

Ways to Improve Your Bridge Game

Bridge is such a hard game.....there are so many things to learn, to remember and to put into practice. Once you become semi-proficient at bidding, declarer play and defense, there are lots of little things that you can do that will help you to continue to improve your game. These are just a few of them.

During the bidding:

- (1) Avoid opening bad hands....for example 4-3-3-3 hands with 12 HCP's unless there's a couple of Aces
- (2) Be very careful in competitive auctions when you are bidding ahead of partner. It's quite possible that partner does NOT have a fit with you and would like to be penalizing the opponents for getting in your way.
- (3) Avoid like the plague using Blackwood or RKC Blackwood with two or three cards or a void in an unbid suit.

When you are declarer:

- (1) Draw trumps at once if you can...especially if you think that the opponents will be ruffing your winners in side-suits. However, if you need to ruff some losers in the hand with the fewer trumps postpone drawing the trumps. Instead embark upon a method to ruff some of your losers with the short trumps.
- (2) If you decide the best way to make a contract is to crossruff the hand, remember to cash out your side suit winners first.
- (3) Know the "hold-up" rule, i.e. the Rule of 7. (A guideline for the declarer in holding up an Ace when declaring a NT contract is to subtract from 7 the total number of cards in the suit in his own hand and in the dummy....the answer is the number of times the declarer should hold up before playing the Ace.) But beware of holding up at all if there is extreme danger in another suit.!
- (4) At times it may be wise to refuse to ruff in order to keep from losing control of the trump suit.
- (5) Read about and practice safety plays. (Good idea for another article!)

(6) Make a habit of trying to picture one or both of the opponents' hands. This is done by taking inferences from their bidding, their leads, their carding and their discards. So pay attention to all the spot cards etc.!!

(7) False card when appropriate but do NOT do it all the time. Do it when you think it is appropriate only.

(8) Consider eliminating side suits and then throwing an opponent in so that they have to lead into your tenace.

When you are a defender:

(1) Cover an honor only when there is a chance to promote a card in your own hand or in partner's hand but do NOT do so if your honor is safe.

(2) When declarer leads from touching honors (QJ, J10) cover the second honor unless you are short in the suit in which case you should cover the first honor.

(3) Second hand low is a good rule MOST of the time.

(4) In suit contracts always consider leading trumps in order to cut down on the opponents cross ruffing possibilities. But avoid leading singleton trumps.

(5) If you're going to be ruffing declarer's tricks try to ruff out his winners, not his losers. This is particularly important to the defender who plays second to the trick.

(6) If dummy has a long suit that can be established, good defenders will attempt to knock out dummy's entries before the suit can be set up.

(7) Do not overruff automatically as often refusing to overruff increases the chances of developing more trump tricks. Thus with a natural trump trick don't overruff unless you want the lead or hope to get a second ruff.

(8) If declarer will be forced to overruff you ruffing high might promote a trump trick for partner.

(9) Do NOT signal unnecessarily. Instead when discarding pitch cards that do you no good and serve to show no interest in that suit.

(10) Leading against slams is not the same as leading against game or partscore contracts. When the opponents' bidding indicates that they have balanced hands

it's normally best to be passive. On the other hand it generally pays to be aggressive if their bidding indicates long suits that will produce a lot of tricks when they are in control.

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September, 2008