

BRIDGE ON THE INTERNET

Before the Virus closed down the Bridge Center, I had never played bridge on line. I have not done particularly well at on-line bridge, even when playing with very good partners. There is a reason for this, I believe.

Several years ago Mimi and I were in New York City, in a cab. We were talking to the driver about safe and unsafe places, and he told us that the city is mostly safe in the daytime, but at night anything goes. He said that the reason for this is that people think that God cannot see what they are doing when it is dark out.

I think that my problem is that I am still playing “at the table” bridge. Internet bridge is not like bridge at the table. The hands are different. There are more two suiters, or hands with very long suits. There are often more hands with voids in an 18 board session than you would see at the table in two or three sessions. And since the other players cannot see you, and since your partner cannot yell at you, or look at you funny, players make bids that they would never have made in pre-virus life. The cab driver was right.

In internet bridge, there are several hands in each session in which both sides can bid and make game. People sacrifice more often than they would have at the table, because no one can see them, or complain about their bids. So they do whatever feel right, even in the daytime. Hands that fit well together are common, but so are misfits.

I have also found, and so have many of my opponents, that it is very often right to lead trump, again and again, as there are many, many crossruff hands.

Here is a hand that I picked up in an on-line game.

A K 7 5 4 My RHO opened one club, I bid one spade, LHO made a
5 3 negative double, partner bid 3 spades. We play that three
A K 8 5 2 spades in competition shows a weak hand, no more than 8
9 HCP, and it could be much weaker. But it promised four

spades. Here were my thoughts, and I did give the matter consideration. If partner held the queen of spades and the queen of diamonds; or, the queen of diamonds and four small spades, I could make four, although the spades would have to split 2/2 if partner did not have the queen. Or, partner could have zero points, and a doubleton diamond, and game would be close to cold if the spades split. In the end I chickened out, and passed. When my partner put down a hand with a doubleton diamond and the ace of hearts, and four small spades. I knew immediately that I had made the wrong bid. However the hand was played nine times, and only three pair got to game. Because spades split it make five, and East/West could not make anything, even though they held more HCPs than we held. Yes, I only had 14 points, but the distribution was such that I needed to bid the game, and put the pressure on them. If they had bid on, we would get a decent result by doubling then.

A J 5 4 2 Partner opened one no trump, and I bid 2 diamonds,
10 8 7 6 4 intending to bid two spades after the transfer. LHO
5 3 bid three clubs and partner bid three hearts. This pro-
9 mised a heart fit. But even if partner had a maximum,,
there was no game in the hand. I only had a five count. She only had 15
points, but her spades were good, and we made 5. Go figure. A few
other pairs got to game. Good fits are worth a fortune in internet bridge.

The point of all of this is that it appears to me that when hands fit, and when you have shortness, bid game; even if you cannot make it, they can make something, and they may save, and go for a big number.

Most important of all, bid it quickly. If you were going to save at four spades if they bid four hearts, bid it before they find their fit. You are unlikely to get doubled, and, again, they might bid too much, thinking that they are taking a save over your strongly bid game. If you try to stop at three, and then bid four spades over their four hearts, you will get doubled for sure.

If you are a fan of the Law Of Total Tricks, internet bridge is where you want to be. I had a hand recently with seven spades to the King Queen, and nothing else. Over one diamond, I bid four spades. LHO bid doubled, partner passed, and RHO bid five diamonds, which partner doubled. We beat it two, for plus three hundred, and only received 25% for the board. Partner had four spades to the Jack along with some high cards. The hand was cold for 5 spades. She should have bid five spades over the double, , knowing that we had an eleven card fit, and making them guess what to do. Wo would have made five spades, and 6 diamonds, doubled would have been a good score.

The opposite is true of misfits. When you are short in partner's suit, deduct points, maybe two or three points, when determining what to bid. Even if you are void in partner's suit, don't try to make it better, hoping to get to a different suit. If the "proof is in the pudding," here is the pudding.

——— Partner opened one spade, passed around to me. I had a good
K Q 8 (well, really a fair) seven count, and if I bid a forcing no trump
J 8 6 5 2 we might have been able to get to a minor suit contract, or a
J 7 5 3 2 heart contract. But as a practical matter, most of the time
the opener has a six card suit, and will rebid it, or, worse yet, jump in it. I
Passed!!!! She made one spade for. Plus 80, and we got an 80% on the
board, because we stayed out of trouble.

The same day, but in another game, my partner (a different partner) opened one diamond. I held:

J 9 4 2 I could have bid one heart, and hoped to get out cheaply in
8 6 4 2 one of the majors, but I passed. So did everyone else. Partner
10 3 had three diamonds to the nine, and a minimum hand, but she
Q 2 played out the hand, and went down two, for minus 100.
They could make a few of almost any suit, including diamonds. We got
nearly 100% on the board, even though they held 8 diamond cards,
including the Ace, King, Queen and Jack. The lesson here is that when
things look an onion field in internet bridge, just try to take as many
tricks as you can. Don't panic. Often, everything will be coming up Roses.

The proof of the pudding came up in the following hand. My bad. I played this board while I was writing this article. I failed to take my own advice.

———— Partner opened one spade. This hand, even with a misfit, was
K Q 4 too good to pass. I bid a forcing no trump. Partner bid two
Q J 8 5 hearts, and I was at the crossroads. I was playing with a very
J 8 6 5 4 good partner, one of the best declarers that I have ever had
as a partner. I raised to three hearts, and he bid four. He had a great
hand, 18 HCP, but the hand had little or no play. Down two, for about
20% on the board. His hand was:

A 9 8 7 3 My thinking was flawed. My heart fit was not useful because
A 8 6 2 of the spade void. If he trumped spades in the dummy, he
A K would have to waste his king and queen of hearts. Maybe I
K 10 should have passed. Plus 110 would be a good score. Or,
perhaps I should have bid two no trump. Partner would have raised to
game, or bid three hearts if he had a five card suit. Three no trump would
be cold if hearts split, or if I could get a club trick or a second spade trick,
or if they led clubs, or simply never got around to the spade suit. After
all, partner bid them, and they could not see my void.

If I had three small hearts, and the king and queen were in diamonds and clubs, my bid might have made sense, as partner would then by trumping spades with small hearts, and might bring home the hand even with a four/three fit. My hand might have been:

———— Same points, same shape, but now much more valuable.
5 4 2 This hand would clearly justify a raise to three hearts.
K Q J 5
Q J 8 6 4

If you do not believe me, here is one more hand. My agreement with the partner that I was playing with is that when we have five clubs and five spades we open most hands with one club, and then bid and rebid spades. She opened one club. I held:

Q	I bid one heart, and she bid one spade. I bid three
K Q J 9 8 7	hearts - invitational, with a six card suit - and it was
Q J 8 6	her turn. She had a fourteen count, with a singleton
9 7	heart, and she bid three spades, to show her 5/5

distribution, and we were sunk. I bid four hearts doubled by LHO, down two, for minus 300, for which we received 10%. Three hearts would not have been doubled, and would have been a decent score. She did not take the misfit into consideration. And, in internet bridge when you have a misfit, more often than not, it seems, that the outstanding trump cards are placed where they could do the most damage.

There is a side issue here. As defenders, in internet bridge, when they get too high, when they have a bad auction, you need to double. Scores are all over the place. Even if four hearts makes, most of the pairs won't be in the contract, and you are getting a very bad score. If four hearts making four is a zero, then four hearts doubled, or even four hearts doubled and redoubled is the same zero. If it goes down, doubling will move you up over a number of other pairs. This is more important if you are playing matchpoints, not IMPs, as you would in a team game. At matchpoints, doubling will beat all of the 140s and 170s.

On this subject, here is a situation that comes up often in on-line bridge.

K Q 8 Partner opens one heart, and you bid two no trump, Jacoby,
A 8 7 4 forcing to game. LHO bids four no trump, showing a very
K Q distributional minor suited hand. Partner passes and RHO
8 7 5 3 bids five diamonds. Your bid. Partner did not bid five hearts,
so he has nothing extra. If he were void or short in one of their suits, he
would likely have bid on. You have forced him to game. Because he
could have bid on if he had extras, or shortness, his pass is a warning not
to go on. Should you bid on? NO. Partner did not bid five hearts. Trust
him. Trumps are not going to split well. LHO might be 6/5 in the minors
and not have any hearts. Should you double? YES, you have to double.
You were bidding to make at least four hearts, Even with weird
distribution, you were likely to make four. If they make five diamonds,
you are getting a zero anyway. Plus 50, plus 100, if they go down, are
going to be very bad scores, so you have to double, and take what you
can get. Some pairs may have stopped short of game, and you must
beat the 170s, and at least tie those that doubled five diamonds.

But take the same hand, except giving you one more heart and one less
club.

K Q 8 You open one heart, LHO doubles, and partner bids four
A 8 7 4 3 hearts. Partner's bid is wildly preemptive, You have
K Q methods for showing strong hands with good fits over
5 a double. Partner is not expecting this contract to
make. RHO bids five clubs. Should you double? No!!!! You were not
expecting to make your contract. LHO might have been hoping to be in
spades, or even in no trump, and 5 clubs making five might be a bad
score for them. They probably do not have slam, your side suit cards are
too good, But if they go down in five clubs you are getting a good score,
just for going plus, but if they make five clubs doubled you are getting a
zero, when you might have been average or above anyway.

5 You open one heart, LHO bids one spade, and partner
A K Q 8 7 5 bids two spades, limit raise or better. RHO bids 4
K 3 spades, and, right or wrong, you bid five hearts. LHO
J 7 6 5 bids five spades. Do you double? NO< NO< NO!!!!!!! You
did not really expect to make five hearts, you were hoping to take a good
save. Your heart cards are good in hearts, but not so good on defense.
You do not expect to take more than one heart trick, and might not get
any. There are lots and lots of voids in Internet bridge. If everyone is in
four or five spades, making five, you get an average board. But if many
pairs are in four, making four, and you beat them one trick, you are
getting close to a top, without the double, but if they make five, doubled,
you are getting a zero. There is little to gain from the double.

Internet bridge is fast and it is fun. It is real bridge, but it is different. It
is like playing tennis on hard courts all of your life, and then playing on a
grass court. You have to adjust your swing to the different surface. Or
like playing baseball and then trying softball. The expectations are
different. The weird distributions make the bidding much more
competitive

I have learned a great deal about the game in the last few months. I hope
that it helps to improve my game.