

Back to the Basics

As most of you know by now, I play and/or watch a lot of bridge hands. I am constantly astounded by those who play this game and either don't know or consistently ignore a whole lot of what I'd call the basics of bridge. Keep in mind that I'm not a devotee of rote application of any or all basic bridge rules but I do think you should at least consider them before taking contrary actions.

So at least know the following so that you are able to apply them or discard them at a conscious level:

1. Know how many high card points (HCP's) it takes to make a NT game (25-26), a Major suit game (25-26), a minor suit game (27-28), a small slam (33) and a grand slam (37). Hopefully we all know these are just guidelines and that with fits and distributional values game is often there with fewer HCP's as long as we have the necessary controls.

Example: Partner opens 1H and you hold KJ x Axxxx AQxxx. You have 14 points in high cards so bid until game is reached even though for now you don't have a fit.

2. New suits by responder are **forcing**.....but there are exceptions: (1) if you play some conventional bids like NMF, (2) if responder is a passed hand, or (3) if responder has previously limited his hand.

Example: (a) 1H 1S (b) 1S 1NT
2H 3C or 3D 100% forcing 2H 3C Not forcing

3. New suits by opener are not always forcing.....but they are if he jump shifts or reverses.

Example: (a) 1C 1H (b) 1S 1NT
1S – Not forcing 2H – Not forcing

4. Jump shifts are game forcing. Just because you shaded your first response doesn't mean that you can pass now.

Example: 1S 1NT
3C game forcing

5. Reverses are forcing for one more round. Just because you shaded your first response doesn't mean that you can pass now. (Sound familiar?)

Example: 1C 1S
2H forcing for one more round at least

6. Do not count distributional points in a suit that partner has bid...at least until you have found a fit in some other suit. In other words do not count distributional points until you know them to be an attribute.

Example: 1S 1NT void KQJx KQxx xxxxx. This is only 11 HCP's and the void is not an attribute (yet).

7. Know which bids are forcing and which bids are invitational in your system.

Examples:(a) 1H 1S (b) 1H 1S (c) 1C 1H (d) 1C 1H
2C 3S? 1NT 3S? 1S 3C? 1S 3S?

8. Your first goal should be to find the best trump suit (or notrump). The second goal is to determine whether to play partscore, game or slam.

9. Don't raise opener's second suit with only three-card support. (Exception: when the auction has already made it clear that you can't have four-card support.) Supposedly, Bob Hamman has said to a partner or two when they put down only three card trump support (having raised a second suit), "You have five seconds to produce another trump."

Example: 1C 1H
1S 2S Promises FOUR spades

10. Opening leads versus 3NT and 6NT are probably not the same.

Example: Qxxx J109 xxxx Qx. Lead a spade versus 3NT but the J♥ or a diamond versus 6NT.

11. When partner opens the bidding and you also have an opening hand the partnership is going to play game somewhere and the opponents don't get to play the hand undoubled. See No. 1 (There's probably an exception or two to this!)

12. When partner opens the bidding and then jump rebids 2NT showing 18-19 HCP's, responder needs at least 15 (or a very good 14) to invite slam in NT.....unless of course one of you has a very good source of tricks in which case controls are important.

Examples(a) 1C 1S (b) 1C 1S
2NT 3NT KJxxx Kxx Ax Qxx 2NT 6NT KQJxx Kxx Ax Qxx

13. When signaling don't confuse attitude situations with count situations and vice versus. Also don't try to make an attitude or a count card into a suit preference

signal. Get the attitude and count situations figured out before you become concerned with suit preference. And whatever else you may think it is extremely hard to give two clear messages with one card!

14. In the interest of promoting good partnership bridge always try to have your bid if you are bidding before partner has had a chance to bid. On the other hand if partner has already passed you have a little more flexibility with overcalls, preempts, etc.

15. Don't make a habit of opening light because you have great distribution. If it happens to be the opponents' hand your partner is liable to double them off with a few cards of his/her own only to be irritated because you don't have any defensive tricks.

16. Don't gamble on slams...try to make them a sure thing. And don't bid a grand slam unless you can count 13 tricks.

17. When you are the declarer try to count your winners and your possible winners before playing to the first trick! (Sometimes there won't be nearly enough!)

18. Most of all remember that bridge is a game.....enjoy it!! (It has taken me years to learn that.)

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