

play bridge

A section designed with the newer player in mind.

I love my job! Sometimes I walk through the club and hear the most wonderful things. It may involve two friends making dinner plans after the game, or it might be a pair with calendars clutched in hand confirming their next seven bridge dates. The best thing I hear, however, is when some of our regulars are giving a newcomer the club welcome.

“You are going to be so happy here. It is the best club in the world. Where are you from? Why aren’t you staying longer? Too bad you’re so far from the club, since you will want to be here every day. Try to schedule your golf in the morning so your afternoons are free for bridge. Need a partner? Need a ride? Need anything?”

It is simply amazing. Our members are definitely the eighth wonder of the world. That is when I know we are not just a club, but a bridge family. We have a very congenial group that comes on Monday nights when we have a 49er game, a 199er game and an open game. The people in the lower sections gather early to hear a “chalk talk” on some topic.

We cover subjects from bidding and play to stop-card usage and bridge etiquette. One question at a recent session was about hand evaluation. This particular person said he often held a lot of points and yet achieved very poor scores. Every time he held a good hand, his partner was “broke.” How could he not bid to the three level when he had 19 points?

My answer is you begin evaluating your hand by looking at length and high cards. The “plus” points come in when the high cards are in your

long suit and you are loaded with 10s and 9s. But all of this is just a jumping-off point in the auction. You must pay attention to what everyone else is saying. Some good hands turn bad and some bad hands just keep getting better and better.

Let’s suppose you pick up your usual fare:

♠432 ♥1065 ♦K754 ♣632.

Notice you do have one 10 in addition to your lone high card! While you are in the process of lining up your pass cards, left-hand opponent opens 1♣ and partner doubles. RHO bids 3♣, passed around to your partner, who bids 4♠. Now your RHO bids 5♣. Do you have anything to think about?

First of all, your partner thinks he has close to 10 tricks playing in spades. He is likely void in clubs, has at least seven spades and some honor cards in the red suits. He has bid a game under his own power, so your partnership is either going to compete to the five level or double the opponents. Do you have any idea what is right? Doubling by you would caution partner about bidding more. Passing says you are not sure whether or not your side can take 11 tricks, and of course, bidding 5♠ means you think you can.

You have two things that make this hand likely to produce 11 winners: three trumps, so that you can ruff a late round of hearts if necessary, and what should be the working ♦K. If he can take 10, you are likely to be providing the 11th trick. So 5♠ is your bold call — and all this on a hand where you thought you were never going to take a bid. Partner’s hand is

♠AKQJ765 ♥AKJ8 ♦92 ♣—.

It turns out that the ♦A is in



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front of the king and the ♥Q is in front of the A–K–J, so you can make 6♠! How’s that for hand evaluation? By the way, if you doubled 5♣, you beat it only two tricks (one spade, two hearts and one diamond) for a very poor score.

One more word about re-evaluating your poor hands: length and high cards in partner’s suits are pluses. Aces and sometimes kings in the other suits are pluses. Queens and jacks in the other suits are more useful on defense than offense.

It is also possible to tone down the value of a good hand. If you are vulnerable and pick up ♠QJ32 ♥KQ ♦KQ ♣A5432, you might plan on doing a lot of bidding. If the bidding, however, is 1♠ by LHO, pass by partner, 1NT by RHO, you may want to rethink that bidding idea. If you double, partner will surely bid a red suit and your clubs are too anemic for an overcall. Even undoubled, you might be minus 200 in 2♣. It’s best to pass. □

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Notes from ACBL Accredited Teachers