

# Olney Bridge Club News

*Official newsletter of the Olney Maryland Bridge Club*

## The Bridge Guy Speaks

Happy Valentine's Day. I'm putting the newsletter out a day early this month. I hope you all are charged up for some great bridge to celebrate the occasion (plenty of heart bids...natch').

The next "mini-lesson" is scheduled for this coming Saturday (February 15). We'll meet at 2:00 – either in the Children's Room or the main meeting room. The topic for the mini-lesson is "**Strong Two Clubs Opening Bid**". I'll have some pre-dealt hands to analyze and discuss.

In coming weeks, please be cautious anytime you feel even somewhat ill. Reports of very high flu infections are rampant (along with a good number of covid cases). We are an older group – don't come if you are sick at all. We'll have plenty of Saturdays to play this year.

However, please be aware that the library needed to book our playing room for **March 8**. We will therefore **cancel that session**. I'll send reminders out in future weeks.

One more note: The Holiday Park duplicate bridge group is still looking for new participants. If you want to learn duplicate play in a lower-pressure environment, Holiday Park is the place. Ernie Schuler is the coordinator; he can be reached at [norrecan@verizon.net](mailto:norrecan@verizon.net).

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:**

- *Strong 2 clubs bid – 2/15*
- *NT Leads/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).*

*The **March 8 session is canceled.***

## More Magic #s (6 and 10)

We discussed the "magic numbers" 8 and 26 in the August 2024 newsletter. The magic number 8 indicates the desired number of cards you'd like in your trump suit. If your team has 8, the other team has 5 – you outnumber them. Note: Nevertheless, if all else fails, a trump fit of 7 cards may often lead to a reasonable contract.

26 points total in a partnership's hands are generally enough to make game in one hand in No Trump, hearts, or spades (3NT, 4H, 4S). The opening bidder and the responder are continually evaluating the bidding to determine whether they've reached the magic 26 count.

So, in this article, let's talk about the responder's hand after their partner opens the bidding at the one level. What are responder's magic numbers? How about 6 and 10?

**With 6 total points**, responder must respond! Why? Because the opener has promised 12 to 21 points. If they happen to have 20 or 21 or even 19, they may have a good chance to make game in one deal (magic number 26). As responder, you must give them that chance. With their next bid, they'll let you know whether they're at the top of the 12 – 21 range or not.

However, with only 6 – 9 points, a responder's options are limited. They generally must bid at the **one level**. For example, over a 1D opening bid, a weak responder may respond 1H, 1S, or 1NT. The 1H and 1S bids are **unlimited**: you could have 6 points or you could have 20 points. Subsequent bidding will clarify your holding. The 1NT bid, on the other hand, is a **limited** bid: exactly 6 – 9 high card points.

There is one exception where a weak responder may answer at the two level: **when they raise their partner's suit**. That bid shows that they have support for partner's suit (3+ in hearts/spades, 4+ in clubs/diamonds) and 6 – 9 points. Examples: 1D – pass – 2D or 1S – pass – 2S. Note: when you know you have an 8-card fit in your partner's suit, you may add in "distribution points" for short suits (void = 3, singleton = 2, doubleton = 1, with additions if you have longer trumps). See the August 2024 newsletter for more details.

With a weak 6 – 9 points, these are your only options. Consequently, when you find that you have no ability to bid a new suit at the one level and no support for partner's suit, **you often bid 1NT as a purely strength-showing bid**. Any other bid

will mislead your partner as to your strength. For example, after a 1S bid, you must bid 1NT with 6 – 9 high card points, even if you have a 5-card club, diamond, or heart suit. By bidding at the two level, you would be promising a stronger hand.

What is required to respond in a new suit at the two level? **Magic number 10**: An average hand (10 points) is required to bid a new suit at the two level. And, as with any new suit bid, the bid is **unlimited**. Therefore, if the bidding is 1S – pass – 2C (or 2D or 2H), responder is promising 10+ points.

There are other "magic numbers", but these four – 8 and 26, 6 and 10 – are the most useful to the average player.

## No Trump Opening Leads

At next month's mini-lesson (March 15), I'll quickly summarize No Trump opening leads with particular emphasis on the "Rule of 11". This article will provide some more detailed underpinning for that mini-lesson.

When your opponents arrive at a No Trump contract, your opening lead may be critical, even though difficult because the opening lead is made when no opponents' cards are exposed. A No Trump contract is often a race to see which team can set up enough winning tricks first. Note: that does not mean that you immediately play all of your aces and kings immediately – plan to win sufficient tricks, not just the first tricks.

Moreover, in opposing a No Trump contract, you will generally have fewer high cards than your opponents, so you'll need to set up the smaller cards in a **long suit**. How can you find that long suit that will score a lot of tricks? Here are the major options:

- Lead partner's suit.
- Lead the highest from a suit headed by a 3-card honor sequence of high cards (T98, JT9, QJT, etc.).
- Lead your longest suit.
- Lead a non-bid suit, hoping partner has length.

Note: Try not to lead a suit bid by your opponents. You may be leading into their strength and may give up a trick. Likewise, do not lead a standalone high card (A, K, Q) unless your partner bid the suit. You'll probably set up tricks for your opponents.

So, how does a discerning opening leader proceed? The answer, my friends, is blowing in the wind – the “wind” in this case being the bidding you've heard (or not heard). What has partner bid? Or not bid? What have the opponents bid? Or not bid?

If your partner has managed to insert a bid (either an opening bid or an overcall), **leading their suit** is often a great choice. This is especially true for overcalls; partner promises 5+ cards in the suit and KJxxx or better.

Which card should one lead in partner's suit? With two cards in their suit, lead the highest card (even if it is an honor card – A, K, or Q). With three cards in their suit, lead the lowest card, especially if you hold a high card in the suit. Why? Because in the 3-card case, you will play your high card on the second trick and not block partner's ability to win more tricks in the suit. You may review **blocking** in the October 2024 newsletter.

Another possibility for an opening lead is the top card of a 3-card honor sequence (JT9, QJT, KQJ, etc.). That lead will force out one high card from the opponents and allow perhaps two winners from the remaining cards. This lead is particularly

effective if made from a long suit. After knocking out the opponents' high card, the smaller cards may win a trick as well. Note: the lead from a 3-card honor sequence and the following lead from a long suit are more or less equivalent.

What if your partner didn't bid and you have no 3-card honor sequence? **Leading the 4<sup>th</sup> best of your longest and strongest suit** may set up tricks in that suit. Of course, don't necessarily lead that longest suit if the opponents have bid it!

Why lead your 4<sup>th</sup>-best card in the long suit? Ah, that's where the “**Rule of 11**” makes its presence known. The Rule of 11 allows your partner to determine how many higher cards are held by the opponents. The rule is: subtract the card led from 11 – that number shows how many cards higher than the led card are outstanding.

Example: you lead the 4 of spades. If partner believes that is 4<sup>th</sup>-best from a long suit, they subtract from 11 and know there are 7 cards higher than your 4 outside of partner's hand. If they see 6 higher cards in dummy plus their own hand, they know that Declarer holds only the one remaining higher card.

Why does the Rule of 11 work? It's not hard. If, for example, you lead the 5 of a suit, there are 9 cards higher in the suit (the 2, 3, 4, and 5 are lower). But because the 5 is the 4<sup>th</sup>-best in your suit, you hold 3 of those higher cards. Therefore, your opponents hold 6 higher (which is 11 – 5).

Finally, another option is to lead in an unbid suit. Because the opponents have not bid that suit, partner may have a larger share of the remaining cards. This lead is especially effective when your hand is very weak (indicating that partner may have more strength).

## Try to Bid (and Play) It

This is from Charles Goren's Goren's New Bridge Complete, pg. 414. Which lead should West make?

		♠ A J 10 8 2	
North Deals		♥ K 6	
None Vul		♦ 7 5 2	
		♣ 6 5 4	
♠ 7 5	N	♠ K 6 4 3	
♥ 9 8	W	♥ J 10 5 3	
♦ A Q 8 6 3	E	♦ 9 4	
♣ Q J 10 7	S	♣ 9 3 2	
		♠ Q 9	
		♥ A Q 7 4 2	
		♦ K J 10	
		♣ A K 8	
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	1 ♥
2 ♦	Pass	Pass	2 NT
Pass	3 NT	All pass	

West did all the bidding for their team, so there is no obvious lead to partner's suit. Because N/S hold about 26 high card points and West holds 9, East holds at most 5.

West could lead the queen of clubs (top of a 3-card sequence), but that might win only one or two tricks (if N/S hold the A and K).

The 6 of diamonds is a better lead. If partner holds anything in the suit, you might win three or more tricks. In this case, South will win and eventually try the spade finesse (lead the queen and play low from dummy). When that loses to East's king, the return of a diamond allows West to win 4 more tricks. Down one.

If West had led the queen of clubs, South would win and immediately finesse in spades. No matter what E/W plays, N/S will take nine tricks, making their contract.

## Famous Bridgies

Led by 16-year-old Avery Silverstein, the USA1 junior team (under 21) beat all comers at the Sam Amer Junior United States Bridge Championship. They will represent the U.S. at the World Junior Team Championship (WJTC) in the summer of 2025. The team is composed of Silverstein, Daniel Balof, Jack Boge, Ethan Derman, Michael Hass, and Sam Pahk. Silverstein, Boge, Derman, and Balof had previously joined Claire Cao and Jeffrey Lin to win the silver medal at the 2023 WJTC (Poland was the winner in the final match). Note that Ethan Derman is a local boy from Baltimore, while the others are scattered across the U.S.

Silverstein is the daughter of bridge expert Aaron Silverstein, who mentored the USA1 team. Father Silverstein was a member of the U.S. team that participated in the first Junior World Championship in 1987 (they placed third). He currently runs the Aces Bridge Club in New York City.

The 2<sup>nd</sup>-place USA2 junior team (under 21) will also represent the U.S. at the WJTC. That team is composed of Brandon Ge, Kayden Ge, Charlie Chen, Arthur Gong, Eric Xiao, and Brian Zhang. Several members participated in previous under 16 junior championships.

Good luck to all!

## 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](mailto: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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