

Various “Rules” of Bridge

As a bridge player you are probably acquainted with several of the so-called ‘rules’ of bridge. There are several different kinds so you may find the term ‘rule’ somewhat confusing. Let me see if I can organize them into categories.

First of all there are the rules we call Regulations. These are the rules found in the book entitled *The Laws of Duplicate Bridge*. Those Regulations you can read on your own; this article has nothing to do with them.

The second category of ‘rules’ are those mathematically or number-based ones that help us in our play and bidding. We’ll call these formulas but they are more widely known as Rules with a number in them. They are usually helpful and should be put to use. Here are some of them:

Rule of 2. With a double tenace, such as AQ10 or KJ10, it is normally best to first finesse toward the lower honor.

Rule of 2,3,4. This is an expansion of the old rule known as the Rule of 2 and 3. It applies when deciding whether to preempt, and if so, how high. Basically it means that you can overbid by four tricks at favorable vulnerability, by three tricks at equal vulnerability and by two tricks at unfavorable vulnerability.

Rule of 4 and 4. This is the belief that it is usually better to play in the 4-4 fit rather than in a 5-3 or 6-3 fit (assuming both fits are of the same rank). This fit is presumably better since there you can use the longer side suit to sluff losers. This also affects the auction. For example when holding ♠AQ5 ♥KJ74 ♦A863 ♣62, and partner opens the bidding with 1♠, it is usually better to show values (in this case by bidding 2♦) instead of immediately raising partner in spades. There is the possibility that the partner’s rebid will be 2♥ and the partnership will be able to find the preferable 4-4 split in hearts instead of the known 5-3 spade fit.

Rule of 5 and 5. This pertains to an ACBL policy issued in the 1980’s that in ACBL sanctioned bridge events (generally meaning tournament events where the General Convention Chart is in use) weak two bids should not contain fewer than 5 HCP’s and that the suit should be a holding of at least five cards.

Rule of 7. The rule of seven is a guideline for the declarer in holding up an Ace when declaring a NT contract. If the declarer subtracts 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.

Rule of 8. When considering a two-suited overcall after a 1 NT opening bid, if the number of losers you have (counting missing aces, kings and queens) subtracted from the number of cards in your two longest suits is no more than 2 and you have at least 6 high card points, ($2 + 6 = 8$ hence the rule name) then you may make a two-suited overcall with a five-four distribution. Thus you could show the majors holding $\spadesuit Axxxx \heartsuit Qxxx \diamond xxxx \clubsuit -$ (9 cards in spades and hearts less 7 losers equals two plus six HCP's = eight).

Rule of 9. This is a guideline to be used when trying to determine whether or not to double the final contract of the opponents. It works like this: add the numeric value of the opponent's contract to the number of trumps held in that suit and if the result equals 9 (or more), then that player should double for penalty. If the result is 8 or fewer, then the defender should pass or bid. A simple example would be that if the contract is $4 \spadesuit$ and one defender holds 5 Spades, then the total number equals 9 and that player should double for penalty.

Rule of 10. (Pertains to opening leads.) This rule applies when the opponents employ fifth best leads versus NT and/or suit contracts. To determine the number of cards in the other three hands that are higher than the card led, subtract the number of the card led from 10. Reduce this count by the number of cards you see in your hand and in the dummy and the result is the number of cards higher than the card led in the non-leading opponent's hand.

Another Rule of 10. (Another guide to doubling.) When contemplating a penalty double of a suit below game, add your expected trump tricks to the number of tricks the opponents are trying to win. If the answer is 10 or more you have the right number of trump tricks and doubling is OK.

Rule of 11. (Pertains to opening leads.) This rule applies when the opponents employ fourth best leads versus NT and/or suit contracts. To determine the number of cards higher than the card led in the other three hands, subtract the number of the card from 11. Reduce this count by the number of cards you can see in your hand and in the dummy and the result is the number of cards higher than the card led in the non-leading opponent's hand.

Rule of 12. (Pertains to opening leads.) This rule applies when the opponents employ 3/5 (third or fifth) leads versus NT and/or suit contracts. If it appears that

the original lead is the third highest of the suit, subtract the number of that card from 12. Reduce this count by the number of cards you can see in your hand and in the dummy and the result is the number of cards higher than the card led in the non-leading opponent's hand.

Rule of 15. The player in fourth position, in deciding whether or not to open the bidding, should add the number of HCP's to the number of spades held in his hand. If the resulting number is 15 or more, the bidding should be opened.

Rule of 16. When contemplating raising a 1 NT opening to 3 NT, count the number of high card points and the number of cards 8 and greater. If the sum is greater than 16, you should raise to 3NT. This avoids the need for the use of 2NT as a bid showing 8 points and asking partner to raise if at the top of his 1NT bid. This method also frees up 2NT for use other than as an invitational bid.

Rule of 20. A guideline that suggests opening the bidding when the sum of the high card points added to the total number of cards held in the two longest suits totals at least 20. This guideline applies to any seat.

Rule Of X Plus One. This is Culbertson's formula for use in determining if a long suit can be established in a notrump contract. Estimate the number of tricks in the suit that must be lost before it is established, calling this number X. Adding 1 to this number will give you the number of stoppers in the opponent's long suit that are needed in order to accomplish this.

The third and last category of 'rules' are those tongue-in-cheek ones that come about as comic relief from a very serious game. These, then are some of the true Rules of the Game.

Rule of Boston. This is a little know acronym for leading. It stands for Bottom Of Stuff Top Of Nothing.

Rabbi's Rule. A satirical rule that calls for playing the Ace when the King is singleton offside.

No Lurker Rule. A rule that allows one to clarify the number of outstanding trump by pulling an extra round in which both opponents fail to follow suit.

Trump Suit Unbid Rule. A rule that states it's very hard to bid and make a slam in a suit that is never introduced into the auction.

Helpful (?) Partner Rule. A rule that says it's permissible to injure a partner who overtakes your trick (as a choice) and then starts to think.

Queen Finding Rule. If you have a two-way finesse for a Queen, finesse the opponent you like the least.....or if you dislike them both play for the drop.

Plus to Minus Rule. Do not pull my penalty double in favor of a minus score.