

Olney Bridge Club News

Official newsletter of the Olney Maryland Bridge Club

The Bridge Guy Speaks

Welcome to the holiday season (Bodhi day, Yule, Christmas, Kwanzaa, Hanukkah). We will honor the month and cancel the last two practice sessions of the year (12/21 and 12/28).

On December 21 from 2:30 – 4:30 we will celebrate with our 2nd Annual Bridge Party at our house (see info to right). As we did last year, Sabine and I will provide a number of cookies, snacks, and drinks. Feel free to bring other items as you wish, but nothing is required. Please join us if you can.

We have also finished two successful mini-lessons (declarer play and preemptive bids). I have set up a schedule for the first six months of 2025. See the box to the right.

If you are not attending a particular mini-lesson, please set up tables for the 2:30 practice session as always. We'll finish before 2:30 and join the practice session. Note: when the Children's Room is unavailable, we will use the main meeting for the mini-lessons. Please quietly set up tables while we finish the lesson.

As our club continues to grow, please be supportive of all our club members. Our club is very new and many of the current players have only a few months of experience. Help them when you can; be patient otherwise. We'll all get better together.

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

Next Mini-Lessons:

- *Hold-up play – 1/18/2025*
- *Strong 2 clubs bid – 2/15*
- *Rule of 11 – 3/15*
- *Basic doubles – 4/19*
- *Play signals – 5/17*
- *Negative doubles – 6/21*

2:00 – 2:30 – Olney library (Children's Room or main Meeting Room).

Ongoing Practice Sessions:

Every Saturday from 2:30 – 4:30 at the Olney library (main Meeting Room).

Bridge Club Holiday Party:

*Saturday, 12/21, from 2:30 – 4:30 at our home (17501 Shenandoah Ct, Ashton, MD 20861). The last two Saturdays of the year (12/21 and 12/28) are **canceled**.*

Bidding After a Preempt

At the December 14th mini-lesson we discussed the basics for making a preemptive bid. In this article, we'll discuss some options for the opponents, who respond after the preemption. In this article I will focus on responses after a 3-level or 4-level preemptive bid. 2-level ("weak two) bids will be analyzed in a future newsletter.

Note: for those who want to review preemptive bids, I wrote articles in the April, 2024, and May, 2024, newsletters about preemptive bids as well as responses by the preemptor's partner. One caveat: in the newsletters I recommended making a preemptive bid with 6 – 11 **total points**. In the mini-lesson, I reverted to the more

traditional 5 – 10 **high card points**. The 5 – 10 high card points range is more conservative, so is probably better for beginning players. Use either method as a guide and then use your best judgment (gained from experience) to pick the best bid.

Now, on to the opponents' response to the preemptive bid. Of course, as per the rationale for the preemptive bid, the opponents should be at somewhat of a loss. The preemptive bid has taken away much of their bidding space. Nevertheless, one must compete in order to win.

A standard approach is fourfold:

- Overcall in a new suit with 12 – 17 total points and a strong 5-card suit (better if longer). Look for more points and a longer suit if you have to bid at the 4 level.
- Double for takeout with a) 15+ total points, b) 3-card support for all unbid majors, and c) shortness in the preempt suit.
- Bid 3 NT with 15+ high card points and stopper(s) in the preempt suit.
- Pass and see what partner says.

Overcalling with a strong suit (at least KJTxxx or AKQxx) is reasonable if you can bid at the 3 level. Your hand and your suit should be stronger if you have to bid at the 4 level. You should also look at the hand structure: say, a strong 6-card suit plus a good 4-card suit if you have only 12 total points).

Here is an example hand (after a 3H preemptive bid):

♠ KJT862 ♥ 8 ♦ AQ93 ♣ K7

Note that the hand is short in the preempt suit (hearts), with a long, strong suit

(spades), and with a useful side suit (diamonds). The hand has 13 high card points plus two length points in spades.

The modern approach is that all immediate doubles are for **takeout** (not penalty). However, this is arranged by partnership agreement – you can pick the level at which a “double” becomes a penalty double. For beginners, I recommend that double is for takeout if the opponent's bid is 3H or lower. You have room to fit in a bid at the 3 level if partner's hand is weak. But if they open 3S (or higher), double is for **penalty**.

You're shooting in the dark – so you should have support for the unbid suits and shortness in the preempt suit. These takeout doubles work the same as with takeout doubles at a lower level: namely, partner responds in their longest suit, even if that is at the 4 level. Yep, you're taking a chance.

Here is an example hand (after a 3H preemptive bid):

♠ KQ62 ♥ 8 ♦ AQ93 ♣ KJ7

Note that the hand is short in the preempt suit (hearts) and with 3-card support or longer in each of the unbid suits (and with length in the unbid major, if possible). The hand has 15 high card points.

In certain circumstances you'll have a stopper or stoppers in the preempt suit: I'd recommend Axx or, even better, KJx. If you have a balanced hand with some sort of high card in each suit, 3NT may be the right place. Gamble if you want to win!

Here is an example hand (after a 3H preemptive bid):

♠ KJ6 ♥ AJ8 ♦ AT932 ♣ K8

Note that the hand has stoppers (AJ) in the preempt suit (hearts), 16 high card points, and a good side suit (diamonds) that may win some tricks.

The fourth choice, **pass**, is more interesting than it looks. If you can't find a strong suit to overcall, your hand doesn't have 3-card or longer support for the unbid suits, and you don't have a stopper in the preempt suit, then pass is the primary option. See if partner has something better to offer.

However, you may also pass if you have length or strength in the preempt suit and a good hand. Depending on your partnership agreement, you may not be able to double for penalty immediately (in my recommendation above, for example, a double of 3H would be for takeout).

Instead, pass and see if partner can say something. If they double, you can either a) pass, which converts the double into "penalty"; or b) perhaps offer another choice at 3 NT or at the 4 level.

Here is an example hand (after a 3H preemptive bid):

♠ KQ6	♥ KJ532	♦ KT93	♣ 8
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Note that the hand has a great heart suit (the 3H bidder probably has AQxxxxx, so your K and J of hearts will win), a modest 12 high card points, and no support in clubs (so, "double" is risky). You'll be fine if 3H is the contract – you should take many tricks. If partner doubles (for takeout), you may decide to pass and play for a big penalty.

As you can see, preemptive bids are effective, because they throw you off your game. But fight back with an overcall, a double, or a "waiting pass" – you'll often do better than allowing the opponents to play their preemptive bid.

Discarding a Loser

This article will show how to set up a long suit so as to discard a loser in another suit. The following is a practice hand:

		♠ A Q J 7 4	
North Deals		♥ A 5	
None Vul		♦ K 3 2	
		♣ 8 4 3	
♠ 3 2			♠ 8 6 5
♥ 10 9 8 2			♥ K Q J 7 6
♦ Q J 10 9 8			♦ 7 6
♣ Q 10			♣ K J 2
			♠ K 10 9
			♥ 4 3
			♦ A 5 4
			♣ A 9 7 6 5

West	North	East	South
	1 ♠	Pass	3 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	All pass	

Lead: ♥ K

North opens 1S with 14 high card points plus a length point (spades). South jumps in spades to show 3-card support and 10 – 12 total points. North's two aces and strong spades are encouraging, so North accepts by bidding 4S. East might have chosen to insert a 2H overcall, but it would make no difference. West doesn't have enough to push past the 3S bid.

After the king of hearts opening lead (showing at least KQ in hearts), North ponders. They appear to have a heart loser, a potential diamond loser, and two club losers – one too many.

The key is to determine which of the losers might be eliminated. It's probably too late to eliminate a heart loser – as soon as E/W get in (with a club or perhaps a diamond), they'll immediately cash their queen of hearts. The diamonds are pretty strong with the ace and king, so perhaps the third diamond can be discarded. But how?

Aha! Look at those lovely clubs! Yes, they don't look so pretty with only the ace and a bunch of smaller cards. But the key word is "bunch" – there are eight clubs between the two hands. That leaves five for the opponents. Moral: long suits are useful for discarding from other suits, even if the long suit isn't that strong.

After that thought process, North proceeds with gusto. They can take two rounds of trumps. If they find a 3 – 2 split, they can play another round of trumps. If they find a 4 – 1 split, they'll wait and deal with that later. So, they take the ace of hearts and ace of clubs and immediately lead another club.

East/West catch on and, after cashing their heart trick, lead a diamond to attack the ace/king in N/S. Too late! North takes the king of diamonds and leads yet another club. You notice that North is losing tricks early (that must be lost in any event) in order to win tricks later that will be particularly advantageous.

If clubs have split 3 – 2 (68% probability), all is well. The final two low clubs in South's hand will be used to discard a low diamond loser in North's hand. North wins a diamond return, draws trumps (ending in South's hand), and plays a club to discard the 2 of diamonds. Ten tricks made.

If clubs split 4 – 1, North will ruff high any returned club, draw trumps, and return to South with the ace of diamonds. A small club is used to discard the 2 of diamonds. Contract made.

Try to Bid (and Play) It

This is from the 12/14/24 Frank Stewart column. Try to bid and play it. Think about the number of potential losers and how to eliminate one of them.

North Deals	♠ K J 3	
None Vul	♥ K 5 3	
	♦ Q 4	
	♣ K Q 6 3 2	
♠ A 5 2		♠ 8 7
♥ Q 10 8 7 6		♥ J 9
♦ A 7 6		♦ 10 9 8 3 2
♣ 10 5		♣ A J 9 4

♠ Q 10 9 6 4		
♥ A 4 2		
♦ K J 5		
♣ 8 7		

	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♣	Pass	1 ♠
Pass		2 ♠	Pass	3 ♠
Pass		4 ♠	All pass	

Lead: ♥ 7

The bidding is straightforward. North opens 1C with a minimum hand, South bids their 5-card spade suit, North provides a minimum raise (indicating 12 – 15 total points), South advances 3S to invite (if North has a maximum), and North accepts.

Review the hand before playing. In a suit contract, count losers first, and let's use the stronger hand (North) as the master hand. You have a spade loser (ace), a potential heart loser, a diamond loser, and a club loser – one too many. You can't help the three missing aces, but you can eliminate a heart loser by discarding a low heart on the third diamond. So, in this hand, hold off on leading trumps (if not, the opponents will lead hearts a second time and plan to win their heart trick before you can discard the loser).

Then, play three rounds of diamonds, discarding the low heart on the third diamond. Win another heart trick and ruff a heart in the North hand. Finally, draw trumps and win the full ten tricks.

Stewart indicates that the 7 of hearts lead is non-optimal. I think he would recommend leading the ten of clubs instead of the 7 of hearts. If East is cagey, they'll hold up winning the first trick. When West wins the diamond lead, they'll lead another club to the ace and East will return yet another small club. Either West will ruff (an extra trick) or South will ruff – in which case West discards their third diamond. Subsequently, when South leads the third diamond, West can ruff – either winning directly or, if North over-ruffs, retaining the small heart loser. A tricky, hard-to-find, but winning approach.

Famous Bridgies

Harold Stirling Vanderbilt, the great-grandson of the renowned railroad and shipping tycoon Cornelius Vanderbilt, was a railroad executive, philanthropist, yachtsman (two America's Cups), and champion bridge player. Vanderbilt was trained at Harvard College and Harvard Law School.

After playing auction bridge (the predecessor to our modern contract bridge) on trip across the Atlantic in 1925, Vanderbilt devised the new scoring rules for **contract bridge**. Contract bridge soon supplanted auction bridge in popularity. Note: Vanderbilt also developed new rules for yachting that were finally adopted by the international yacht union in 1960.

Vanderbilt instituted the Vanderbilt Trophy competition (now called the Vanderbilt Knockout Teams or "Vanderbilt"), a premier event for top-level 4-person teams. He was part of teams that won the Trophy twice. He also won the North American Bridge Championships twice.

Vanderbilt supported Vanderbilt University (originally sponsored by his great-grandfather) and served as its president for

over 30 years. The university has several scholarships in his honor.

Bridge Story

When World War II began, Vanderbilt's yachts Vagrant and Vara were appropriated by the US Navy. Vanderbilt received a check for their value [\$300,000], but he signed it over to the USO so the money would benefit servicemen. U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings, June 2014, "Special – 'A Project So Unique'"

Olney 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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