

At CHAT, I still see us taking our winners too early. Are you really in danger of losing those winners? If so, take them now. If not, focus on setting up tricks and getting rid of your losers early.

Giving up control to the opponents at the right time is a powerful skill that can improve your game. Practically every hand you play has tricks that you must lose. You have some discretion as to when you give the trick(s) up. It is a decision you make either wittingly or not. Wittingly is better.

You are playing in a 3NT contract. You have a 7-card heart suit (♥Qxxx in your hand and ♥AKx on the board). You are praying for a 3:3 split (about a 36% possibility). So, about 2 out of 3 times your prayer will go unanswered. God created this 36% chance, so prayers might not help anyway. You might try hoping for the 3-3 split. Better yet, just take what you get and shut-up.

If the suit breaks 3:3, you can be happy with your “average” score. Everybody is having “good luck” today. How nice. Quite dull, but nice. It is very likely (better than 98% of the time) that the suit is going to break the same way for the other pairs in the room. (Trust me. I have this percentage thing figured out.)

I told you last month to look forward to these unfavorable splits. This is what you want. Smile when this happens. Smiling after a bad break is unnerving to some opponents (that’s a good thing). It gives you an edge over the pairs at other tables that are grumbling (not smiling) about their “bad luck”.

When the hearts break 4:2 (about ½ the time), the opponent gets a mixed bag. The ♥J has been established, but declarer gets to decide when to “throw you in” and let you have it. “Let you have it” is exactly what declarer has in mind.

Clearing out another suit before the throw-in is common technique. This leaves the opponent with only two suits to return. You know which opponent has the J♥. Set it up to make it difficult for that opponent to find a safe lead to return. Sometimes it is a “lock”. You are pulling off a true endplay. The opponent has no good lead and must give you a trick (or more).

Sometimes the throw-in is not a guarantee. But, even in those cases you are giving the opponent a chance to make a mistake. Make them find the right card to return. The defender might give you a free finesse, or a ruff and a sluff or they might break a suit that helps you. Have you ever been put in a situation and had difficulty coming up with the right card to return? Yes. You have.

I drew up an example of the timing of a “throw in”.

	South	West	North	East
Bidding:	1♣ 1NT	1♦ P	DBL 3NT	P passed out

Dummy ♠9843 ♥AK3 ♦A52 ♣Q92	
♠AQ ♥J976 ♦QJ974 ♣86	♠JT762 ♥T4 ♦86 ♣K754
Declarer (you) ♠K5 ♥Q852 ♦KT3 ♣AJT3	

You are declarer. The opening lead is the ♦Q. Pause for a moment. What do you see? Looks like 8 tricks ought to be easy (3 hearts, 2 diamonds, 3 clubs). You have 26 points; the 1♦ overcall makes LHO a favorite to hold the ♠A (not good). Better keep East out of the lead.

Take the ♦Q with the Ace. Lead the clubs. You pick up all 4 club tricks. RHO had the ♠K. This makes it a near certainty that LHO has the ♠A.

Nine Tricks are in the bag now (4 clubs, two diamonds and 3 hearts). If hearts divide 3-3 you get 10 tricks.

So, you lead the Ace, King and Queen of hearts hoping (not praying) for a 3-3 split. Do you see why the hearts cannot split 3-3? Think about it.

It has nothing to do with percentages. The hearts cannot be 3-3 because that would screw up my example! Duh!

Dummy ♠9843 ♥ ♦5 ♣	
♠AQ ♥J ♦J9 ♣	♠JT7 ♥ ♦86 ♣
Declarer (you) ♠K5 ♥5 ♦KT ♣	

East shows out on the 3rd heart. The Jack doesn't fall. (nonchalant smile now)

◀ Here is what we have with 5 cards yet to play:

Now is the time to give LHO his precious ♥J. When LHO gets in, all the hearts and clubs have been played. LHO must return a spade or a diamond. Either return gives you a trick. You make 4NT. It would have been easy to just lead towards the ♠K which is doomed to fail.

On a good day this will give you an “Above” score. If it doesn't, then stop all this bothersome and irritating smiling. JUST BE YOURSELF. Join in with your friends and do some serious grumbling and whining.

Arne Fockler

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I have been having a good time attending CHAT bridge (CHAT) sessions on Monday Mornings. We have 5 or 6 tables on most occasions. The CHAT participants are our guests. They are in various stages of their bridge lives. They ask for and appreciate my advice and they consider me to be an “expert”. I like that. I like that a lot! Especially when 52% seems to be my average game lately, at the club.

Format of the CHAT sessions

Several other experienced club members are also mentoring. We sit by a table and answer questions. Or we walk around and help at any table that asks for help. We sometimes insert ourselves to make a point that the table has not thought of. The idea is to learn by playing.

I like to sit at a table and “pair up” with one of the participants. We become ONE player at the table. We collaborate on what is the right bid or the right play. I like this because it provides some one-on-one mentoring while also working with the other 3 players at the table. I let my collaborator decide on each bid or play. On occasion, I insert myself and suggest a different bid or play. After the hand has been played, we discuss these alternatives suggestions. Then, if the bid/play works out, I can take the credit. If it fails, I explain that I chose the incorrect play just to teach a point. Perfect!

Actually, These alternative bids/plays lead to good discussion. Often we “back up” and replay/rebid part of the hand so we can see firsthand the results of different bids/plays.

The participants have been reading books and/or playing party bridge. They catch my mistakes at times, or they have a better idea on what to bid/play. They seem to like it when I make a mistake.

Occasionally, we have a long pause when a participant is having a difficult time with a particular bid or play. When that happens we sometimes just place all four hands on the table and collect opinions on what they think is the right course of action. Somebody at the table typically has the right answer. Sometimes there is no right answer – it depends on partnership agreement. Then we finish the bidding/playing the hand with all cards exposed. If we make a mistake, we back up and do it over. We have often seen the dramatic effect a different opening lead or which card you choose to lead from a suit can make.

During these sessions, I am seeing and hearing a common line: “I am nervous about playing against the **club experts**. I’m not ready for that yet”. I would ask you to keep these truths in mind:

- We have a very good bridge club! Good players. Good people.
- We want you to enjoy your play here. We want you to “stay with it”.
- **Everyone** (yes, everyone) wants to see you become a good bridge player. They will help you grow.

Sometimes the **help you grow** part comes in the form of a thrashing at the table. You leave the table with a “Thank God, that’s over” feeling. That happening is not restricted to newcomers. We all have that experience at times. It goes with the territory. Just keep in mind that as the thrashing continues, your opponents are only thinking about your growth as a player. They are happy to be a part of it. (smile)

I was playing with Grant at the club and I passed his transfer bid. He played in a 3-1 fit and only went down one. Not fun at the time. But we have had a lot of fun with that story after the incident. The pain is temporary and becomes humorous as time goes on. There is something very funny about playing in a 3-1 fit. Plus, it was a different type of challenge for Grant. I think he enjoyed it.

John Ryder and myself have volunteered to lead the Mentorship committee for our club.

Arne Fackler

CHAT Bridge was initiated by Mary Anderson. She saw it as a vehicle that would help us grow the “B” game. We would help less experienced bridge players improve their “game” and join us at our regularly scheduled Duplicate games. We owe a big Thank You to Mary for her insight and leadership in getting this program off the ground.

Thank you Mary!

Below is an update on Mary’s initiative - Chat Bridge.

The number of attendees has grown dramatically. We had seven tables last week! The B game has not grown much yet, but it will as CHAT participants’ skills improve and their confidence grows.

A number of club members (me included) have volunteered to be mentors. Learn by playing is the idea. Mistakes happen. Learn from your mistakes. The atmosphere is relaxed. Slow play is encouraged, e.g. we bid and play a hand and open up discussion at any point where questions arise. At times we will lay down all four hands and rebid or replay the hand.

Some mentors sit at a table and participate as a fourth or fifth. Others walk around and help when called upon or when they choose to make a point on a bid or a play.

I have met many people at CHAT Bridge. Some of these participants refer to me as an “expert”. **I Like that!** (My partners don’t use that term to describe me.) CHAT Bridge has become somewhat of a social event for me. There is a lot of humor that emerges as people differ in how they would bid or play a hand. This “light” environment leads to better discussions and from more people.

I like to sit at a table either as a fourth or as a fifth. Being fifth works best for me. Let the CHAT participants play. Then watch the play, answer questions, trigger discussion, insert myself when I think it will help. Try not to insert myself too much. Sometimes the discussion brings a better suggestion than mine.

The participants seem to enjoy it when I make a mistake. But, since I am an expert, I tell them that all my mistakes are deliberate. I make the mistake to illustrate a point. Perfect!

Aside from learning bridge technique, we discuss **table protocol**. Things come up that we take the time to discuss.

- Don't snap the cards
- May I lead partner?
- No Hearts partner?
- Director PLEASE
- Agree on the score, then pick up your cards. et al.

The CHAT Bridge participants enjoy these sessions. They are having a good time and their understanding of the game is growing. Some are playing at a high enough level that they could play in the B game. Playing with an experienced partner would be a good way to get started.

Arne Fockler

***It's not the handling of difficult hands that makes the winning player. There aren't enough of them. It's the ability to avoid messing up the easy ones.
... S. J. Simon***

CHAT Bridge has been going well. Some days we have 7 tables. It's fun! It's a place where you can play bridge, make mistakes, and laugh about them. I hear a lot of laughter at these sessions. I went to a Community Education class some time ago where the topic was laughter. The presenter said that laughing is very healthy for you, even if you don't mean it! That was new information for me. ...back to bridge!

I was standing by one of the CHAT tables watching the play when one player spoke up:

Partner, you are not supposed to snap the cards.

I didn't snap them. Yes you did. No I didn't... etc.

I liked it. The discussion was good. Laughter happened again. It worked out amicably. Play resumed quickly. People are learning more than just how to play the cards.

At another table, I am asked to help out with a difficult bidding sequence. We work through it and now it is time to play 3 spades. "Partner, may I lead" etc. and the opening lead is the 4 of diamonds. Dummy comes down and it has a singleton diamond. Declarer pauses for a moment and Right Hand Opponent (RHO) places a diamond on the table. Dummy now quickly plays the singleton and declarer rushes a bit to catch up with the pace and takes the trick. Declarer was harried by this sequence of events. We stopped the play and discussed this.

What happened just now? Declarer allowed herself to be rushed into play before she was ready; before she had a plan. In the play to the first trick, RHO should not consider the singleton as played until Declarer calls for it. Declarer has no option as to what to play, but the singleton is not played until the card is called for. Then, RHO plays a card.

Being too quick at trick one can be something you may regret. I see this happen regularly at CHAT. It still happens to me. If you are going to take a short pause during the play, take it before you play to trick one and put together a plan. Look at information available: what was bid, what wasn't bid, Opening lead – what does it tell you? Etc... Then plan the hand. How do I get nine tricks? Overtrick possibilities? Risky suits, How do I keep the dangerous opponent out of the lead. There is a ton of information available at this time. Use it to your advantage.

But, don't take too long. Long pauses are not appreciated. If you do a bit of planning up front, it can help you in avoiding long pauses during the play. That's because you don't have to figure out how to overcome something you didn't plan for.

Later I am called to a table and asked how many points are needed to make a certain bid. I tell them 6-10. And then: "That's not what Audrey Grant says". Nuts, now I have to deal with Audrey. Another player adds to the discussion – "Yeah, Pat told me 8-10". Now it gets worse. I have to deal with Pat as well (that's tougher than Audrey). These discussions are confusing to CHAT participants (and to mentors). But they are useful. The answer is often "partnership agreement". But, the decision can be situational. Are you vulnerable? Are you fighting for a contract? Has your partner shown a side suit that meshes with your hand? Maybe your hand has grown in value because of a few other bids?

So, now that you have partnership agreement on the convention, when will you "stretch" the rule a bit (take a flyer)? Infrequently might be a good answer. Factor in what you think partner might do with the misinformation. If you change the rule often, you might as well change the convention. Then partner knows what you are doing. Truthfully, when to stretch bids is not a good area for me to give advice. I really haven't figured this out myself. Ask Pat.

Arne Fockler

**When I take a 50-50 chance I expect it to come off 8 or 9 times out of 10.
...Hideous Hog ...from "Bridge on the Menagerie"**

We had nine tables at the last CHAT bridge session!! We had 6 mentors. Some of the CHAT participants attend every session they can. Some neophyte bridge players are attending their first few CHAT sessions. Many have played party bridge for some time and now they want to try the “real thing” (my words). For newcomers, there are a variety of anxieties that surface during the sessions. Getting used to the bidding boxes has pained more than a few of our CHAT players. When are alerts needed? Should we reshuffle the hand before returning the cards to the board? Etc...

One anxiety that we see regularly is Slam bidding/play. There is a lot of nervousness about slams. I am called over to a table to help East with a bidding quandary. We come up with a couple of bids and then partner just jumps to 6 spades. This was exciting, but I hear:

“You get to play it partner. Good luck.”

“Oh no! I can’t play a slam. I have never done that before.”

I offer help: “No problem, you can do it. All you have to do is take 12 tricks.”

“I don’t think so. This makes me nervous.”

“Your partner has shown confidence in you. She bid it knowing you would play it. Come on, I’ll play it with you.”

The opening lead is made and the dummy comes down. We pause a moment.

“OK, we need a plan. Let’s count the tricks we have right off the top. Let’s see, we will get 6 spade tricks, and 1 heart trick, 4 diamonds and 3 club tricks (4 if the finesse works). Looks like we have 14 tricks. That’s encouraging!”

“I am still nervous.”

“Don’t be. Our plan is simple. Start with trump and just take tricks. Skip the finesse.”

The hand is played and makes 7 spades. The table celebrates (including the opponents). See, playing slams isn’t all that hard!

At another table I am asked to help West (declarer) with the play of a hand. The contract is 3 diamonds. Six tricks have been played. Declarer took 4 of those tricks and needs 5 of the remaining 7 tricks. At first look, it appears to me that declarer might be able to get two more tricks; getting 5 tricks is not going to happen.

Declarer is looking a bit bewildered. "What can I do?"

I try to be helpful: "Are you religious? Prayer is the only possibility I see."

That didn't seem to help anything, so I suggested that we start over and see if we can bid the hand differently and get to a better contract. This is the beauty of CHAT. You get to feel the pain of a bad bidding mistake and then press the UNDO button and try it again. Some of this pain is useful. You say to yourself, "I'm not making that mistake again!" Voila! Your game has just improved a bit.

It is easy to see that the CHAT group is strengthening their games. The questions they ask are getting harder. I find myself consulting with other mentors more often on the answer to some questions. The mistakes I am seeing now are at a higher level. Overall understanding of the basics is growing. I am being challenged/corrected more often. My "expert" status seems to be taking a hit.

But, I am sticking to my story. I make these mistakes on purpose. I am sacrificing my credentials for the greater good. It facilitates good discussion and helps build confidence. Noble!

Have fun,

Arne Fockler

There are three kinds of bridge players:

- those who can count, and
- those who can't.

Last Monday at 10:00 A.M. I counted 29 cars in the parking lot. I walked into the clubhouse and saw 8 tables. It was very loud. It stayed that way until the game started. Then it died down a bit. I commented to one table that it was a bit noisy. "We are having fun" was the response. Good!

We use the previous Friday hands. We can compare our results against the "field". If we had problems, we can replay/rebid/discuss the hand to see what we might have done differently. Very helpful! This Friday's hands were very distributional. The CHAT participants were asking for answers rather than suggestions. At one table I hear:

"I can't bid 2D. I don't have 10 points. Supporting Spades is a lie, Passing is bad, NT is out of the question. Help!"

"Choose the bid that will help partner the most."

"Nothing will help, just tell me what to do!"

"OK, Bid 2S, it's a much better lie. Partner will be deceived less."

The table thought that was very funny. "Now, he's teaching us to lie." Much Laughter! Maybe, "choosing the best of bad alternatives" would have been a better way to word it.

Another table asks for help. The hands were all face up on the table. Declarer had just made 3 Hearts. Even so, declarer was being challenged on her bidding.

"You can't support hearts, you only have 3."

"I couldn't find another bid."

"Why not 1 NT?"

"I didn't have diamonds stopped."

"You don't have to stop every suit."

"I know. (Pause) I think God made me do it."

Good conversation. I did suggest to the bidder that blaming God was not good form. She agreed, thanked me for the advice and said she would do better in the future.

Later I am at another table where another group was challenging a bid. The bidder was a bit defensive and finally said "the Devil made me do it." YES, this is much better terminology than blaming God!

I went back to the previous table, and relayed this information to the person I had just counseled. Again, she was very appreciative, I think. She did have a somewhat quizzical look on her face.

Good start! I have been here 10 minutes and I have given advice on Lying, Deception and Blasphemy. This is more than just mentoring. My mother was right. I should have gone into the ministry.

Back to earth. Another table was arguing over whose trick it was. RHO had trumped the trick with a diamond but the table would not let her have it. She was informed that the contract was NT, not diamonds! "Oops, sorry". Followed by red face and embarrassment. I really do hate it when that happens! The bidding had shown agreement on diamonds but the final contract was NoTrump. She was still thinking diamonds. I made a suggestion. When dummy lays the cards down at a NT contract, don't place the diamonds (the side suit that was bid) on the left side where trump is normally placed. Sounds unnecessary, but if you are playing with me, please do it!

I recently purchased one of Mike Lawrence's computer programs on counting at the table. I need to work on my counting. I am a math guy. Counting is simple arithmetic. I should be able to do this, but miscounting is still a part of my game. I have learned some new technique. I found a table that needed counting advice. Declarer was deciding how long to hold up in a risky suit.

"How many hearts does LHO have? She has followed to two leads. RHO has at least 5 because of his overcall. You and dummy had 6. So, LHO had exactly 2. She is out of hearts."

"Oh Arne, That's too much. Maybe next year. My head hurts thinking about it."

"Well, you are trying to do a holdup play. That's great! You can handle this."

"Please go find another table. Help someone else. You make me nervous."

I took that positively. She wasn't yelling at me. She was just pleading for mercy. Mercy is something we in the ministry understand.

Arne Fockler

How many Bridge players do you need to change a light bulb?

Four. One to change the bulb and 3 to explain how it could have been done better.

WARNING: The thoughts expressed in this article have not been approved by the ACBL, the RDBC or by Ann Van Ryn.

Many of our club members are involved with CHAT Bridge. Ann Van Ryn has had a key part in CHAT since its inception. She listened to the attendees and found that they wanted a game of their own. She surveyed the group and they chose Thursdays. Done. She is there on Thursdays and is studying to become a director so she can run that game. Additionally, she works with and is in charge of a two session tournament that Jade Barrett runs here twice a year.

We owe Ann a debt of thanks for her efforts. Ann's contributions outside of CHAT Bridge are many as well. She hosted all the Life Master parties (many) for the club until we moved to Hadley Creek. She ordered and picked up the Wednesday birthday cakes for years. She served on the RDBC board 3 different times including being president. She has done much more but that's enough accolades for one person. I need to say something about the current CHAT sessions (which shows another of Ann's contributions).

At many CHAT tables I hear a lot of "I did it wrong", I bid it wrong or I played it wrong. Their face shows the disappointment/confusion they are feeling.

Too often, we are too hard on ourselves. Sometimes we played it well and end up with a negative score. It looks bad, but we generally don't really know at the table. We play three hearts. It goes down two tricks. The defenders are trying to hide that smug look about their defensive prowess. We are trying to hide our embarrassment of our weak play. Not fun.

But, three hearts, down two might be what is happening at several tables. The decisions we make at the bridge table are often difficult. Let's not invoke the "I screwed up" conclusion too quickly. Better to start thinking about the next hand as soon as possible. If you continue to be troubled by this hand, it will make your play at the next hand more accident prone.

Enough positivism. Sometimes it is clear cut. **You did screw up.** You know it. Your partner knows it. The opponents know it. If you react too radically, the tables around you will also know it. You notice that your opponents are being extremely thoughtful and considerate (just what you need at this moment – Pity). You messed up! BUT the same advice applies. NEXT HAND! Put it behind you and start the next hand as quickly as you can.

If the frustration just won't go away, you might try a technique that Ann has endorsed. Go to the rest room and CRY (try not to cry at the table).

Do whatever you have to do to put it behind you. I considered trying Ann's suggestion once, but as I thought about it, I started to laugh. That worked better than crying anyway.

It is hard to believe that I am advising people on this? I don't always follow this advice myself. But I am working on how to handle my disappointments at the table. I try to keep in mind how funny this mistake is going to be when I talk about it a week or two from now. Hopefully, this gaffe will reduce the chance of me making this mistake again.

Every club member experiences this on occasion. There are a lot of smart people in our club (like: all of them). Have you noticed that? We have different levels of play (strata), but there is no "slow" section. If it was easy, it wouldn't be any fun. We might as well just work on our UNO prowess.

Arne Fackler

Twenty tables - Wow!! I enjoyed our PRO-AM event on Monday. I saw a lot of CHAT faces. Good! The organizers and directors had their hands full. Thanks to all that managed this event. It was worth it. I played with Marie. It was fun, especially for me. Anytime a hand didn't work out so well, Marie took the blame. I didn't have to own up to any of my mistakes. Thanks Marie.

As other pairs came to our table, I thought the AMs were treating the PROs well. Maybe, too well? Some seemed to be intimidated by their PRO partner. I mean that in a good way (maybe impressed is a better word). But, the objective of the PRO-AM was not to boost the PROS confidence. We don't usually get that kind of respect from our regular partners. Thanks. It was very nice.

Speaking of intimidation, I want to give a report on the personal progress I have made as a mentor. The CHAT group has intimidated me a bit. They are nice people but they ask difficult questions and demand better answers than I have some times. It has been tough, but, my fears are diminishing and my confidence is growing. I am starting to feel at home. I thought you should know.

SLOW PLAY. I have discussed slow play before but maybe a few more thoughts on it. I like John Wooden's quote: "Be quick, but don't hurry". Don't slow the game down but do take the time to think. Club members have been quite patient with me when I obsess over a bid. I finally figured out that it has nothing to do with patience. My slowness is giving them information. Why is he in a quandary? That information is used against me in the subsequent play. Your partner is also getting information from your slow play and that can prompt a director call in subsequent bidding. Not good.

Often the slowness comes when we can't find the right bid. At a CHAT session I walked over to a table having exactly this problem. It looks like the right bid is 1.75 hearts, but we don't have a bidding card for that. All the bids we have thought about are tainted a bit. I have suggested that some bids come from the brain and some come from the stomach (or ... you know). I see, blank stares. You need a better suggestion Arne.

So, I suggest that we choose the bid that has "the most truth" in it (the group frowns on it when I advise them to lie). But "the most truth" isn't working either. Pick the bid that deceives the opponents more than your partner. I have tried to sell the idea that a little deception can be a winning part of your game. Uff Da, I won't bring that up again. I get bewildered looks that seem to scold me (I don't know for sure but I suspect that some of these people are Lutheran). Finally, the frustration sets in and I hear: "just tell me what to bid".

So I do. I pick one of the half-truth bids. But, I am serving notice: I am not going to do this anymore. Don't ask. Telling half-truths multiple times for different players every CHAT session adds up. It's a heavy burden to bear. I need to be able to sleep at night. You might try calling Ann over when you have this quandary. I don't think she is Lutheran.

Arne Fockler

CHAT is working! I can just feel it. A primary objective of CHAT is to improve skills and become a successful, competitive bridge player. It's happening! My game IS getting better. This month I had a 59% game. 3rd place! Even better, we ended up ahead of Pat.

I want to thank all the people that got me here. It is humbling to see 25+ players show up every week just to work with me and help me improve my game. Humbling. Yes, that's the right word. My humility seems to grow with every session. I'm very proud of that.

But, enough about you, there are some very good CHAT things happening.

One morning, none of the tables were asking for help. I was just standing around drinking coffee. I walked over to a table and listened to the discussion. Declarer had just gone down 1 trick at 3 NT. Looking at the results online, they found that the entire field played the hand in 4 spades. The bidding was:

<u>N</u>	<u>E</u>	<u>S</u>	<u>W</u>
1C	P	1S	P
1NT	P	3NT	passed out

The group placed all the hands face up on the table. They discussed each bid, 1 by 1, as a group. Subsequently, they still could not see anything wrong with their bidding. They missed a 5-3 spade fit, but couldn't see why. They lamented: "How could South know that North had 3 spades?"

I told them that **New Minor Forcing** is a convention that might have been used here. It's not my intention to talk about New Minor Forcing. I bring this table conversation up to talk about the method they used to analyze their bidding. It was good. No, it was GREAT! As they walked through the bidding, each person agreed on each bid before they moved on. Excellent! After this analysis, they concluded that their bidding was correct. I agreed. It was. Their convention card just wasn't strong enough to help them get to 4 spades.

On a good day, 3NT plays better than 4H and you get a good result. Your opponents get "fixed". They become quiet. They look at each other with a twisted expression of pain. This is not a good time to gloat over your success (luck). The percentage of the time, getting to the wrong contract fails.

On another topic, I have been told that I seem to like breaking the rules. My suggestions don't fit the Audrey's book and I don't seem to like Audrey Grant.

I must defend myself here. First, I have no problem with Audrey Grant. She might not like me, but I'm OK with her. I do like to break the rules and go against the grain at times. But "at times" is the key phrase here.

When a mentor is called over it often means that Audrey's notebook doesn't cover this situation. If it did, you wouldn't need a mentor. Making the best choice, in these difficult situations, is crucial. It requires bending, sometimes just outright breaking the rules. Frequently, the decision you make in these critical situations is the key to successful bidding of a hand. Experienced players have dealt with these situations before and find the better choice. My advice – Get experienced. It takes time.

I see CHAT participants breaking rules too. So there! Here are a couple examples:

Opening Leads: Don't under lead an Ace in a suit contract. This is a rule I never break. I'll bet Audrey doesn't either. I still see it happening (but rarely).

Second hand low: You should break this rule occasionally, but don't break it unless you have a good reason. I see second hand high too often and it hurts.

Finally, I have a suggestion. This already happens frequently but I want to bring it up anyway. **Police yourself a bit.** When you see an error happen, talk about it; give some constructive criticism. Take the time. If you are the one that made the error, don't take it personally. This is good advice for the Club games too, but we don't have as much freedom to take the time then. This isn't Club Bridge. This is CHAT. We need constructive criticism and we have plenty of time.

Along these lines, I think that declarer often has more chances to talk about a defensive play that helped make the contract. Something like: "Your lead of the Heart Ace made it easy for me". Declarer has a view of the hand that is usually broader than the rest of the table.

I apologize for the length of this article, I didn't have the time to make it short. A great mathematician (Pascal) said that. I find it to be true.

Arne Fockler

The CHAT group got a lot of press this week. I thought the Post Bulletin did a good job and captured the gist of what CHAT is. More than a few people have talked to me about the article. Several liked the picture of the back of my head. One of my outside friends told me that the article made duplicate bridge sound less intimidating to her. Good! That's what we wanted to do.

One of the callers had tried to get into Layne's Community Ed class, but it was full. So she came to the club Monday and kibitzed (next to Pat). It helped her find out if she was prepared for CHAT. She is. We will be seeing more of her soon.

Group discussion, after a hand has been played, is happening regularly. It works! Insights to better bidding and play pop up from the players and the mentors.

Here are some recent discussions that I have observed.

Bids that limit your hand are very helpful and give partner valuable information that helps you get to the right contract. For instance:

- 1D – P – 1NT
- 1S – 2H – 2S
- Any NoTrump Opener
- 1H – P – 3H ... and many others

Not watching for partner's first discard caused problems a few times. It is so basic, yet we miss it at times. Pay attention. It improves partnership harmony.

Choosing NT or a suit contract?

1NT – P – 2D – P

2H – P – 3NT

Your hand is somewhat flat with a 5 card heart suit. After the 1NT opener, you transfer partner to hearts. You have 11 points and want to be in game. You don't know if partner has more than 2 hearts so you bid 3NT. Partner needs to make the decision whether to play 3NT or bid 4 Hearts.

Reaching the right contract.

At one table, 3S was bid, making 4. Most of the field bid 3S as well. We walked through the bidding and play and I complemented them on reaching the right contract. They weren't satisfied with that comment. One pair got to 4 spades. "Why didn't we?"

I looked up on the website and found out that Grant was Declarer. I told the table to move on to the next hand. Grant plays aggressively and it works for him. Some people live on the edge. Be wary of opponents that wear cowboy boots.

Grant probably:

- overbid and got lucky. (I'm going with this one.)
- had a convention that you don't use. (he is never short on conventions)
- found information in the bidding that you missed. (again, no luck involved)
- forgot that he was playing bridge and thought he was in a poker game.
- was "pushed" into 4S by competitive opponents (who now regret the push)
- bid aggressively, took some risk and played the hand well.

(This is likely to be the correct answer)

I've played with Grant for a long time. He has to use the back side of his convention card to cover all his conventions. Conventions like **Kokish, Rubinsohl, and AWABAF**. I have studied Kokish for hours. It has only come up once and I screwed it up that time. Even so, it has been a great source of entertainment when having a beer with bridge friends. It was worth the time.

Oh, you might be wondering about **AWABAF**. This one is self-explanatory: "ALL Wild Ass Bids Are Forcing". You need this if you are playing with Grant.

We now have you hooked on bridge. This cannot be reversed (you're welcome). There is no **BPA** -Bridge Players Anonymous. You are not "normal" anymore. I want to give you some advice that might help you appear to be more normal to your family and your friends. I hope it isn't too late. Here it is:

Don't strew the house with Bridge Bulletins, Bridge Books and Convention Cards. Keep them out of most of the bathrooms. If that isn't workable for you then at least limit the number you have on tables and stands in your house. No more than 3 bulletins in a stack, and you might want to put your Bible on top of the stack. That lets them know you do read other things. You have to make sure that a guest has something else to read when they have to use your bathroom.

Arne Fockler

We continue to see 7-8 tables at the Monday morning CHAT sessions. It's a noisy place. Good! We are not competing. We are collaborating. It's a friendly place to spend some time and learn some bridge from each other.

Discussions about new conventions occur regularly. Some players are anxious to master the latest and greatest convention. Others are content to grow at a slower pace, making sure they have their current card mastered before adding new conventions. Good idea. Having a convention card that scares you is not healthy. Trust me, I KNOW!

But, adding conventions to your card is something you have to do over time. The negative double is an item you must have on your card eventually. It is very simple (but, undoubtedly someone has written an entire book on it). There are many nuances to the convention, but you don't have to know all of them before you employ a simpler usage of the convention. Here are some convention discussions we have had at CHAT recently.

NEGATIVE DOUBLE

1C – 1D – DBL here shows 4 cards in each major. If you had only one 4-card major, you would just bid it.

1C – 1D – 1H here promises 4 hearts. It also says that you have fewer than 4 spades. If you had 4 spades as well, you could have negative doubled (as in the above example).

1C – 1D – 1S Similarly, **1S** here promises 4 spades and fewer than 4 hearts.

1C - 1H – 1S. **1S** here promises **5** spades. With 4 spades you could have negative doubled. Partner now knows that you have more than 4 spades. Useful!

CUE BIDDING TO SHOW A LIMIT RAISE

1H – 2C – 3H Many of you play that **3H** in this sequence shows a limit raise in hearts. An alternative bidding sequence: **1H – 2C – 3C** (a cue bid) shows the same limit raise in hearts. It says nothing about clubs. Partner gets the same information. Additionally, this this can sometimes complicate the bidding for the opponents. Two benefits: Partner is informed. LHO is annoyed. Nice!

There is actually a third benefit here. And this is a larger benefit. You can now tell other players that you are using cue-bids. Awesome! Now, when you ask your opponent what their bid means and they tell you “it is a cue-bid”, you don’t have to wrinkle your brow and look stunned. You nonchalantly shrug your shoulders and say “Of course”.

I have said this before. We have smart people playing bridge. They have to be. This is a complex game. Deep thinkers gravitate to Duplicate Bridge. Our club has a lot of exceptional people. We have Doctors, Lawyers, Teachers, Engineers, Programmers, members of the Unemployed Philosopher’s Guild, the list goes on.

But, being smart is not enough to get you competing with some of our “elite” players (you know who you are). No, it takes some psychology as well. It isn’t well known, but I took a couple of psychology courses back in college (about 50 years ago). So, I am qualified to give advice on this topic. Listen up! A little psychology at the table can be useful.

Ann is declarer and I must make the opening lead. The bidding has convinced me that I should lead a club, but I am not sure which card to lead from **Q 8 3**. I’m thinking that the 3 is the right card. If I lead the 3, my partner will expect me to have a high card in clubs.

But I know that Ann knows what the lead of the 3 means. On top of that, Ann also knows that I know that she knows. So if I lead the 3, she will think that I am trying to deceive her and that I really don’t have a high card in clubs. NOW, the right lead for me is obvious. Lead the 3! Partner knows. Ann doesn’t. Just what you want.

Incredible! Without a little Psychology (and deep thinking), I would have just blindly led a small club.

Arne Fackler

Combatting Zero Tolerance

At a tournament, a man was angrily criticizing his partner. RHO took a mint from his pocket, gave it to the critic, then spoke to the others. "Let's keep his mouth busy."

I saw several CHAT participants at the La Crosse Sectional tournament. Marvelous! Now that you have some master points you are definitely **hooked** on this game. That was the plan. The next step after **hooked** is **obsessed**. Be patient.

BLACKWOOD: I have had several ask questions about the **Blackwood convention**. This convention is used **after** you and your partner have agreed on the trump suit and you want to explore to see if a slam bid is possible. For instance:

1♣ – pass -- 1♥ -- Pass

3♥ - pass -- 4NT (asking for Aces; ♥ is the agreed to trump suit)

Responses: 5♣ – 0 or 4 Aces, 5♦ – 1 Ace, 5♥ – 2 Aces, 5♠ – 3 Aces

Now you can choose your bid: 5♥ or 6♥. OR...

...If you have all 4 aces and ✓ **Moderate Greed** is marked on your convention card, you can find out how many kings partner has by bidding 5NT.

Responses: 6♣ – 0 or 4 Kings, 6♦ – 1 King, 6♥ – 2 Kings, 6♠ – 3 Kings

Now you can choose your bid: 6♥ or 7♥. OR...

... if ✓ **Exceptional Greed** is marked on your convention card, you may decide if 7NT will play as well as 7♥ and choose 7NT as your bid. This is also a relief to your opponents who have run out of pass cards and had to find extra bidding boxes.

PLANNING FOR ENTRIES: Have you ever worked hard to set up a suit and then found that you have no entry to get to these winners? Some of you have. No fun.

Declarer	Board
♠KJT2	♠A9874

“8 ever, 9 never” suggests that we should not finesse for the Queen. Declarer leads deuce to the Ace and then plays 4 back to the King. Both opponents follow suit! Things look good, except that Declarer now holds ♠JT. Without another entry to dummy the 5th spade cannot be cashed. Declarer messed up on the first lead. He must save his entry card (the deuce) until the 4th lead. Saving the deuce would be a good thing to do even if you do have side entries. It costs you nothing and opponents are very good about making you spend the side entries early.

BIDDING the HAND seem to bring up more questions than the play of the hand.

“There is no bid that describes what I have in my hand. What do I bid?”

West has a balanced hand, 14 points, with a stopper in spades. Nice hand! Is West happy with this hand? No. West is grumbling.

"I have spades stopped but I can't bid 1NT with only 14 points; I don't have a five-card suit so I can't overcall; Double is an awful bid (it is). What do I do?"

"You have a nice hand. Quit bitching." (just kidding; I didn't really say that).

"You have come up with a few options. You can bid 1NT, or overcall with a four-card suit. Misrepresenting a hand slightly doesn't have to be a moral issue." You might also PASS. That is an option you have not considered.

"Pass! You must be kidding me. This is my best hand today. Would you pass?"

"I would." "OK, I'll pass."

"Probably the best choice. If your partner finds a bid, you are back in business."

Those players that consistently score 60 - 70% know when to fight for the bid and when to stay out of the auction. Don't overlook the PASS option.

PSYCHOLOGICAL ADVICE (again). I received some positive responses from club members on my strategy for playing against Ann. One said that my psychological advice was about as good as my bridge advice. Very thoughtful! Thank you.

Understanding the Psyche of your partner can help you with your **timing**. If you are going to do something highly irregular, you need to choose the right time.

Let's say that I am playing against a strong player at the club. For anonymity, let's call her Pushpa. I am on lead and I want to make an irregular lead that will fool Pushpa. But, as usual, this could deceive my partner and he will mess things up big time (and then blame me for it). I don't want that. Here is where timing and your understanding of your partner can really give you an edge.

If my partner is Grant (again an alias), no problem. He doesn't trust my leads anyway. Plus, he likely has just been in a serious discussion about pheasant hunting or something like that. Little chance that my deceptive lead will cause trouble. Great!

But if my partner is Bar (again, you know – fake name) this isn't likely to work. She probably doesn't hunt pheasants and she pays attention to her partner's leads (even believes them). Better save my deception for another time.

Arne Fockler

We are having fun at these Monday Morning sessions. There is something entertaining about making mistakes and then reviewing them with everybody. Showing people how you messed up can be humbling. But, it pays off. It helps you develop your sense of humor. It improves your game, and I think it also adds to your confidence. After your confidence builds up, you can drop this humility thing and work on total domination. YES! Now we are getting somewhere.

Here are a few confidence builders we discussed recently.

Worthless Dummy (not your partner! ...the other dummy).

How does declarer play a hand when there are no entries to dummy. The bidding sequence (**1NT – P – P – P**) showed this problem a few times. Sometimes you might be able to manufacture an entry to dummy. Good! Now, you get to the board and you have one chance to be very clever. Don't screw it up. That is good advice. You are welcome.

But, it is when you have **no entries** to dummy, that you really need to be clever. You lead every card from your hand. Opponents need to be patient here. Taking winners too quickly can help declarer. Don't help him. Let declarer lead to you. As declarer, you need to get help from your opponents. Make them help. Your dummy isn't going to give you any help. Give the opponents the lead at the right time and they might give you a trick.

Suppose you have ♥Qxx and dummy has ♥Jxx. This is a suit you do not want to lead. Instead you might work on clearing out a longer/stronger suit that you have and then give up the lead. The opponents can now take their tricks but will have to lead back into you. They can't lead the suit you just cleared out. Now they have to lead another suit. They might help you with the ♥ suit (or another suit). You are not the only one that can screw up. Give them a chance. On a good day, anything they lead now helps you. You have the hand with the strength. This may "make your day".

Second hand Low (the default choice). I am wearing this warning out, but we are still playing 2nd hand high too often and usually to our detriment. If you have good reason, for example, you think that your partner can ruff a side suit, so you choose to go up and then give partner a ruff. Good – play high. But, if you don't have a clear reason for playing high, then DON'T.

Third hand High? Greg's advice from the Defense class he is conducting has shown us that 3rd hand play is much more difficult. There are many more places where **Third Hand High** is not the right play. Even so, if you don't have a clue, playing high is my suggestion. That said, **not having a clue** is not a recipe for high scores at the bridge table. Your opponents are finding clues regularly. You need to Get a clue!

Finding the Queen: As declarer you have: **AT83** and dummy has **KJ92**. Finessing for the Queen is typically right when you have an 8 card suit. Should you finesse LHO or RHO?

Before making this decision, delay playing this suit until later in the hand (if it is safe to do so). Play other suits first and gather information (clues) that might help you determine where the Queen is. Think about the bidding. How many points do the opponents have? How many points have shown up in the play. What discards have you seen? Any clues on suit length? You need a clue (or two).

You have done everything I said. Now the director is on your case for slow play. Your thinking time is over. Get off the dime. Time to put all this sleuth work into practice. You must choose whether LHO or RHO is more likely to have the Queen. If after all this work, you still (unbelievably) have no clue, you might consider Pinochle. That's fun and there are no directors. Sorry, I am supposed to be encouraging. Try **Bentley's Law** (August Bridge Bulletin):

"When you can finesse either way, either-way finesse, take it into the hand of the defender you like more".

If the finesse fails, lose it to someone you like. It might ease the pain a bit. The law does not say that you must dislike the other opponent. But, it will still work if that happens to be the case. Don't put this law on your convention card. Also do NOT alert this. Be careful not to damage any relationships (especially with people you do not like).

On a more positive note, maybe you DID find a clue. Hallelujah! Now you simply lead the Ace or the King and finesse the opponent you "know" has the Queen. It doesn't matter if you like him or her. You don't have to depend on Bentley now. Your sleuthing has paid off. The finesse works, and you pick up the entire suit. Voila! Now, control yourself. Fist pumps are a bit tacky.

Opening Leads.

On occasion I have asked someone at the table "What was the opening lead?" I get a pause and then I get an answer that includes "I think". Not a great answer. Still, I like that answer better than "We didn't have one".

You must remember what the opening lead was. It is full of **clues**. Was the lead likely to be 4th best? Does it show length or shortness? Why was partner's bid suit not led? The King was led – does it show the Queen as well? The deuce was led – does the leader likely have 4 cards in the suit? maybe an honor as well? The information you can gather is amazing. Think about it before playing to trick one. Do this quickly. You do not want to see the director's pained face about slow play again.

Basic Bidding. In the December 2017 Bridge Bulletin, Larry Cohen writes about "Bidding Basics" on pages 49-50. Good stuff!

Hope your holiday season was great!

Arne Fockler

Helen Sobel story.

Many experts say that Helen Sobel was one of the greatest bridge players of all time. She played bridge for 20 years with Charles Goren, aka the "king of bridge". Once, when a kibitzer, observing Goren, asked her how it felt to play with an expert, Sobel replied, "I don't know. Why don't you ask him?"

Good news! I am not going to bitch about “second hand high” problems. I’ve wore that one out. I need to find a new topic to “wear out”. I suppose I could just be pleasant today. OK, I’ll try it. I have seen some exceptionally good play recently. (see, that was pleasant! I’m glad that’s over.) CHAT players are playing a lot of hands about equal to the Friday club participants. I told one CHAT player recently “You played every card right. You took every trick possible.”

She thanked me and looked quite relieved. She wasn’t sure if she had played it right. That’s not unusual (for all of us). I often find out the truth after the game is over and I am looking at the club website. If you don’t use the club website (rochestermnbridge.net), try it. Nate has turned the RESULTS section into a treasure trove of information. The work you do AFTER the game might be more important than your play that day. If you don’t know how to examine these results, let me know. Nate would gladly do another education session for us. There is more information available out there than most of us realize.

I have suggested before that we should pause and plan before playing to the first trick. Oh good! I do have another topic to wear out! This is a good place for me to be repetitive and annoying. It is crucial. OK, so what should you as declarer think about before playing to trick one?

You should think about Analyzing the opening lead and Reviewing the bidding. Books have been written on this. The amount of information available about the opening lead and the bidding (or lack of bidding) is astounding. There is much more to this topic than what I have to say. This is just a snippet.

LHO leads a card. Why did he lead that suit? Forget the suit. That’s another discussion. Let’s just talk about what the actual card led tells us and then tie what we learn into the review of the bidding.

The Lead - **What does it tell us**

The Ace – LHO has the King (thus at least 7 points)

The King – LHO has the Queen (at least 5 points).

The Queen, the Jack, etc.

Lead looks like the top of nothing? Then RHO has the missing high cards.

Lead likely promises an honor? Useful: Who to finesse? Who has the missing points?

Looks like 4th best? Use the rule of 11 to get info about RHO cards.

Did **Grant** make the opening lead? Use “The Law of Diminishing Returns”.

(Don’t think about it.)

Nothing earthshaking here, simple stuff, but good information that can help you determine where the missing high cards are placed. You see your hand and the dummy. You know exactly how many points the opponents have. Try to determine how these points are split between them. The bidding will help.

Suppose you are the opening bidder and bid 1♥.

1♥ P 1NT
2♦ 3♥ P 4♥ (passed out)

You end up as declarer in 4♥. LHO opens the ♠K. Time for a short pause to think and plan. What do you know at this point? A LOT!

Say that you and your partner have 25 points. The opponents have 15. LHO is likely showing 5 points by opening the ♠K (should have ♠KQ). RHO showed 10+ for the 2♦ overcall.

So LHO has ♠KQ only (there are no points left). Play accordingly. You have yet to play to trick one and you know where **ALL** the missing high cards are. Don't mess this one up!

I set up this example to illustrate a point. But this bidding sequence is not unusual. I wrote a lot of words here, but the thinking needed for this analysis is about 10-15 seconds (if you do this regularly). Do it regularly.

Arne Fockler

I want to discuss a simple topic (**Attitude**) and a more complex topic (**End Play**).

ATTITUDE: Here is what Larry Cohen says about it:

Attitude is used in two very important situations:

a) Partner leads to the trick. If partner or dummy is winning the trick, tell partner your attitude. Play a high spot card if you like it, low if you don't. For example, partner leads a spade and dummy's ace takes the trick. Play the ♠8 if you have ♠KQ82. Play the ♠3 if you have ♠843.

b) You make your first discard. Throw the ♥9 if you like/want hearts; throw the ♥3 if you don't like hearts.

Do not make attitude signals with cards above the 10. Don't signal with what could potentially be a trick. Of course, you won't always be dealt the right card to signal with.

Note: There are many possible variations to what is shown here. There are many methods I like (such as odd-even) or upside-down. This is just intended as a mainstream summary.

Attitude is an essential part of the game. We need to understand it and use it.

“STRIP and ENDPLAY”: We have talked before about getting help from the opponents. This technique can do that. It sounds a bit tawdry, but It is an approved technique for consenting bridge partners. It is worth studying. It is powerful. Many club members use it as a basic part of their arsenal. It gives them a sizeable edge over those that don't.

Basically, the idea is to eliminate a suit or two and then put the opponents into the lead. After they take their trick(s), they have no safe exit. They must give us a trick. Sometimes it does not matter which opponent is put into the lead. That is the case in this example.

Example:

Declarer	Dummy
♠AK742	♠QJ63
♥KT7	♥AJ4
♦K73	♦A82
♣J7	♣A62

You are in **4S**. Looks like you might lose a heart a diamond and a club. You should make 4. You might get 3 heart tricks and make 5. You can finesse for the 3rd heart trick – a 50% chance - but before you do that, examine whether you can make the

opponents help you get that 3rd heart trick.

The opening lead is a the ♦Q. Take the ♦K and then get the trump out. Now take the ♣A and give up a club.

- If the opponents lead a heart back, they give you three heart tricks. Done.
- If they lead a club back, ruff it and play the ♦A.
- If the lead a diamond back, play the ♦A and ruff your last club.

You have now “stripped” the clubs and have just one small diamond left. Lead the remaining diamond. The opponents are in and they are endplayed.

- If they lead a heart back, you take 3 heart tricks. You make 5.
- If they lead a club or a diamond, ruff it in one hand and discard a heart in the other hand. Again, you make 5. No need to take the heart finesse.

To review: You “stripped” the clubs and the diamonds and your 3rd diamond was the exit card. You must lose the ♦ anyway. Choose the right time to lose it.

I know that some of you are going to tell me that this topic is too advanced for you. It is complex. If this is too much for you right now, you might try just a part of the technique. Forget endplay and just work on clearing and exiting one suit (in attempting to get opponents to break a specific suit for you.)

Determine which suit(s) you do not want to lead (hearts in the above example). Then clear out another suit before giving up the lead. Give them a chance to make a mistake. Maybe they will “break” one of your suits. Maybe they will have to! You may endplay the opponents without knowing that you are endplaying them. If that happens, **do not** act as if you were lucky. Keep a stoic demeanor. Your opponents will fear you in the future. That’s good!

As usual, this topic has books written about it. It is far greater than my brief excursion into it. But, we must start somewhere.

Somewhat heavy. If you read this far, Thanks!

Arne Fockler

Chat Bridge (Rules/Guidelines – not Laws)

March 2018

We often get into discussions at CHAT that require more discussion than we have time for. I have two different topics that we have had cursory discussions on.

First Topic: Eight Ever, Nine Never (EE-NN):

...do we finesse for the queen or play the Ace and King and hope to drop the queen?

- If you have 8 cards in the suit always (**Ever**) finesse for the Queen.
- If you have 9 cards in the suit, (**Never**) finesse for the Queen. Instead play for the drop.

Disclaimer: Always and Never, NEVER always mean Always and Never.

There are always exceptions to the rule. I watched the same hand played at two different tables. Declarer had **AKJxx** and Dummy had **T9x** in the trump suit. Both declarers played for the drop of the queen. **Eight Ever** says “always finesse”. Playing the trump suit first was the right plan. But there were no additional clues available. With no additional information, I would have finessed as the rule states.

We discussed this rule at one table and then played the hand over again. BUT, we still didn't get it right. There is another part to the play of the suit that I hadn't discussed. We should take the Ace first, then cross to dummy (we had entries) and try the finesse. Don't let the singleton Queen become a trick for the opponents!

Losing to a singleton Queen is distressing. It can do long term damage. It may lead to negative self-talk which can affect your play on subsequent hands. Continued mistakes diminish your perception of yourself. You get home and you experience malaise: “I don't want to play bridge anymore!” More distress, indigestion, sleep-deprivation, melancholy, etc... You likely will be paying for some counseling.

All this can be avoided. Follow my prescriptive psychological advice:

“Don't lose to the singleton Queen!”

Second Topic: Playing in a 4x4 versus a 5x3 suit.

your hand:

♠ KJ7

♥ KQT7

♦ 875

♣ A75

the bidding: (opponents are silent)

(you)	(partner)
-------	-----------

1♣	1♠
----	----

1NT	3♥
-----	----

?	
---	--

Partner's bidding promises 5 spades and at least 4 hearts. You can see that you have at least 8 cards in each major. Which one do you want partner to play in?

For these two examples, we are going to assume that neither major breaks 5-0.

1. Choose 5-3 distribution and play in 4♠.

The opening lead is ♦A followed by a switch to ♣T.

You (dummy)	Declarer
♠ KJ7	♠ AQT43
♥ KQT7	♥ AJ43
♦ 875	♦ Q
♣ A75	♣ 862

Take the ♣T with the Ace. Count your tricks. You have 1 club trick, 5 spade tricks and 4 heart tricks. That's 10. Can you get another trick? Greg or Genny probably could, but I am done. Take my **10 tricks** and wait for the electronic description of my bridge play – "AVERAGE". Very Inspiring. Ho Hum. ~~Malaise and melancholy set in...~~ Darn, I already used that.

Note: Trumping your two diamond losers in the long hand (the 5-hand) gains nothing.

2. Choose the 4-4 distribution and play in 4♥.

Again, the opening lead is ♦A followed by a switch to ♣T.

Take the ♣T with the Ace. Now you trump the 7♦ with the 3♥. Lead the 4♥ to the King; trump your last diamond with the J♥. Take the A♥. Low spade to the King. Clear the Trump suit and take the spades. You take 12 tricks. All you lose is the A♦.

I researched 4x4 vs 5x3 a bit. The experts I found all agreed that 4x4 is a better choice than 5x3. Jerry Helms (ASK JERRY in the Bridge Bulletin) had a simple summary:

"Faced with a choice between a 5-3 or 4-4 trump fit, the 4-4 fit is usually superior. Reason: With equally divided trumps, either hand may become the short hand to create extra winners."

Note: You don't have a "long hand" when you have a 4x4 trump fit. Trump is divided evenly. In this example, we turned Declarer's hand into the short hand and trumped for extra tricks.

I cherry-picked my example to illustrate how the 4x4 distribution can lead to additional trump tricks. Not all 4x4s work this well. But it is useful to know this. I hope all this detail has not made your head hurt (something I have heard from CHAT players a few times).

Arne Fockler

The Rochester Sectional tournament is over. It was a big success. Many participants gave us rave reviews for "Rochester Nice". "Rochester Nice" is a step up from "Minnesota Nice". Many of us heard participants say that they love the Rochester tournament and the friendly atmosphere they enjoy here. This a great statement for our club. The Board of Directors ordered a celebration – Good idea!!

OK, enough about "Rochester Nice". I want to talk about "Rochester Serious". I am suggesting that you work on making your opponent's life a "living hell". Interfering in the bidding as much as possible, more penalty doubles, pushing the opponents bidding to higher levels, getting back at experienced players that consistently reduce your position on the leader board and finally, ~~learning to smile in a manner that looks friendly but has an "in your face" aspect to it~~ (better leave this one out).

Have you ever noticed that some of our "Rochester Nice" members seem to be downright pushy? They do most of the things listed above. Their names are frequently at the top of the leader board. When you sit down at their table you get: "Welcome to Table 7. We hope you enjoy your time here". Why wouldn't they welcome you? Fresh meat!

It may sound like I am picking on these good players. No! I like pushy players. They make you think. They "push" you into really difficult decisions. Research is showing that the mental and social aspects of playing bridge have many health benefits. Be thankful for the health benefits that these caring people provide.

But, to compete with these nice people, you might have to jack up your own "pushiness". I have a couple of small suggestions that might help:

1. Suppose RHO opens 1♦. If you don't have a biddable major and 2♣ is a possibility, s-t-r-e-t-c-h to make that bid. This doesn't induce the "living hell" state, but it is a little pushy. The opponents don't get to bid a major at the one level. This can complicate their bidding. It's a start.
2. In this bidding sequence,
 1♥ pass 2♥ pass
 pass **you?**

You need to think carefully before you lay the pass card down. The opponents have found an 8-card major fit and likely own at least half the points in the deck. If you have good defensive possibilities, pass. If not, letting them have it at the 2-level doesn't sound like the percentage play to me. Look hard for a bid to "push" the opponents higher. Down one could very well be a good board for you. **Note:** Pass is still an option. Don't do something crazy.

To bid, you should have a good suit - the likelihood of being doubled is less. Don't overlook a takeout double as the bid you need. Your partner may leave it in. Partner may be lying in the weeds and thinking along the "living hell" possibility for the opponents. Give him a chance to demonize them. This could be much more than creating a minor annoyance.

PUSH!

Arne Fockler

Be Nice! – don't overwhelm.

We had a Pro Am game on April 30 where less experienced players were assigned a more experienced partner. It looked like we had a good time. I did. Prior to starting the play, the experienced players were cautioned to "be nice". That wasn't the exact phrase used but I took it that way. I think we were asked to "speak only when spoken to". The fear is that the "Pros" will overwhelm the Ams with more advice than they want.

Where did this fear come from? Overwhelm! Who? Us? You must be kidding! Our "Pros" don't overwhelm. They are just happy that they can do some small service for those that are not quite as skilled. The needy. Some see it as community service; kind of a skills development for the wealthy. We are breaking new ground here. Commendable! True heartfelt concern for others!

The Pros have taught many lessons to many players (free of charge) and they always give you a friendly smile after the lesson is over. They can't help it if they continually dominate the top of the leaderboard. Some don't have a choice. They just naturally put their pants on both legs at one time. The thought that these thoughtful, giving people would overwhelm? Absurd!

I saw a lot of CHAT players at the Gopher regional tournament this week. GREAT! They did very well. Being an "Am" is a temporary thing. The Gopher results show that your game is growing. It follows that your confidence is growing as well. Soon, you will be cautioned to "be nice". Then, you know that you have arrived. Overwhelm away! Do some of that thoughtful community service yourself. I suggest that you continue to put your pants on one leg at a time, but you can now show some of the newbies how much you know! Have fun! That's why we play this game, right?

Now I have overwhelmed you with my "how not to overwhelm" article. (AND, you didn't ask for it!) But, it is too late, I don't want to rewrite it.

Be Quick! Be Slow! (At the right times)

I've said this before: "Bridge players are smart people". That's my view, but I think it is true. We are "**quick studies**". We pick up difficult bridge concepts quickly. People sometimes treat us a bit like "nerds". I take that as a compliment.

CHAT players are often a little too quick. We take our Aces too quickly. Is there a good reason to "cash out"? We are too quick to switch suits. Opening a new suit often helps the opponents. Let the opponents be the first to lead a suit that each of you have tricks in. During the play, I frequently try to work on one suit. On a good day, I can take my tricks in that suit and then give up a loser on the last play of that suit. Then the opponents get to open the next suit.

This is very general advice. It's your job to use it in the right situations. Make sure this is a good strategy for your current hand. It's fun when it works.

Sometimes you need to be QUICK!

1♥ -Pass - 4♥: The 4H bidder is warning partner not to get too excited. The hand is distributional (it typically promises 5 hearts with limited values). "Fast Arrival" gives us a good chance for a makeable game while also making it difficult for the opponents to compete. Yes!

Sometimes, you need to go slowly.

1♣ - Pass - 1♦. You hold the 1♦ hand and have a strong opening hand yourself. No need to be quick here. You have time to explore for the right contract. **Slow Shows** is a simple phrase that has deep meaning. We may be "quick" people, but slow is often the key to success, especially with strong hands.

You **do** need to find forcing bids, so partner does not pass before game is reached. The **4th suit forcing** convention can pave the way for slower bidding. It might be a convention you want to add to your card; if you haven't already.

Note: When you are working on this slow bidding thing, the opponents have very limited point count. If they interfere you might find doubling to be the right choice, especially at favorable vulnerability. Look for it.

Finally, The **Two over One** bidding system is a system that allows you to bid in a deliberate manner. For instance, 1♥ - pass- 2♦ is forcing to game. After these opening bids, you can bid slowly and find the optimum contract. Effective! Many in the club use this convention.

Slow Play – NEVER play too S L O W !

Quick and Slow discussion wouldn't be complete without talking about slow play. I don't view this as an issue in CHAT. Playing slow is what we do. Backup and discuss the play. Take our time. That's the plan.

But this is an issue with Pro's and Am's playing in the club (or tournament) games. We all need to consciously work on avoiding slow play.

Be quick (at least don't be slow) with your play at the table. This isn't something that Directors fix. **Players need to fix this.** We need to police ourselves. Whoever is playing slow, likely does NOT realize it. If play is excessively slow at your table, politely speak up. **Speak up even if you are not spoken to!** Joke about it. Do something. If the joking is directed your way, take it as more than a joke. A little introspection from everyone will help.

Enough. I feel like I have been using my "teacher voice". Sorry.

Arne Fackler

Bridge is fun. I don't know why I keep repeating that. It is an obvious truth. Otherwise I wouldn't spend 3 to 4 hours 3 to 4 times a week sitting at small tables, drinking coffee, eating candy and various treats, and bantering with people that are focused on beating me. They don't appear to be looking out for my best interests.

When my partner and I "scratch", we earn more master points. I tell my exercise buddy's that I won 1.26 Masterpoints. They ask questions ad nauseum: Do you win money? What good are MPs? Can you cash them in for something useful? Can't you find something useful to do? etc. etc. My family is equally excited about my masterpoint accumulation. If only I could cash some of them in for a free pastry at Panera. Then things would be different.

OK, I am supposed to talk about CHAT. One of our CHAT players was trying to have fun at the club one Monday. She needed nine tricks to make 3NT. She had a good trick on the board, but she had no way to get to the board. This was ruining her fun.

Declarer: ♠ AJ72 Dummy: ♠ K6543

The play went 2 to King, 3 to Jack (finesse works), Ace takes opponents Queen. Cash the seven. The last club in dummy is good, but there is no outside entry to the board.

Sometimes we have entry cards in other suits and this is not a problem. But, opponents have a way of knocking out those entry cards. In this situation, no outside entry is needed. Just hang on to the deuce and lead the 7 first. The deuce is then the entry for the last 2 tricks. It isn't always clear to us if an entry will be available later in the play. But, keeping a low card in the short hand is often a good idea. You don't have to think about it, just do it. It won't hurt you even if it is not necessary on this hand. Save your thinking for something more important, like which goodie to choose out by the coffee pots.

I went with friends to the Crystal Lake regional last week. We got off to a late start. One of our team members lost her glasses and we couldn't leave until she found them. I won't name names because that might offend Ann.

The tournament was a humbling experience and I am a better person for it. I must have spent \$400-\$500, but it was worth it. I hope you will be able to see my improved demeanor. I paid for it (in many ways – not just financially).

We played against some very nice people. A few (very few) of our opponents will not be invited to any of my parties. My partner and I found their words and their tone to be annoying at best; insulting at worst. I should have called the director, but the director was very busy. Better yet, I might have spoken up and told them how I felt about their behavior. I didn't. I talk big on this subject. It's more difficult to do it - take some action.

But, despite all these complaints and playing difficulties, my partner and I are still friends. All of us had a very good time. We always do. Much laughter. Good food and drink (I drank ONLY Lutheran beverages). Great discussions of the right way to bid/play various hands. This should help my game. Be forewarned. The gloves are off.

It is good to be back in the safety of the Rochester club, where compassion and selflessness rule. May the Golden Rule continue in all our play. Amen.

Arne Fackler

In bridge, deception is good and lying is bad. They are synonyms, so it is challenging to tell them apart. Difficult? Yes. But we are bridge players. We eat “difficult” for breakfast!

A few words about lying. I am qualified (for obvious reasons) to talk about the evils of lying. It is very simple. “Don’t do it”. Your partner gets angry. Some get even with you. Then they quit playing with you. They might be talking behind your back about the pain they have endured while playing with you and what a relief it was for them when that pain stopped. The word spreads. You feel lonely at the club. The only people that will play with you are other liars. You don’t really like each other but you keep playing together because your alternatives are few. You deserve each other. You end up paying \$6 a session for bridge and \$100 per session for therapy (because you play bridge). Nice! Are we having fun now? My sermon is over. Don’t lie.

OK. Lying is off the table (so to speak). We don’t really want to lie anyway. We just want to keep that threat alive. Your opponents should have serious doubts about your integrity. Your partners should be wondering why you did not enter the ministry.

But (and this is the part I like), all rules can be broken occasionally. For instance, dummy comes down and a little arithmetic tells you that partner is completely broke. You can see that you have all the remaining points. Your opponents don’t know that. Attitude and first discard? Play whatever you like. You are in the “Deception Zone”. Being honest here is not required. This is a fun place to be. And you know that bridge players are all about having fun. Rejoice!

OK, I should say something about bridge. At CHAT, I see some of us working on attitude and discards. We are trying to give partner some direction on how to defend. The opening lead is a great place to improve partnership communication. Partner needs help in knowing whether to continue playing a suit. We have rules for this.

Rule: We lead from the top of a sequence; **Ten** from **T98**. But, when following third hand we should play the lowest of touching cards; **Nine** from **JT9**.

First Example:

	64 (dummy)	
Q9753		Jack
	A (declarer)	

You lead the 5 and partner plays the Jack. It is very likely that Declarer has the AKT. Third-hand-high says partner does not have the King. The low-from-a-sequence rule says partner doesn’t have the Ten. If you continue this suit when you get in, you will give up a trick.

Second Example:

	64 (dummy)	
Q9753		10
	A (declarer)	

You lead the 5 and partner plays the Ten. It is very likely that Declarer has the **AK** – if he had the jack he would have won the trick with the jack. So, **partner has the Jack** as well as the **10**. It is safe to continue and set up the suit the next time you get in.

The first example shows that partner does not have the **JT** sequence. The second example shows that partner does have **JT**. Even with a very ugly hand your play makes a difference. You need to help your partner make decisions. Follow suit with the right card.

Arne Fockler

REVERSES: CHAT participants are showing confusion about what a reverse bid by opener is. I left a table last Monday where I am sure the confusion level was worse after my explanations. Maybe some examples will help.

Some reverse bidding sequences:

1♣ – 1♥

2♦ – ?

1♣ – 1NT

2♥ – ?

1♦ – 1♠

2♥ – ?

1♥ – 1NT

2♠ – ?

Audrey Grant’s REVERSE bid definition:

A non-jump bid by opener at the two level in a new suit that is higher-ranking than opener’s first bid suit.

It promises:

- 16 or more high-card points.
- 5+ cards in the first suit.
- 4 cards in the second suit.

A reverse bid is forcing for one round.

These bids are NOT reverses:

1♦ – 1♥

1♠ (1♠ is below the 2 level)

1♥ – 1NT

2♦ (♦ is a lower ranking suit than the opening bid suit)

A reverse bid often makes the bidding uncomfortable for partner. **But partner is forced to bid now.** Find the right bid: Choose one of partners 2 suits, **or** bid NT, **or** raise your own suit, **or** find another bid that is helpful to partner.

Why is a reverse useful? A reverse gives you a way to describe a distributional hand that has extra values (similar to the values of a 1NT opener – with balanced distribution), but not jump-shift values. Partner now has detailed information that can help to place the contract.

There is much more that can be said about this bid. Many situations arise in a competitive bidding situation that can make the bidding even more difficult. For more, read Audrey’s full account of the reverse bid.

<https://www.betterbridge.com/misc/StandardArticles/Standard200903.pdf>

My view is that the reverse is a bid that has to be in your partnership agreement. If you don’t have it, you should work on understanding it and adding it to your card.

Enough of that. Let's lighten up a bit. Reverse bidding is merely Bridge. We are a lot more than just card geeks battling for masterpoints. We are social animals. The club game is a social gathering. Play some cards, taunt your opponents, eat some treats, then go out and drink beer and discuss how you screwed up hand #10. Admit to all your friends that you were an idiot on that hand. That really feels good! Self-deprecation is good for the soul. It must be, or we wouldn't do it so much. Now, go home and give your spouse (who has zero interest in this peculiar obsession we have) a lengthy report on how the day went.

Reviewing the day's hands at the local Pub is fun, but it doesn't give you "lasting fun". It can be helpful at improving your game when you see mistakes that you don't want to make again. But you have to do something memorable at the table to get this "lasting fun". Maybe just getting an extra trick (one that is not rightfully yours) is all that is needed.


There are a lot of ways to get an extra trick. You can trump in the short hand. You can squeeze people. You can execute an end play or a dummy reversal. You can set up a side suit and throw away losers. You can deceive people! (has a nice ring to it, doesn't it?)

Find some clever little ruse that dupes the opponents. I was fooled one day when defending against 1NT. Declarer had a miserable hand with little chance of making 1NT. He (some guy named Bill) led his worst suit at the first opportunity. Fooled me. I took the trick and immediately switched suits (just what he wanted) and helped him make 1NT. I still remember it. I can still see the smirk on his face.

Find something like that. On a good day, the opponent is visibly upset at being deceived. Perfect! There is a chance, after this swindle, that the opponents might remember your first name the next time you meet. You can improve on this possibility by showing them the sensitivity and thoughtfulness that defines the real you. "I can feel your pain" is a phrase you might use here. Try to create a lasting experience for everyone!




Here's to "Lasting Fun"!

Arne Fockler

You see  AQJxx on the board and declarer seems to be in no hurry to play diamonds. Why is that? If you don't have a stopper, guess what – it is likely that your partner doesn't have a stopper either.

Declarer has diamonds locked in and is setting up additional tricks while there is time (while holding controls in the other suits). Maybe you should put some urgency on your trick-taking possibilities? ...might not be much time left for you.

Different hands dictate the urgency of running a long suit. Here are three thoughts on this:

1. As in the example above, work on other suits (while you have time) to setup extra tricks.
2. Run the suit immediately. Do it early in the hand. Make the opponents guess what to discard while they have less information to go on. If you wait until trick 4 or 5 some of our club members will have already figured out the length of all your suits, where the  9 is and what you ate for breakfast. Earlier in the play they might discard the  3 from  T843. This might be exactly what you need. Ain't gonna work later in the play.
3. Run 3 cards in the suit. Then recognize that you are squeezing yourself and switch to another suit. While playing the other suit, your clever opponents find a way to disable your entries to the board.

Now you play losers from your hand and discard your good tricks from the board. Painful at the time, but I've said it before, humility is good for the soul. It keeps you grounded.

If you feel that club members are laughing at you (or as we say – “with you”), take solace. You are a more rounded and grounded (and pounded) human being.

You are always growing when you play bridge. **Savor that thought!**

Arne Fockler

I just got back from a Friday afternoon session - 45%. I couldn't get out of the club fast enough. My partner (who we will keep anonymous) was 10 steps ahead of me. He seemed to be in a hurry to leave too. We could have sat down and discussed our failings and talked about how we can avoid those problems in the future. But it was Friday afternoon and I needed a beer (and I don't particularly like beer). I am not sure what Dick needed but I don't think he needed me anymore.

I looked over the scores on Saturday and I found some solace. Some of the low scores could not have been avoided. Our opponents defended too well, or they bid games that no one else got to, or they got lucky, on and on. A little "beer time" would probably have been therapeutic. We were not as dumb as we thought.

But we did spend a little time in the "dumb play" zone. Early in the afternoon I was in a 4 spade contract. I had a good plan. It looked like 4S was in the bag – maybe an overtrick.

Just get the trump out and then strip the hand of clubs, exiting with my last club (which I had to lose anyway). The opponents are in and they will have to lead a red card. Either suit and I get an extra trick.

Good thinking Arne! It ain't gonna be 45% today! Great plan! I get the trump out and start the clubs. The opponents ruff my 3rd club lead. It is rare, but this has happened to me before. Fourteen cards in the trump suit – there is nothing you can do about that! Bad luck!

I assigned it to the aging process. I'm 73. If only I was 10 again (back in the days when I could count). It was about 1:30pm. I didn't fall asleep. (I generally do not fall asleep until around 2:30pm.) My partner is very sympathetic. Everyone at the table feels sorry for me – very comforting! I still have 2 ½ hours yet to play. I will regret this error for most of that time.

I need to just "put it behind me". Yeah, Right.

Baring my soul about my failures, might be a good lead-in to a bridge principle that I created myself: **The Principle of Restricted Choice**. It goes something like this:

When you start playing bridge you find a partner and get going on it. Over time you find other partners for different days, for tournaments and for special events. You build a cadre of partners that you can call on to play with you. After you have played together for a while and have made a few of the gaffes like I described a moment ago, this base of partners shrinks.

Now you are hearing: "Fridays don't work for me anymore" or "I need exposure to other players to broaden my game", etc. You get the picture, right? You now have a smaller number of people to play with. This is known as **The Principle of Restricted Choice**.

Now, whenever someone asks you to play with them, you take it! Your choices are limited (restricted). You are now at a new plateau in your bridge career. You hear yourself repeatedly telling other people that "Master points mean nothing to me, I just play to have fun." That word just keeps popping up. FUN! And it only cost me \$6. What more could you want?

There is another version of **The Principle of Restricted Choice**. It is not as valuable as my version, but it is worth discussing. It may add to your FUN sometime down the road

The Principle of Restricted Choice (definition I found on the net):

"The principle of restricted choice is an application of [Bayes Law](#). Increases and decreases in the probabilities of original lies of the opposing cards, as the play of the hand proceeds, are examples of [Bayesian updating](#) (as evidence accumulates). The play of a card which may have been selected as a choice of equal plays increases the chance that the player started with a holding in which his choice was restricted." Note that restricted choice is always introduced in terms of two touching cards – consecutive ranks in the same suit, such as QJ or KQ – [where equivalence is manifest](#)."

I hope you caught that part about "**Manifest Equivalence**". For the geeks at the club (you know who you are) this is the kind of phrase that brings a smile to their faces. Your kind of language. Bring it on! We are getting to "adults only" conventions. Next, we can talk about Kokish Relays, Ghestem, Double-Barreled Stayman or (my favorite) The Yellow Rose of Texas.

For the "lesser geeks" at the club that found the above definition to be a bit intimidating, let's use [one example](#) to give you a basic understanding of the **Principle of Restricted Choice**.

North (dummy)

♠ K T 3 2

South (you)

♠ A 8 7 5 4

Your plan is to play ♠AK and hope for a 2-2 split.

You lead ♠A, LHO plays small, 2♠ from dummy, [RHO drops the ♠Q](#).

Now, did RHO play the ♠Q because it was singleton or does RHO have the ♠QJ and he is trying to fool you? Should you play the ♠K and hope East started with ♠QJ doubleton? Or, should you finesse dummy's 10, playing for West to have started with Jack 3rd. The **Principle of [restricted choice](#)** says you should finesse. Don't play for the drop. Assume that RHO was "restricted" and had to play the Queen.

Two times out of three, the honor that dropped from East will be a singleton. Only one time in three will it be from queen-jack doubleton (per Larry Cohen).

Cheers.

Arne Fockler

Geek ...solving problems you didn't know you had, in ways you can't understand.

Have you ever played a hand where everything is against you? All the finesses lose, none of the suits break, Singleton kings are getting tricks for the opponents. You are not showing any maturity and are pouting and complaining. Making the contract? Not gonna happen. Screw it. I give up, just get it over with. Next hand.

Been there? I have. Don't go there anymore. It's a bad place. Momma told you to stay away from these kinds of places.

Everybody played the same hand, but you had "bad luck" (maybe it's been that way for you your entire life?) We need to change how we react to "bad luck". This is one of those lemon/lemonade things. This could be your big chance. If you get rid of the pout you might come out of this OK.

Other pairs are running into the same problems. If you can muster up a little more maturity, you might be able to play for only down-1. That could be a winner! Have you ever noticed that some club members seem to be amused by bad cards and bad suit splits? They shrug and smile. Their smile seems to say, "what an unusual break". What it really says is "what a break!" They know if they play the situation well from here on out, they can score big. Learn from them. Now, when the suit breaks 5-1, don't get down. Smile. Shrug it off. This is a good time for a fist pump. A bad split is just what you were hoping for.

Save your down times for the places where you could have made the contract but went down two. The finesse worked but you used a little too much intellect and didn't take it. Just the average players take finesses. You're thinking that the double squeeze is the safer route. Plus, it's flashier and it's worth the price of admission (\$6) to see the looks on the opponents faces after you have completed this coup. Where can you get this kind of enjoyment for only \$6?

Back to the down-2 dilemma. The big plan didn't work. Don't rationalize that you still had a good plan, but something went wrong in the implementation. No. This is not the time for that. This is the time to cuss (under your breath); to roll your eyes; to slap your forehead; to place (bang) your head on the table. The whole table knows you botched this. Act like you know it too. Confession is good for the soul. You'll feel better. The table may be stressed with your behavior, but it is you we are worried about.

Simply summarized:

- Bad splits → fist pump
- Bad play → head bump

Just a guess, but this advice is probably not sanctioned by the club.

Arne Fockler

At CHAT, I still see us taking our winners too early. Are you really in danger of losing those winners? If so, take them now. If not, focus on setting up tricks and getting rid of your losers early.

Giving up control to the opponents at the right time is a powerful skill that can improve your game. Practically every hand you play has tricks that you must lose. You have some discretion as to when you give the trick(s) up. It is a decision you make either wittingly or not. Wittingly is better.

You are playing in a 3NT contract. You have a 7-card heart suit (♥Qxxx in your hand and ♥AKx on the board). You are praying for a 3:3 split (about a 36% possibility). So, about 2 out of 3 times your prayer will go unanswered. God created this 36% chance, so prayers might not help anyway. You might try hoping for the 3-3 split. Better yet, just take what you get and shut-up.

If the suit breaks 3:3, you can be happy with your “average” score. Everybody is having “good luck” today. How nice. Quite dull, but nice. It is very likely (better than 98% of the time) that the suit is going to break the same way for the other pairs in the room. (Trust me. I have this percentage thing figured out.)

I told you last month to look forward to these unfavorable splits. This is what you want. Smile when this happens. Smiling after a bad break is unnerving to some opponents (that’s a good thing). It gives you an edge over the pairs at other tables that are grumbling (not smiling) about their “bad luck”.

When the hearts break 4:2 (about ½ the time), the opponent gets a mixed bag. The ♥J has been established, but declarer gets to decide when to “throw you in” and let you have it. “Let you have it” is exactly what declarer has in mind.

Clearing out another suit before the throw-in is common technique. This leaves the opponent with only two suits to return. You know which opponent has the J♥. Set it up to make it difficult for that opponent to find a safe lead to return. Sometimes it is a “lock”. You are pulling off a true endplay. The opponent has no good lead and must give you a trick (or more).

Sometimes the throw-in is not a guarantee. But, even in those cases you are giving the opponent a chance to make a mistake. Make them find the right card to return. The defender might give you a free finesse, or a ruff and a sluff or they might break a suit that helps you. Have you ever been put in a situation and had difficulty coming up with the right card to return? Happens all the time.

I drew up an example of the timing of a “throw in”. (couldn’t find just what I wanted on our website)

	South	West	North	East
Bidding:	1♣ 1NT	1♦ P	DBL 3NT	P passed out

Dummy ♠9843 ♥AK3 ♦A52 ♣Q92	
♠AQ ♥J976 ♦QJ974 ♣86	♠JT762 ♥T4 ♦86 ♣K754
Declarer (you) ♠K5 ♥Q852 ♦KT3 ♣AJT3	

You are declarer. The opening lead is the ♦Q. Pause for a moment. What do you see? Looks like 8 tricks ought to be easy (3 hearts, 2 diamonds, 3 clubs). You have 26 points; the 1♦ overcall makes LHO a favorite to hold the ♠A (not good). Better keep East out of the lead.

Take the ♦Q with the Ace. Lead the clubs. You pick up all 4 club tricks. RHO had the ♣K. This makes it a near certainty that LHO has the ♠A.

Nine Tricks are in the bag now (4 clubs, two diamonds and 3 hearts). If hearts divide 3-3 you get 10 tricks.

So, you lead the Ace, King and Queen of hearts hoping (not praying) for a 3-3 split. Do you see why the hearts cannot split 3-3? Think about it.

It has nothing to do with percentages. The hearts cannot be 3-3 because that would screw up my example! Duh!

Dummy ♠9843 ♥ ♦5 ♣	
♠AQ ♥J ♦J9 ♣	♠JT7 ♥ ♦86 ♣
Declarer (you) ♠K5 ♥5 ♦KT ♣	

East shows out on the 3rd heart. The Jack doesn't fall. (nonchalant smile now)

◀ Here is what we have with 5 cards yet to play:

Now is the time to give LHO his precious ♥J. When LHO gets in, all the hearts and clubs have been played. LHO must return a spade or a diamond. Either return gives you a trick. You make 4NT. It would have been easy to just lead towards the ♠K which is doomed to fail.

On a good day this will give you an "Above" score. If it doesn't, then stop all this bothersome and irritating smiling. JUST BE YOURSELF. Join in with your friends and do some serious grumbling and whining.

Arne Fockler