

# Olney Bridge Club News

*Official newsletter of the Olney Maryland Bridge Club*

## The Bridge Guy Speaks

Happy New Year and best of good fortune in 2025! Our first meeting of 2025 started slowly – the library was closed due to some sort of mechanical issue. However, we restarted our year on January 11 with 30 attendees at our weekly practice session.

The next “mini-lesson” is scheduled for this coming Saturday (January 18). We’ll meet at 2:00 – either in the Children’s Room or the main meeting room. The topic for the mini-lesson is the “**hold-up play**” in No Trump. I’ll have a pre-dealt hand to analyze and discuss.

I wanted to note that I have put the beginner bridge classes on hold until further notice. We are still gaining a new person or two every week, and nearly 40 players show on many Saturdays. I think the largest reasonable number of players who will fit into the main Meeting Room is about 48. So...I’ll wait a few months to see if our numbers continue to grow. Apologies in advance to any of your friends who are looking for a bridge course – I’ll keep you apprised as my thinking evolves.

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).*

## When to Compete

Bridge is a competitive sport. When I taught the beginner classes in 2023 and 2024, I chose to mostly emphasize non-competitive auctions. Why? Because it made the class simpler. The bidding is easier when no one is throwing sand in your gears (via competitive bidding).

But in the real world, especially as players become more experienced, competitive bidding often becomes the norm. There is gear sand everywhere!

So, how do you decide when to enter the auction after your opponents have opened the bidding? For this article, we’ll assume that the opening bid was in a suit. The following material is primarily a summary of the available options. I will point to other newsletter articles for details when available. I will explore other options in future newsletter articles.

If you are in second position (the next to bid after the opening bidder), you have the most leverage. Here are your choices:

- With a weak hand, but with a longer suit (KJxxxx or better), make a weak two overcall (e.g., 1C – 2H)
- With a weak hand, but with a long suit (KJxxxxx or better), make 3-level overcall (e.g., 1D – 3S).
- With 10+ points and a good 5-card suit (KJTxx or better), make a regular (non-jump) overcall (e.g., 1D – 1S or 1S – 2H).
- With 15 – 18 points and a balanced hand with a stopper in the bid suit, you may overcall 1NT.
- With 13+ points and at least cards in each of the unbid suits, double for takeout.
- Finally, with a hand of 10+ points and two good five-card suits, considers the “Michaels cuebid”.

We discussed preemptive bids in three 2024 newsletter articles: in April, May, and December. We discussed takeout doubles in January and February of 2024. And we briefly discussed Michaels in the November 2024 issue.

If you are in 4<sup>th</sup> position (the 3<sup>rd</sup> hand to bid after the opening bidder) and if the opening bidder’s partner has not bid (1<sup>st</sup> bid – pass – pass – you), you may make a regular overcall (suit or NT) or double as above. However, your right-hand opponent has not bid (indicating < 6 points). So, you can be a bit more aggressive.

The standard approach is to “assume” one extra king (3 points) in your hand. For example, you can bid 1NT with 12 – 15 points (rather than the usual 15 – 18). Of course, your partner should take that into account and bid appropriately.

The exception in this case: jump bids in 4<sup>th</sup> position are considered strong rather than weak. There is no need to preempt with a weak hand – instead, just pass and let the strong opening bidder play at the one level! So, a bid like 1D – pass – pass – 2H should show 16+ points and a strong heart suit.

Finally, if you are in 4<sup>th</sup> position and both opponents have bid (e.g., 1H – pass – 1S – you), then be a bit more cautious. Your opponents have shown about 20 or more points between them – you may be outgunned.

So, use all of the above tools, but plan to be a bit stronger and to have stronger suits when you enter the bidding. But don’t let them walk away with an easy bid if you the ability to compete. Make them work for their reward!

## Hold-Up Play – Part II

I last discussed the “hold-up play” in the January 2024 newsletter. I’ll follow up with the topic at the January 18 mini-lesson. Also, Frank Stewart had a sequence of articles on the hold-up play from September 23 through 28, 2024. You can see the archive of his articles at <https://baronbarclay.com/pages/frank-stewart-daily-bridge-column>.

In this article, we’ll discuss examples of when to use the hold-up play (and when to bypass the hold-up play). I’ll attempt to give some general guidelines, but the main question is “will taking a trick help or hurt my ability to win my tricks before the opponents score theirs?”.

Indeed, in the next case, the hold-up play is not on the opening lead. This hand is from Frank Stewart’s September 24, 2024 article.



West has an opening hand and opens 1S. North doubles and South shows an invitational hand (10 – 12 points) with a 2NT bid. North proceeds to the 3NT game. Note that North is not overly concerned about the short spade suit. North knows that South wouldn't bid NT without a stopper in the opponents' suit.

West leads the king of spades (showing KQxxx or better in spades – how do you know?). How many times do you hold up before taking your ace of spades? Where are your winning tricks? Where do you expect to find the additional tricks needed to make your contract?

Evaluate your hand: from where are your nine tricks going to come? You see single winners in spades and hearts (the aces), plus the 4 club tricks. You need three tricks from diamonds. That is not a problem – if you drive out the ace early.

But, looking at the North/South hands, you are really concerned about the heart suit. You have only the ace as a stopper and nothing else. Ouch! And East is the “danger hand”, because if they ever get in, they'll lead a spade through your hand toward the strong West hand. So, N/S are in desperate straits: you got lucky that they didn't attack your weak heart suit, so you must act now before they do.


Take the ace of spades – there is **no hold-up play at all**. Play your high diamonds to drive out the ace. Win your nine tricks. If by some bizarre chance, East actually has the ace of diamonds and leads back a spade – well, there is always the next hand. Note: because West opened (12+ points), East shouldn't be able have 4 points for an ace.

So, to sum up, the hold-up play is used to break communications between the opponents' hands. You give up tricks early

to allow that to happen. But you must consider the circumstances: if you a) need to act quickly before the opponents do so or b) if you have a weakness that the opponents will attack, you may choose to skip the hold-up play initially or entirely.

## Try to Bid (and Play) It

This is from the 9/23/24 Frank Stewart column. Consider the number of potential winners and how to play the heart suit.

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♣
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	1 NT
Pass	3 NT	All pass	
Lead: ♥ 5			

The bidding is straightforward. South opens 1C with a minimum hand, North bids their 4-card spade suit, South shows a minimum with 1NT (indicating 12 – 14 total points), and North advances 3NT.

Review the hand before playing. In a No Trump contract, count winners first, and let's use the stronger hand (North) as the master hand. You have a spade winner (A), two diamond winners (AK), and three club winners (AKQ). You are three tricks short.

You have an obvious finesse in spades: lead toward the queen in the North hand and

cover with the ace only if West plays the king. That will set up three tricks.

You also have an okay configuration in hearts: you have three stoppers and six total cards (leaving seven for East/West). The king, jack, and ten together are a great stopper: after the ace and queen are played, the remaining card of the three will stop the suit from running.

Also, West led hearts – West may therefore have length in hearts. That is good, because you’ll be finessing toward the East hand in spades. If East happens to win the finesse (with their king), you want them to have no hearts to lead back to West.

So, what to do? If you are in the “always win a trick no matter the consequences” crowd, you’re in trouble. West will win 4 more hearts plus East’s king of spades – down one (at least).

Instead, when East plays the queen on the heart opening lead, let it win. When they return hearts, hold up the king and let West win their ace. Play the spade finesse as soon as available. East can’t lead another heart when they win their king of spades. Nine tricks and the contract are safe.

## Famous Bridges

Ely Culbertson was one of the founding members of contract bridge. Along with Harold Vanderbilt and Charles Goren, he was selected as an initial member of the bridge hall of fame. Culbertson, born in Romania, attended the Sorbonne and the University of Geneva but was primarily self-taught in most areas. He became fluent in five languages and had a reading knowledge of another five plus some Latin and Greek.

He earned a living as a bridge and poker player and became a major self-promoter of the new “contract bridge”, which was

supplanting auction bridge in the 1920’s and 1930’s. He married Josephine nee Murphy, who was a well-known bridge player, and teamed with her in successful matches against some of the major bridge teams of the day.

Culbertson edited the *Bridge World Magazine*, owned the card manufacturer, Kem, and owned a string of bridge schools teaching the Culbertson method. In his later life, he wrote books on world peace and various card games and discontinued his bridge playing.

## 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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