

Olney Bridge Club News

Official newsletter of the Olney Maryland Bridge Club

The Bridge Guy Speaks

As we bring 2023 to a close, I want to congratulate each of you for contributing to our success. We began June with zero members of the club. We now have 55 people on our email distribution list. If you've visited the club (or a beginner class) even once, you have played a role in promoting bridge in the Olney area. Thank you all, and let's do even more in 2024!

So, what does "more in 2024" mean? I have a few thoughts. First, I'll hold two additional beginner bridge classes (in the spring and summer) to bring in some more novice players. Second, you (our current bridge community) will encourage your friends and colleagues with bridge experience to join us for an occasional game. I'll continue to hold occasional "mini-lessons" on various topics (focusing more on the play of the hand early in 2024).

I also plan to query the library about ordering a few more bridge tables. We regularly seat 5 tables weekly but have only 2 actual bridge tables. If the library is unable to procure funds for this purchase, I'll plan to ask for donations from the group.

As always, practice, practice, practice! And convince your friends to join us! Our message to the community: bridge is fun and intellectually stimulating – come join us! All ages are welcome!

Beginner Bridge Lessons

Next Class (2024):

The fall beginner bridge classes have completed. Next lessons start March 30, 2024.

Upcoming mini-classes:

- *Slam Bidding III – December 16*

All mini-lessons start at 2:30 Saturdays at the Olney library. The mini-lessons will generally run less than 15 minutes.

Ongoing Practice Sessions:

*Every Saturday from 2:30 – 4:30 at the Olney library. Note: **the December 23 and December 30 sessions are canceled.***

We will hold a small party for the bridge club on December 23. The party will take place between 2:30 and 4:30 at our house in Ashton. I'll send an email on December 15 with details.

Play It Safe

This month we'll discuss yet another new approach for winning tricks – the **safety play**. The primary goal in rubber bridge (the primary form of bridge played in social settings) is to make one's contract. The safety play is a strategy to lose a trick early in order to increase the probability of bringing home a successful contract. This concept of losing a trick early is often hard for beginners to comprehend. The hand on the following page will begin to show you how it works.

North Deals
None Vul

♠ A 6 5 4
♥ A Q 3
♦ A K 9 6
♣ 8 3

♠ K 10 9 8
♥ J 10 7 4 2
♦ 5 4 3
♣ 9

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ J 7
♥ K 9 8
♦ Q J 10 8 2
♣ Q J 10

♠ Q 3 2
♥ 6 5
♦ 7
♣ A K 7 6 5 4 2

West	North	East	South
	1 N	Pass	3 N

All pass
Lead: ♦ Q

In this practice hand North and South arrive at a 3NT contract after South bids 3N on their 9-point hand, giving extra value to the 7-card club suit headed by the AK. How would you play the hand after a lead of the Q of diamonds?

First, plan the hand. After you win the A of diamonds on the first trick, you see six sure winners (the 4 aces and the 2 kings). Where will you generate the other three tricks?

Well, if all goes well, the clubs will split 2 – 2 (40% chance) and you’ll win all six club tricks. Woo hoo!

But...what if the clubs split 3 – 1 (a 50% chance)? If you take the A (or K) of clubs on the second trick, you have no chance. Even if you lose a trick on the third trick, you have no means to return to the South hand to cash the remaining clubs (the only entry, the Q of spades, loses to West’s K).

So, the winning approach is to play a club on the second trick...and let East win. So long as the clubs don’t split 4 – 0 (in which

case, you’re doomed), you can win the remaining club tricks. Nine tricks are at hand.

This is but one example of a safety play. We’ll explore others in a future newsletter.

Slam Bidding – Part 3

Last month we discussed a means by which to determine whether a partnership is missing two aces when bidding a slam. After opening 1NT or 2NT, we showed how a jump to 4C (the Gerber convention) allows exploration of the number of aces.

In this article we’ll expand that ace-counting exercise to hands where a partnership has found a fit in a suit contract and may want to proceed to slam. After a suit is agreed as trumps, a subsequent bid of 4NT is the Blackwood convention, which is another means to get the count of aces.

The 4NT bid is totally artificial – it says nothing about an interest in playing in no trump (you’ve already agreed to play in a trump suit!). Moreover, this use of 4NT is nothing like an earlier sequence (1NT – pass – 4NT), which was a quantitative, invitational bid. That bid occurred only after an initial NT bid and a subsequent jump to 4NT.

The Blackwood convention is used only a) after a suit is agreed as trumps; b) if the 4NT player has no voids (empty suit); and c) if the number of aces is of interest. If you have a void or you need to know whether partner holds a specific ace (e.g., the A of diamonds or the A of hearts), then Blackwood is not the right approach (investigate: cue-bidding aces/controls).

The Blackwood convention is useful when you’re interested in a slam in a given suit and you are uncertain whether your team is missing two aces.

The Blackwood convention may be initiated by either partner. The first who knows a slam is possible will bid 4NT if uncertain about the number of missing aces.

After the 4NT bid, the other partner shows their number of aces by bidding “up the line”:

5 clubs	0 or 4 aces
5 diamonds	1 ace
5 hearts	2 aces
5 spades	3 aces

The responder will then proceed accordingly:

- Missing two aces, sign off at the lowest level in the agreed trump suit.
- Otherwise, bid the slam in the agreed trump suit.

Note: when the bid is 5 clubs, it should be obvious whether opener has 0 or 4 aces. If not clear, you probably had insufficient points to bid a slam.

In the very rare case where you have all 4 aces and you may have a grand slam, you may subsequently bid 5 no trump (artificial) to ask for the number of kings. Partner will respond up the line:

6 clubs	0 or 4 kings
6 diamonds	1 kings
6 hearts	2 kings
6 spades	3 kings

Here’s a sample hand to show when to use Blackwood. After the 1D opening, East bids 1H, West raises to 2H with a minimum hand. East knows the partnership has 32 – 34 total points (about 21 – 22 in the East hand and 12+ in the West hand). But with only one ace, East uses Blackwood to check – are two aces missing? In this hand, 5H shows 2 aces. Woo hoo, you’re missing only one ace! You can bid 6 hearts. The only loser is the A of diamonds.

South Deals ♠ 9 8 5 4
♥ 8
E-W Vul ♦ A J 8
♣ 9 7 5 3 2

♠ A 6 3 2
♥ Q 6 4 3
♦ 10 7
♣ A K 6



♠ K Q J
♥ A K J 5 2
♦ K Q 5 3
♣ 10

♠ 10 7
♥ 10 9 7
♦ 9 6 4 2
♣ Q J 8 4

West	North	East	South
			Pass
1 ♦	Pass	1 ♥	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	4 N	Pass
5 ♥	Pass	5 N	Pass
6 ♦	Pass	6 ♥	All pass

If West had only one ace (and bid 5D to show that), East would have signed off by bidding 5H (the lowest level of the agreed trump suit).

Read more about the Blackwood convention online to see more examples.

Try to Bid It

This is a hand from William Root’s *How to Play a Bridge Hand* (recommended). First, how would you bid it?

South Deals ♠ A 9 7
♥ K 8 5
None Vul ♦ 6 3
♣ A K J 4 2

♠ Q 10 8 4
♥ Q J 10 2
♦ 9 4
♣ 7 6 5



♠ 6
♥ 9 7 6 3
♦ 10 8 7 5 2
♣ Q 10 8

♠ K J 5 3 2
♥ A 4
♦ A K Q J
♣ 9 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♠
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	4 N
Pass	5 ♥	Pass	6 ♠

All pass

Lead: ♥ Q

South opens 1S; North shows 10+ and 5 clubs with the 2C bid. South conservatively shows their diamond suit, and North jumps to game (4S), showing 13+ points and 3 spades. South bids 4NT (Blackwood – see article above), North answers 5H (2 aces), and South bids the 6S slam.

The key to playing this hand is a safety play (see the article above). There are no losers in the side suits. If trumps split 3 – 2, all is well, but a 4-1 split is tricky. To avoid more than one trump loser, cash the spade K, then lead a low spade toward North. If West plays a high card, win the ace. If West plays low, finesse with the 9. If West shows out, play the ace and then lead a small spade toward the J in South. All approaches leave only one loser. This is an important approach – play it for yourself.

Famous Bridgies

Many would claim that Dwight Eisenhower’s favorite relaxation method involved golf. And, yes, he played a lot – perhaps 800 rounds during his 8-year term.

But he also played a great deal of bridge during WWII and his presidency. His WWII naval aide, Commander Harry Butcher, was supposedly selected (partially) because of his expert bridge skills. His favorite partner was General Alfred Gruenther, perhaps the best military player and also the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe during 1953. While president, Eisenhower had regular Friday night games

with members of his cabinet, the Supreme Court, business leaders, and Oswald Jacoby (a professional bridge player). Jacoby evaluated Eisenhower as a 90’s golfer but a 70’s bridge player (for those of you who don’t play golf, 72 is often a good score).

Olney Bridge Club

We have formed an Olney MD Bridge Club. The primary purpose of the Olney MD Bridge Club is to teach and encourage social bridge in the areas including and surrounding Olney, Maryland.

We meet regularly (Saturdays from 2:30 – 4:30) at the Olney library for practice playing sessions.

Please feel free to send email to bridgeinfo@bridge.careytutor.com with any questions, comments, recommendations, or other correspondence for the editor. In particular, if you have a bridge article to include in a future newsletter or a suggestion of a possible topic, any such submission would be much appreciated.

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