

Olney Bridge Club News

Official newsletter of the Olney Maryland Bridge Club

The Bridge Guy Speaks

Happy Chocolate Chip Day! There is nothing better than an open bag of chocolate chips to make your day right. Except, of course, a good game of bridge!

Our bridge group has been active in the past four weeks. We've had 38, 40, 41, and 29 people attend during that period. I'm also considering when to hold another beginner bridge class. I'll keep you apprised.

This month's mini-lesson is scheduled for the coming Saturday (May 17). We'll meet at 2:00 in the main meeting room. The topic for the mini-lesson is "**Play Signals**". The materials are available on the website: <https://bridge.careytutor.com/classmaterials.html>.

In coming weeks, please be cautious anytime you feel even somewhat ill. Reports of flu and covid infections are still high (although starting to trend downward). Sabine and I just caught some sort of cold (covid negative) and skipped a session. 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:

- *Play signals – 5/17*
- *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).

Strong Balanced Hands

We all know that we will open the bidding if we hold 12+ points (13+ for beginners). We also know that with a balanced hand (a hand with 5 – 3 – 3 – 2, 4 – 4 – 3 – 2, or 4 – 3 – 3 – 3 structure), we might gravitate toward no trump (either immediately or eventually).

In particular, if we have 15 – 17 high card points and a balanced hand, we may open 1 NT. That often makes for the simplest bidding. The opening bidder's strength is defined up front, and the responder has some straightforward bids – raising in No Trump, bidding a suit (or using transfers to do so), using the Stayman convention (if available to you), or passing if weak.

A 2 NT opening bid (20 – 21 high card points) gives a similar benefit. But what if you're in the in-between zone (18 – 19 high card points and balanced)?

The answer is to open in a suit and then jump in No Trump. Here is an example hand:

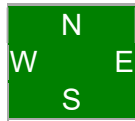
North Deals
None Vul

♠ A 3 2
♥ K J 10 5
♦ K Q J 10
♣ A 8

♠ 10 9
♥ Q 7 6 2
♦ A 9
♣ Q J 9 6 2

♠ J 4
♥ A 8 3
♦ 8 7 6 2
♣ 10 5 4 3

♠ K Q 8 7 6 5
♥ 9 4
♦ 5 4 3
♣ K 7



West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	2NT	Pass	?

North (with 18 high card points) is too strong to open 1 NT. The entire advantage of the 1 NT bid is that the strength is absolutely within the range 15 – 17 high card points. If you open stronger (or weaker) hands with 1NT, your partner won't know when to trust your bid. Not a good place to be.

So, in this case, North opens their longest minor (diamonds) because they don't have a five-card or longer suit. South shows their spades (promising at least 4 in the suit and at least 6 points).

North's jump to 2NT shows 18 – 19 high card points. If North had a weak hand (12 – 14 high card points), they would bid 1 NT. But they didn't – therefore, they must have “more than”. More than what? More than that minimum 12 – 14.

But they also can't have 15 – 17 and a balanced hand, because they would have opened 1 NT directly. Nor can they have 20 – 21, because they would have opened 2 NT directly. So, “more than” must mean whatever range is left: 18 – 19 high card points. Perfect!

I left South's bid open (?). South has a choice once North declares their strength. South may a) raise to 3NT with a “balanced-ish” hand; b) offer a 2nd suit at the 3 level; or c) return to spades.

In this specific hand, I'd be inclined to return to spades. The two doubletons are weaker for No Trump and the 6-card spade suit is great as a trump suit. But what spade bid should be made?

With 8 points opposite 18 – 19, the magic 26 points has been reached. Moreover, North must have a balanced hand and so at least two spades. South's six spades plus at least two from North gives the second magic number: an 8-card fit in spades.

So, the correct bid is 4S. You have enough for game (26+ points) and an 8-card fit, so place the contract. Don't wait for your partner to figure it all out (they might not). **The one who knows, goes.**

I'd bid 3S in this sequence if South were missing the king of clubs. With such great spades but lesser strength (5 high card points), I'd leave the choice to North. North would raise to 4S if they had great spades and a maximum (19+ points, adding points for any short suit) but would otherwise pass.

We'll review even stronger balanced hands in a future newsletter.

Play Signals

We'll discuss play signals at the Saturday, May 17, mini-lesson. This article will give a few more tips and examples on this topic.

In the mini-lesson, we focus on two situations when a play signal is potentially called for: After an opening lead (or subsequent lead) from partner, or when

making a first discard after a lead in suit in which you are void.

But how do you decide if it is appropriate to signal? And how do you pick the card with which to signal? These are tricky calls for the best of players, but there are some basic approaches to take.

First, when signaling encouragement (you like the suit led), pick the highest card available in the suit *that won't take a trick*. The obvious case: you hold KQ2 in a suit, and partner leads the ace. You'd love partner to continue the suit – but you have no easy way of signaling that. If you play the king or queen, that card will no longer win a trick. The play of the 2 looks like a discouraging signal, but that's the break. (Note: sometimes the play of the king or queen is indeed useful in such a situation if you really only need to win one trick).

Another example: you hold QJ876 and partner leads the ace, then the king, in a No Trump contract. Woo hoo! You want them to lead the suit again so you can win your queen and jack and probably the fifth card as well. Lead the eight (and “echo” on the second trick with the six). If partner is paying attention, they will at least consider that you hold good cards in the suit after the play of the eight (“looks encouraging”). They will absolutely know to lead again once you play the six. The play of the eight suggests encouragement. The play of the eight-six (high, then low) blares out encouragement.

What if you had the same hand in a suit contract? Well, you may not want partner to lead the suit, because declarer will ruff in one hand and possibly discard in the other hand. Not a good thing. In that case, discourage by playing the six on the first trick and the eight on the second trick.

Here's another example including an initial signal in one suit and a signal when the lead is in a void suit:

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

♠ Q J 10 4 ♥ 8 5 ♦ J 5 2 ♣ A 10 7 5		♠ 8 5 3 2 ♥ 4 ♦ A Q 10 4 ♣ J 6 4 2	
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♠ A K 7
 ♥ A K Q 7 6
 ♦ 9 8 7
 ♣ K 3

West	North	East	South
			1 ♥
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	4 ♥
All pass			
Lead: ♠ Q			

In this hand, West leads the queen of spades. You know West also has the jack (and probably the ten). Do you want them to continue spades? No, you have no help in the suit. So, you play the two of spades.

Not knowing what to lead next, West leads a trump. Declarer wins two rounds, and you discard on the second. What would you like West to lead if they get back on lead? You'd love a diamond lead. So, what do you discard? Oops, the ten of diamonds could be a winning trick, so you can't encourage in diamonds. You'd have to play the four, which looks discouraging.


Instead, play the two of clubs. That is a discouraging signal for clubs. When declarer drives out the ace of clubs, West will know what to do – lead a diamond. They know you don't like spades (first signal) and you don't like clubs (second signal) and you have no hearts. Diamonds it is.

To set the contract, West leads the jack of diamonds, trapping the king. That means either declarer loses the king (and two other tricks) immediately, or West remains on lead and leads diamonds again.

More on play signals in a future article.

Try to Bid (and Play) It

This is a hand from Frank Stewart's March 1, 2025, column. Try to bid and play it. What does the 2NT bid mean? What becomes tricky in the play?

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

South has 19 high card points. They can't open 1NT (15 – 17 high card points) nor 2NT (20 – 21 high card points), so they compromise with a 1C bid. North shows their 4-card spade suit. South jumps to 2NT (indicating 18 – 19 high card points – perfect!). Note that North is not concerned about the weak spade suit, given that North has at least 4 cards in spades.

After the jump in NT, North knows that South has 18 – 19 high card points. With their 8 high card points, that gives 26+ points – game time. They also know that

South doesn't have 4 spades (or they would have raised spade – 3S or 4S – instead of bidding 2NT). Therefore, the bid of 3NT.

The play is much trickier. If you are observant bridge players, you will plan the contract before playing to the first trick. It looks like there are 9 easy tricks: ace of spades, ace/king of hearts, 5 diamonds, and the ace of clubs. But do you see the problem?

The warning sign is the set of 4 very low diamonds under the queen in the North hand. You realize (from your planning) that you need 5 tricks in the diamond suit. Anytime your long suit has very low cards in the hand with more cards in that suit, be on your toes. It's possible that your long suit may be **blocked**. Note: The October 2024 newsletter has an article and some examples related to blocking.

Amazingly, the key card is the 7 of diamonds!

In this case, if you play the ace and king of diamonds and lead the 8 to the queen, the next trick will be won by that nasty 7. Not a problem if you have an **entry card** (high card) to allow you to return to the North hand. But in this case, those pesky opponents have led the king of spades. When you take your ace, you have no more entries to the North hand. Oh, my – what will we do? What will we do?

No need to panic – just follow Frank Stewart's continual advice – think before playing to the first trick.

When the king of spades is led – don't take it with your ace! I know – your instincts say "take it now, take it now!". But ignore your instincts and trust your brain.

If West leads the queen of spades, again, don't take the ace. You need to play two rounds of spades before taking your ace.

Why? Because whenever that next spade is led, you want to win with the ace? Why? Because you can now discard from the South hand (they no longer have any spades). What will you discard? That horrid 7 of diamonds.

Once the 7 of diamonds is removed, all is well. The diamond suit is no longer blocked. Play the ace, king, and then queen, and the remaining diamonds are now high and will win tricks.

Blocking solved!

Famous Bridgies

Karen Walker is not famous in bridge circles for her many tournament wins. Yes, she has won at the national level (e.g., the winner of the 2006 Rockwell Mixed Pairs with Tom Kniest). But her real claim to fame is as a teacher and writer.

Ms. Walker lives in Illinois and runs a local bridge club in Champaign-Urbana. She has taught multitudes of new and continuing bridge players in that area for over 30 years.

She is the author of numerous books and regularly writes a column for the *Bridge Bulletin* magazine. Of even greater importance, she maintains a bridge website (<https://kwbridge.com/>) with an array of articles on bridge at the beginning, intermediate, and advanced level. I highly recommend that you peruse it to gain her viewpoint on most of the fundamental aspects of bridge.

Ms. Walker is married to Mike Halvorsen, another Illinois bridge expert, who she met in college (she has a funny poem about her first big contract – at which she failed due a blunder, but met her soon-to-be husband).

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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