

Marti's Mutterings

by Marti Ronemus

For those of you who are new to the bridge world, or maybe returning after a long hiatus, I'm not going to welcome you (back). Instead, I'm going to tell you something a little different: I'm not just welcoming you, I'm **warning** you. You don't know what you're in for, and I need to alert you.

You are about to become utterly addicted to a strange new world. You won't notice the little changes at first. It's probably already too late. So how does this happen? Very innocently and I'll share how it happened to Gary and me, as a **Cautionary Tale**.

My husband and I went to a Nationals, the biggest of the tournament types. We had taken a couple bridge lessons and someone told us there was a tournament about 20 miles away. Gosh, we said, why not? How hard can it be?

Well. We were knocked over! Hundreds and hundreds of tables of bridge going all at the same time. Games just for players as clueless as we were. Wonderful speakers right before each game. So we played...

At the end of the game, they announced that Gary and I had won the 0-5 Masterpoint game! We got great glasses saying WINNERS to prove it! (And didn't we thrust **those** on people...till the ink wore off.) Our first Nationals hooked us. We were done for.

Gary and I ended up owning a bridge club with 14 games and two workshops a week. I only have two friends left who don't play bridge. I think Reverse Drury is the neatest thing since beer in cans, and I suffer separation anxiety when I can't find my convention card.

I'm writing this to encourage you to try a tournament if you haven't already. Usually they are set up to be fantastically welcoming to newer players. Summer and Fall are filled with excellent venues with fabulous hospitality. Those of you who are more experienced, drag a newcomer with you to the next one!

But be forewarned. Life as you know it is over. Don't say I didn't warn you.



ALEX'S BRIDGE TIPS

Keep those questions coming! AKORNEL2015@GMAIL.COM

NEW EMAIL ADDRESS!!!

BID THESE HANDS WITH ME.

What is West's next bid?

- a) Pass
- b) 4NT
- c) 4H
- d) 4S

Question 1.

West is Dealer

West
S Q643
H AKQJ
D K5
C J32

West - East
1NT - 2C
2H - 3NT
?

Question # 2

West is Dealer. This is East's hand:

East
S K875
H A762
D K542
C 8

West - East
2C - 2D
2NT - 3C
3S - ?

What is East's next bid?

- a) 4C
- b) 4NT
- c) 4S
- d) 6S
- e) 3NT

Question # 3

West

S 64
H A96
D AK542
C Q94

West - East
1D - 1H
?

What is West's next bid?

- a) 2D
- b) 1NT
- c) 2H
- d) Pass

ANSWERS

Question 1.

West is Dealer

West
S Q643
H AKQJ
D K5
C J32

West - East
1NT - 2C
2H - 3NT
?

What is West's next bid?

ANSWER: East's bid of 3NT says he does not like Hearts. So why did East use Stayman in the first place? East must have four Spades. West must now **bid 4S** as they have an eight-card Spade fit. It is safer to play a hand in a trump suit contract than in NT.

Question # 2

West is Dealer. This is East's hand:

East
S K875
H A762
D K542
C 8

West - East
2C - 2D
2NT - 3C
3S - ?

What is East's next bid?

ANSWER: East has 13 dummy points in support of Spades. The singleton Club is worth 3 points. West has promised 22-23 HCP. So East should be heading for / exploring slam. 4NT is not Blackwood however. It is quantitative. **Bid 4C:** Gerber.

- a) 4C
- b) 4NT
- c) 4S
- d) 6S
- e) 3NT

Question # 3

West

S 64

H A96

D AK542

C Q94

West - East

1D - 1H

?

What is West's next bid?

ANSWER: West must **not** now bid 1NT without a Spade stopper. Rebidding Diamonds suggests a six-card suit as there is usually something better to do than rebid your 5-card minor. The correct bid is 2H and this does not promise 4-card support. If you are unable to rebid 1NT, then raise partner's major with three-card support as you have ruffing values. **Bid 2H.**

East will not rebid their Hearts unless they have a five-card suit.

If this last one confuses you, email Barbara and she will send you a write-up on raising partner with three-card support.

BALANCING OVER THEIR 1NT by Jack Brawner

If the auction has gone 1NT (assume 15-17 for the moment, though it will not matter)
– Pass – Pass to you, what do you know?

Opener has 16 points (within one point). Responder assumedly has 0-7 with, probably with no five-card or longer major or six-card or longer minor. In essence, they have about half the deck.

This means that YOU have about half the deck, and should consider balancing! Allowing the opponents to play in 1NT is a long-term losing proposition, which has been shown by computer analysis, historical hand analysis, and by many authors including Larry Cohen in the Florida Bridge News a few years ago.

Also, consider this: you have a mere 6 points. Would you ever balance? Most people would answer no, so let's ask a different question. If you KNEW your side had 20 points between you, would you rather have 14 of them sitting under the notrump bidder (in other words with the NT bidder as your LHO) or would you rather partner had 14 of them sitting over the notrump bidder (her RHO)? When you think of it that way, perhaps you will be more inclined to balance with hands that are light in high-card points. 😊

So the question becomes this: HOW do you balance. Here is my suggestion...

Use DONT in the balance seat.

No matter what your partnership agreement is for your direct seat interference, DONT is an excellent system in the balancing seat. The biggest flaw in DONT is the lack of ability to show a strong hand. In the balancing seat, this may actually be a benefit – the stronger you are, the less partner has! The DONT convention works like this:

- 2C* shows Clubs and another suit, frequently stated as “clubs and a higher ranking suit”.
- 2D* shows Diamonds and a major, frequently stated as “diamonds and a higher ranking suit”
- 2H* shows Hearts and Spades, which can also be humorously stated as “hearts and a higher suit”.
- 2S shows spades.
- DOUBLE shows a single-suited hand (usually not spades unless the hand is truly strong – doubling and then bidding spades is stronger than a direct bid of 2S).

(*The partner of the balancer is expected to either pass or bid the next higher suit if they prefer all of the other options.)

The biggest advantage of DONT is that all one- and two-suited hands can be shown *without ever being above the two level*. The disadvantage of DONT -- the inability to show strong hands -- really doesn't apply very often when the opponent has opened 1NT.

Remember, our primary purpose is to push them out of their 1NT contract... we do not really care who takes the bid at this point.

How often should you balance? This is a matter of personal style, but I have spent years experimenting and have decided on this style:

- With a six-card suit, I balance. Points don't matter.
- With two four-card or longer suits, I balance. Points don't matter.
- This means I balance with all hands EXCEPT 4-3-3-3 and 5-3-3-2 shape. And did I mention that points don't matter? 😊

THE LAW OF TOTAL TRICKS

You have all heard of the Law of Total Tricks. This was developed some time ago by French bridge theoretician Jean-René Vernes some 50-60 years ago. It spread like wildfire when

American expert Larry Cohen popularized it with his two books "To Bid or Not to Bid" and "Following the Law".

The Law of Total Tricks is merely a bidding guideline: How to Know How High to Go!

Very simply put, when competing in the bidding (both sides are in the act)

With 8 trumps between you and partner, bid to the 2 level.

With 9 trumps, bid to the 3 level.

With 10 trumps, bid to the 4 level.

So, if the responder to the opening bid of 1S has

S Q63

H 75

D 543

C 76543

He will still pass. He will not bid 2S as that shows 6-9 points. That has not changed.

BUT if the bidding were to proceed:

1S – P – P – 2H back to him, he should now bid 2S, since between the partnership, they have 8 trumps. There is no guarantee that your side will MAKE 2S but if you did not bid this, then the likelihood of the opponents making 2H is high. Thus, if you are minus 50, it is better than being minus 110.

If you had

S K754 H 87 D Q9832 C 65

If opener bids 1S, you will still bid only 2S (since bidding 3S would show 10-12 points, unless partnership is playing Bergen Raises). BUT if the opponents now compete in Hearts or Clubs, then Responder should now compete to 3S, knowing that their side has 9 trumps.

With 5 trumps, responder would bid 1S – 4S immediately with 2-9 points. Some teachers call this the Weak Freak.

e.g. S K9532 H 5 D QJ432 C 54

The Law of Total Tricks is also used strategically when partner preempts.

Let's say Dealer opens with 2S and his partner has:

S Q65

H 76

D A9865

C 762

The responder should immediately bid 3S. This says: "Partner, you have trash, I have more trash". This is based on the Law. Opener has 6-10 HCP (give him an average of 8 HCP) and Responder has 6 HCP. 24 HCP between the two hands. The opponents have 26 HCP between them. The opponents should be bidding and making game. You want to make it difficult for them. Give Responder one more Spade (above hand) and one less Heart and Responder would bid 4S instead, compounding the preempt.

Use the Law of Total Tricks only when you do NOT have 26 points.

Do not lie about your points. Remember that 1H-P-2H still means 6-9 points.

The Law of Total Tricks applies at the 2, 3 or 4 level, not at the 5 level.

If you use the Law wisely, it will take some of the guesswork away in knowing whether to bid on or not, when the opponents are in the act.

Adjustments to the Law: If you have Queens and Jacks in opponents' suit, your hand is flawed. Downgrade your hand. Also downgrade if you have poorly situated honours in opponent's suit. e.g. you have Spades Kx and your LHO (Left Hand Opponent) has bid Spades. You know that LHO is not going to lead a Spade. He will wait till his partner is on lead to lead a Spade through your King. Your King is doomed. Downgrade your hand. You have an unhappy King. BUT if RHO had bid Spades, you have a Happy King (or a working King) so can upgrade your hand.

When/Why to Open Light in 3rd Seat

by Larry Cohen www.larryco.com

After partner deals and passes and RHO passes, why would it make sense to open light (in 3rd Seat)? Of course, all normal hands with 12/13+ points will be opened. That is not the issue here.

There are many hands with which you would pass in any other position, but should open in 3rd seat. For example, after 2 passes, you should open 1S with:

S KQ1076 H 4 D AJ43 C 543

Why? Because it makes it harder on the opponents! It is much more difficult to find the right contract when you are starting out against a 1S opening as opposed to having a free run. Maybe when you open 1S, your LHO has, say:

S A52 H K8765 D K2 C Q62

Perhaps he is vulnerable and fears a 2H overcall. Meanwhile, his partner has:

S 83 H AQ92 D Q10976 C 87

It might be tough for the opponents to enter the bidding--yet they have an easy 3H contract their way. On many occasions, your light 3rd-seat opener will cause your opponents to miss a laydown game. They might get into the auction, but might not be able to appreciate their fit/values.

Simply put, bidding is much harder when the opponents have struck the first blow. "Defensive bidding" (responding to takeout doubles and overcalls) is much tougher than when your side gets to open the bidding.

Lastly, it is "safe" to open light in 3rd seat. Your partner is a passed hand. He can't (shouldn't) bury you. He won't have enough to get your side too high. The advent of [Drury](#) (a popular convention) is also a big aid in putting on the brakes after a light 3rd-seat opener.

When (and with what) should we open light in 3rd seat?

Not 5 points (unless you are preempting). Probably, you should have at least 8 or 9 HCP for a light opening.

As usual, vulnerability and suit quality plays a big role. Here are some examples:

After 2 passes, both sides are vulnerable and you hold:

S KQ1098 H 2 D KJ1072 C 54. Open 1S.

This will make it much harder on your opponents. You will get a spade lead (good) if partner ends up on lead. Partner (a passed hand) won't get you too high.

S 107654 H AJ6 D AJ6 C J2. Pass.

You have spread out (defensive) values and a poor suit (which you don't want partner to lead).

S KQJ10 H 3 D 876 C A10762 . Open 1S.

Yes, we assume 5-card majors. But, in 3rd seat, try this space-consuming, lead-directing action. Partner isn't going to get you too high and meantime you really mess with the opponents' auction.

After 2 passes, you are white against red (favorable vulnerability), holding:

S A10654 H 2 D KJ76 C J103. Open 1S.

This makes things much tougher on your opponents than a pass. So what if you end up -50 or -100? Likely it is their hand. Go for it!

S 5 H KQJ98 D 765 C 7642. Open 2H!

Yes--with only 5 hearts. Partner can't do too much damage and you are white on red. Make it tough on the bad guys.

S 5 H KQJ2 D J8765 C Q32. Open 1H.

Get in their way, get a heart lead and take advantage of the favorable vulnerability. Summary: When in doubt, open light in 3rd seat. It makes life much tougher on your opponents. Be wary when your partner opens in 3rd seat--tread lightly as responder.

TO PULL OR NOT TO PULL?

To pull or not to pull, that is the question! Trumps that is. We learned at mother's knee that we should always get the kiddies off the street. Thus as new players, we assume that on all hands we should make "drawing trumps" the first order of business.

In order to decide whether or not to embark immediately upon pulling trump, let us explore the scenarios in which doing so will cause us to not make our contract.

<p>AKQ3 2 J10976 1085</p>	<p>97642 K93 3 AJ62</p> <p>-----</p> <p>QJ10876 A52 KQ43</p>	<p>J1085 A54 KQ84 97</p>
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You and partner have overbid considerably on this hand and you (south) have landed in 6 Hearts. West leads the Ace of Spades. South counts his losers to find that he has 1 trump loser and two Diamond losers. He looks to dummy and notes that there is a singleton Diamond over there. Great!

First item on the agenda: Create a Diamond void in dummy and ruff a Diamond loser in dummy, crossing back to your hand with a Club to ruff the final Diamond in dummy. Hold it...suppose you think to yourself that he only needs to ruff two Diamonds in dummy and therefore can afford to pull one round of trump first. Alas, the opponents will win the Ace of Hearts and lead back a Heart. Now there is only one Heart left in dummy with which to ruff two Diamonds. Moral of this story: When you have a useful singleton, doubleton or void in dummy and have to ruff some losers from declarer's hand with dummy's trump, don't pull trump first unless you have gazillions of trumps hanging around in dummy.

On this next hand, you have arrived in 4 Spades. You are South and West leads the K Hearts.

North
J643
A52
AQ3
Q102

South
KQ752
643
K7
KJ6

Counting those pesky losers again, you find that you have 1 Spade loser, two Heart losers, no Diamond losers and one Club loser. One too many.

Let's analyze those Heart losers again. Are they quick losers or slow losers? Since we won the Ace Hearts at Trick # 1, the two small Hearts are now quick losers as opponents will take two tricks QUICKLY if they win the lead. Along with Ace of Trumps and Ace of Clubs, this will spell disaster. So, the moral here is: When you have quick losers and no Ace of trump, try to discard

a loser before pulling trump. Look for an extra winner i.e. A good looking lopsided suit (more cards on one side of the table than the other) which will provide an opportunity for a discard.

Careful how you play that suit...Play the Diamond 3 to the King, then the Diamond 7 to the Ace and Queen of Diamonds. On the Queen of Diamonds, you must now pitch the Heart 4. Aha, now you can pull trump safely because now the opponents cannot hurt you. Less experienced players worry and think: "What if the opponents trump the third round of Diamonds?" Well in that case, you were never going to make the contract. If you had pulled trump first, you would have lost the next 4 tricks in a row.
