

Olney Bridge Club News

Official newsletter of the Olney Maryland Bridge Club

The Bridge Guy Speaks

Our bridge club has entered a new era, as another set of students has completed the beginner bridge class. We now have upwards of 35 people who occasionally or regularly appear at 2:30 on Saturdays to practice their bridge. On any given Saturday we may have 10 to 20 people playing together. Our little club is growing.

So, where do we go from here? I'll write down my thoughts but please feel free to share your vision as well – I check the club email regularly.

First, I'll teach another round of the beginner bridge class – but not until the last Saturday of March, 2024. I thought a gap was needed to allow us to consolidate our current club.

In the interim, I plan to hold occasional “mini-lessons” on various topics. I'll limit their duration to 10 or 15 minutes. The initial mini-lesson schedule is shown in the box to the right. In the first three “slam bidding” topics I'll cover direct bidding of a no trump slam, the Gerber convention, and the Blackwood convention.

I have other topics in mind (the uses of doubles and redoubles, transfer bids, throw-in/elimination plays), but I'm also interested in your feedback. What (if any) items would you like to see?

Otherwise, practice, practice, practice! And convince your friends to join us! Our message to the community: bridge is fun and intellectually stimulating – come join us! All ages are welcome!

Beginner Bridge Lessons

Next Class (2024):

The fall beginner bridge classes have completed. Next lessons start March 30, 2024.

Upcoming mini-classes:

- Slam Bidding I – November 18
- Slam Bidding II – December 2
- Slam Bidding III – December 16

All mini-lessons start at 2:30 Saturdays at the Olney library. The mini-lessons will generally run less than 15 minutes.

Ongoing Practice Sessions:

Every Saturday from 2:30 – 4:30 at the Olney library. Note: the December 23 and December 30 sessions are canceled.

Throw Them In

This month we'll start talking about a new approach for winning tricks – the elimination (or throw-in) play. In this practice hand North and South both have good hands. How would you bid it?

	♠ A J 3										
North Deals	♥ A Q 10 5 4										
None Vul	♦ A 3										
	♣ A K Q										
♠ 9 6 5 4	<table style="border: 2px solid green; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto; text-align: center; color: white;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q 8 7
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ 3		♥ 7 6									
♦ J 9 6 5 4		♦ K 10 8 7									
♣ 9 7 6		♣ 10 5 4 2									
	♠ K 10 2										
	♥ K J 9 8 2										
	♦ Q 2										
	♣ J 8 3										

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♥
Pass	6 ♥	All pass	

North opens an artificial 2C bid with 24 high card points. South has 8+ high card points plus a good heart suit (KJxxx) and accordingly bids 2H. North has heard enough. With 4 aces, great heart support, and 32+ combined points, this hand belongs at the 6-level.

West has no obvious lead and so leads the top of nothing (9 of clubs). South wins in the North hand and plans the hand.

There appears to be a diamond loser (sure loser) and perhaps a spade loser. The diamond loser can't be eliminated (no long suit, no ruffing potential). South could then guess which way to finesse in spades – a 50/50 chance. Is there a better choice?

You betcha'. We notice that we'd really not like to lead spades if avoidable. So, we can set up an elimination and throw-in play to force E/W to lead spades first.

First, draw trumps in two rounds. Then play the remainder of the clubs. Finally, play the Ace of diamonds and the remaining diamond in each hand. Note that N/S both have only spades and hearts left. We've eliminated all other suits. It really doesn't matter whether East or West wins the king of diamonds.

If E/W lead a club or diamond, South can discard a spade from one hand and ruff in the other hand (this is called a "ruff and slough"). The spade loser is immediately eliminated.

Alternatively, E/W can lead a spade – and South gets a free finesse! Again, no spade losers. Try it yourself – it's easy to see.

There are many other variations on the elimination/throw-in play. Look for them as an option before trying the even-chance finesse.

Slam Bidding – Part 2

Last month we discussed the 1NT – pass – 4NT auction inviting opener to slam. I had promised to discuss the Roman Keycard Blackwood convention. However, I have changed plans and will instead extend the discussion of no trump slams.

What if you have slam-level points in no trump but are uncertain whether your team is missing two aces? You may lose the first two tricks if you're unlucky. Although this scenario occurs rarely, everyone should at least know of the Gerber convention.

The Gerber convention may come up in several scenarios, but this article will focus on two: after an initial 1 no trump opening or after an initial 2 no trump opening. The Gerber convention is used when you are uncertain whether the partnership is missing two aces.

After either opening no trump bid, a bid of 4 clubs (the Gerber convention) is artificial – it means nothing about clubs. Instead, it asks the opener to show their number of aces. The opener bids "up the line":

4 diamonds	0 or 4 aces
4 hearts	1 ace
4 spades	2 aces
4 no trump	3 aces

The responder will then proceed accordingly:

- Missing two aces, sign off at 4 no trump or in non-club suit.
- With 3 aces, bid 6 of a suit or no trump.
- With all 4 aces, bid 6 or 7 of a suit or of no trump.

Note: when 4 diamonds is bid, it should be obvious whether opener has 0 or 4 aces. If not clear, you probably had insufficient points to bid a slam.

In the very rare case where you have all 4 aces and you may have a grand slam, you may subsequently bid 5 clubs (artificial) to ask for the number of kings:

5 diamonds	0 or 4 kings
5 hearts	1 kings
5 spades	2 kings
5 no trump	3 kings

Here's a sample hand to show when to use Gerber:

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

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K 3
♥ K Q J 10 7 5 4
♦ K 3
♣ A J

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1 N	Pass	4 ♣
Pass	4 ♠	Pass	6 N
All pass			

After the 1NT opening, South knows the partnership has 32 – 34 high-card points. But with only one ace, South uses Gerber to check – are two aces missing? In this hand, 4 spades shows 2 aces. Woo hoo, you're missing only one ace! You can bid 6 hearts or 6 no trumps (some would bid 6 hearts because West would be on lead).

Read more about the Gerber convention online to see more examples.

Try to Bid It

Here's an odd practice hand played on the BridgeBaron application. I was playing South, and the other three players were computer-generated. Try to bid it yourself before viewing the results.

East Deals	♠ K	
E-W Vul	♥ K J 8 2	
	♦ 9 2	
	♣ A Q 9 6 3 2	
♠ A Q 8 5 3		♠ J 9 7 6 4 2
♥ —		♥ 10 7 3
♦ K J 8 4 3		♦ Q 7 5
♣ K J 4		♣ 10

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10
♥ A Q 9 6 5 4
♦ A 10 6
♣ 8 7 5

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		Pass	2 ♥
Dbl	2 NT	3 ♠	4 ♥
4 ♠	5 ♥	5 ♠	All pass

There are many ways to bid this hand. If South doesn't bid, West will open 1 spade, North will overcall 2 clubs, and East will bid either 2 spades (matching our simplified standard American system) or 4 spades (this is preemptive bid in many other systems). The heart suit may never be mentioned.

However, I opened 2 hearts (6 – 11 high card points and a strong 6-card heart suit. West doubled for takeout (asking partner to bid). My computer partner bid 2NT to show a strong hand and asking me to bid a suit with a king or ace (this is a standard method to show a strong hand over a weak two bid, but we haven't explored this approach in the beginning bridge lessons). East stretches to bid their long spade suit. South would ordinarily have bid 3D to show the ace, but I instead bid 4H directly,

believing I had a great supporting hand. West raised to 4S on their great hand, North raised to 5H with their great hand, and East closed their computer eyes and bid 5S to shut out our heart game bid.

Well. It turns out that (with correct play) either team could make 10 or 11 tricks! At the 5S contract East must cash the ace, dropping the king (when there are two cards outstanding, there are slightly better odds they split 1 – 1). Then, E/W lose only the diamond and club aces. At a 5H contract N/S will lose a spade, a heart, and a diamond unless they set up the clubs first.

Famous Bridges

Barbara Seagram is an accomplished bridge teacher, writer, and player. Originally hailing from Barbados, she and her husband, Alex Kornel, run a large bridge training center in Toronto, Canada with thousands of students each year. Barbara and her husband also travel around the world to teach bridge.

Barbara originally was trained and worked as a nurse, where she taught fellow nurses before transitioning to bridge teaching. She has played a large role in regional and national bridge coordination and popularization.

Barbara has authored 25 bridge books, all of which provide deep insight into the game of bridge (particularly for the new or intermediate player). For any of you who aspire to playing tournament bridge sometime in the future, please consider her *25 Bridge Conventions You Should Know*. I use that book (and its companion, *25 More Bridge Conventions You Should Know*) regularly to refresh my memory of the most important bridge conventions in use by most tournament players.

Olney Bridge Club

We have formed an Olney MD 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.

Bridge Quotes

The average defender operates in a fog of uncertainty. **Hugh Kelsey**

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