

Olney Bridge Club News

Official newsletter of the Olney Maryland Bridge Club

The Bridge Guy Speaks

Happy anniversary of the late 18th century discovery of the Rosetta Stone by French engineer, Pierre-François Bouchard. The Rosetta Stone provided a correspondence between Egyptian hieroglyphics and ancient Greek. Subsequent scholars translated the information and used it to explore early Egyptian history.

As many of you know, bridge itself needs a good Rosetta Stone. We frequently find ourselves trying to piece together various disparate clues to make inferences. But how we interpret available data is the means by which we develop our own Rosetta stones. We will explore some means to interpret the available information later in this newsletter.

In coming weeks, please be cautious anytime you feel even somewhat ill. Reports of a new covid variant that is quite infectious are rampant. We are an older group – don't come if you are sick at all. We'll have plenty of Saturdays to play this year.

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:

- *Stay tuned – more coming*

2:00 – 2:30 – Olney library (main Meeting Room).

Ongoing Practice Sessions:

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

Responses to 1 NT - Recap

Your partner opens 1 NT (15 – 17 high card points and a balanced hand). This recap will review the responses outlined in the beginner bridge class and the associated simplified 5-card major bidding summary sheet.

The responder has several immediate options:

1. Explore a no trump contract.
2. Explore a suit contract in a long suit.

Let's begin with responder hands that are suited to a no trump contract. Those would include not only balanced hands (e.g., ♠ K74 ♥ 94 ♦ JT84 ♣ AJ75), but also unbalanced hands with length in the minor suits (e.g., ♠ K4 ♥ 9 ♦ JT842 ♣ AJ753). Typically, these hands will score just as many tricks in no trump as in the minor suits opposite the opening 1 NT bid. No trump tricks count more (40 – 30 – 30... vs 20 – 20 – 20 – ...), so gravitate toward the no trump contract except in unusual circumstances (e.g., ♠ 8 ♥ 9 ♦ K654 ♣ J987532 may play better in 3C than in 1NT).

The bidding is straightforward in these cases:

- Pass 1 NT with fewer than 8 high card points.
- Bid 2 NT (invitational) with 8 – 9 high card points.
- Bid 3 NT (game) with 10+ high card points.

In each of these cases, the responder can identify the appropriate NT bid based on their high card points. With fewer than 8 points, the team has fewer than 25 high card points (even if the 1 NT opener has the maximum of 17 points), so the responder should stop the bidding. With 8 or 9 points, the opening bidder will pass with a minimum (15 high card points) and raise to 3 NT (game) with 17 high card points (and with 16 points, they'll make their best guess, based on the structure of the hand). With 10+ points, the responder knows the team has 25+ (even if the 1 NT opener has the minimum of 15 points) and should jump to 3 NT (game). The one who knows, goes.

There are other higher-level bids, but these are best left to a discussion of slam bidding (details in the October 2023 newsletter).

When the responder has a long suit (5+ cards) and an unbalanced hand, they have a choice: they may continue with no trump bidding as above, or they may explore that long suit. I'll focus on our beginner bridge approach: direct bidding of the long suit. For those interested in transfers, see the May 2024 article on Jacoby Transfers.

The responder's bids are straightforward:

- With a long major suit (hearts or spades) and less than 10 high card points, bid 2 of that suit.
- With a long major suit and 10+ high card points, bid 3 of that suit.
- With a weak hand and a long minor suit (clubs or diamonds), bid 3 of that suit.

The bid of 2 of a major suit promises 0 – 9 high card points and a 5-card suit. The opening 1 NT bidder will generally pass. With a maximum (17 high card points and 3+ trump support), the opener may venture 3 of the suit to see if partner is close to 9 high card points (partner will raise to 4 of the suit) or fewer (partner will pass).

The bid of 3 of a major is forcing to game. The opening 1 NT bidder will raise to 4 of the suit (with 3+ trumps) or bid 3NT (with 2 trumps).

In this simplified system, the bid of 3 of a minor suit is fairly rare. The above weak hand with 7 weak clubs and few points might qualify.

The Stayman Convention

After your partner opens 1 NT (15 – 17 high card points and a balanced hand), what if you (as responder) have a 4-card major suit? You can obviously proceed as above with a NT bid (or pass), but you can't show the major suit, because you don't have 5 cards in the suit.

This is where the Stayman convention plays a role. The Stayman convention is used to determine **whether a 4 – 4 fit exists in a major suit**. The standard bidding sequence is 1NT – pass – 2C.

The 2C bid is totally **artificial**. It says nothing about clubs. Instead, it merely asks the 1NT bidder "do you have a 4-card major?". This 2C bid is completely separate from any other 2C bid in other situations – this 2C bid occurs only after the opening 1NT (or, as we'll see in a future newsletter, after some other NT bids as well).

First question: why even bother looking for a major fit? It turns out that playing in a 4 – 4 fit in a major suit often scores better than playing in a no trump contract, because some tricks will be won by ruffing.

In this article we will discuss “basic Stayman” – without any bells or whistles. We’ll discuss some of the options with Stayman in a future newsletter.

In general, you must generally have 8+ high card points to bid the Stayman 2C. With fewer than 8 points, pass; 1NT is a perfectly fine contract. This is similar to the case previously discussed with a balanced hand.

So, what are the opening bidder rebids after the 2C Stayman bid?

- If the 1 NT bidder has no 4-card major suit, they bid an **artificial** 2D. This says nothing about diamonds. It merely indicates the lack of a fit.
- If the 1 NT bidder has a 4-card (or longer) heart suit, they bid 2H.
- If the 1 NT bidder has a 4-card (or longer) spade suit, they bid 2S.

Notice that if the 1 NT bidder bids 2H (indicating that they have four hearts), they may have four spades as well. However, if the 1 NT bidder bids 2S, they are denying four hearts.

The responder (partner of the 1 NT bidder) bids the Stayman convention in 3 ranges:

- 0 – 7 high card points: pass (we’ll discuss an exception in a future newsletter)
- 8 – 9 high card points: invite (by bidding 2C and then rebidding at the lowest level in a suit or no trump)
- 10+ high card points: bid to game (by bidding 2C and then rebidding either 4 of an agreed major or 3 NT)

After the 1 NT bidder bids 2D, their partner bids as follows:

- With 8 – 9 high card points, bid 2NT, just as if you had directly responded 2NT to the 1 NT opening bid.
- With 10+ high card points, bid 3NT, just as if you had directly responded 3NT to the 1 NT opening bid.

Example hands after 1NT – pass – 2C – pass – 2D:

- ♠ 9874 ♥ 94 ♦ KT84 ♣ AJ7
Bid 2NT, showing 8 – 9 high card points.
- ♠ K74 ♥ QT42 ♦ Q984 ♣ A6
Bid 3NT, showing 10+ high card points.

After the 1 NT bidder bids 2H, their partner bids as follows:

- With 8 – 9 high card points and four hearts, bid 3H (invitational). The 1 NT bidder will pass with a minimum or bid 4H with a maximum.
- With 10+ high card points and four hearts, bid 4H (game).
- With 8 – 9 high card points and no 4-card heart suit, bid 2NT, just as if you had directly responded 2NT to the 1 NT opening bid.
- With 10+ high card points and no 4-card heart suit, bid 3NT, just as if you had directly responded 3NT to the 1 NT opening bid.
- Note: we’ll discuss the case where the 1 NT bidder has both four hearts and four spades in a future newsletter.

Example hands after 1NT – pass – 2C – pass – 2H:

- ♠ K76 ♥ QJ42 ♦ JT52 ♣ Q2
Bid 3H, showing 8 – 9 high card points.
- ♠ K74 ♥ QJ42 ♦ JT84 ♣ A875
Bid 4H, showing 10+ high card points.
- ♠ 9874 ♥ 94 ♦ KT84 ♣ AJ7
Bid 2NT, showing 8 – 9 high card points.
- ♠ K754 ♥ QJ5 ♦ JT42 ♣ A2
Bid 3NT, showing 10+ high card points.

After the 1 NT bidder bids 2S, their partner bids as follows:

- With 8 – 9 high card points and four spades, bid 3S (invitational). The 1 NT bidder will pass with a minimum or bid 4S with a maximum.
- With 10+ high card points and four spades, bid 4S (game).
- With 8 – 9 high card points and no 4-card spade suit, bid 2NT, just as if you had directly responded 2NT to the 1 NT opening bid.
- With 10+ high card points and no 4-card spade suit, bid 3NT, just as if you had directly responded 3NT to the 1 NT opening bid.

Example hands after 1NT – pass – 2C – pass – 2S:

- ♠ K764 ♥ QJ2 ♦ JT52 ♣ Q2
Bid 3S, showing 8 – 9 high card points.
- ♠ K742 ♥ QJ2 ♦ JT84 ♣ A8
Bid 4S, showing 10+ high card points.
- ♠ 98 ♥ 9874 ♦ KT84 ♣ AJ7
Bid 2NT, showing 8 – 9 high card points.
- ♠ K75 ♥ QJ75 ♦ JT42 ♣ A2
Bid 3NT, showing 10+ high card points.

And, lastly, when should one not use the Stayman convention? First, a 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 hand will usually not provide any ruffs, because the hand has no short suits. Pursue a no trump contract instead (and be a bit cautious: a 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 distribution will not win as many no trump tricks either).

Second, if the hand includes a single 5-card major suit (and the other major suit has fewer than 4 cards), it's better to bid that 5-card suit (directly or via a Jacoby transfer).

We will discuss other options with the Stayman convention in a future newsletter.

Bridge Rosetta Stone(s)

As with the Egyptian Rosetta Stone, the equivalent bridge Rosetta Stone is composed of multiple, partial fragments. It is your job as a bridge player to piece together the information to get the big picture.

Naturally, the bridge bidding summary sheet is part of that Stone. I'll also be adding a page summarizing the Stayman convention in coming months.

Another part of the Stone is the set of “rules of thumb” that we've encountered in lessons, in our play, and in our reading. Be aware the “rules of thumb” are mostly true (about 90% of the time), but that they are meant to be broken when exceptional situations arise. With more experience, you'll recognize those situations. Here are the major rules of thumb that come up often (in no particular order):

Rule 1: *Think before playing to the first trick.*

- The Declarer should definitely plan the hand (determine where to get the required number of tricks) before playing from dummy after the opening lead. However, the defenders should also plan where they might win the tricks necessary to set the contract before leading/playing to the first trick.

Rule 2: *Look for the danger hand.*

- Which hand would you not like on lead? Typically, that danger hand would lead through your weakest suit.

Rule 3: *Second hand low.*

- If the declarer/dummy to your right leads a card, generally play low (as the second hand to play). That will allow your partner to have a chance to win the trick in fourth position.

Rule 4: *Third hand high.*

- If your partner leads a card, generally play the “highest card necessary” (i.e., if you hold king and jack and dummy has the queen, you need play only the jack to be highest). Your partner (likely) led the suit to set it up. You must help by playing your highest card.

Rule 5: *Cover an honor with an honor.*

- Generally, if your right-hand opponent plays an honor (king, queen, jack, ten), you should cover with a higher honor if available.

Rule 6: *Play toward weakness and through strength.*

- If you are on lead and have no clear evidence of specifically what to lead, try leading toward the weakness of your right-hand opponent and through the strength of your left-hand opponent.

Rule 7: *Prefer major suit contracts to minor suit contracts.*

- Major suits (hearts and spades) are higher-ranking and higher-scoring than minor suits. If you bid a major, the opponents must bid their minor suit at a higher level.
- However, if the minor suit offers the best contract, pick that contract.

Rule 8: *For the trump suit, length is more important than strength.*

- In the trump suit, you want to outnumber the opponents. Don't be put off by a long suit with no honor cards. Who knows – perhaps your partner has an honor or two.
- Your goal is to find an 8-card fit, no matter the strength of that suit.

Rule 9: *As a beginner, plan to draw trumps early.*

- If you have succeeded in finding an 8-card fit for your trump suit, then your trumps outnumber the opponents'. By playing them early, they will not be able to ruff your long side suit.
- When more experienced: Sometimes it's better to do something else before drawing trumps.

Rule 10: *In a suit contract, don't lead a low card when you have the ace.*

- If you lead a low card, the opponents may win the king, draw trumps, and discard other losers in the original suit. Your ace may never win a trick.

Rule 11: *Try not to lead from a suit with an honor card (unless partner bid the suit).*

- This is a corollary to Rule 6: you're leading away from your strength. For example, if you lead a small card from Kxx, your opponents may undeservedly win the queen as well as the ace.
- However, if partner had bid the suit, a low card is a good lead. As we'll see in a future newsletter article, leading “low from something” in partner's suit indicates the presence of an honor card.

Rule 12: *Eight ever, nine never.*

- Generally, with AKJ in a suit where your team holds eight cards, plan to finesse the jack.
- Generally, with nine cards in the suit, play the ace and king and try to drop the queen. Don't finesse unless other information (bidding, play) indicates to do otherwise.

Rule 13: *If forced to lie about your hand, don't lie about your strength.*

- Bridge, like life, is never perfect. Sometimes, you won't have a perfect bid to make. However, when you must stretch the truth, never stretch the truth about your hand strength.
- Example: after bidding 1C with ♠ Q32 ♥ QJ32 ♦ 5 ♣ AK762, your partner bids 1S. A bid of 2H is a "reverse" (higher-ranking suit on second bid) and shows 16+ points. So, a rebid of 2C (usually showing six clubs) is the better choice.
- Corollary: if you must stretch the truth a bit, a lie about a minor suit is usually less dangerous.

Rule 14: *In general, the lead of a low card shows strength and the lead of a relatively high spot card (non-honor) shows weakness.*

- This is a generalization of the BosTon approach: Bottom of Something/Top of Nothing. We'll discuss this strategy in a future newsletter.

Rule 15: *The one who knows, goes.*

- If you are the partner that knows that you have 26 points and therefore a game bid is available, bid the game (unless you simply don't

which game is best). Don't wait for your partner (who has less information). They may choose to pass and lose the game opportunity.

Other rules of thumb will be added to the list in future newsletters.

Bid and Play It

This hand is from Frank Stewart's April 7, 2025, bridge column. How would you bid it? More importantly, how would you play it to avoid danger?

South Deals
None Vul

♠ 10 7 5 2
♥ J 4 2
♦ A J
♣ K J 8 2

♠ J 8 6 4
♥ K 8 5
♦ 10 8 6 5 3
♣ 5

| | | | |
|---|---|---|-------------|
| | N | | ♠ Q 9 |
| W | | E | ♥ Q 9 7 6 3 |
| | S | | ♦ K 7 4 |
| | | | ♣ Q 6 3 |

♠ A K 3
♥ A 10
♦ Q 9 2
♣ A 10 9 7 4

| | | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| <i>West</i> | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> | <i>South</i> |
| | | | 1 NT |
| Pass | 2 ♣ | Pass | 2 ♦ |
| Pass | 3 NT | All pass | |
| Lead: ♦ 5 | | | |

The bidding shows a typical Stayman sequence. South opens 1 NT with 17 high card points and a balanced hand. With 10 high card points, North wants to be in game. Instead of jumping directly to 3NT, North checks for a 4 – 4 spade fit by bidding 2C (the Stayman convention). Alas, South does not have a 4-card major and bids 2D (artificial, indicating only the lack of the major fit). North proceeds to 3NT.

The play is slightly tricky – but not if you've accumulated some portion of the Bridge Rosetta Stone!

First rule on the Stone: think before playing to the first trick. Your time to plan the hand is before that first play.

Second rule on the Stone: look for the danger hand. Which hand offers the most danger if they get the lead?

With those two rules in mind, South should note that a) there are six top tricks available; b) there are two or perhaps three extra tricks available in clubs and one in diamonds; and c) East is the danger hand – if they lead hearts, East/West could take four heart tricks plus the king of diamonds.

In the original hand, declarer finessed the jack of diamonds, losing the to king. A low heart was led, and the contract was set.

The better play is to win the Ace of diamonds. South should expect West to have the king of diamonds (see Rule #11 above), so the finesse can't work. By taking the ace, South prevents East from immediately gaining the lead.

South now can get to work on the clubs. South takes the king of clubs and leads the jack, planning to finesse if East doesn't cover. In this hand, that wins immediately. The queen is in East's hand and is trapped. South takes two spades, one heart, two diamonds (after driving out the king), and five clubs.

But even if West had the queen of clubs, all was well. West is not the danger hand and can't effectively attack the heart suit. A heart lead by West will give South two heart tricks. A diamond lead will give South the second diamond trick. In all cases, South will win two spades, one or two hearts, two diamonds, and four clubs, making the contract.

Famous Bridgies

Alvin Roth was not a pleasant partner. When he played in the last century, bridge was more rough and tumble, and such niceties as "bridge etiquette" were scorned. One partner, Dick Freeman, described Roth as "very tough to sit opposite—unless you were so thick-skinned that no insult was severe enough to hurt, or you were willing to make extreme sacrifices to get on a winning side." Today, after a hand or two, you would excuse yourself to pick up a quick sandwich – at a different bridge club.

Given all that, when he wasn't berating his partners, Roth was an innovative and successful expert player. He won 35 North American championships and finished second in the international Bermuda Bowl (3 times) and the World Team Olympiad. He ran major bridge clubs in Miami, Washington D.C. and New York City.

He and his first long-time partner and WWII army buddy, Tobias Stone, developed many of the conventions in use today: 5-card majors, negative doubles, weak two bids, and various no trump conventions. He published a number of books with Stone and others.

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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