

Olney Bridge Club News

Official newsletter of the Olney Maryland Bridge Club

The Bridge Guy Speaks

Happy anniversary of the initial signing of the Magna Carta by King John of England in 1215! What, you ask, does the Magna Carta have to do with bridge? First, you might note that the framers of the Constitution heavily relied upon the Magna Carta. Due process of law, habeas corpus, and other rights were first noted in the Magna Carta.

But, more importantly, the ideals embedded in the Magna Carta were echoed by the Superman television series in the 1950's. The intro to the show (starring the inimitable George Reeves) announced that "Superman ... fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice, and the American way!"

Accordingly, this newsletter will touch upon those themes – and how they influence your bridge play.

This month's mini-lesson is scheduled for the coming Saturday (June 21). We'll meet at 2:00 in the main meeting room. The topic for the mini-lesson is "**Negative Doubles**". The materials will soon be available on the website:

<https://bridge.careytutor.com/classmaterials.html>.

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:

- *Negative doubles – 6/21*

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).

Truth

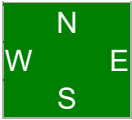
Many people believe that politicians are constantly lying to them. That is somewhat untrue. Politicians generally tell you the truth...they just may not tell the whole truth. They feel (for whatever reason) that the entire truth is too much to bear.

As a bridge player, you are similarly constrained. You just cannot, with one bid or one play of the cards, tell the whole truth about your hand. But you can describe your hand to the best of your ability at each turn, and eventually the whole truth of the hand will come out.

The main theme in bridge is to tell the best truth you can at any moment. As a bidder, that means that your bid must describe the strength of your hand, even if you must fudge a bit on the length of suits that you

might have. Indeed, in some cases, you will use a bid in a shorter suit to explore alternative options before confirming a fit.

One of our players brought up a useful example: his partner opened in a minor suit and he had great support. However, minor suit contracts a) score fewer points and b) require bidding at the 5 level to make game. So, what else can you try? Here's a practice hand example:

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

After the 1D opening bid, South has a choice. In our beginner class, I simplified the Standard American 5-card Major bidding in this case. The only choice offered would be 4D. That bid (in our non-standard but simplified bidding scheme) shows 13 – 15 points and at least five diamond cards. That's all great – but in this case, North (with a minimum hand) will usually pass and you won't make a game on this hand.

Here's an alternative: bid 2C to show your club suit. That is a **new suit** by responder, so the bid is forcing for one round. Yes, you have only three clubs, so you're not telling the whole truth. But you are describing the

strength of your hand. That is the first priority. So far, you've shown 10+ points.

If North bids 2H, jump in diamonds to show your diamond strength. Your jump shows extra strength. Therefore, you must have more than a medium hand (10 – 12 points).

It is possible that North might bid 2S (showing a 4-card spade suit because they didn't originally bid 1S). However, a) South didn't bid 1S, so they probably don't have four spades in support; and b) the strength of North's hand would be unclear – some play this bidding of a higher-ranked suit as a minimum hand, while some think North should have a bit more.

In the current hand, North chooses 2NT, because it describes their hand perfectly. It is at the lowest NT level possible, so it shows a minimum hand (12 – 14 high card points). Moreover, the bid shows a good probability of a stopper in the unbid suits (hearts/spades). North isn't worried about clubs because South bid the suit.

Accordingly, South bids aggressively: they assume that North has spades stopped and go for the game. They know they have 26+ high card points in the two hands – so ya' gotta' bid it.

The play is tricky but offers a good chance of success. There are eight tricks (two spades, one heart, four diamonds, and one club) readily available. The ninth trick can come from diamonds (if the queen is taken) or hearts (if you lead toward the queen to finesse) or the clubs (if you finesse the queen).

If East leads a spade, you can win and proceed with diamonds. If East leads a heart, your queen will win a trick. If East leads a diamond, you get a free finesse and win five diamond tricks. So, assume that East leads a club – I'd lead the 4th best (the six).

South should duck the first round. West will win and have no damaging play. You can win the return and drive out the queen of diamonds. I'd lead the king and a small diamond, planning to finesse (to keep East out of the lead). In this case, the queen falls and all is well.

Moral of the story: As an alternative to the plain vanilla “raise your partner’s minor suit” bid, think about exploring for a possible no trump contract first.

Justice

The term “justice” has many meanings, dependent on philosophy and context. Nevertheless, the Stanford Philosophical Encyclopedia identifies four core concepts of justice (derived in large part from Justinian’s 6th century AD *Institutes*):

1. How individual people are treated
2. People are due justice
3. Justice is impartial
4. An agency (individual or state) is required to dispense justice

Bridge, as an ethical and honorable undertaking, attempts to satisfy these core principles in every way. Note that I discussed bridge ethics and etiquette in the August and September, 2023, newsletters. I'll summarize key points in the remainder of the article.

First, our goal in playing bridge is to treat all players – beginners through experts – with kindness and humility and equanimity. Kindness: because bridge is an unforgiving game, and allows for ample opportunities for error. Humility: because, no matter our level of experience, we understand that we are not all-knowing, and that we have committed every known error sometime during our bridge careers (or will do so in the future without doubt). Equanimity:

because we know that our partners are flawed and will err, but they too will judge us one day on our own errors.

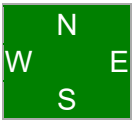
Second, we play bridge without hidden knowledge and with the goal of providing a fair playing environment for all. In previous newsletters, I've occasionally mentioned some of the Laws of Bridge. You'll note that those rules are set up to encourage players to find the best solution for all, to not take advantage but to instead assume the best of all players.

Third, those rules are purposefully set up to be impartial. All players are treated the same and are accorded the same benefits. The goal is fair play for all.

And, finally, we have multiple agencies set up to ensure that fairness. First, we ourselves are the first layer of justice. When a problem occurs, we all try to solve it at the table in the fairest way possible. If we don't see that fair path, we can check the Laws of Bridge. If the laws are unclear, we can get guidance from a more experienced player (that includes me, but you know of other experienced players in the club as well). Finally, we have the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL) and the American Bridge Association (ABA), both of which collaborate to maintain the Laws of Bridge, hold tournaments, teach bridge, and support the promulgation of bridge playing throughout all communities.

Given all that, there are other manifestations of justice. The bridge writer, David Bird, is the creator of “The Abott”, a pompous and self-proclaimed bridge expert and leader of the abbey. He regularly berates his younger priests (even when they play brilliantly and beat him). But his brother, Claude Yorke-Smith, is even more pretentious. As brothers do, they regularly clash when they play bridge together at the

abbey. Yorke-Smith denigrates every bid and play by the Abbot. But here's one hand where justice came through:

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

West	North	East	South
			1 ♠
Pass	4 NT	Pass	5 ♥
Pass	5 NT	Pass	6 ♠
All pass			
Lead: ♥ Q			

After the natural 1S opening bid, North saw that a slam was a possibility if South had two aces.

The 4NT bid (in case you haven't encountered it before), is the "Blackwood Convention". It is an artificial bid asking partner to bid their number of aces. The response is artificial, and there are multiple ways to show the number of aces. In this case we'll assume the generic form of the convention: 5C indicates 0 aces, 5D indicates 1 ace, and 5H indicates 2 aces. If South had bid 5C or 5D, North would sign off in 5S. In this case, the two aces make slam a good probability.

Yorke-Smith correctly evaluated the hand. He saw no spade losers and one heart loser, plus one club loser (the king) and as many as three diamond losers. He developed a plan: to draw trumps, finesse the queen of

clubs, win the ace of clubs and ruff a club, setting up the remaining clubs – which he would use to discard losing diamonds and a heart.

Accordingly, Yorke-Smith won the ace of hearts, drew trumps in three rounds, and led a club to finesse the queen. The stage was set.

Brother Paulo, sitting East, knew that taking the queen of clubs with the king was a doomed mission. So, he ducked (see the August 2023 newsletter for the ducking article) by playing the two. Yorke-Smith continued with the ace and jack of clubs, discarding his heart loser and complaining that the Abbot had underbid – Yorke-Smith was going to take all thirteen tricks!

Oops. East played low on each club, and West discarded on the third club. Yorke-Smith had only one entry to the North hand (the king of hearts). After playing that and leading a club, East takes the king and leads a diamond through the AQ in South's hand. The king of diamonds will win a trick, setting the slam try by one trick.

So, where did the overbearing Yorke-Smith go wrong? Let me count the ways. First, because he was an "expert", he expected to take that extra thirteenth trick. Because he was not an expert, he didn't account for a) a lack of entries into the North hand; b) a non-equal split in clubs; and c) the loss of a trick to East, which is the "danger hand".

Why is East the danger hand? Because South can't abide a lead of a diamond through the AQ until the clubs are set up.

There are many ways to play the hand to make twelve tricks.

Instead of leading the ace at trick six, North could lead the jack, discarding the small

heart. If West wins the king, they can't attack diamonds, and South has time to discard on the remaining clubs. If East wins the king, South ruffs and returns in hearts to cash the good clubs and discard losing hearts/diamonds.

Similarly, South could lead the ace of clubs at trick six, discarding the heart, and then lead the jack of clubs, discarding a small diamond. East must take the king, or it will take no trick. The remaining clubs will be used to discard diamonds.

Another plan is to notice the short suits (diamonds in North, clubs in South). That cries out for a cross-ruff (see the October 2023 newsletter). South will not draw trumps in this situation. Instead, South will play the king of hearts, ace of clubs, and ace of diamonds (playing out all the high cards before ruffing). Then, South ruffs a diamond in the North hand with a small spade and a club in the South hand with a low spade. The cross-ruff continues in diamonds and clubs to win the first twelve tricks: the initial four plus eight spade tricks.

The only concern with this last approach is if the opponents are short in hearts (6 – 1) or clubs (5 – 1) or diamonds (7 – 1). That works out to about a 20% chance of failure.

In any case, Yorke-Smith got what he deserved. Justice triumphs.

The American Way

Bridge was not originally an American game. There are different origination stories, but many believe that bridge derived from the Turkish/Egyptian game “Britch”, played in Constantinople (now Istanbul) from at least 1873 (and possibly invented earlier by British soldiers in the region during the Crimean War – who

theoretically named it after the Galata Bridge in Constantinople). Those early forms of auction bridge were heavily influenced by whist, triomphe, plafond and other card games of preceding centuries. The game of auction bridge grew in popularity in England, France, and then the United States.

In 1925, however, the American businessman Harold Vanderbilt created “contract bridge”, based on the plafond principle (bid to your highest ceiling) but incorporating more consistent scoring, slam bonuses, vulnerability, and doubling/redoubling, among other features. Vanderbilt's contract bridge was so well laid out that it became the de facto standard across the world. By the 1940's American experts were competing for world championships and over 40% of U.S. households regularly played the game.

American Charles Goren subsequently popularized what has come to be known as the “Standard American” bidding system, which was based on bidding 4-card major suits (hearts/spades). However, from the 1950's, bridge teachers have increasingly gravitated to the “Standard American 5-card Majors” system, which requires a 5-card suit for an opening bid in a major suit.

In any case, the game that Vanderbilt created and Goren promoted has now spread throughout the world. The top ten players on the World Bridge Federation website are from Switzerland (6 players!), Norway, Poland, Italy, and the Netherlands. There are ten Americans in the top 25, but the game developed by American ingenuity has gone viral. And the world has benefited.

That is the true American way.

Famous Bridgies

My father, Harold Gire, was not a bridgie. He grew up poor in south central Ohio to a farm family (working at local fruit orchards). He joined the Army Air Corps (soon thereafter, the Army Air Forces, and later, the U.S. Air Force) a few months before Pearl Harbor. He participated in two major wars (never at the front lines, or I might not be here to write his tale). He served for more than 20 years before retiring to work for the army (civil service).

But the army also provided another outlet: pinochle. My dad was a great player of many card and other games, but pinochle was the army's unofficial game of choice. In the private sector of that time, perhaps 40% of the population played bridge. But the army distributed special pinochle decks to those overseas in WWII, so pinochle became my father's game.

Many other soldiers followed suit (sic). For fans of wartime films, in *Stalag 17*, the main character (played by the immortal William Holden) is asked whether he was beaten up (fellow prisoners thought he was a German "rat" and let him have it). He replied "Nobody beat me. We were playing pinochle. It's a rough game."

My dad played the game in a similar fashion – aggressive, decisive, well-thought-out, and for blood. My brother, mother, and I tagged along for the ride. It was a great time. And his wisdom led me to learn bridge at an early age (and to still play 55 years later!).

If my dad had lived a different life, he would have been a fine bridge player. He was smart but intuitive and was willing to gamble to get the best result. We could all do well to acquire his skills.

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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