same cards.

Sitting South, in 4th seat, I held:

♠A10742

♥Q84

♦A4

♣AKQ

What a hand! 19 HCP; 5 losers; 7 controls; 5 Spades. Looks like I will open 1♠. Hmm, what will I do if partner responds with a forcing 1NT? I will probably bid 3NT. Partner can correct to 4♠ if he has a hand that calls for it.

Having planned out the auction in some detail, I emerge from my reverie to learn that the auction had not waited for me to open. How annoying!

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	?

Wow! It's hard to imagine stopping below slam. I start by bidding 1♠. The opponents pass throughout. Partner raises to 2♠. I bid 4NT, and

receive a 5♥ (2 keycards, without the Queen) reply. I can see from my hand that partner holds the King of Spades and the Ace of Hearts. He has 4 Spades, so we have 9 Spades together, and even though we lack the Queen, we will drop it singleton or doubleton more than 50% of the time. *The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge* puts the odds at 58%. If we pick up the Spade suit, we will have 10 guaranteed tricks, and partner still has at least 5 undisclosed HCPs. It would be, in my opinion, a pessimistic person who would not place the contract in 6♠. This was our complete auction:

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♠	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♥	Pass	6♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West leads the 10 of Diamonds, dummy comes down, and I examine my prospects:

♠KJ85
♥A72
♦KQ65
♣54



♠A10742
♥Q84
♦A4
♣AKQ

Knowing the odds, I plan to cash the Ace and King of Spades, hoping to drop the singleton or doubleton Queen. If that works, I have 5 Spade tricks, 3 Diamond tricks, 3 Club tricks and 1 Heart trick...for a total of 12 tricks. Is there a way to take all 13 tricks? A careless defender holding 4 Diamonds might pitch one, allowing us to take a 4th Diamond trick. And, yes, there's a potential squeeze. We'll get to that a bit later in the hand...after we deal with the trump suit.

I play the Ace of Spades. All follow, West playing the 9, and East playing the 6. Where is the 3, and is somebody trying to conceal it? I ask about the opponents' defensive carding, and am told that they give trump suit preference. This means that the play of the 9 of Spades (if accurate) was intended to imply a value in the higher of the two remaining suits...excluding trumps and the suit of the opening lead, i.e., the King of Hearts. Noting that potential inference, I internally chided myself for trying to "mastermind" myself out of the odds-on play. I therefore called for the King, and watched RHO discard a Club.

<Expletive deleted>

So...I have a trump loser. Is there any hope of still making it? Yes! You have to assume that LHO has the King of Hearts, and that he has at least three cards in each Minor suit. With this scenario in mind, play off all 3 rounds of Clubs, pitching a Heart from the board. Then play all 4 rounds of Diamonds, pitching a Heart from your hand on the 3rd round of Diamonds, and ruffing the 4th round of Diamonds your hand. The end position is this:

Here's the whole hand:

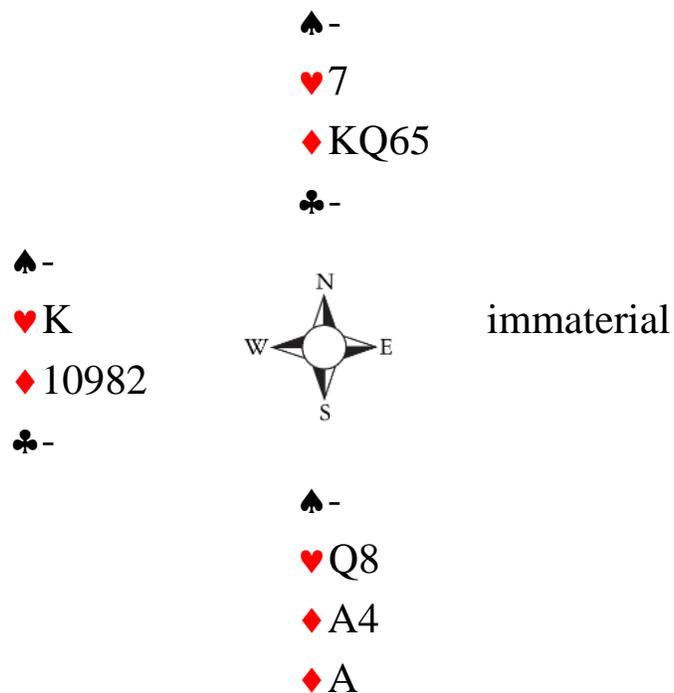
West Deals

EW Vul

	♠KJ85	
	♥A72	
	♦KQ65	
	♣54	
♠Q93		♠6
♥K96		♥J1053
♦10982		♦J73
♣983		♣J10762
	♠A10742	
	♥Q84	
	♦A4	
	♣AKQ	

Epilogue: Every night after the day's two sessions were over, my partner and I, and our teammates, would repair to the hotel buffet to review the events of the day. At dinner following the session at which Ellie and I played the aforementioned 6♠ hand, we were joined by two brothers from Florida who are good friends of our teammates. They were excited to be able to compare hands from the day, since we had all played the same hands, albeit in different brackets, and since we had hand records. When the hand above came up, we learned that the brother who had sat in my direction had also been declarer in 6♠, and had also made 6. "You found the endplay?" I asked, sincerely impressed. Actually, he had not.

He had finessed West for the Queen of Spades, without even cashing the Ace of Spades first to cater against the singleton Queen offside. As the cards lay, he therefore took five tricks instead of my four. Ellie and I simultaneously asked him what had made him play the suit that way. Long answer short: he hadn't given it much thought. But back to the squeeze, having just secured 5 Spade tricks by playing West for the Queen. After having drawn trumps, when South cashes the Ace of Clubs, West is squeezed. Here's the position at Trick 9 as South leads the Ace of Clubs:



If West pitches the King of Hearts, he gives Declarer the Queen of Hearts and 3 Diamonds. If West pitches a Diamond instead, he gives declarer 4 Diamond tricks. Either way, Declarer takes all 13 tricks. Not surprisingly, our dinner companion had not found the squeeze. The moral of the story is, I suppose:

*If you're not good enough to lose a Spade trick,
You're probably not good enough to find the squeeze.*

Strip Squeeze (Ingi Agnarsson)

As your game advances, you start thinking more about ways to gain extra tricks that at a quick glance seem nearly impossible. The easiest to execute is the *endplay*, where you throw in an opponent to force him to make a lead favorable to you:

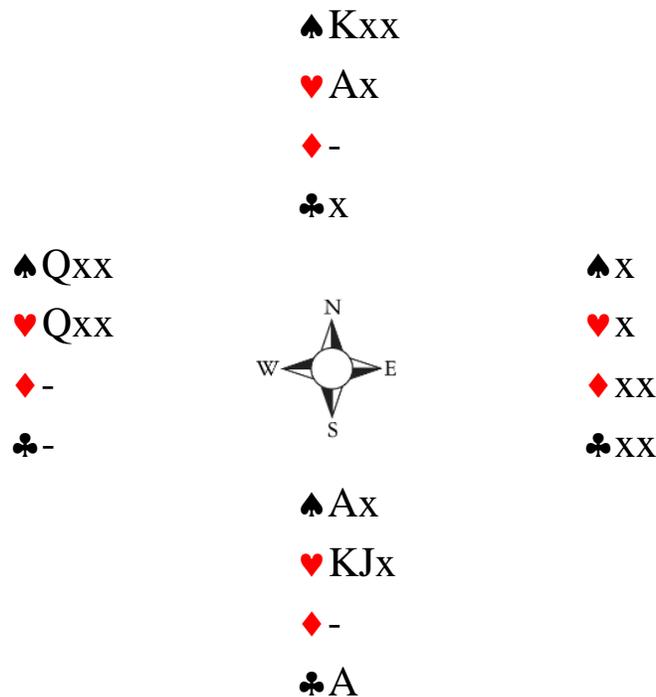
♠AQ
♥Ax
♦-
♣-

♠XX
♥XX
♦-
♣-

With four cards left and the other suits cleared, you need three tricks. A straightforward try is to finesse the Queen of Spades. However, if you have reason to believe (or know) that East has the King of Spades, then go for the endplay. Take Ace of Hearts and exit with a small Heart. If East wins that trick, he will be forced to lead up to your Ace-Queen of Hearts.

Another relatively easy tool (intermediate players should familiarize themselves with this play) is the **simple squeeze**. Here you have an

opponent needing to guard two (or more) suits, who will be forced to unguard one of those suits as you play down your other tricks. The key here is to “rectify the count,” in other words, to get to a position in which you have all of the remaining tricks *except for one* (the ‘unavailable trick’) when you are ready to execute the squeeze. Hence, if you are aiming to get your 10th trick via a squeeze, make sure you have given the opponents their 3 tricks already!



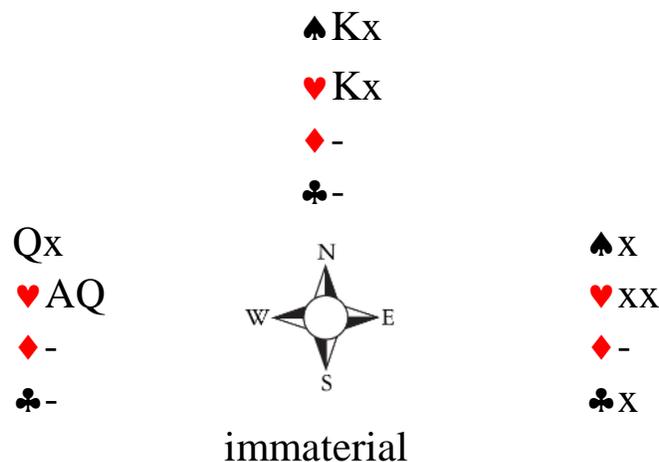
You need the remaining tricks and it looks like you have to either lose to the Queen of Spades or try a losing finesse for the Queen of Hearts. But you’ve done your job, you have rectified the count, and you now play the Ace of Clubs, and West is in deep doodoo. If West throws a Heart, the Queen will drop under the Ace and King, and if West throws a Spade, the Queen of Spades will fall and dummy’s third Spade will become the final trick.

A third somewhat more complex tool combines these two approaches into one, and is referred to as the **strip squeeze**. There, you first squeeze, and then endplay, the squeezed party! The key difference in this type of squeeze is that you do not rectify the count in the same way. As the squeeze happens, you still expect to lose one trick - the throw-in card for the endplay. I got an opportunity to use this tool against my favorite opponents - Mary Savko and Ellie Hanlon - in a recent regional.

	♠KJ93	
	♥K9	
	♦KQ106	
	♣Q107	
♠Q654		♠A72
♥AQ107		♥8
♦9873		♦AJ2
♣8		♣AK9653
	♠108	
	♥J65432	
	♦54	
	♣J52	

I was East and opened 1♣, partner Mary Tierney bid 1♥, and Ellie sitting North entered the bidding with X. I bid 3♣ to indicate extra strength, and this was passed out. Note that it is possible to make 3NT, but that was not the contract I had to play. As you start you only see 5 tricks on power, though more will surely come in the clubs. What you must immediately be concerned about, however, is that North must have all the key outlying cards for her double - which rules out right away any thoughts of a Heart finesse or a play towards dummy's Queen of Spades. Mary Savko led the 10 of Spades. On the previously established premise, putting up the Queen of Spades was pointless, so I ducked the

lead to my Ace of Spades – the first step in the strip squeeze. Now, as I took my Ace and King of Clubs, and played a third trump, we got some good news; a 3-3 split. Now, we were up to 8 tricks. Ellie was in on the Queen of Clubs, and was already in some trouble. If she were to take the King of Spades, I would get my 9th trick from the Queen of Spades. Obviously, Ellie could not lead a Heart, so she led the King of Diamonds. I ducked to set up the finesse, and Ellie had nothing better to do than play another Diamond, which I finessed. That was the ninth trick, yay! Making the contract is good, but you are playing matchpoints, so the overtrick could mean everything. Is there a way to engineer the overtrick with Ellie covering the Queens in both Majors? Yes, there is, and in fact, it's quite simple; the hand plays itself. Don't think you can't execute a strip squeeze! I simply played all of my Clubs, and this was the situation before I played the last Club:



As the last Club was played, I threw a Spade from dummy, and Ellie was squeezed. Throwing a Heart is obviously hopeless (since her double clearly indicates she has the remaining high cards), so she is forced to throw a Spade. This “strips” her of her low Spade exit card, so now I could simply play a Spade to my Queen, overtaken per force by Ellie, who now had to return a Heart into dummy’s tenace; 10 tricks!

Snatching Defeat from the Jaws of Victory...Yet Again (Suggested for Newer Players) (Mark Oettinger)

East Deals

EW Vulnerable

Here's another hand from the Montreal Regional. I did not know the opponents, but from their body language, and from the general strength of the field, I assumed that they were good players. I was South, holding the following hand:

♠8
♥AJ6432
♦3
♣J10965

RHO passed, and I decided to open 2♥. Yes, it's off-shape, with the 5-card Club suit on the side, but with a singleton Spade, I was anxious to make it harder for the opponents to find their likely Spade fit.

LHO bid 3♥...Michaels, showing 5+ Spades and an unspecified 5+-card Minor. Partner jumped to 4♥. RHO bid 4♠. With my 1=6=1=5 shape, I raised to 5♥. LHO carried on to 5♠, and all passed. This was the auction:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	2♥
3♥	4♥	4♠	5♥
5♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

What should I lead? It strikes me that we can rule out a trump right away, for at least two reasons. It could very well play the suit for declarer, when he would go wrong left to his own devices. Also, given the fact that the opponents have competed to the 5 level, they likely have enough trumps that I will not be able to prevent ruffs by leading a trump.

What about my Jack of Clubs? That's a nice, traditional, "top of a sequence" lead, unlikely to give away anything in the Club suit. Returning to the bidding, however, remember that West has shown 5+ Spades and 5+ cards in a Minor. From my hand, it looks like West's Minor is Diamonds.

What about leading my singleton Diamond? If partner has the Ace of Diamonds, I will get a quick ruff with my singleton trump, and if my Ace of Heart cashes thereafter, we will have the opponents down 1. It seems from the bidding, however, that West is far more likely to have the Ace of Diamonds than partner.

Maybe I should lead my Ace of Hearts, and have a look at the dummy. If my Ace of Hearts holds, I will have a much better sense of what to do next. Of course, if one of the opponents is void in hearts, and if partner does indeed have the Ace of Diamonds, I will have missed my chance at getting a Diamond ruff. This last scenario (an opponent being void in Hearts *and* partner having the Ace of Diamonds) is the only one in which I stand to lose by starting with the Ace of Hearts. Since that combined doomsday scenario is highly unlikely, I think, in retrospect, that the Ace of Hearts stands out as the best lead.

Here's the whole hand:

East Deals

EW Vulnerable

	♠53	
	♥985	
	♦9654	
	♣AK32	
♠AKQJ9		♠107642
♥10		♥KQ7
♦AKQJ2		♦1087
♣84		♣Q7
	♠8	
	♥AJ6432	
	♦3	
	♣J10965	

I led my singleton Diamond. Sadly, partner did not have the Ace of Diamonds, so declarer won the lead, drew trumps, pitched his 2 Clubs on dummy's long Diamonds, and lost only 1 Heart (roughing the 3rd Heart on the board).

In response to partner's opening lead, one usually gives attitude with third hand. Here, however, with a singleton heart on the board, it is clear to the defense that continuing a Heart would be futile. This converts 3rd hand's signaling obligation from attitude to suit preference. He therefore follows with his lowest Heart, suggesting a Club shift. If he did not have first round Club control, and had a Diamond void, he would play his highest Heart, in order to suggest a Diamond shift. Had I

led my Ace of Hearts, partner would have followed with the Five of Hearts, and I would have dutifully shifted to a Club, allowing us to take 1 Heart trick and 2 Clubs tricks, putting declarer down 1 before he got in.

Note that (with proper defense) the opponents can make 4S, which would have cost us -620. Bidding 5H was therefore a good bid, since it would have gone down 1...-50 if undoubled or -100 if doubled. When the opponents competed to 5S, they should have been down 1, giving us +100. Instead, my unsuccessful lead cost us -650.

My partner castigated me in front of the opponents, in spite of my immediate apology. I felt bad enough without him doing that, and despite my sincere efforts to “let it go,” that public condemnation had to have affected my play for the balance of the round. We actually did pretty well in a very strong field, but we could have done even better. One of the things that he and I did agree on, however, after 14 consecutive sessions of bridge, is that we will not play together again. What’s the lesson? It’s only a game? Be nice to your opponents? Be nicer to the Director? Be nicest to your partner? Something like that.

As far as “Ace leads” are concerned, Santa Claus brought me a pair of fascinating books last Christmas. They are entitled *Winning Suit Contract Leads* and *Winning Notrump Leads*, by David Bird and Taf Anthias. A point about their methodology. They posit the opening leader’s hand, and they then have the computer generate 5,000 different iterations of the remaining 39 cards in the other three hands. Each plausible lead is run for each hand iteration. The average trick score for each lead is therefore an empirically-based measure of the effectiveness of that lead. The books go on to attempt to distill “general principles of

leading” which may be applied to categories of antecedent auctions, such as 1M - P - 2M - P - 4M, as opposed to 1M - P - 2m - P - 2M - P - 4M. Analysis is intriguingly differentiated as between matchpoints and IMPs. The above books conclude that “Ace leads” are surprisingly effective, if only because, absent a first-round ruff, you will get a second chance to lead, now with the benefit of having seen the dummy and the play to the first trick.

Viva Las Vegas! The 2019 Summer NABC (Ingi Agnarsson)

I was lucky enough to get to play in the 2019 Summer NABC, the first time that I have played at a national tournament in the United States. The venue was the Cosmopolitan Hotel, in Las Vegas. People differ in their opinions of the “Sin City,” but whether you have a positive or a negative view of it, it is amazing. It’s a city of endless entertainment, lights, spectacular buildings, shows with superstars, multi-colored water fountains that dance to music, amazing eats, beautiful people (and lots of skin), and high prices! I have heard a lot about Las Vegas, and was therefore prepared for most of it, but I did certainly not understand how amazingly expensive it is. \$25-30 appetizers, \$8 bottles of water, one hour wage beers (\$15)—for those thusly inclined—and hotels that rip you off with “resort fees” and other add-ons. It’s an experience, and while I object to \$8 water, I didn’t mind too much paying top prices for some of the top-quality food that I got, at places like Hell’s Kitchen and other Ramsey Gordon establishments that are simply excellent. Still, as I was staring in disbelief at one of my food bills, a “native” approached me with a sly smile. “Do you know what you can get for a dollar in Las Vegas?” he asked. I, very sincerely, responded, “No.” Hard to imagine what that might be. “A quarter” he replied giggling. Sounds about right. Las Vegas is not cool, in the every-day weather sense. It went up to

108F, and this Icelander was at my melting point. So, I relied on cold smoothies and Uber, which weren't any more expensive in LV than in Burlington. I didn't get to see any shows, or hang out superstar-spotting, as much more important things were on the menu: Bridge!

To bridge. The venue was fine, a fancy hotel with nice playing conditions. But what was really fine was the company. Bridge superstars left and right. In here, at least, I could spend some time superstar-spotting. I spoke briefly with Eric Rodwell, who signed a book for me last year, and amazingly, remembered our short chat then. I also got to chat for a minute with bona fide bridge God Zia Mahmood. We discussed his numerous bridge tours to Iceland to play at the Reykjavik bridge festival, each time the highlight of the year for us junior players back in the 1990s. Other stars were in abundance, too many to name, but I got to put faces on a lot of names, and it was thrilling. Thousands of players were in attendance, unlike any event in which I've previously played.

I played pairs for the first three days, scoring rather poorly with a partner/client I had just met. We were not quite on the same page, but were approaching that page in the last day, when we scored respectably. Then I joined a team to play in the mini-Spingold (0-6000), restricted teams with no individual players exceeding 6000 masterpoints. The open Spingold is one of the biggest tournaments in the world each year, in the sense of sheer bridge talent and power. All the big names were in that game, while us mere mortals were happy to compete in the "mini." Even there, the competition was stiff, with a number of professional players scattered among teams. It's a knock-out format, where you basically need 9 wins in a row to come out on top. My team was led by captain Arti Bhargava, a business powerhouse and a strong player. I had the opportunity to play with a friend from Iceland, Gudjon Sigurjonsson, a

very strong player, who flew in from Iceland on a short notice when the team was a man down. I know him from all the way back to middle school. We grew up with the same bridge background and have competed numerous times, especially in junior bridge, but I had actually never played with him before. However, bridge roots are strong - we discussed the system for 30 minutes and then went on to play 350 hands with only a couple of misunderstandings during the whole week. Bidding and defense worked like we had been long term partners.

We started slow, in a three-way during the first day, leading in both games at half time by tiny margins (1 and 7 imps). However, then we got into gear. We won both games that day, and looked forward to joining the other teams making it to the second day of play. From that moment on, we were unstoppable, winning every match easily, not losing a single session against any of the teams. In the quarterfinals, we played a team with two pros, and they forfeited after three out of four sessions. We met an all-pro team in the semifinals, who forfeited after only two out of four sessions, after we had taken an astounding 80 imp lead. On the menu for day seven: the final of the mini Spingold! We were very happy and excited to be in the final. Once we sat down against our opponents in the final, we felt it right away - this was a much stronger team than the others, with two pros who were very tuned to the game, expert bidding and excellent defense. In the first session, we lost our first session of the tournament, and lost big, about 40 imps. Sure, they were good, but that was not the main issue; I was failing. I had not slept the night before, I felt sick, and I was exhausted from play. I have never before played more than 5 days in a row, and the final was my 10th 8-hour day in a row playing bridge. I made a number of what I consider uncharacteristic mistakes, including some very elementary errors. The team was in a bit of a shock. Everybody else was playing at or near their normal level, although Arti also felt sick. But we regrouped, and the

team “poured some coffee on me.” Our game improved. We trailed by 25 imps heading into the last session. First hand in the last session, our opponents took a risk slam-hunting, and ended up in 5♠. I led the Ace of Clubs. Unfortunately, the situation was unclear. Dummy held a menacing Club suit, and partner’s discard was an arguably discouraging high card (we use upside down signals). Declarer effortlessly concealed a missing low card, further clouding the issue. Was partner discouraging, or did he have a singleton? Unfortunately, I could have taken the game down by continuing with the King of Clubs and then giving partner a rough (he did have a singleton), but I rewarded declarer for concealing a low club by choosing a different defense, probably unwisely, and certainly not successfully. After that, we still had a good round, and we thought that we might have a chance. But the result at the other table had swayed against our teammates, and we ended up losing the mini Spingold by 20 imps, after 64 hands. Oh, well. Next time.

There were many spectacular hands among the 350. Perhaps we will take a look at some of them in later issues of Table Talk.

Exploring Slam (Mark Oettinger)

Here’s another hand from the Montreal Regional. In third seat, both vulnerable, I picked up the following hand:

♠AKQ872

♥9

♦AQJ9

♣84

16 HCP; 4 losers; an essentially solid suit...and the suit is Spades.

Much to my (internal) surprise, partner opens 1NT (15-17) in first seat. The opponents pass throughout. Keep in mind that partner is a very strong (and volatile) player. During the course of the roughly ten sessions thus far, we have been bidding our slams with remarkable success. Can we manage to get another one right?

I start with a 2♥ transfer bid, showing any strength hand with 5+ Spades. Partner dutifully bids 2♠, “accepting” the transfer. I know nothing more than I did a round earlier in the bidding. Partner has 15-17 HCP, and some variant of notrump distribution. And he has at least 2 Spades.

Aside: Under the General Convention Chart, which is promulgated by the ACBL Board of Directors, it is now legal to open 1NT with a singleton Ace, King or Queen, as long as the hand does not also contain a doubleton in another suit. It is beyond the scope of this article whether such an opening is wise. My general reaction that it should only be used when a failure to do so will limit opener’s rebid options in such a way that they would even more misdescribe opener’s hand. Also, I have heard it said that it should never be done if the singleton honor is in a Major suit, as that would turn out awkwardly if partner were to Jacoby Transfer you into your singleton suit. I solicit from readers their opinions as to whether one should ever open 1NT with a singleton Ace, King or Queen...and if so, under what circumstances. See your letter in the next issue of *Table Talk*. I doubt that there are clearly right and wrong approaches. More important, in my view, is that you have a clear agreement with your partner on this point.

Back to the hand under discussion: Since I have the Ace, King and Queen of Spades in my own hand, partner must have at least two Spades in his hand, so I know that we have a Spade fit of at least 8 cards. Note that partner does *not* know that, however, since my Jacoby Transfer only guarantees 5 Spades. This is something to keep in mind as the auction develops.

I next bid 3♦, forcing to game, and presumably showing 4 Diamonds. Partner rebid 3♥, and I countered with 3♠, presumably showing 6 Spades. Partner now bid 4♠ (showing 2 Spades, as he would have supported on the previous round if he had 3 Spades). I can't help bidding 4NT, asking for key cards. Partner bids 5♥ to show 2 key cards without the Queen of trumps (Spades). From my hand, I can see that partner's key cards are the two outstanding Aces. Remember that partner has 15-17 HCP, with at most 1 of those HCP in Spades. Even after the 2 Aces that he has shown through his Roman Key Card Blackwood response, he has 6-8 additional HCP. Do we have a grand slam? I next ask for Kings with 5NT.

The auction thus far has been as follows:

West	North	East	South
	1NT	P	2♥
P	2♠	P	3♦
P	3♥	P	3♠
P	4♠	P	4NT
P	5♥	P	5NT
P	?		

Note: initiating King Ask guarantees partner that we have all of the Key Cards. This knowledge can occasionally produce a 4NT *responder* who is better able than the 4NT *initiator* to set the final contract. My partner and I were playing Specific Kings, and partner bid 6♣, showing the King of Clubs. It did not deny other higher-ranking kings. That still only accounts for 11 HCP, so he has to have at least one of the other kings...maybe both.

If partner's second posited king is the King of Diamonds, 7NT will be cold. And even if he has the King of Hearts and *not* the King of Diamonds, the Notrump Grand will still make if the King of Diamonds is onside. Combined, 7NT is over 75% likely to succeed.

This was the final auction:

West	North	East	South
	1NT	P	2♥
P	2♠	P	3♦
P	3♥	P	3♠
P	4♠	P	4NT
P	5♥	P	5NT
P	6♣	P	7NT
P	P	P	

And here is the whole hand:

North Deals
Both Vul

	♠ J9 ♥ AQ84 ♦ K732 ♣ AK2	
♠ 1064 ♥ J1062 ♦ 10854 ♣ 96		♠ 53 ♥ K753 ♦ 6 ♣ QJ10753
	♠ AKQ872 ♥ 9 ♦ AQJ9 ♣ 84	

For partnerships who respond to King Ask with Number of Kings, South would have received a “2 Kings” response, and may well have decided to bid 7NT on much the same logic that I had used in deciding to bid 7NT over my partner’s 6♣ “Specific King” bid.

Recall, however, that my partner and I were a new partnership. With some of my more regular partners, I would have bid 6♦ over 6♣, which I like to play as “help-suit.” In other words, it asks partner to bid 7S if he has “help” in Diamonds. By “help,” I mean a heretofore undisclosed honor...a non-trump King or Queen. I could tell from my hand that that the only Diamond honor that partner could have was the King, and so, the 6♦ bid by me would allow him to bid 6♠ *without* the King of Diamonds, but to bid 7♠ *with* the King of Diamonds. In the latter case, I could confidently convert to 7NT, as I can now count 13 sure tricks.

Upcoming Vermont Tournaments

0-500 MPs; Non-Life Master Sectional

Burlington Bridge Club

600 Blair Park Road

Williston, VT

January 25, 2020

Vermont Sectional

Burlington Bridge Club

600 Blair Park Road

Williston, Vermont

May 15, 16 & 17, 2020

Vermont Sectional

Battenkill Eagles

2282 Depot Street

Manchester, Vermont

July 10, 11 & 12, 2020

President's Cup

Location TBD

August __, 2020 (tentative)

Vermont Sectional

Burlington Bridge Club

600 Blair Park Road

Williston, Vermont

September 11, 12 & 13, 2020

Vermont Sectional

Quechee Base Lodge

3277 Quechee Main Street

Quechee, Vermont

October 30, 31 & November 1, 2020

Vermont and Nearby Clubs

Lyndonville Bridge Club

Cobleigh Library
14 Depot Street
Lyndonville, Vermont 05851
Jeanie Clermont; (802) 684-2156
Saturday, 1:00 p.m.; semi-monthly; stratified

Manchester Equinox Village Open

49 Maple Street
Manchester, Vermont 05254
Elizabeth VonRiesenfelder; (802) 362-5304
Tuesday; 1:00 p.m.; 0-200 MPs
Tuesday; 1:00 p.m.; open, stratified
Sunday; 2:00 p.m.; February, March; open; stratified
Multiple sites; call first; reservations requested

Taconic Card Club

6025 Main Street
Manchester, Vermont 05255
Kim Likakis; (802) 379-1867
Thursday; 12:30 p.m.; open; reservations requested

Apollo Bridge Club

115 Main Street
Montpelier, Vermont 05602
Wayne Hersey; (802) 223-3922
Friday; 6:30 p.m.; open

Newport Club

84 Fyfe Street

Newport Center, Vermont 05855

Eric McCann; (802) 988-4773

Wednesday; 1:00 p.m.; exc. Jan, May, Oct, Nov, Dec; open; stratified

Barton Bridge Club

34 School Street

Orleans, Vermont 05860

Linda Aiken; (802) 525-4617

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

Rutland Duplicate Bridge Club

66 South Main Street

Christ the King Church

Rutland, Vermont 05701

Raymond Lopes; (802) 779-2538

Monday, 12:00 Noon; open; stratified

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

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

Multiple sites - call first for locations

St. Albans DBC

75 Messenger Street

St. Albans, Vermont 05478

Marsha Anstey; (802) 524-3653

Monday; 7:00 p.m.; open

Burlington Bridge Club

600 Blair Park Road

Williston, Vermont 05495

Phil Sharpsteen; (802) 999-7767

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

Tuesday; 7:00 p.m.; open; stratified (call first November-April)

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

Wednesday; 1:30 p.m. 0-20 MPs; strat'd; *may resume Fall; pre-reg. & part. req'd*

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

Sunday; 1PM; open; semi-mo. exc. May, June, July, Aug; strat.; *call/check web*
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; gmboy51@gmail.com
Monday; 1:00 p.m.; open; stratified; weekly; year-round
1st Thursday of each month; 6:30 p.m.; *monthly*; year-round

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

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

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