

District 16 Newsletter for Future Life Masters

Volume 10 Issue 1 - January 2024



From the Editor

I hope that your 2024 is off to a good start as you continue your bridge journey and that you are finding these newsletter articles helpful.

With tournament season underway, this issue features articles by Karen Walker regarding strategy differences to consider depending on whether competing in a pairs or team game.

Speaking of tournaments, our highlighted story comes from a player who fondly recalls an experience he and his wife had, back in 2009 when he first met Betty Starzec (our current District 16 President) at the bridge table.

Over time, we all tend to have at least one bridge story we'll always treasure, and I'd love to consider publishing yours.

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Upcoming Intermediate/Newcomer (IN) Tournaments

IN Sectionals

Feb 3-4	Austin Winter NLM	Flyer: Click Here
Feb 8-11	BCOH 499er Tournament	Flyer: Click Here
Feb 29-Mar 2	Bridge Academy West Houston 499er	Info: Click Here

Regionals (with Lots of IN and Gold Rush Opportunities)
Jan 22-28 Houston Lone Star Regional

Flyer: [Click Here](#)

Upcoming Tournaments In General

Upcoming Tournament Info within our region:

For District 16, [click here](#).

For District 15, [click here](#).

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Weekly Online Game for 0-50 Players

District 16 provides a 12-board game on BBO just for players having 0-50 masterpoints for \$4.50 on Monday afternoons at 4:00. A director (Ken, Consie or Kim) and assistants will be on hand to offer guidance during the game.

For more information, check out our Frequently Asked Questions [D16 0-50 Game Frequently Asked Questions](#) or email Beginner20Bridge@gmail.com.



Highlighted IN Story - Ken MacMorran (Unit 207)



My wife, Sharon, and I were rookies playing in one of our first tournaments. We were about ready to play in the 299er game that Scott Humphrey, a fairly new ACBL director at the time, was directing.

Our friends Steve and Judy Hoffman from San Antonio came into the room and dragged us out to play in the big kid's Swiss team game. Sharon and I sat down at the table and met Betty Starzec for the first time. As the start time approached, I asked if her partner was going to show up. She told me not to worry.

Exactly at start time, she started waving at her partner as he made his entrance. Eddie Wold came across the room and we started playing. I was too naive to be intimidated because I had never heard of either of the two. We lost, of course, by 3imps. I was distraught. Judy came over saying we did great, we survived. When the game was over, we even got a scratchy MP award in Scott's words.

After that experience, we realized we might not win, but we could place or show even in the big leagues.

Thank you, Betty and Eddie, for being nice to us rookies.

Editor's note: Betty Starzec is our current District 16 President and has over 9,400 masterpoints. Eddie Wold is a Grand Life Master and has over 79,750 masterpoints. The MacMorrans each have over 1,650 masterpoints. Their photo was taken by their 13-year-old granddaughter, Lauren Ross.

Better Bridge Habits

This month's tip is to take advantage of the educational opportunities offered during the tournaments you attend. The free speaker series offered are well worth checking out. Topics vary daily.

The speaker line-up at this month's Lone Star Regional in Houston will include Betty Starzec, Robert Todd, Jacob Morgan, Bob Morris, Gary King, and one more pleasant surprise, to be announced.

Eddie Kantar's Tip

Two tidbits follow from Eddie Kantar's *Bridge for Dummies*

"You're moving up in the world when you enter a regional event. Regional tournaments usually take place in a classy hotel or a convention center (the extra space is necessary because of the larger number of participants). Regionals offer the players an opportunity to win a substantial number of gold and red points, awards that are necessary to achieve the rank of Life Master. Experts often come out of the woodwork from other states to play in regional tournaments. Masterpoints flow like champagne at these events."

"The greatest bridge stories of all come from pairings at the partnership desk.
Don't be afraid to try it."

www.kantarbridge.com

Matchpoint Strategy

Matchpoint (Pairs Game) Strategy

The Bidding:

Go for the big reward. Duplicate pairs tend to bid "close" games and slams, so don't settle for a safe partscore if you think there's a fair chance (60 percent or better) that you can make game.

But when in doubt, settle for the sure thing. It's important to get plus scores at matchpoints. If you aren't sure of your fit or partner's strength, don't push too hard. If the opponents have outbid you, consider taking a sure penalty instead of bidding higher to a contract you might not make.

Choose the highest-scoring game. For game contracts, you should be most eager to play 4H or 4S, willing to play 3NT and reluctant to play 5C or 5D. If you have game values and fit in clubs or diamonds, consider playing 3NT instead.

Choose the safest partscore. When you have minimum high-card strength, choose the safety of a trump suit. A major-suit is still best, but if you're deciding between a notrump and a minor-suit partscore, play the suit contract if you have a fit.

Overcall freely. At the one-level, don't be afraid to make light, lead-directing overcalls (as few as 8 or 9 points if you have a good suit), especially if you're not vulnerable and your opponent opens a minor. If you have to go to the two-level to bid your suit, though, be cautious. For a two-level overcall, you should have good high-card strength (11-12+ points) and a very good suit (a strong 5-carder or, better, a 6+-card suit). A **vulnerable** two-level overcall should be even stronger.

Raise partner's suit freely. Even if you're light in high-card points, stretch to raise partner if you have a fit for his suit, especially in competitive auctions.

Sacrifice more often. If you have a good fit, sacrifice freely if your opponents are vulnerable and you are not. But be **very** conservative about sacrificing when you're vulnerable.

Don't "sell out" too low. If the opponents stop at a low level, you don't have to have a strong hand to balance back into the auction. The best situations for competing are when:

- (1) You're not vulnerable
- (2) The opponents have stopped in 1 or 2 of a suit contract (not 1NT or 2NT)
- (3) You're short in the opponent's trump suit.

Double more partscores. If you bid to a partscore you think you could have made, but your opponents bid over it, a double is sometimes necessary for you to get even an average score. (Be very careful in choosing when to use this tip!)

Use a simplified form of the "Law of Total Tricks (Trumps)" for competitive decisions. In partscore situations -- those where you've found a fit but wanted to stop below game -- don't let the opponents push you to the three-level unless you have at least a 9-card trump fit.

The Play:

Make "normal" opening leads. Don't try for a "top" by choosing an unusual lead. Against most contracts, choose a safe, non-deceptive opening lead.

Look for overtricks. Unlike in rubber bridge, it's sometimes right to make a fairly risky play trying for the overtrick -- especially when you're in a "normal" contract that you think will be bid by other pairs.

Play it safe if you're in an unusual contract. Go for the sure plus score if you're playing or defending a contract that you think probably won't be bid at most tables.

In General:

Play with the "field". When in doubt about what to bid or play, try to guess what might be happening at other tables and go for a similar result.

Consider using 15-17 points as the range for your opening 1NT bids. A 1NT opening often gives you a bidding advantage because your responses are so well defined, and your opponents will find it more difficult to enter your auction. Most duplicate players use the 15-17 range (instead of 16-18) because it allows them to open more hands with 1NT. If you use this range, responder will need to adjust his point requirements up by 1 point. You should also change your 2NT opening range to 20-

21 or 20-22 points.

<http://kwbridge.com>

IMP Strategy

IMP (Team Game) Strategy

IMP (International Match Point) scoring is used in Swiss team and knockout team events. Unlike matchpoint scoring (where your score on a board is compared with results from several other tables), IMP scoring compares your result to just one other table (the team you're playing against).

The scoring of the result of each board is the same as in other events, but the difference between your result and the result from your team-mates table is converted to IMPs. This conversion diminishes the impact of very large scoring differences **and** very small ones (overtricks, for example). The scoring table is [here](#). IMP scoring is sometimes used in pair events, too. Called "IMP Pairs", it's a pair movement that uses the same scoring method as IMP team matches. The difference is that instead of comparing your result to that from one other table, it's compared to the average score from all other tables.

In general, your strategy when playing IMPs is similar to that used in rubber bridge. It's important to avoid large minus scores, so you'll usually want to be a bit more conservative in the bidding. In the play, your goal is to get a plus score, without being too concerned about overtricks. Here are some tips on bidding and play strategy:

The Bidding:

Games: Bid the **safest** game. At matchpoints, you may get a markedly better score for playing in notrump instead of a major, or in a major instead of a minor. IMP scoring, however, neutralizes the differences between these contracts. Your best strategy is to choose your best (longest) trump fit and bid the game that's most likely to make -- even if it's 5C instead of 3NT.

If you're not vulnerable, don't stretch too far to bid a close game -- the odds favor bidding only those games that you are reasonably sure will make.

If you're vulnerable, it pays to be a little more optimistic when considering a thin game. The IMP odds (your potential gain if the contract makes) favor bidding any game that has even a 40% chance of making.

Partscores: Look for the **safest** partscore. Don't worry about searching for a few extra points by playing in notrump instead of a minor.

Overcalls: Matchpoint players often make light overcalls, but it pays to beef up your overcalls at IMPs. A vulnerable overcall, even at the 1-level, should promise a fairly good suit or a good hand (or both). If your overcall is at the 2-level, you need a strong suit (usually 6 cards) and the playing strength of a full opening bid.

Competing and balancing: Don't be too bold. Unless you have a good suit and good hand, let the opponents play in their low-level contracts, especially if you're vulnerable. Trump length is more important than overall strength, so don't let the opponents push you to the 3-level unless you have a 9-card trump fit.

Doubles: There's little to gain -- and much to lose -- by making a close penalty double, especially of a partscore. Don't make a penalty double unless you're reasonably sure the contract is going down **at least two tricks**. If the opponents sacrifice against your game and you're in doubt about whether to bid higher, double and take your sure plus score.

Sacrifices: If you want to take a non-vulnerable sacrifice over your opponent's vulnerable game, you should be reasonably sure that you won't go down more than two (perhaps three) tricks. If you're vulnerable, you should be virtually certain that you won't go down more than one (perhaps two) tricks. Anything more is "too close for comfort" in team play, and won't gain you many IMPs. When in doubt, let opponents play their contract and hope you can beat it.

The Play:

Overtricks: When you're declarer, don't risk your contract trying to make an extra trick. Always choose the safest line of play to make your contract, even if it might cost you an overtrick or two. Use [safety plays](#) to protect against bad breaks of the opponents' cards.

Opening leads: Be cautious about trying for a swing with an unusual opening lead. It's usually best to make your "normal" lead -- the same one you think your opponent will make when the board is played at your team-mates' table. Save your brilliant defensive plays for later in the hand, when you have more information.

Defense: Be optimistic and fairly aggressive when you're defending the opponents' contracts. If there's a layout of the cards that will set the contract, choose your leads and plays to cater to that possibility, even if it means you may give up one or more overtricks if you're wrong.

<http://kwbridge.com>

Claims and Concessions (Part 1)

There sometimes comes a point during a hand where we, as declarer, are certain we have the rest of the tricks. Perhaps we are in a notrump contract, and we are on lead holding four aces. Or we are playing a trump contract and the only cards left in our hand are the high trumps. The reverse can also be true: as defender, we may know that our side is not taking any more tricks.

When the outcome is known, we may want to end the current hand without playing out the tricks we know the declarer is going to take. By curtailing this current hand, we may gain an extra minute or two for the next hand, which might require more thought.

Laws 68 – 71 govern claims and concessions. We are going to look at the main points of Law 68, Claim or Concession of Tricks this month and next month we will look at Laws 69 – 71. This discussion is **not** exhaustive. The full text of each law can be found by clicking here:

Law 68: Claim or Concession of Tricks

Law 68A. Claim Defined

Any statement by declarer or a defender to the effect that a side will win a specific number of tricks is a claim of those tricks. A player also claims when he suggests that play be curtailed, or when he shows his cards...

Law 68 B. Concession Defined

1. Any statement by declarer or a defender to the effect that a side will lose a specific number of tricks is a concession of those tricks; a claim of some number of tricks is a concession of the remainder, if any. player concedes all the remaining tricks when he abandons his hand. Regardless of B1, if a defender attempts to concede one or more tricks and his partner immediately objects; neither a concession nor a claim has occurred. ...

Law 69 C. Clarification Required

A claim should be accompanied at once by a clear statement of the line of play or defense through which the claimer proposes to win the tricks claimed, including the order in which the cards will be played. The player making the claim or concession faces his hand.

Law 69 C. Suspension of Play

After any claim or concession, play is suspended. ... (The there are circumstances, not discussed here, under which play can be resumed.)

How does claiming work in practice? The preferred way to claim is to state that we will take a certain number of the remaining tricks and to immediately state how we will play the cards, including what cards we will play from dummy. If we are in a trump contract and there is still a trump in an opponent's hand, we should acknowledge this and ensure that we are very clear about how we are going to draw it.

Example 1

The contract is 3NT and the lead is in the dummy. Dummy has three small spades and one small heart. We (declarer) hold the ♥A and the ♣ A K Q. Our claim statement would be something like, "I am claiming four more tricks. I will lead the small heart to my hand and then play clubs from the top."

Example 2

The contract is 4♠ and the lead is in dummy. In our hand, we hold the ♠10 9 4 and the ♥A. The dummy has two small clubs and two small diamonds. The opponents still hold the ♠ 8. Our claim statement would be something like, "I am claiming four more tricks. I am going to lead a club from the board and ruff it high. Then I will play the other high trump, pitching a club from the board. This will draw the last trump. Next, I will play the ♥A and the last trump, pitching the two diamonds."

The claim statement is very important. If we were to simply face our hand and say that we have the rest of the tricks, an opponent who has now seen our hand may come up with a different line of play that gives the opposing side a trick.

In Example 2, assume we had said only that we were going to get to our hand by ruffing a club and did not specify "high." Further assume our LHO holds the ♠8 and is out of clubs. LHO could argue that "ruffing a club" meant playing the ♠6 and, therefore, he (LHO) is entitled to win the ♠ 8. As we will see next week, when there is room for interpretation of a claim statement, the statement is usually interpreted in a way that favors the non-claiming side.

Some players, instead of facing their whole hand at once, face each card as it is mentioned in the claim statement. This makes very clear the order in which the cards will be played.

Next month: What happens after a claim or concession is made?

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