

Steel City Bridge

VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1

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EDITED BY CRAIG BIDDLE

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MOVING FORWARD

BY CRAIG BIDDLE

Hello all,

After years of mostly thankless toil editing our newsletter, Arlene Port has retired. We all hope this means that she'll have more time to play now. As you see, we've renamed the newsletter to emphasize that we want to use this as a vehicle to move bridge forward in the Pittsburgh area.

We have assembled a team to replace her (one person couldn't possibly do that). And we're going to publish the newsletter online only. Our intent is to have new content up a few days before the start of each month. If you're interested in joining our crew, have an interesting deal to report, have an article you want published, or just have a question of general interest, drop me a line at crb1164@verizon.net. This is intended to be your newsletter; all help will be appreciated and almost anything bridge related could be published.

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Right now our team is:

Lorraine Hanna – Unit President and Scuttlebutt Editor

Bill Holt – Unit Webmaster and Newsletter Publisher

Richard Finberg – Problem Editor

Phyllis Geinzer – News Correspondent

Chris Wang – Tracking winners at club games

Craig Biddle – Editor and Navigator

I plan to run two monthly columns intended to help newer players progress. One will be a series called, "Making Sense of Bidding," where I will be explaining bidding from a top-down viewpoint rather than as a jumble of dos and don'ts. And the other will be a focus on helping you learn to play the cards better. Because, seriously, that's the fastest

way to improve. What's the point of learning a new bidding gadget if you're just going to go down in that cold 25 point slam that you were able to bid with your new bidding toy?

By doing this, I will be able to change the focus of the "Biddle Bits" to relatively more advanced topics. They will continue to appear, but may become less frequent. Or not. I don't know what the future will bring. I understand that this game is an uncharted jungle – I am sure than in my life I have spent 75,000 hours (about 8½ years) playing, reading, or thinking about bridge in the nearly 60 years since I first learned. And there are still things I need to get better at, as my partners are often quick to point out.

But hopefully, I will be able to help all of you to see more and more of the beauty of the game, as well as helping you to get better. You'll have to help, though, by doing the homework. But most of the "homework" involves playing the game, online or in person.

I also plan on adding a Q&A column, although I do not promise to answer all questions I receive, either by responding to the questioner or by publishing the Q&A in that column.

FOR NEWER PLAYERS IMPROVING YOUR CARD PLAY

Nothing you can do will improve your game faster than studying card play. Really. And this most especially includes working hard at your defense. There are many excellent books on beginning and intermediate play and defense. And if you don't want to go that route, here's a list of web sites you can follow.

<https://www.baronbarclay.com/frank-stewarts-daily-bridge-column/>

Frank is a terrific writer and he covers a variety of topics. You can binge read his columns, too, they are archived on the site, I think for several years.

<https://www.larryco.com/>

Larry has a free daily newsletter and relatively economical lessons on various topics.

<https://www.bridgebase.com/v3>

A graded set of declarer play problems. Don't feel bad if you can't get them all right, I can't either. But the idea isn't to get them all right the first time, it's to go over them

until the patterns are imprinted in your mind. Because card play and defense at this game is, above all, an exercise in pattern recognition.

<https://michaelslawrence.com/>

Mike is a world class player and a great writer. He has online webinars, an archive of articles, and other goodies.

<http://www.rpbridge.net/>

Richard is a friend of mine; we both lost our wives at about the same time. He has a unique style, but there is enough material here to keep you occupied for years. His material ranges from the very basic to the wildly impractical and esoteric. Among other things, he ran monthly contests from 2000-2006/7 that were exceedingly difficult and often required you to do things like construct a deal where you can make 6NT on the fewest points.

<https://playbetterbridge.com/>

This is Donna Compton's web site. Most of you have heard of her husband, Chris, as well. The great thing about this web site is the counting quizlets:

<https://playbetterbridge.com/p/counting-quizlets>

They will help you with counting hands. All of us need to get better about this. But Donna also has a bunch of videos on various topics at \$10 apiece. So you can do that instead of watching Seinfeld reruns for the 13th time.

And it's also very important to keep track of which cards have been played in critical suits. I visualize suits as four set of 13 dominoes each, and remember which ones started in my hand and dummy. As the others are played, I knock them down in my head. Maybe you can't do that for all the suits, but if you can learn to do that for the most critical suit on any given deal, it will help you realize that your 85 left in dummy are both winners because the only card left standing is the 7.

<https://bridgewinners.com/>

This is by far the best bridge learning tool on the web. Some of you will find the Intermediate Forum, USBF Junior Bridge Forum, and Youth Bridge Education Forum to be valuable. But I find the main content to be utterly amazing. It ranges from articles to reports of interesting deals. And there are bidding and opening lead problems by the

hundreds, most of which have expert (and not so expert) commentary that you can read (and see that there are no absolutes in bridge). But my favorite part of the site is Kit Woolsey's weekly (usually Sunday morning) bridge column. Kit is just an amazing teacher.

FOR NEWER PLAYERS MAKING SENSE OF THE BIDDING

Introduction

Bidding is a very foreign concept to most new players. Most books just give you rules to follow and they are generally a mish-mash tinged heavily by the author's own preferences.

In reality, there is an underlying logic to auction. And if you think about it from that perspective, bidding becomes much easier. Your objective in the bidding is to cooperate with partner to reach a sensible, if not necessarily optimal, contract. By this, I don't mean stopping in two spades with a 9-card fit and 28 HCP between you.

In over 40,000 deals from top level tournaments (therefore over 80,000 results, since these events were all team matches scored at IMPs), Richard Pavlicek has tabulated the following final contracts. 3NT was played 19.2% of the time, 4♠ 15.1%, and 4♥ 13%. The next 3 most likely contracts? 1NT 6.2%, 2♠ 6%, and 2♥ 4.1%. Some grand slam is played about 1% of the time, small slams a total of about 6.4% of the time (6NT was by far the least-played small slam), minor suit games about 5.3% of the time, 3 of a suit about 13% of the time, and the rest rarely.

Do you see a pattern here? Good players want to play part scores and games in major suits or in notrump, and slams in suits. We want to arrange our bidding so that when opener has 11-14 points and responder has 6-9, we don't go past 1NT or 2 of a major unless we have a 9+ card fit in a minor. Similarly, when partner opens 1NT, we want to stay there with 8 points or less unless we have a 5-card major suit. And even if you have no points and a 5 card major, you want to play those hands in a major so you can use your little trumps to ruff things. Unless partner has 4 cards in our suit, you'll never take a trick in notrump if you have ♠xx ♥xxxxx ♦xxx ♣xxx

We want to play in a major suit whenever we have at least 8 trumps in the combined hands. By far the most efficient way to do this is to play that a major suit opening promises 5 cards and after a minor suit opening we bid 4-card major suits up the line. We don't bother responding 1♦ over 1♣ unless we have enough to force to game (or, as a passed hand, if we would have opened the bidding with another Queen). This is called the Walsh style, after Richard and Rhoda Walsh who, along with Paul Soloway and John Swanson, popularized it in Los Angeles in the 1960's. Curiously, this was introduced by Kaplan and Sheinwold in their weak notrump based methods (fondly known as K-S). But it took the Walshes and their friends to show that it could work with strong notrumps as well.

The early part of an auction is focused on finding whether a major suit fit exists and, if not, whether notrump seems playable. After a major suit opening, responder must show a fit with four or more card support, or with 3-card support unless responder has a game invitational or better hand with 5+ cards in the other major.

When raising partner, you always take the opportunity to give partner an idea of how strong you are. A jump raise to the 3 level always says, "Bid game if you have an extra queen above your minimum." A raise to the 2-level is always weaker. And stronger hands usually don't raise directly, since raising an opening bid in a major suit all the way to game is preemptive, a good fit with a void or singleton somewhere, but less than 7 high card points.

YOUR NEWSLETTER TEAM

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YOU BID WHAT???**COMMENTARY, SCORING, AND ABUSE BY RICHARD FINBERG****Matchpoints. E/W Vul.; N/S not Vul.**

The auction is: W N E S
 2♥ 2NT* 4♥ ? *2NT is a 1NT opener.

You hold: ♠ A10
 ♥ 8
 ♦ AJ9754
 ♣ K754

What do you bid as South, and what is your follow-up plan?

This proves to be a tough problem. First, the penalty doublers:

Jan Assini: My bid is double. Partner's overcall of 2NT might not have the right fit for a minor slam, so I will be happy to collect +500 or more.

Paul Caplan: Double. Plus 800 is likely and a slam is not a sure thing. If partner bids a suit, I will choose a slam: Diamonds if spades is bid, raise clubs to 6 if clubs is bid. Partner should not pull the double.

Gail Carns: Double. Second choice is 6♦. The double should beat any game bid.

Trudy Cohn: I will make a penalty double. We have a sure plus score if we defend. Bidding something is a crap shoot. We may well have a game or slam in diamonds but no assurance of either. The vulnerability impels me to choose the penalty double.

Gus Costanzo: No room to safely and confidently explore for slam. E/W hold at most 13 HCP. West has a 6-card ♥ suit (likely KQJTxx) with a side A or K for the vulnerable 2♥ bid. Assume East's 4♥ shows 4-card support, a singleton, and a side K or A. Thus, E/W will win 5 hearts, 2 ruffs in dummy, and 2 side tricks if the K is favorably placed. The K may not be a winner and extra values in North's hand may make down 3+ possible. Plus 500 for N/S should be a top. Plus 800 means a slam was missed.

Connie Hoechstetter: I double for penalty. If North bids over that, I will bid 6 of a minor.

Bernie Fudor: At matchpoints, I double expecting about +800. If this were IMPS, I think I bid 6♦. It's risk reward on the form of scoring.

R.F.: IMP tactics are beyond the scope of this column, but I note my disagreement with the above strategy. Some future columns will involve IMP scoring.

Richard Katz: 6♦ may make, but it's difficult to just shoot it out. Also, quite unilateral. Likewise getting to 6♣ clubs on convoluted bidding. To bid 5♦, which will be passed, is also unilateral and produces plus 400/420. Can't always be perfect, especially in a preemptive auction, so I prefer a penalty double. Starting with two aces and a trump trick promised by partner, we only need two more tricks for 500. Money in the bank. [Smiley face deleted. 😊]

Bob Zimmerman (Richard Katz's Grand National Team partner) also doubles but is not spending the money just yet: If there were a clear path to a minor fit at the 6- level, I would consider taking it. As it stands, I am looking at 2.5 tricks and a 15-17 (or so) partner with a heart trick. With any luck, we can take 5 tricks and rack up +500. On a good day, we will hold them to their 5 trump tricks. If dummy shows up with ♠KQJ9 ♥Kxx ♦xx ♣xxxx, opposite ♠xxx ♥AJTxxx ♦xxx ♣x, I will mark another zero on the scorecard and move on. Should partner take another call, we will be in slam.

R.F.: Who else smells a rat? This double is too easy. E/W *know* they are vulnerable, that N/S are not, and that North bid 2NT, yet East chose to bid 4♥, not 3♥. Could East have 5=4=0=4 shape with good spades and West a stiff club? Just saying....

And now, the 5♦ bidders:

Patti Katz: I bid 5♦. The preempting has made it too difficult to know if we are missing six.

Jane Marshall: 5♦. I do not expect North to take another bid.

Asim Ulke: I bid 5♦. Partner should have 3 diamonds unless he/she made an off-shape NT with 5 clubs. 4NT could be a better bid in such case.

R.F.: Asim (and others) obviously believes 4NT is to play, presumably because of North's 2NT bid. But that view is not universal, as shown by the 4NT bidders:

Ernie Retetagos: 4NT. I'll ask partner to bid their longest minor, and then pass their likely 5♣ response. There is no way to bid slam with any certainty, and a 4-4 club fit would have the best chance of an overtrick. There is a slight chance that partner does not have a 4-card minor, but sometimes we risk our contract at matchpoints to make an overtrick.

Reanette Frobouck: 4NT. Quite a problem to start with. I think my partner has a lot of minor suit cards as he didn't make a takeout double indicating spades. I will bid 4NT. I expect pard to bid 5♣, and I will correct to 5♦ which should show some slam interest.

Frank Cymerman: 4NT meant as minors. We could have a slam in a minor. Partner did not double 2♥, and with the 4♥ response, I would not expect him to have more than two hearts, and maybe only 3 spades. I will pass 5♣ and consider bidding 6♦ over 5♦.

Steve Nolan sums up the situation nicely: 4NT. I don't know what this means, but it should work out. If partner passes, we have stoppers in all suits and enough points to succeed. If partner bids a minor, I'll pass. East must have a lot of spades, some hearts and possibly a void, which is why I'm not trying for a slam.

R.F.: I personally like the 2-way, whatever-it-means 4NT. While each 4NT bidder has a different bidding agenda, 4NT could work exactly as each of them intends. 4NT also enables a heroic pass in what may be the best contract. Watch this space for more Nolan magic.

Finally, let us hear from the slammers. There are the blasters and the scientists:

Jack Hawthorne: 6♦. I do not know how to ask partner to pick a minor suit slam. 6♣ might be a better spot, and 6NT could make if partner's heart stopper is the Ace or King. But we might need to ruff something, so I bid what I think I can make: 6♦. If partner rebids 6NT, I am passing.

Stanley Ruskin: 6♦. So, opponents have at least eight spades and nine hearts— since partner did not double 2♥, partner has at most 3-3 in the majors. He should have at least 3 diamonds. We may be able to make 7♣ or 7♦ or might not be able to make a small slam. Since we do not know what we actually have, I bid what I think we can make – 6♦. If partner bids 6NT, and I will pass of course. An alternative would be to bid 5♥ for partner to pick a minor suit slam, but if he is 3=3=4=3 or 3=3=3=4, 6♦ is better.

Herb Sachs: 5♥. Taking my medicine right or wrong! I expect partner will bid 5♠, and I will bid 5NT hoping partner is not 3-3 in the minors. With a five-card minor, I might hear six [of the minor] over 5♥; I know, I am dreaming.

Bill Holt: 5♥. Forcing, uncertain as to strain. Partner did not double so perhaps lacks spade length. On this auction, he cannot have many hearts – perhaps Ax or Kx (allowing a potential spade pitch if the ♥A is led). I want to play 6 of our better minor so this is how to start. Perhaps pard will bid 6 of a minor. I will pull 5♠ or 5NT to 6♣. It's tempting to double here for penalty, but I like our slam chances better.

The Results and Score

This hand recently appeared on bridgewinners.com where players of all skill levels can vote on the best bid. That may not be the best way to judge a bidding challenge, but the online results do reflect the collective wisdom of players who wish to improve their game. Bridgewinners does not grade the answers, so the scoring is my own and is presented only because some people may expect it. Feel free to disagree with my scoring. I give grudging deference to the actual votes and then upgrade or downgrade the awards based on the overall trend of the voting, the intrinsic merit of the bid (as I myopically see it), and of course, my mood. Here are the results, with my reasoning:

Bid	PBA	Bridge-winners	Score	Reason
DBL	9(45%)	27 (51%)	100	The crowd cannot be wrong.
5♥	2(10%)	0 (0%)	90	See comment (1) below.
6♦	2(10%)	9 (17%)	80	See comment (2) below.
4NT	4(20%)	0 (0%)	80	See comment (3) below.
5♦	3(15%)	17 (32%)	70	See comment (4) below.
Total	20(100%)	53 (as of Aug. 18)		

My Comments

- I upgraded slam bids and slam tries because 11 of 20 PBA panelists either bid or explored slam, said a slam was their second choice, or said they would bid slam on certain continuations. More importantly, +920 may be a complete top, while +400 or so gets no matchpoints from those doublers who score +500 or +800. If several bidding choices are close, why not choose a bid that can win all the matchpoints?
- Many favored 6♦ without exploring for the ♣ fit (perhaps due to the limited bidding room). However, a 4-4 ♣ fit is sometimes better than the 6-2 or 6-3 ♦ fit. This is because (1) side losers can be discarded on the long suit, (2) a ruff from a 4-4 fit creates an extra trick, or (3) a 6-2 ♦ suit can be set up without losing a trick.

On this hand, North should be loaded in the minors, perhaps holding something like: (1) ♠xxx ♥Ax ♦KQxx ♣AQT9; or (2) ♠Jxx ♥Kxx ♦KQxx ♣AQJx. When North has the ♥A (as in Hand (1)), you likely have 12 fast winners. But when North instead, as in Hand (2), has the ♥K and also lacks the ♠K or ♠QJ, an opening ♠ lead will establish a ♠ loser while the ♥A is still out. On those hands, you need to play in 6♣ (assuming North has 4 clubs) or you can play in either minor if North has a 5-card club suit. The added risks in 6♣ is that the clubs break badly (and you lack good spot cards in ♣) or an E/W ♦ ruff. All things considered, I slightly downgraded auctions that do not check for a club fit.

- I like the 4NT bid and serious partnerships should agree to its meaning. The fact that the four panelists bid 4NT with four different agendas is a testament to its flexibility. But its best virtue is allowing you to play the best scoring game contract. I scored 4NT

an unambiguous 80. The only mark against it is that, on this deal, you may miss a slam, which is the favored alternative to doubling 4♥.

4. 5♦ is the safest bid, but a minor suit game should be avoided when NT is a plausible alternative (ask Bob Hamman). Also, the panel leans toward a slam. I awarded 5♦ a generous 70 because of uncertainty over the meaning of 4NT, a logical alternative bid. But, if you bid 5♦ because your partner might think 4NT asks for minors, just follow the no-worry Nolan rule: “What can [possibly] go wrong?” If partner refuses to pass 4NT and bids his longer minor, you can pass 5♣ if you wish or “correct” it to 5♦, where Reanette’s partner can step in and raise it to 6♦ on suitable hands. If this nevertheless all works out badly, just say, “Partner. Why didn’t you pass 4NT?”

Craig’s Comments

Whenever we have an unfamiliar situation in the auction, we need to start from ground zero. Here, the first question is, how are the hearts distributed? While I don’t agree with Gus that LHO must have ♥KQJ10xx and another card for a vulnerable weak 2, even Phil and I rarely open vulnerable first seat weak 2’s on 5-card suits. And RHO must have 4 hearts and a lot of shape to justify a 4♥ bid at these colors, most likely a major two-suiter.

Now we turn our attention to partner’s shape. Given that he most likely has only two hearts, it’s very unlikely that he has 4 spades; if so he would have doubled. Oh, partner could have 4 spades, 5 clubs, and 2-2 in the red suits, but that’s only one of many possible patterns.

What do our bids mean here? Many of our panelists have characterized double as “penalty.” Horsefeathers! We don’t make penalty doubles with singleton trumps. And partner isn’t going to play us for much more than a singleton heart on this auction, no matter what we do. In the unlikely event that partner has 3♥, he’s going to expect us to be void. Does that mean that we can’t double? No, it just means that our double will tell partner that we have enough high cards to expect to collect a game-sized penalty. I would characterize this double as just an attempt to protect our expected equity of a game-sized plus.

There is a huge difference in playing strength between these two hands for partner: ♠ **K94** ♥ **A9** ♦ **Q103** ♣ **AQ862** and ♠ **KJ4** ♥ **K9** ♦ **K1032** ♣ **AJ62**. The first hand is going to make 6 of a minor an enormous percentage of the time, and will often make 7. The second hand will probably make 5♦ less than 30% of the time. So, bidding anything is a mistake, since we don't know what partner has. But partner does. Partner should sit for the double with the second hand, having no source of tricks opposite a hand that can't bid a suit on its own. The first hand, however, likely has no heart loser, a nice club suit, and fillers in both spades and diamonds. Partner should bid 5♣ with the first hand, and I will raise with this offensive monster.

FIRST AT THE POST CHRIS WANG

5 in a row:

Paul Caplan	Glenshaw	Wed
William Holt	Allegheny CC	Wed
Leroy Hackenberg II	Greensburg	Wed
John Doyal	Lebo	Fri

2 in a row:

Asim Ulke	Rodef	Mon
Glenda Gibb	Natrona Heights	Mon
Kenneth Eichler	Export	Mon
Kenneth Eichler	Greensburg	Wed
Jim Gump	Lebo	Fri
Don Averbach	Concordia	Sat
Ethel Levine	Concordia	Sat

Big Games:

Kenneth Eichler & Peggy Shivetts	70.37	Export	Mon
Kenneth Bergman & William Holt	71.43	Allegheny CC	Wed
Kenneth Eichler & Cecilia Powell	70.00	Greensburg	Fri

BRIDGE IN PITTSBURGH **LORRAINE HANNA**

Pittsburgh Bridge Association ByLaws calls for a maximum of 15 Directors. The Board is at its maximum of 15. Our newest members are Lonnie Carey, Gus Costanzo, Martin Greenberg and Ann Plunkett, We need everyone's help in improving and making our game grow. Helpful comments are encouraged. Tell a Board Member, or email us on the Director's page of our website.

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

Pat Anders is Director of Membership. Phyllis Geinzer writes Memorials in our Newsletter. They need your help in identifying people in our bridge Unit who are sick or have passed on. Pat sends a card to the ill person or a sympathy card to the family. You can report directly to Pat or Phyllis, or send a message on the link at the top of the Club Results page.

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

Face to Face Bridge.

Have you been back to the tables yet? If not, when do you intend to come back? Suggestions are welcome.

Monday games at Rodef Shalom are suspended until September 13. For more information check our website under Club Results. There you will find all Clubs and their status.

BridgeWhiz: Bridge Classes for Kids

The ACBL is offering a free online course to teach children bridge in grades 4-12 The 20 week course begins 10/25/2021. Please spread the word. Here's a link to sign up and more information on the project.

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

Last month we went over options on defense over opponent's 1no trump opening showing 15-17 points. (Mainly DONT and Cappelletti)

Here are some links on how Responder can handle interference over partner's 1NoTrump Opening and more.

Article from Audrey Grant. Handling interference after partner opens NoTrump.

<https://www.betterbridge.com/misc/StandardArticles/Standard200406.pdf>

<https://www.larryco.com/bridge-articles/notrump-interference-intermediate>

<https://www.larryco.com/bridge-learning-center/detail/41>

<https://www.larryco.com/bridge-articles/defense-vs-notrump>

If partner's 1nt opening or 1nt overcall is doubled for penalties, what should you do? You can't have many points, but if you have a distributional hand you have a chance of finding a better place to play. Marty Bergen suggests DONT Runouts. If you have two four card suits or one 5 card suit, your side will have a fit over 70% of the time.

With a one suited hand, redouble. Partner is forced to bid 2 clubs. If your suit is clubs, pass. If not, bid your suit to play.

With a two suiter, Bid 2 clubs, 2 diamonds or 2 hearts showing the suit bid plus a higher ranking suit. Partner should pass if he likes your suit, or bid the next suit up asking for your other suit.

Bid 2spades if that's your suit with at least 5 spades

You can agree to play this system if you're the Responder or Advancer or the NoTrump bidder.

NEWS PHYLLIS GEINZER

Phyllis Silver, a former PBA Board member, passed away in early August. She had not been very active but occasionally played before the Covid pandemic. Phyllis enjoyed world travel, family gatherings, golf and walks on the beach. She was active in the community and a philanthropist. A curious and bright lifelong learner, she attended classes throughout her life. She was a member of the Tree of Life Congregation in the early years and later joined Temple Sinai. She was a Bridge Silver Life Master and an avid reader. She worked for many years at Reuben Donnelly as Sales Representative and was a successful Real Estate Agent. Phyllis will be remembered by her many friends and family members as a very strong, proud, courageous, independent, vibrant and beautiful woman with her silver hair always perfectly-coiffed.

A former member of the Pittsburgh bridge community, Harriet Menzer, passed away at her home in Sarasota, Florida in August, 2021. She was a native Pittsburgher for most of her life. Harriet raised two teenagers on her own when her husband died. She met her second husband, Milton, at the duplicate bridge table. They became partners at both the tables and in life until Milt's death in 1987. Harriet continued to play locally until she moved to Sarasota to be closer to her daughter, Suzan (Tom) Lordi, in Sarasota. Many Pittsburghers remained in contact with Harriet through online bridge. Harriet was 98 at the time of her death.

WE HOPE YOU HAVE ENJOYED THIS FIRST ISSUE OF STEEL CITY BRIDGE. AS ALWAYS, UP TO DATE INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE AT

WWW.PITTSBURGHBRIDGE.ORG

WITH CLUB RESULTS, TOURNAMENT SCHEDULES (HOPEFULLY), AND LINKS TO THIS NEWSLETTER AND PAST ISSUES OF THE POST-MORTEM.