

### Points, Schmointz

One of the new books just acquired by the Club is "More points, schmoints" by Marty Bergen. The book is a sequel to his 1996 "Points, schmoints" which won the 1996 bridge book of the year award. Both books are based on the premise that the point count method of hand evaluation can be wildly inaccurate. In a series of entertainingly written chapters, Bergen offers tip after tip for improving your hand evaluation methods. One of my favourites is the "Rule of 20". Unsure about whether to open a marginal hand? Just add your HCP to the lengths of your two longest suits. If you get 20 or more, bid! Although Bergen is writing largely with American readers and American bidding in mind the book also contains tips for the later parts of the auction that Acol players will enjoy. Highly recommended.

### From the early years of the club

Mabel Porteous gave me this story from the club's early years. A beginning husband and wife were playing at the club (not with each other) when the wife called out to her husband "I want to go home. I can't sort my shovels from my spades".

### Items for the Newsletter

I'd like some more gossip from the club's early years, please. Send it to [mike@cs.otago.ac.nz](mailto:mike@cs.otago.ac.nz)

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## Taieri Bridge Club

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### It takes all sorts

New Zealand is the fourth country where I've been a member of a bridge club and I've been struck by the differences. I remember playing in Canada in the 1980s when one of my partners returned from a trip to England where he had played as a guest in a bridge club there. He was highly amused by the practice of having an interval in which tea and biscuits were consumed! In Canada it is rare to own one's own premises so the clubs rent rooms by the hour - they have a vested interest in getting the game over in short order and literally can't afford a tea break. In the 1990s I played in a very conservative Scottish club. The club rooms had a bar but ladies were not allowed to approach it - they had to rely on a kindly gentleman to conduct their trade with the barman! In that club we had always to wait until the next week for the results - none of those new-fangled computers! At that strange Taieri club... but I've run out of room!

### The rocky interlude

Gordon Rhode was feeling rather miserable. His friend Frieda Mayer had cancelled their dinner date on the grounds that Gordon had not been sufficiently appreciative of Frieda's play. Things had been going quite well until then, and Gordon had developed a fondness for Frieda that had quite surprised him. He resolved to be more appreciative of Frieda's talents (the bridge ones). He soon had an opportunity when he was dummy and Frieda was declarer (West) in 3NT with the ♠4 lead

♠ A Q T 2	♠ 7 6 5
♥ K Q 5	♥ J 3 2
♦ A Q 9 8 7 6	♦ J T 2
♣ void	♣ A 8 7 6

Somewhat to his surprise, when South played ♠9, Frieda played ♠A! But it seemed to work out well. Frieda played a small diamond losing to North who, naturally, continued with ♠K and another spade. Frieda then knocked out ♥A and was home with three spade tricks, 5 diamonds and one heart. Gordon was full of genuine admiration. "That was brilliant, Frieda" he enthused. "If you had won the opening lead cheaply, it would have been easy for North to find the club switch when winning the ♦K". Frieda gave him a warm smile (not confessing she had pulled the wrong card). "Oh, Gordon, would you like to come to dinner on Saturday?"

### Humour

These items were sent to me by club members.

1. At a Creative Writing School conducted by Oxford University, students were asked to write a short story based on four themes: Religion, Royalty, Sex, Mystery. The top story was: "My God", cried the Queen, "I'm pregnant. I wonder who dunnit?"
2. A housemaid was applying for a new position, and when asked why she left her last position she replied: Yes sir, they payed good wages, but it was the strangest place I ever worked for. They played a game called Bridge and last night a lot of folks were there. As I was about to bring in the refreshments, I heard a man say, "Lay down and let's see what you've got". Another man says, "I got the strength but no length..". And another man says to a lady: "Take your hands off my trick". I pretty near dropped dead just then, when a lady answered: "You forced me. You jumped me twice when you didn't have the strength for a raise." Another lady was talking about protecting her honour, and two other ladies were talking and saying: "Now it's time for me to play with your husband and you can play with mine." The last straw was one of them saying "I guess we'll go home soon; this is my last rubber".

### Captain of the Auction

Bidding to the right contract isn't always easy even when those pesky opponents are silent. In Acol, when we open one of a suit and our partner bids at the one level also, our combined assets may range from between about 20 HCP (a low part score if you're lucky) to about 35 HCP (close to a grand slam). How should the bidding proceed in the face of such uncertainty?

When one member of the partnership has made a bid that limits their strength they have implicitly delegated much of the responsibility for the final contract to their partner. Their partner becomes *Captain of the Auction*. Good players strive to make a limit bid as early as possible in the auction. The most difficult auctions are those where neither partner has yielded captaincy within their first two bids. For example, if the bidding starts

2♣ - 2♥ - 3♦ - 3♠

you're already rather high and still don't know where you're heading!

Examples of limit bids in Acol are: most bids in no trumps (which generally say to within a point or two how strong you are), jump raises by responder (11 - 12 HCP with support), and any pre-emptive bid. So, if your partner has made a limit bid, be a wise captain. And, if you have the chance to make a limit bid, seize it gladly and trust your partner.

### Understanding Precision

No, I don't intend to teach you the Precision Bidding System in just one page. Even if you never intend to play Precision it is worth knowing just a little about it so that you are not over-awed playing against Precision players. Particularly, a smattering of knowledge of their opening bids is most useful.

Bid	Meaning	What should you do
1♣	16+ HCP	Don't be intimidated! Overcall with a good suit.
1♦	11-15 HCP	Treat it like an Acol short club.
1♥ or 1♠	11-15 HCP at least 5 cards in ♥ or ♠r	Pretend they are playing Acol and note they are not too strong.
1NT	13-15 HCP	Pretend they are playing Acol.
2♣	11-15 HCP 6 clubs or 5 clubs with a 4 card major	Overcall with a good suit.

Finally, many Precision bids have to be alerted. Don't be shy of asking for the full explanation you are entitled to.

## When to cover

As a defender we often see declarer play an honour and have to decide whether to cover it. "Cover an honour with an honour" goes the oft repeated adage and, indeed this is often the right thing to do. But it is important to understand the reason for covering because sometimes it is an error to cover. Let's have a look at some examples.

1. Spades are trumps and the opponents have bid 1♠ - 3♠ - 4♠. You hold ♠K 2, dummy on your left holds ♠A 8 2, declarer plays ♠Q. Do you cover? Yes, certainly. It is possible that partner has J x or T 9 x in which case you promote a trump trick. Could it ever be wrong to cover? It is just possible that declarer has eight or nine spades and is intending to play the Ace if you don't cover; but that is extremely unlikely (if the bidding had been an opening 4♠ bid, it would be a different matter). The reason that we cover is *to promote a trick in partner's hand or our hand*. So, in this hand we would also cover if declarer had led the J rather than the Q; declarer may be trying to fool us into thinking that partner has the Q but then covering will not cost; and, if partner has T 9 x, covering is the only way to guarantee a trick.

2. What about this? Same bidding, same spade

holding in dummy. But this time you hold K 4 3 2 when the Q is led by declarer. Do not cover! You cannot possibly promote a trick for your partner since she can have no more than a singleton trump (you can deduce this from the bidding and your own trump holding). By not covering you ensure a trick for your ♠K eventually.

3. Here's another one. You hold ♠K T 8 7 with dummy again on your left holding ♠A Q 4 3 and declarer leads the Jack of spades. You must cover to ensure two spade tricks (the King forces the Ace; subsequently you cover the ♠9 to force the Queen and then your ♠8, 7 are winners). Was that too elementary? My partner at the Otago Bridge Club last month slipped up by not covering.

It's hard to lay down simple rules. Often you need to think it out. The majority of times it will be right to cover and that leads me to a useful bridge principle that can be used when you are declarer. Because many players cover automatically a declarer can reason "If she doesn't cover, she hasn't got it".

Suppose, as declarer you hold ♠K J T 9 with dummy holding ♠A 4 3 2. Lead the Jack! If your left hand opponent fails to play the Queen, go up with the Ace and then finesse against your right hand opponent.