

Aloha Bridge Club

Unconventional Thoughts

Bridge is a uniquely challenging game that we love and strive to get better at.

- Bridge is a game of errors. The good news is that we can succeed by making fewer errors than our opponents. The bad news is that we cannot eliminate them entirely. So, when we or partner make an error, we should accept it and learn from it.
- Bridge has two phases; Bidding (Auction) and Play of the hand (Declarer play and Defense). We need to be competent at both phases.
- It is important to be in the optimal contract. Superior declarer-play or defense may not salvage a poor contract. However, bidding is rote rules with some judgement. Card-play on the other hand allows us to combine our intellect, instincts, and deductive power to solve multiple puzzles in succession while having fun with friends. We need to work with a partner to improve our bidding. Same is not true for improving our card-play. We could fly solo.
- My observation is that we do not value this beautiful aspect of Bridge. Let us ask ourselves:
 1. Do we find ourselves in the same contract as the field?
 2. Do we take all the tricks available to us as the declarer or a defender?
- The honest answers are:
 1. Yes. Most of the time.
 2. No. Not as often as we should at this stage of our Bridge quest.
- Balance is essential in life and Bridge. Because we have limited time, energy, and stamina, we must control how we expend those resources.
 - We expend too many resources on bidding:
 - Materials on bidding systems.
 - Hours of partnership discussion.
 - Too much effort on learning Conventions. Yes. They are fun, but there is a cost.
 - We ignore the play of the hand:
 - Materials on card combinations – Thought process.
 - Partnership discussion – Carding – Review of defensive mishaps.
 - Card-play techniques – Yes. It can feel like that mandatory math course 😊.
 - We can continue to have fun with the easy stuff. It is up to us to balance our efforts between the two phases of Bridge.

Conventions classified

- We could classify conventions in terms of tiers ranging from required to useful to nice luxuries:
 - Tier 1 – Negative Doubles, Stayman, Transfers, Control bids then Blackwood.
 - Tier 2 – Takeout Doubles, Takeout Doubles, Takeout Doubles and Takeout Doubles. This is not a typo. Takeout doubles masquerade as Negative, Support, Responsive, Maximal, Card showing and Balancing doubles. Low-level doubles request partner to bid and not pass. This game would be a lot easier if partners take out, Takeout doubles and sit for Penalty doubles.
 - Tier 3 – Forcing No Trump, New Minor Forcing (NMF), Drury and, OGUST / Feature. Depending upon how much time we want to spend with our partner, these bids could use some clarification. How forcing is Forcing No Trump? 2-Way NMF and XYZ are a definite improvement over simple NMF. There is a better way to play 2-Way Reverse Drury.
 - Tier 4 – Meckwell / DONT, Michaels, Lebensohl and Unusual versus Unusual. There is a lot of room for proper application of these defensive tools. We should take the time to study.
 - Tier 5 – Jacoby 2NT, Splinters, Inverted minors, and Criss-Cross. These could have been Tier 3 B. I separated these because most people play these, but do not discuss the nuances of selecting one tool over another. Simple approach to Inverted Minors is too revealing.
 - Tier 6 – Reverse Flannery, Size Ask, Invitational Jump Shifts, 2NT as Major Suit Limit Raise⁺, and Kickback (Keycard inquiry).
- We could stop at any one of these tiers and enjoy a good game of Bridge. If we decide to keep adding, we should take time to read articles and discuss more details with experienced players. Tom offers a free class on Mondays 😊.
- My apologies if I did not list your favorite convention. It could be inadvertent, or it could be intentional. Without naming names, here are a few concepts I try to avoid:
 1. Any bid that unnecessarily leaves room for opponents to enter the auction.
 2. Any bid that attempts to solve a problem that did not exist before the convention.
 3. Choosing bids that muddy the waters instead of ones that narrow the focus.
 4. Multiple bids to show similar hands.
 5. Weak jumps when vulnerable.
- Concepts I love to use:
 1. Describing Invitational and Invitational or better hands as soon as possible.
 2. Bids that narrow the focus – game forcing, invitational or just competitive.
- Conclusion:
 1. We do not need to play every convention that comes around.
 2. We need to understand the tradeoffs and cost benefits of conventions we choose.
 3. We need to allocate more time to card-play techniques.
 4. **We must start reading Watson’s Classic Book on the Play of the Hand at Bridge.**
- Borrowing a quote from Dennis Miller; “Of course, that is just my opinion. I could be wrong.”