

My partner and I had a memorable hand that we played recently. After a few bids, he bid 4♣. I did not take it as Gerber. We ended up in 7NT (very exciting). We were missing one Ace (curbs the excitement a bit). Left Hand Opponent (LHO) does not find the right suit and I make 7NT (the excitement is back). This opponent does not appreciate being FIXED and gives me “the look” that I so hate (ruining the excitement for me).

There is a common term for screwing up and benefitting from your mistake (at the expense of your opponents). **FIXED!** Fixed is a pretty harsh word that may leave you with unpleasant imagery. I suspect that is why it was chosen.

A common FIX that I have received (and given) few times is getting to a 2NT contract when the entire field bids 3NT (the right bid) and then 3NT does not make. I received this “blackbird” a few weeks ago. It wasn’t easy, but I did not respond with “the look”. It was hard, but I did it.

Stuff happens! Maybe it all works out in the big scheme of things? This incident was certainly unintentional. Nobody feels good about it. Move on!

As I said at the beginning, my partner and I were not on the same page as far as when the 4♣ bid means Gerber. I thought I would tell you what went wrong and what we will do differently next time.

I searched the bridge bulletin archives and I found that Marty Bergen wrote a five-part series on the Gerber convention (a couple of years ago). One article every month for 5 months! After reading them I sense that he really is not a fan of Gerber. He does feel it has a place in his game, but he really uses it sparingly. He says that Gerber works best when partner has a distributional hand and Aces is all that matters.

I can’t go through all that analysis. Here is how we use 4♣:

1. 1NT- pass - 4♣ Gerber
2. 2NT - pass - 4♣ Gerber
3. 1♦ - pass – 1♣
2NT - pass – 4♣ Gerber
4. 3NT - pass – 4♣ (Stayman)

Meaning of responses to 4♣ bid:

- 4♦ : 0 or 4 Aces
- 4♥ : 1 Ace
- 4♠ : 2 Aces
- 4NT : 3 Aces

Partnership agreement is the message here. I would not bet that we have the very best way to use Gerber. But having my partner and I in synch is probably more important than the actual usage.

Keep on the same page with your partner.

It would be interesting to see how many variations we have at the club. Some simply say that anytime 4♣ is bid and clubs has not been bid before, it means Gerber. Others don't feel that you need a NT beginning sequence to use Gerber. For others, 4♣ over a 3NT opener is Gerber - some prefer to play it as Stayman.

Bergen's explanations are easy to understand. It just takes 5 articles to make it simple! Once you understand the convention and when it should be used, it is simple.

Mike Lawrence does the same. I read Mike Lawrence's advice a lot. His analysis is very straightforward. He looks at the bidding and the opening lead and draws 5 or 6 valuable conclusions about what the lead tells us (by what people have bid AND by what people have not bid). He makes simple inferences on where the key cards are and where the points are. Putting that all together in the 10-15 seconds you have before playing your first card and then building on it throughout the play of the hand is the trick. It isn't simple for me, but it is getting simpler as I work on it.

NET: You really have to work hard to add simplicity to your game.

Onward!

Arne