

SELF-GRADING YOUR CARD PLAY

I continue to tell anyone who will listen that you need to improve your card play. And you all continue to not listen. One of you told me that during the pandemic you studied two books – both on exotic bidding systems. Another opportunity to improve lost.

CONTENTS

SELF-GRADING YOUR CARD PLAY – PAGE 1

AN EASY DECLARER PLAY PROBLEM – PAGE 1

A HARDER PLAY PROBLEM – PAGE 2

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO IMPROVE? – PAGE 2

FOURTH SUIT FORCING CONTINUED – PAGE 3

YOU BID WHAT??? - PAGE 4

STREAKS & BIG GAMES – PAGE 13

UNIT NEWS – PAGE 14

PLAY PROBLEM ANSWERS – PAGE 15

Here's a very easy way for you to understand how hard you need to work on your card play. After a live bridge session, pick up a hand record and go over every deal, recording how many tricks your side was supposed to take in that particular strain, and how many you actually took. If your difference is negative, you have work to do. If you want to be better than average, you need to be at least 4 or 5 tricks better than the double-dummy analysis. Note that this does not mean that the DD tricks available are wrong, it means that you are playing your cards better than your opponents are.

Now comes the hard part, you have to try to figure out how the double-dummy play should go, and compare that with how you played the deal. At first, this will be very hard for you, but it gets easier with practice. The important thing, though, is to build a library of card play techniques in your mind that you can access when faced with a real play problem,

Online play is perfect for this, you can review your hands after the session with GIB telling you the effectiveness of every play that you made. And you will come across deals where you made an optimal play every time. As you get

better, you should see this happen more frequently.

AN EASY DECLARER PLAY PROBLEM

This is so easy that probably at least a dozen of you will get it right.

Dummy: ♠K7432 ♥10762 ♦-- ♣10876

Declarer: ♠AJ96 ♥AK543 ♦AQ10 ♣A

Contract: 6♥

Lead: ♦2

I'll help – this is how I would go about planning the play:

How many tricks do I have in high cards? One club, and two each in the other suits thanks to the lead.

How many more tricks do I need to establish? Five.

Where can I get more tricks? I could get 3 more spade tricks if they behave. I can ruff a diamond loser in dummy. I can ruff three clubs in hand if I can figure out how to get to dummy to lead them.

What will happen if trumps are 4-0? I'll go down. There's no way around it.

What will happen if trumps are 3-1? I will have to play spades for no loser. Usually, that will fall into the "eight ever, nine never" rule, I will play the K then the Ace.

What will happen if trumps are 2-2? I will make all the tricks if I pick up spades for no loser, or make six if there is exactly one spade loser, or go down if there are two losers.

This probably would take me no more than a few seconds at the table; I've done it a lot. Not only at the table, but in reading books and magazines.

OK, I've given you all the facts. The form of scoring is IMPs, you want to go down on as few layouts as possible.

Now plan the play.

A HARDER PLAY PROBLEM

Here's a nice play hand. I'll tell you the story behind it later, along with the answer to the problem above.

Dummy: ♠KQ109xx ♥QJx ♦xx ♣xx

Declarer: ♠A6 ♥A10 ♦AKQJ9x ♣AQx

Contract: 7NT – You opened 2♣, Partner responded 3 spades to show a 6-card suit with two of the top 3 spades, and you bid 7NT. Science is for geeks.

Lead: ♠2

Top card tricks – 9

Extra tricks available – 2 diamonds if the suit is not 5-0 with the length on your left, 3 spades if nobody has 4 to the Jack, possible finesses for 1 trick each in hearts and clubs.

What do you play from dummy? The 10, of course. RHO plays the 8. What do you play from hand?

You'd better play the ace, otherwise you will never get to dummy to run the spades unless the ♥K is singleton. You test the diamonds by cashing the ace. Everyone follows. You're up to 11 tricks.

Plan the play.

HOW DO YOU PLAN TO IMPROVE?

I hear through the grapevine that many of you are unwilling to play in some club games because they are “too hard.” It’s very difficult to motivate yourself to get better if you are satisfied with the results that you get in the games that you play in. So restricting yourself to playing in fields where you can be happy with your results means that you don’t really have a viable plan to get better. That’s OK, many people, especially those of you in my age bracket or older, play the game for the social aspects. And it’s depressing to step up in class and get stomped.

But if you really want to improve, you have to play in a mix of tough games and easier ones. You use your results in the tough games to identify what you need to work on. And you take the lessons back to the easier games you are playing in now. If you do this, you will improve.

FOURTH SUIT FORCING, CONTINUED

Last month, I started describing the use of the fourth suit to give responder the opportunity to sign off, invite, force to game, or express slam interest at an economical level. I used the auction 1♥-1♠, 2♣-2♦ as an example, because it is clear in that case to use opener’s 2♥ reply as a punt, to show that you have nothing to show. Other auctions are not always so convenient.

And then there’s 1♣-1♦, 1♥ where it’s not clear what the 4th suit bid should be. The consensus standard for this, I think, is that responder’s 1♠ rebid always shows spades, and a jump to 2♠ is the artificial 4th suit bid. After 1♣-1♦, 1♥-1♠, when opener fails to raise spades he might bid any of the following:

- 1NT – now 2 of a minor is invitational, 2♥ is invitational with 3-card support, a 2♠ rebid is game forcing and doesn’t promise any extra spade length or quality, 2NT is invitational, and 3 of a minor is game forcing.
- 2♣ - again, 2♠ is an artificial game force, 2 of either red suit is invitational (again, 2♥ is 3-card support), 2NT is invitational, 3♣ is invitational, and 3 red is a game force.
- Opener’s other rebids don’t pose much of a problem, as they will mostly be limit bids.

When the 4th suit bid bypasses opener’s first suit, things get tricky, too. A principle of good bidding is that, when nothing descriptive is available, and you are forced to bid, make the cheapest call that doesn’t misdescribe your hand. So, for example, after 1♣-1♥, 1♠-2♦, we use opener’s 2nd suit (spades) as the default.

- 2♥ now shows 3-card support
- 2♠ denies a lot of things. (1) opener has no stopper in diamonds, (2) he has fewer than 6 clubs, and (3) he has fewer than 3 hearts.
- 2NT shows a weak notrump strength hand with a diamond stopper.
- 3♣ shows 6 cards.

And then there’s the issue of what opener should do with 4 cards in the 4th suit. Fortunately, this doesn’t happen very often; true 3-suiters are pretty rare.

- After 1♣-1♦, 1♥-1♠, since responder promises spades, he just raises to the appropriate level assuming that responder has the minimum that the partnership allows (10-11 points if you play the Walsh style or 6 points if you play up-the-line suit responses).
- When the 4th suit bid is at the 2-level, he rebids 2NT with weak notrump strength and raises the 4th suit with more. This allows responder to find a 4-4 fit in the 4th suit. Note that after 1♣-1♦, 1♠-2♥, a 4-4 heart fit is impossible; opener would have rebid 1♥ with 4-4 in the majors.

When the 4th suit is bid at the 3-level, things get awkward. Here, it's almost always necessary to use the cheapest call as a punt. And there's the sequence 1♠-2♥, 3♦ where the 4th suit bid bypasses 3NT. The 4th suit 4♣ should be reserved for slam tries in responder's suit where his suit is not particularly strong and needs both a doubleton and high cards from opener for slam to be feasible.

In conclusion, 4th suit forcing makes a lot of invitational sequences available to responder, but it can complicate further bidding. There was a famous hand from a National Knockout final many years ago that illustrates the things that can go wrong.

West: ♠10x ♥AJ87xx ♦KQx ♣Ax East: ♠KQxx ♥KQ10x ♦Jxxxx ♣--

West opened 1♥ of course. East didn't want to splinter with a void, so he responded 1♠. West thought he was too strong for a mere 2♥ rebid, so he tried 2♦. Now East was really interested in exploring for slam, so he trotted out 3♣ to create a game force. But West rebid 3♥, depriving East of his planned 3♥ rebid. Rather than risk partner passing 4♥, East rebid 4♦ here and West further compounded East's problem by rebidding 4♥. By the time the auction ground to a halt, it was in 6♥X, which lost the obvious two aces for -200 and a 13 IMP loss. It's easy to see why East was so excited once West rebid 2♦ but the whole auction just never got around to establishing trumps in time. This is a frightening example of the trouble you can get into by refusing to raise partner's major immediately with 4-card support. At the other table, the auction consisted of three bids – 1♥-4♣, 4♥.

YOU BID WHAT???

COMMENTARY, SCORING AND ABUSE BY RICHARD FINBERG

[\(doublemenot@gmail.com\)](mailto:doublemenot@gmail.com)

Match points. EW Vul.

You are East and hold ♠KJ63 ♥A ♦82 ♣KT7654. You open the bidding with 1♣, and the auction goes as follows:

W	N	E	S
		1♣	Pass
1♥	1♠	2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♥	Pass	?	

This auction is hard to put your head around. Our expert panelists vehemently disagree as to whether partner's 3♥ bid is forcing. We are out of bidding space, appear to be on a misfit, and must now either commit to game or pass a possible slam try. But stick around. I will help you solve this problem while we tar and feather your partner for putting us in an untenable position. We need to answer three questions:

1. Is partner's 3♥ bid forcing?
2. What do you bid over 3♥? And,
3. Why does my partner always make bridge so complicated?

I asked the bidding panel to answer the first two questions and have asked my therapist to answer the third.

Overview

Today's problem is particularly perilous because, not only do panelists disagree whether 3♥ is forcing, but the bid itself a plausible place to play. Ambiguous bids in your best suit are much more accident prone than ambiguous bids in an opponents' suit, which would never be passed. You have already made three bids, and West knows how strong or weak his heart suit is, so shouldn't West just place on to place the final contract, or at least, make a bid that cannot be passed? Bidding 3♥ is just asking for trouble if you are not certain partner will understand it.

I usually start with the panelist's comments here, but since today's auction is convoluted and the hand is complex, I think it is more helpful for me to start by framing the issues.

Analysis

Your hand as East is ♠KJ63 ♥A ♦82 ♣KT7654. You bid clubs twice, then bid 2NT with your double spade stopper sitting over North's spade suit. Your partner, West, first bids 1♥, and then 2♦. Both of these bids are new suits opposite your opening bid, so both are forcing one round. In standard bidding, neither bid is game forcing. But many of the panelists who consider 3♥ to be game forcing do so because they treat 2♦ as establishing a game force. If that is your agreement, you of course,

must not pass. But absent such an express agreement, I would never assume we are in a game force. Do you really need to test him to find out?

Our 2NT bid over partner's 2♦ is also not forcing in standard methods. You were forced to bid something, so you did. A third round 2NT bid is natural and descriptive, but since you were forced to bid, should not be assumed to show extra values. Over 2NT, partner either 'retreated' to 3♥ or 'advanced' to 3♥, depending upon your point of view.

Clearly, West has a decent 6-card heart suit, but does he have limit values or game going values? Let's consider:

- (1) West did not cue bid 2♠ over 2♣ which *would have* established a game force in light of his prior forcing 1♥ bid.
- (2) West did not jump to 3♥ over 2♣ to make a limit bid in ♥
- (3) West did not rebid 3♦ over 2NT to show 5-5 or 6-5 in the red suits, although he did bid 2♦, which absent a special agreement, is natural and forcing 1 round since it is a new suit in response to an opening bid. Possibly, West was just temporizing with some diamond values, hoping you can show belated heart support.
- (4) West refused to take charge by placing the final contract in 4♥. Does that mean West is trying to stop in 3♥? If the latter, you should pass with your actual (junky) hand. With a more useful hand, with fast tricks (say, AQxx, Q, xx, AJTxxx), you would proceed to game – though it is a close call between 3NT and 4♥ with this hypothetical hand. (With the problem hand, if you are required to bid, 4♥ is far superior to 3NT to minimize entry problems).

Since no game force has been established, in my view, and partner did not jump to 4♥ or cue bid (now, or previously), I infer is not only willing, but is trying, willing to stop in 3♥. We are not, for example, on a 2/1 auction or a 4th suit forcing auction. I take West's auction at face value, and therefore pass with my poor fitting hand.

The important lesson from this hand is not whether 3♥ is forcing. It is "Please do not bid like West does in this problem!" When you ask partner to decide what to do, make sure he has the information he needs. If he lacks critical information, you should make the decision yourself or find a better auction.

I note there are some progressive bidders who treat 2♦ as an artificial game force, not the 1-round force in standard bidding. *See*, Ron Franck's comments. It is a reasonable, and probably quite helpful, agreement, but I would never *assume* my partner plays it. Partner should never be forced to guess whether a bid of your own is forcing, especially when there is no more bidding space available.

In The Extra Points section below, I briefly discuss two points that are very distantly related to the current issue. First, there are an unfathomable number of possible auctions. Second, since it is physically impossible to customize agreements for every auction, you need default rules by which both players can quickly come to the same decision – such as whether a bid is game forcing.



Here are the individual panelist responses, starting with the “Nays”:

Bob Zimmermann: Not forcing. I pass. West has a wide range for 3 hearts, but this is a case of the dog that didn't bark. If West wanted to be in a game forcing auction, he could have bid 2 spades instead of 2 diamonds. Then, both 3 diamonds and 3 hearts would have been forcing over 2NT.

Can partner bid 3 hearts with both $x, KJxxxx, AQxx, xx$ and $x, KQJxxx, AKxx, xx$? One of those should be forcing and the other invitational. For that matter, is 2 diamonds forcing? If not, can 3 hearts be forcing?

RF: I agree with Bob that if West intended to make a forcing auction, he could have cue bid 2S to render his subsequent bids forcing. By the same reasoning, West's failure to cue bid 2S implies his auction is *not* intended to be forcing.

As to Bob's questions, in standard bidding 2 diamonds is forcing one round because it is a new suit by an unpassed hand opposite an opening bid.

Stanley Ruskin: Not forcing. I don't think 3H is forcing. This hand looks to me that we are both 6/4. I think that I bid my all up to this point. Since I don't have anything more than I previously showed, and I don't think 3H is forcing, I pass. If you tell me that it is forcing, then I must bid 3NT. I don't have anything else I can bid. I hate these hands!

RF: I agree with all the passers. But if forced to bid, 4H is a much better bid than 3NT due to poor fits and spot cards and communication problems. If partner has as little as $KT9xxx$ in hearts, you are a favorite to make 5 heart tricks, and you don't have to worry about the heart suit being stranded when hearts are trump.

Jan Assini: Not forcing. I disagree that 3 hearts is forcing as there was a cue bid available for West if he wanted to force to game. I pass 3 hearts.

Gus Coststanzo: Not forcing. West had the opportunity to make a game forcing bid and did not. Opener showed minimum values with the 2C bid. After 2NT, E/W are bidding what they think they can make. No game force is on. Basic bidding rule, after the bid of no trumps by either partner, absent some game forcing jump or responder's reverse, all bids become invitational.

At match points, pass. At IMPs, try 4H, especially if E/W are vulnerable. From the auction, West appears to have a 2-6-4-1 hand or 3-6-4-0. Perhaps he holds a 2-7-4-0 or 1-7-4-1 with minimum values. With max values and the latter hand, he might have bid more aggressively.

Jack “Webb” Hawthorne: Not forcing. I'm passing 3H if I must deal with the auction as presented. I don't believe 3H is forcing, even if West thinks it is.

Clearly, this depends on your treatment of 2D. It is undoubtedly forcing, but is it forcing to anything beyond 2H? Obviously, I have spades under control, but how significant is that without some club support from West? The 500-pound gorilla in the room is the 2NT rebid. I feel that call is atrocious and responsible for this bidding problem in the first place. I would have rebid 3C. Does the 2NT rebid suggest that partner raise with a club fit, or more help in spades? I have a nice distributional hand, but only 11 HCP. I'm not a huge proponent of point counting, except when contemplating a notrump contract. To bid 2NT implies a much more balanced hand pattern, along with the spade stopper. If you are going to make 3NT, you will need club support or a nearly solid 6-card heart suit.

This is sounding a lot like a misfit auction. I prefer to play defense in misfit situations. West might have anything from 8-10 red cards; he might have jumped with 11. If West rebids 3H over 3C, then you can show your spade stopper by bidding 3NT and convert 4D to 4H if West doesn't pass 3NT.

But since I am forced to deal with the auction as displayed, the 3H rebid in the actual auction sounds like 6-4 in the red suits. I do not feel that 3H is forcing, so I would pass and hope we don't go down much.

Paul Caplan: Not forcing. You have a weak opening hand that you have overbid. It is time to pass. You are 6-4 in the black suits and your partner seems to be 6-4 in the red suits. You will have transportation troubles and are probably too high already. Your 2C call was a big overbid with a weak suit, and it showed extra values. If you had the values you showed, your partners bid would be forward going, but you do not have what you promised, so pass before you make it worse.

Trudy Cohn: Not forcing. I don't think 3H is forcing, and I am looking at a subminimum hand. I will pass.

Richard Katz: Not forcing. Pass.
I do not find this auction compelling,
Though losing count started at six.
My opening hand was quite hopeful,
But its value has mostly been nixed,
Alas, now my hand is worth less.

The auction's subtlety is lost on me.
Too many kings, and no potatoes.
I pass and suggest as a start:
"Next time, pard, bid four hearts."
Once again, I am tilting at windmills.
Yes, another wind reference.

RF: This is almost as Richard first wrote it,
In prose, but with rhythm, near rhyme.

So now I must praise it and quote it –
Non-verbose, with wisdom sublime.

Other writers, take note: More potatoes, please, and less wind.



Now let's hear from the "Yeas" – those who voted that 3♥ is forcing, some of them rabidly:

Reanette Frobouck: 100% Forcing. Over 2 clubs, West could have bid 3H with an invitational hand. This auction should show 6 plus good hearts—no real information on diamonds, as 2D could have been bid just to create a force. I am going to bid 4H. My partner should be very happy that I produced the Ace of H. Who knows? He could have extra hearts and I never promised any.

Bill Holt: Forcing. Yes, it's forcing. West is running through my 2NT, which sez "I've got a minimum and no Heart fit Stop Sign" to 3 Hearts, so... I am bidding 4H. Partner has 6 or 7 Hearts, and their hand is worth more to the partnership in Hearts. My Heart Ace will be pleasant news for partner.

Steve Nolan: Forcing. My 2NT invited game. Partner has accepted the invitation but wants to play in one of his suits rather than in notrump. With a minimum 6-4 hand in the red suits, he would have bid 2H rather than 2D in the second round of bidding, and he could have passed or bid 3C or 3D rather than 3H in the third round to allow us to sign off below game.

I bid 4H. Partner's good six-card suit opposite my ace is the best fit we are certain of and (to put it mildly) I have no extras to show. Repeating notrump after partner has rejected it would be asking for trouble.

Craig Biddle: 100% Forcing. If partner had wanted to invite in hearts, he could have bid 3H last time. The most likely hand types for him now are either long strong hearts with slam interest or a chunky 5-card heart suit willing to play 4H opposite two small hearts because he is short in spades. In an uncontested auction, partner's 2D rebid should allow subsequent passes only in previously bid suits at the minimum possible level, or 2NT. Thus, if partner wanted to invite with a long heart suit, he could have bid 3H directly over 2C. Since there's no reason to change the meaning of that jump to 3H in competition, there's no reason to change the meaning of sequences after responder's 2D rebid either.

As far as that 2S cue-bid is concerned, I think that it should show an invitational or better hand interested in notrump or clubs, without a good spade stopper. Since it prevents partner from taking a cheap heart preference, it logically means that responder's hearts aren't good enough to be the trump suit unless opener has systemically unexpected heart length.

If I bid 3S now, I should be showing doubt about strain. Something like a hand with only a single spade stopper, no particular heart support, and a non-solid club suit. Since I have a double spade stopper, I could bid 3NT instead, but the fact that my heart is the ace makes me think I should be leaving the door open for us to play hearts. It would be clear for me to just raise to 4H if we were playing support doubles so that partner would never expect me to have as many as 3 hearts. But without that gadget in the system notes, I think I should bid 3S to let partner decide which game to play.

And if he has the slam try with long hearts, he can bid 4D to tell me that (I will decline with no potential ruff coming anywhere). This can't be natural, since his failure to rebid 3D over my 2NT means that he either doesn't have as many as 4 diamonds or that his hearts are so good that he is willing to play 4H opposite a void.

Connie Hoechstetter: Forcing. Just bid 4 hearts. No interest in going any farther. Have nothing else to show. My hand will probably not have much help.

Bernie Fudor: Forcing. I bid 4H. Not doubled yet!

Ernie Retetagos: Forcing. Seems obvious. Isn't this standard in the 2/1 bidding system which uses new minor forcing? If partner wanted to invite, they would have jumped in hearts after my 2-club rebid.

I bid 3NT. This is the last chance to play 3 NT. Partner can bid again if they want to play in a suit.

Herb Sachs: Forcing. Ugly and forcing. Not loving this one bit. I bid 4H, and I do not like it.

Gail Carns: Forcing. Since I would never rebid 2C on a minimum hand, I'm not sure of this partnership's understandings, but I do think the 2D bid made 3H forcing. So, I bid 4H thinking there would be transportation problems in notrump.

Ron Frank: Forcing. I believe 3H in this auction is forcing. Partnerships should have discussed this. My understanding is 2D is an artificial game force and 3H shows extras with at least 6 hearts.

I bid 4H. Not happy though. I think partner is short in clubs and will have entry problems in 3NT.

RF: 2D as an artificial force seems like a reasonable idea and would work well enough in this hand. It would certainly establish a game force in today's hand.

The Extra PointsWhy You Need Clear, Easy to Remember
Default Bidding Rules

The entire language of bidding consists of only 15 words: the numbers 1-7; the four suits and notrump; and pass, double and redouble. Yet, the number of unique auctions will surprise most readers.

If the opponents pass throughout, there are 16 different ways to bid 1NT. They are a 1NT opening (1 way); bidding one suit, followed by 1NT (4 ways); bidding 2 suits followed by 1NT (6 ways); bidding 3 suits followed by 1NT (4 ways); and bidding all 4 suits followed by 1NT (1 way). If we also differentiate auctions by the number of initial “passes” prior

to the first suit or notrump bid, there are 64 ways to bid to 1NT (starting with 0, 1, 2 or 3 initial passes).

But that is nothing. With interference by our opponents, the number of possible auctions increases exponentially. If you bid 1♣, there are 21 possible auctions just to get from 1♣ to 1♦. Here they are:

- | | | | |
|-----|---------------------------|-----|----------------------|
| 1. | 1♣-P-1♦. | 13. | 1♣-X-P-1♦. |
| 2. | 1♣-P-P-1♦. | 14. | 1♣-X-P-P; 1♦. |
| 3. | 1♣-P-P-X; 1♦. | 15. | 1♣-X-P-P; XX-1♦. |
| 4. | 1♣-P-P-X; P-1♦. | 16. | 1♣-X-P-P; XX-P-1♦. |
| 5. | 1♣-P-P-X; P-P-1♦. | 17. | 1♣-X-P-P; XX-P-P-1♦. |
| 6. | 1♣-P-P-X; P-P-XX; 1♦. | 18. | 1♣-X-XX-1♦. |
| 7. | 1♣-P-P-X; P-P-XX-P; 1♦. | 19. | 1♣-X-XX-P; 1♦. |
| 8. | 1♣-P-P-X; P-P-XX-P; P-1♦. | 20. | 1♣-X-XX-P; P-1♦. |
| 9. | 1♣-P-P-X; XX-1♦. | | And, of course, |
| 10. | 1♣-P-P-X; XX-P-1♦. | 21. | 1♣-1♦. |
| 11. | 1♣-P-P-X; XX-P-P-1♦. | | |
| 12. | 1♣-X-1♦. | | |

No matter which of the 21 routes we took to 1♦, there are now 21 more possible bidding routes that lead to 1♥, for a total of 441 (21 x 21) unique auctions that start with 1♣ and end with 1♥. Assuming all four suits are bid on the way to 1NT, there are at least 9,261 unique auctions to get from 1♣ to 1♠ (21 x 21 x 21) and at least 194,481 unique auctions to get from 1♣ to 1NT (ignoring all initial passes). Each player will be the declarer about 25% of the time, but no adjustment has been made for pairs that play weak notrump openings (which are much more frequent than strong notrumps) or for *prima donnas* who are always the first to bid notrump.

I say “at least” because the above totals are illustrative and not complete. They ignore auctions in which one or more suits are not bid on the way to 1NT. For example, if you are on bidding path 11 above going from 1♣ to 1♦, a player may ‘jump’ all the way to 1♠. That bidding path is not included in the above chart, which merely illustrates a subpart of all auctions.

None of my numbers here been “peer reviewed”, so if I am off a zillion or two here or there, please forgive me. But to show you I am not totally crazy, look at these numbers from the Official ACBL

Encyclopedia of Bridge (7th Ed.). The Encyclopedia reports that the number of possible auctions with North as dealer and *assuming East and West pass throughout* is:

$(2^{36} - 1)$, or 68,719,476,735 (about 69 billion).

But, when East and West are not required to pass, the number of possible auctions is:

128,745,650,347,030,683,683,120,231,926,111,609,371,363,122,697,557.

I do not know what this number is, or how you even pronounce it. But to give some perspective, you can express the entire population of Earth using only 10 digits (assuming we are still under 10 billion). A 51-digit number is too much to even think about.

On a personal level, I feel lucky when my bridge partner and I both remember to wear socks. How can I expect us to remember how to cope with so many different auctions? In fairness, most of the 51-digit-bridge-auctions are irrelevant in practical play. I mean, how often have you encountered 4 redoubles on your way to a 1NT contract?

To get a better sense of how the numbers of auctions can multiply so quickly, let's review a genealogical chart for a very prolific family. It is a different calculation than used for the auction count because families need not follow the rules of bridge. But the calculation is still enlightening. Since we have 21 possible steps between 1 ♣ and 1 ♦, let's also use 21 in our family genealogical example:

Mom and Dad have 21 kids. Each child has 21 kids with unrelated persons. Surprise, surprise! You now have 441 grandchildren (21 kids x 21 kids). If each generation also has 21 kids per each kid, by the 8th generation, you would have about 1.8 billion (21^8) persons in the family tree (about 20-25% or so of the current population of Earth). But as far as I can tell, in the ACBL-land auction count, you have only bid from 1 ♣ to about 2 ♥, even ignoring initial passes prior to 1 ♣.

Only an estimate, of course, but you get the idea.

I have probably used a bazooka to kill a mosquito. My simple point is there are far too many different auctions to consider and remember separately. A good partnership should have default bidding rules that tell you, e.g., whether you are on a game force, and whether a bid is forcing, limit, constructive or weak, weak, constructive, limit or weak. Exceptions to such default agreements should be few, as sooner or later, one partner will forget, or partners will disagree as to whether the exception applies.

Get to work folks, and please send me a copy of your default bidding rules when you are done.



The Scoring

The Poll: Forcing or Not Forcing?

Here is a little Civics lesson:

18 SCB panelists answered whether 3 ♥ is forcing (excluding my vote).

8 emphatically answered "No."

9 even more emphatically answered "Yes." And 1 first answered "No", but later changed it to "Yes."

I decided the second choice should override their first choice, since I generally allow ‘Mulligans’ and we do want to see all panelists’ best efforts. So, the “Yeas” seem to have it, 10-8. But at the bridge table, the first bid would have to stand since this is a change of mind, not a correction of a mechanical error like pulling the wrong card from the bidding box. So, the score would be tied at 9-9.

But if you count my vote, we get to 10-9, in favor “No.” Why not count the vote? I may be the Judge of Elections but that is no reason I should lose my right to vote.

If instead, we disqualify the person who voted twice (clearly improper), we have an exact tie at 9-9 if we still count me.

Best, I can disqualify all email votes, and only count my own, so the “No” wins it, 1-0. In any event, the vote is close, no matter how you or I finagle it.

While it is possible to do surveys on Bridgewinners.com, that is a separate pool from the bidding pool, with different persons voting, so as a practical matter, I only have Bridgewinners.com results for the second question.

Part 1 is a Pass-Fail question, and all voters get the same grade. Ironically, it is “Pass.” There are good arguments on both sides. Also, many who thought the auction was forcing based that on how they play. Only our partner, West, fails, for the reasons stated.

Scoring the Bidding

At bridgewinners.com, only 5 out of 25 bidders (20%) passed 3♥. 3NT was the most popular bid, with 14 out of 25 (56%) choosing it. I do not know where they expect to get their tricks. The SCB panel much more sensibly favored 4♥. As always, my vote is not included in the scoring tabulation.

Bid	BW		SCB		Score	Comments
	No.	Pct.	No.	Pct.		
Pass	5	20%	8	44%	100	All “No” voters passed
3♠	1	5%	1	6%	80	Flexible, but hand is bad, and pard does not know you have the HA.
3NT	14	56%	1	6%	50	Against weight of the bidding.
4♥	5	20%	8	44%	100	Majority rules.
Totals	25	101%	18	100%		



One Last Thing

Thank you everyone. I will be retiring from writing this column to commit more time to family, including Grandson, and dogs, Koi Pond, and other things, so this will be my last “You Bid What???” column. However, I will try to regularly submit short materials, humorous or otherwise.

Also, I am not retiring from bridge. I will be both playing and teaching. If you are not on my email list, and want to be, please contact me at doublemenot@gmail.com.

Thank you. Richard

CB: Thank you Richard for all the time and effort you put into your columns. I will be more than pleased to publish your future efforts. And you are surely right that a good set of system notes starts with a couple of pages of general principles.

STREAKS AND BIG GAMES

CHRIS WANG

Big games:

Patricia Anders & William Holt 70.00 Glenshaw Thu

Streaks:

3 in a row:

Mary Lou Flach Glenshaw Mon

Leroy Hackenberg II Export Mon

JoAnn Szymecki Glenshaw Mon

2 in a row:

Barbara Belardi Greensburg Wed

Dennis Jacobs Glenshaw Wed

Janet George Edgeworth Wed

John Alioto Glenshaw Wed

Dorothy Murray Export Mon

Kenneth Eichler Greensburg Wed

Jenny Janitor Export Mon

Kitty Jo Hellmann Greensburg Fri

Marcella Retetagos O'Hara Tues

UNIT NEWS

LORRAINE HANNA

Congratulations to Arlene Cullen for becoming a Ruby Life Master and Janis Davis for her achievement of Bronze Life Master

I hope you booked your partnerships for next month's Sectional Tournament from May 20-23 at Masonic Temple. If you need a partner, email your request to partners@pittsburghbridge.org. For those of you who are Newcomers & 499ers, Darlene Mannheimer is there to help, as always

499er@pittsburghbridge.org or 412-913-5944

It will be great to see you back at the tables and having fun at our Sectional.

The ACBL is allowing clubs to run charity games for Ukraine Relief in all sessions in April. Gus and Craig are both going to participate, check the unit web page for other clubs.

Here is a link to the Schedule of Tournaments through the end of this year.

<http://www.pittsburghbridge.org/Tourneysched.htm>

Below is a link to our Classes and Lessons page showing lessons offered in the Burgh. Richard Finberg continues his free online lessons and I will be teaching Bridge Basics 3, Popular Conventions starting 4/12.

<http://www.pittsburghbridge.org/classes.htm>

Youth Bridge Online Summer Camps

Online Bridge for Youth

We know most of our younger generation is into online games; well, here is the best game around offered to our youth.

<https://www.acbleducationalfoundation.org/page/online-bridge-camps-57.html>

Bridge Whiz Free online lessons for young people. Next session starts in the Fall.

<https://www.acbleducationalfoundation.org/page/bridgewhiz-online-bridge-lessons-for-grades-4-12-44.html>

Currently we have one evening game. Play starts 6:45 every Thursday at Glenshaw and is directed by Craig Biddle. Pass the word to those who would like to play in the evening. For a list of current open games, here's the link

<http://www.pittsburghbridge.org/clubresults.htm>

Continuing on last month's Committees of the Board, here are a few more.

Facebook Page: Yes, we have a Facebook Page maintained by Martin Greenberg. Here's the link <https://www.facebook.com/pghbridge/>

Join this group and voice your comments (hopefully positive), send pictures. Martin notes items of importance in our Unit.

Membership: In addition to being our Secretary, Pat Anders is in charge of Membership. She receives Membership status from the ACBL and also sends cards to members who are ailing, or member's family, when appropriate. Please advise Pat of a member's illness so she could send a note of concern from all of us. At the top of the Club Results page, there is a link, or on our PBA page.

<http://www.pittsburghbridge.org/board.htm>

<http://www.pittsburghbridge.org/clubresults.htm>

Site Assessment: Ever wonder how we find locations for our Sectionals and Special Games? Bill Holt, Craig Biddle and Ken Bergman are our hard-working crew who do just that. In fact, they secured the Thursday evening night game location, with the help of Gus Costanzo, in Glenshaw after looking at site availability and cost.

Grand National Teams Qualifier will take place at the Erie Bridge Club. No pre-qualifier required. Dates are 4/30 and 5/1. Here's the flyer.

<https://www.d5bridge.com/GNT/2022/Flyer.pdf>

More info

<https://www.d5bridge.com/index.php/GNT>

Be kind at the tables...

PLAY PROBLEM ANSWERS

Problem 1 – Pitch a spade from dummy. You don't need five spade tricks. Now cash two high trumps. If they split 3-1, play a spade to dummy and take your choice if, on the 2nd round of spades you still haven't seen the ♠Q after RHO follows. Play for the drop if RHO is the one with 3 hearts and finesse if LHO has three hearts. The whole point of the spade pitch is that, if trumps are 2-2, it's a safety play to avoid losing two spade tricks when all four spades are behind your AJ9. Again, play a spade to the K. If RHO shows out, play a spade to the ace and pitch another spade from dummy on your 2nd high diamond. Then lose a spade and you will have two trumps in dummy, one for your diamond loser and one for the 4th spade. Meanwhile the three small trumps in your hand will take care of dummy's clubs.

Problem 2 – Your only concern is if LHO has 4 spades to the Jack. Why would he lead a spade then? Because he has both the missing kings. Run diamonds, pitching down to:

Dummy: ♠KQ109 ♥x ♦x ♣--

Declarer: ♠6 ♥A10 ♦-- ♣AQx

Steel City Bridge

APRIL 2022

LHO must come down to 6 cards; 3 spades and 3 of his choice. Cash both of your aces. If LHO has a spade stopper, one of the kings will fall and you will have another winner to cash. Cash that winner, and LHO will have the choice of pitching his other king or unguarding spades.

LHO started with ♠Jxxx ♥Kxx ♦x ♣Kxxxx. This hand is from the World Championships currently running in Italy. If you would like to kibitz, BBO has vugraph on through Saturday the 9th. Sessions start before dawn here, and the last session it typically over by 1 PM. Or you can watch the archive at any time. The USA is well represented, and many of the names will be familiar to you.