

Thursday Morning Bridge

It seems that after you play bridge for 40 years, you're supposed to know something about the game. Likely you still show up at the local club games where you have become somewhat of a permanent fixture. You're sort of a local bridge guru, and, as such, you have some ownership rights for a particular place....say at Table 5 in the North position. Now I'm not the only one by any means.....many people at our club seem to sit in the same direction at the same table every time they play. If someone is missing it's the topic for discussion until we all know why they aren't there.

Now whether you actually know as much about bridge as you pretend that you do is totally irrelevant. They THINK that you KNOW. And truthfully you have gained some knowledge and insights over the years... if only by osmosis and perfect attendance. Now it's quite possible that you forget occasionally (like what's trump or whether the Ace of clubs has been played) and your focus isn't what it used to be, but still they come to you with questions and for advice.

This was sort of my status when some of my club game friends came to me for lessons. We started the Thursday morning lesson group with the goal of improving our bidding, defense and declarer play while at the same time gaining some new insights into bridge psychology. Now it turns out that's fancy talk for an opportunity to get together and go over hands from club games. And, of course, it is necessary to spend a small amount of time on the usual womenfolk' thing of dealing with the latest news and rumors about mutual bridge addicts and friends.

There are nine of us....but of course not all are there at the same time. That would be far too easy. I wouldn't have to rack my brain about who has what handouts and what has been discussed with each and every one of them and even whether they were listening (or talking) when something was discussed.

It's a rather interesting bunch of nine women.....five over 60 and the other four between 39(?) and 60. What the older women have gained in experience is balanced by the younger ones' desires to try new and different approaches. They are all reasonably good bridge players but with varying amounts of tournament experience. Their goal is to learn to play partnership bridge and to become competitive at regionals and NABC's in the upper

flights. Now this is a rather lofty aspiration and they have my wholehearted admiration and assistance for attempting such an endeavor.

We started by forming some pacts. I'd lose weight if they'd count the hands. I'd exercise if they'd count the hands. I'd go to some tournaments with them if they'd count the hands. You get the idea.....I'd have to change drastically but all they had to do was to count the hands!!

But, actually, we have started to build a bidding system. And believe me when I say that this is an EXPERIENCE. While learning to count hands is a requirement, listening doesn't seem to be, so it's best for me to keep remembering that patience IS a virtue.

My job as leader of this group is to introduce ideas, conventions, and treatments that are new and different to them. These are then either built into the system or rejected..... depending upon the group's understanding of them, their determination as to how often they will be used, and mostly, whether or not they are worth the effort of remembering them. A likely agenda is to present (in writing) a new convention or treatment for study (haha) before the next meeting, then bid and discuss prepared hands that incorporate previously adopted system and partnership understandings. In addition, we try to play together frequently at club games and then discuss problem hands either afterwards or on the next Thursday morning.

We are now playing such things as modified Bergen raises, Kickback, Serious 3NT, LTTC as well as some other interesting treatments. And counting has become mandatory!!

A sample of the conversation gives you some idea of how it goes. During our discussion of reverse Drury, one of them said, "My husband heard me talking about that and wondered if that was some kind of new position!!" So much for keeping the group focused and on course.

I knew we were making progress when I gave them the hands below to bid. (We try consensus style bidding with half versus the other half.) With very little discussion the bidding went as follows: (Non-existent opponents silence throughout.)

North
♠ AKJ
♥ 76
♦ K987
♣ KQJ2

South
♠ 97
♥ AK10932
♦ -
♣ A6543

North	South
1NT	2♦ (transfer)
2♥	3♣
3♠	4♦ (cuebid)
4♠	5NT (grand slam force)
7♣*****	

“Pretty good”, I told them (not being one to over-emote). But being the devil’s advocate, I then asked them, “How do you know your partner’s cuebid was in support of clubs?” They had a good answer.... partner should have bid 4♥ over 4♦ if hearts was going to be the trump suit. I couldn’t argue with their logic and they left me smiling over their trust in their partner as well as their progress in bidding.

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