

FOCUS, FOCUS, FOCUS!

by Barbara Seagram

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How often do we hear social bridge players say: "We don't want to play duplicate"..."Those people are too serious"..."We just want to have fun."

When social players see people playing a game of duplicate, it looks very intense and serious -- no table talk or joking around during the hand, everyone intent on the bidding boxes and the cards. But hard as it might be to believe, duplicate players *are* having fun.

All of us play bridge for fun, but it is always more fun when you're winning. And you are so much more likely to play well and win if you concentrate and give it your all. Daydreaming will not bring you many top boards.

If you were playing the piano, would you be able to chat about last night's movie, your last vacation or Shirley's new boyfriend while tickling the ivories? Surely most of us would need to concentrate and would not be able to talk at the same time?

So too when we play bridge, we can chat at the outset of a hand or on its completion but what if we are not focused during a hand? Will we be able to remember how many clubs have gone, or recall that West opened the bidding and so East is marked with no points, or know whether the queen of diamonds is now high? Even counting trumps takes some effort.

Our mental filing cabinets are so full. That's how I visualize the part of the brain that we use for processing bridge data. We constantly misfile information and have trouble pulling what we need from the right folder within the cabinet. We have a much better shot at it if we are not idly chatting but are concentrating instead and trying to remember what we have learned to do in this given situation.

Make the pauses in the bidding or play productive. Don't look around the room when you are waiting for someone at the table to play a card, think about what is going on in the hand and what your next likely play is going to be. Review what you know about the hand from the bidding and play so far - try to work out your opponents' distribution.

Consider the following hand:

S Q1074
H Q105
D KQJ10
C Q9

S A9
H 87432
D 763
C AK5

S 632
H 9
D 982
C J106432

S KJ85
H AKJ6
D A54
C 87

S	W	N	E
1NT	P	2C	P
2H	P	3NT	P
4S			

Imagine that you are sitting west. You lead the CA. Partner signals with the C2. You look at the dummy and see that dummy has three H. Let's see: You have 5, declarer has four H (which he showed on the bidding) Your partner must have a singleton H. You now switch to the H8. East follows with his singleton H9. The trick is won by dummy's H10.

Declarer now pulls trump. You win it immediately with the SA and lead another H which partner ruffs. Partner now leads back a C to your CK. You now give East another ruff. Down two because you were focused and took the time to work out declarer's (and thus partner's) distribution.

Bob Hamman calls this "being at the table". This game is all about being focused. Your opponents, if they are good players, will be doing the same thing. When they aren't chatty or super-social, it's not that they're being mean or unfriendly; they're just concentrating on the task at hand. And they are having fun - otherwise they wouldn't be there at all!

