

ChRONicles of Cardplay

District 6 TableTALK – October-November 2009

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A “Quickie” Convention Card

I attend many bridge tournaments and *prefer* to go without a partner for at least some of the days. I find picking up people at the partnership desk interesting and exciting. A bonus is that we often do quite well together. I've finished 1st or 2nd with people I've never seen before or since. Interestingly, this is a common phenomenon. The reasons are unclear, but the theories abound. My belief is that you just sit in your seat and play bridge -- no fancy bids or plays. Both of you bear down just a little more because you don't want to embarrass yourselves. And, importantly, you trust your partner implicitly because you have no history with them. Mistakes are blamed on “It's a new partnership” rather than “you're a moron!”

That said, we almost always have at least one bidding disaster, usually because we're in a hurry and don't have the time to go over a convention card thoroughly. I've discovered however, that MOST of the disasters revolve around a relatively few number of bidding conventions. So, here's the “quickie” list. **IF** you don't have time to go over the card completely, **AT LEAST** try to discuss and agree on the following items. You can run this list in less than five minutes. I've tried to list the items in the order of most to least problematic. If you only have a few minutes, start at the beginning and get as far as you can.

Note that some conventions have multiple variants. For example, there are several forms of Bergen Raises and several forms of Drury. It's not good enough to just ask “Do you play Drury?” You must delve a little deeper and ask a couple more questions.

Occasionally you don't have time to talk about even these few items. So, the answers below are coded: **undiscussed**, I treat the **Bolded** answers as the “standard” agreement. If the bid comes up at the table and you didn't discuss it in advance, assume the **Bolded** item as your best guess. Then discuss and clarify it after the hand is over or between rounds (NOT *during* the hand!).

- Do you play 2-over-1 or **Standard American**? If you have just one minute, you should ask this question. Most newer players play Standard American whereas more experienced players typically play 2-over-1.
- Do you play **standard defensive signals**, upside down, odd/even, or Lavinthal? You'll be on defense for at least half of the hands. Even though this is the last item on the convention card, it should be one of the **First** items you discuss with a new partner. People play all sorts of defensive signaling systems. When I have a disagreement, I try to get a new partner to simply play **Standard** signals. Also ask if they play **Ace from Ace-King** and whether they play that the lead of a Jack denies any higher honor in the suit or if they play **Standard Honor Leads**.
- Is a 1NT response to a 1-of-a-major opening bid forcing for one round? **Yes** or No? Another tricky one to have to guess at the table. While a 1NT bid by responder is often played forcing by players playing 2-over-1, many Standard American players also play 1NT forcing over 1-of-a-major opening bid.
- Which version of ace/key card asking do you use? **Blackwood**? RKC? 1430? When is 4♣ Gerber (**over 1st and last NT**)? This is another item that's at the end of the card but that should be discussed early.
- What does a 2♦ response to a 2♣ opener mean (**Waiting**? Negative? Controls? Steps?) What do you need to respond with 2♥ or 2♠ over a 2♣ opener (**5 cards with 2 of the top 3 honors**)? Is 2♥ an immediate double negative?
- How do you play an opening 2♦ bid? **Weak**? Flannery? Mini-Roman? Multi??
- What do we play over their opening 1NT? **Natural**? Cappelletti? DONT? If this comes up at the table without discussion, it's probably best to just pass partner's bid with no forward going values. If partner doubles their 1NT opening bid, bid 2♣. Who knows what's going on?
- Are “Systems On” after we overcall 1NT? **Yes** or No? After we double their 1NT (Yes or No)? Over a balancing 4th seat 1NT (Yes or No)?

- What do you do when they interfere over our 1NT opening bid? **Natural**? Stolen bid? Lebensohl? Negative doubles? Systems on over double and 2♣?
- What's your preemptive style? Traditional? Anything goes? **Varies based on vulnerability?**
- What does a response of 3-of-a-major to 1-of-a-major opening bid mean? Game forcing, Weak or **Limit Raise (10-12) with 4 pieces?**
- Is a 2♣ opener **100% forcing to game**, or can I pass if you rebid 3 of a major? Of course, a 2NT rebid by the 2♣ opener is always passable. When in doubt, take another bid. Better to go down one than miss a game. After all, that stray Queen may be all that partner needs.
- Do you lead fourth best, or third and fifth? Most people lead **fourth best**, but some lead third and fifth.
- What's your opening 1NT range? **15-17?** 16-18? 12-14? 10-12? Social bridge players often play the 16-18 HCP range, but the vast majority of duplicate players now play 15-17.
- Over a 1NT opening bid, do you play 2-suit transfers, 4-suit transfers or 2♠ relay to clubs, pass or correct? A better way to ask this question is "What do 2♠ and 2NT bids in response to a 1NT opening bid mean?" Newer players often play that **2NT is invitational**. Very new players might not even play transfers. Undiscussed, **2♠ is a relay to 3♣, followed by responder's pass or correction to 3♦.**
- Do you play Texas transfers? In other words, after you open 1 or 2NT, is a jump bid by responder to 4♥ to play? Or is it a transfer to 4♠? A newer player might treat the 4♥ bid as natural, but without prior agreement, you should "accept the transfer" and bid 4♠. You might end up playing 5♥, but at least you'll have a real trump suit!
- Do you play Smolen? Yes or **No**? If they say "What's Smolen?" move on to the next question!
- Do you play Bergen Raises? Yes or **No**? If Yes, which form? **Standard?** Reverse? Are Bergen raises **on over doubles?** On or **Off** in competition? On or **Off** over third and fourth seat openers?
- Do you play inverted minors? Yes or **No**? Are they On or **Off** in competition?
- Do you play weak or **strong jump shifts?** If weak, always, or just in competition? What is a jump bid in the other minor over one-of-a-minor?
- Do you play Drury, Yes or **No**? If Yes, which form? **Original?** Reverse? Two-way? **On** or **Off** over 4th seat openers or do you always promise a full opener in fourth seat?
- Do you play fourth suit forcing? **To game** or just one round?
- Do you play Support Doubles and Redoubles? (Yes or **No**)
- What do you play over their 1NT opening bid? (**Natural**, Cappelletti, DONT, MeckWell)?

Here are a few more generic tips:

- I'll offer an astute piece of advice from Jerry Helms -- ASBAF -- "All Strange Bids Are Forcing!" When in doubt about whether a bid is natural or artificial, you'll get better results more often when you bid again rather than pass. Often partner's next bid will clarify the issue. At worst, you'll be one level higher, but at least you won't be playing in a 3-2 fit!
- Don't make quick "reflexive" bids. Take an extra few moments to think about what you discussed and the suggestions in this article. Select the bid that's most likely to generate a good result.
- Follow the KISS rule -- Keep It Simple, Stupid. When in doubt as to how you both play a convention, it's better Not to Play it at All. Simplifying reduces stress on both parties.

Remember, it's only one hand. If you have a disaster, it actually may turn out OK. And you can still win with a zero or two.