



BRIDGEWORKS



LEARNING FROM THE DEALS

A DAY AT THE DUPLICATE

BY DANNY KLEINMAN

It was ten minutes before game time, and Oscar the Owl [one of Victor Mollo's *Bridge in the Menagerie* characters, who usually does best when he sits Southwest] was sounding off about his theory of the game as I walked in.

"Take Weak Two-Bids," he was saying to all who would listen. "There's many a hand that the field opens a weak two that I don't."

I wondered: Could Oscar actually play the disciplined weak two's that I learned 50 years ago, avoiding the ragged suits and trickless hands that had become commonplace two-bids in the current era?

"I always pass a hand too strong for a weak two-bid but not strong enough for a one-bid," Oscar continued. "Give me ace-king-sixth and an outside king, and I'll pass. The field doesn't know enough to pass, so often I'm the only one. Going against the field, that's the way to win. And—oh yes—you need luck. There are so many bad players around that winning isn't within your control. You must pray that they'll make their mistakes against you to give you tops. You need lots of tops to win."

As usual, Oscar was only about one-third right. I felt it my civic duty to present an alternative view, lest the

others gathered round the table take his theories to heart.

Waiting For Tops

"I don't believe in a no-man's-land between one-bids and two-bids," I said. "There are hands that are too weak for a weak two, hands that lack a strong enough suit for a weak two, and hands that have the wrong shape for a weak two. But with ace-king-sixth and an outside king, I'll open a one-bid if I have a singleton, a two-bid if I don't."

"And, yes, luck plays a role, but you don't always need lots of tops to win. Did I tell you about the game I had with Shy Sharon last month?"

Brows knit in puzzlement. "Who's Shy Sharon?" asked Solid Annie, one of the club's more experienced players. Sharon had been coming to the club for a year, playing once every week or two, usually as my client, yet only one of the club's other members had ever asked to partner her.

"She's my most earnest student," I answered. "Recently, we had a 70-percent game. When I looked at the scores, I saw none below four on a twelve top. That's my formula for success. Keep the average-plus in hand, and let the tops come to you. The scores on deals that I declared in normal contracts were like a regular drumbeat, seven, seven,

twelve, seven, seven, twelve."

Just then, I felt a tap on my shoulder. I looked up and saw Deirdre the Director, who drew me aside and whispered, "I have half a table. Will you help me out? You get your choice of partners, Oscar the Owl or Nora Knowitall."

"Why don't you let those two play together?" I asked.

"He won't play with her," answered Deirdre.

I wasn't in the mood for being lectured to either, so I chose Oscar. I'll skip over the things that belong in technical articles and show, in increasing order of difficulty, the four most instructive bidding errors that arose, errors that are typical among club players of average skill.

The Marginal Opening

I reached for the simple convention card that I recommend to an unfamiliar partner, but Oscar waved me off and thrust one of his own in front of me. "You won't mind playing this card with me, Danny. It's the one I used with Sensible Selma when we played seven weeks ago, and it's not all that complicated."

On the first board, with the opponents vulnerable, Oscar opened one club in second position on,
 ♠ Q 8 4 2 ♥ Q J 9 3 ♦ A ♣ K 10 4 3
 then passed my two-notrump response. Personally, I might not have opened Oscar's hand, as I discount short honors (even aces) and, retaining a remnant from my early training, still like to have two-and-a-half honor tricks to open when I have neither a good suit nor much shape. However, on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, I would bid one club just as Oscar did. I am

sometimes inconsistent, though I hope not in too many ways.

Oscar realized that he had a marginal opening, and, almost as if he knew of my Monday-Wednesday-Friday theory, regretted that he had opened. (This was on a Saturday.) So he passed, excusing his action by saying, as he put down the dummy, that he wasn't quite certain what Selma had marked on the convention card and thought she might have preferred invitational two-notrump responses to minor-suit openings.

Of course, Sensible Selma prefers nothing of the kind. Aware of the modern trend to nonforcing two-notrump responses to a minor, she had taken care to mark her card in bold capital letters: ALL TWO-NOTRUMP RESPONSES BY UNPASSED HAND FORCING.

Even with my intended-as-game-forcing response, in two notrump I had only eight sure tricks. A ninth was available in hearts, where I had king-third, if I could guess whether to play for a three-three split or take a third-round finesse against the ten. Information from other suits told me that finessing was the percentage play, which I would have taken had I been in three notrump, but in two notrump I played safe for the contract. This decision was essentially a matter of matchpoint strategy. The field rated to reach three notrump and play hearts "straight up," making if the suit split three-three, going down one otherwise. I was destined for a bottom regardless if the ten fell third and didn't need an overtrick to earn a good score if it did not. Spurning the finesse to ensure a plus score made sure of our beating the pairs that failed in the normal three notrump or had

some random accident.

Was Oscar right to drop me in two notrump?

No. A good working philosophy after having taken a doubtful action is to assume that your tactic was the winning one. If you may have overbid, assume that this is one of the deals on which aggression is destined to succeed; don't backtrack later. If you were timid, assume that this is one of the deals on which conservatism pays off; don't try to compensate.

Is it wise to play two-notrump responses to minor-suit openings as nonforcing?

Well, it is wrong to phrase the question that way, a sin fostered by the ACBL's poor convention-card design, which lumps responses to one club

with responses to one diamond. Playing one diamond — two notrump as nonforcing makes sense for pairs that play a two-club response to one diamond as a game-force (or as a game-force except for responder's three-club rebid), but playing one club — two notrump as nonforcing serves no useful purpose, as with invitational strength it is adequate either to respond one diamond or to raise clubs.

Audiometer Bids and Faux Raises

Oscar's next decision had him ranting and raving five minutes into the next round. With neither vulnerable, he held,

♠ A J 9 5 ♥ 5 4 ♦ A J 3 ♣ K J 8 3,
doubled RHO's first-seat one-heart bid, then heard it go pass — two diamonds

IMPROVE YOUR PLAY

Problem A

Rubber bridge
East dealer
Neither side vulnerable

NORTH
♠ 10 8 6
♥ A Q 10
♦ J 7 5 4 2
♣ 5 4

SOUTH
♠ A 5 4 3
♥ —
♦ A K 10 9 8 6
♣ A K 3

SOUTH	—	—	1 ♠
2 ♦			
3 ♠			
5 ♣			

West

Plan the play.

Problem B

Rubber bridge
West dealer
Neither side vulnerable

NORTH
♠ 5 3 2
♥ 10 7 4
♦ 8 6 5 2
♣ K 9 5

SOUTH
♠ A K Q 10 7 6 4
♥ J
♦ K 9
♣ A 8 6

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
—	1 ♥	Pass	2 ♥
4 ♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

*Heart ace, four, three, jack.
Heart king, seven, two, ?*

Plan the play.

(Solutions on page 75.)

— two hearts — ? back to him.

Oscar raised to three diamonds. Colonel Blimp, on Oscar's left, doubled. Result: down two.

"Tough luck," moaned Oscar. "You could have had a better hand, and the Colonel didn't have to have five strong trumps behind me. I had to raise, because it was a competitive auction."

Actually, I had a rather better hand than I might have, and our trumps would have split favorably if Oscar had passed, because I would have risked three clubs, down one on best defense but often making in the real world. Instead of mentioning that, I said to Oscar, "You raised your own diamonds, which you had bid with only three."

"Didn't I hear you bid two diamonds after I doubled?" he asked.

"That's what you heard, but really you bid one-spade-two-clubs-two-diamonds, and I passed your two diamonds."

"I must be getting old," said Oscar. "Maybe I need an audiometer test."

I call bids like Oscar's three diamonds Audiometer Bids. The only excuse for them is, "Maybe partner didn't hear my last call, so just in case I'll repeat my message." The raise of a simple suit advance of a takeout double is a special case, a Faux Raise. Perhaps these terms for those bad actions will reduce their frequency.

Oscar kept muttering something like, "He's supposed to be a strong player. Doesn't he know that in competitive auctions it's mandatory to overbid?"

Delayed Raises

As the stakes at her rubber-bridge club escalated, Mrs. Guggenheim [S. J. Simon's hopelessly inept player in

Why You Lose at Bridge] worked out that she could save money by hiring the Unlucky Expert [Simon's technically excellent player] to play with her in duplicate games instead of paying out losses at a nickel a point in four-deal bridge.

Against Oscar and me, Mrs. Guggenheim held this hand with both vul.:

♠ J 10 9 ♥ A Q 8 5 3 ♦ 7 5 4 ♣ J 6

Her partner, the dealer, opened with a weak two spades; I passed; she passed; Oscar reopened with three clubs on her left; partner passed; I tried three diamonds, and she . . .

"Three spades," said Mrs. Guggenheim. When it came round to me, I doubled. Unlucky had almost a hand from Oscar's no-man's-land: ace-king-sixth and an outside queen. He was lucky to go down only one (I had doubled on two low spades, so he picked up the suit). Still, that was minus 200 and a tie for bottom for the dear lady.

Unlucky had something to say to her after the play. "Ordinarily, your three spades would be fine, as they can make 110 in three diamonds and three spades down one is only minus 100. But you mustn't do it against Mac The Knife here," he said. "He's too quick on the trigger," completed a pleasantly mixed metaphor.

Unlucky was right about not getting overboard against opponents who make hair-trigger matchpoint doubles for 200-point penalties. However, had Mrs. Guggenheim been my client, I would have made a different suggestion. It is bridge gospel that balancing actions require *less* strength than direct moves, and that a player with a hand

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limited by the previous auction can bid later without fear from partner. But it ain't necessarily so. Consider:

(1) Over a direct, purely preemptive, raise of two spades to three, an immediate double is for takeout. After a delayed raise, either opponent can double for penalties.

(2) A direct raise requires the opponents to enter (if at all) at a higher level. They have less bidding space to find a good fit. If an opponent stretches to intervene and is not too high already, his partner may play him for a better hand

and get overboard. After a delayed raise, the opponents are likely to have shown their suits and shot their wads.

As it happens, a direct raise to three spades would have earned Mrs. Guggenheim and the Unlucky Expert a good score, minus 100, instead of the minus 110 for which they were slated had she allowed me to play in three diamonds. Nonetheless, her initial pass was correct. Not only might three spades have gone down two on poorer breaks, but two spades might have stolen the pot for plus 110.

IMPROVE YOUR BIDDING

67. RESPONDING TO A WEAK TWO-BID

BY BEVERLY KRAFT

Matchpoints, neither side vulnerable, the bidding has gone:

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
—	—	2♥	Pass
?			

In Bridge World Standard, after partner's weak two-bid, an unpassed responder may: (a) bid three notrump or raise to any level to bar opener from further action; (b) force for one round with a simple new-suit bid; (c) jump to four clubs as a key-card-ask in opener's suit; (d) make any other below-game new-suit jump to ask about controls in that suit (replies: one step, neither first- nor second-round control; two steps, second-round control; three steps, first-round control; higher, first- and second-round controls); (e) bid two notrump to ask opener to bid a side feature with a maximum or to repeat his suit with a minimum.

A system leaf replaces feature-showing over the forcing two-notrump response with Ogust: three clubs shows a minimum and a weak suit; three diamonds a minimum, strong suit; three hearts a maximum, weak suit; three spades a maximum, strong suit.

As South, what call do you make with each of the following?

- (a) ♠AK9842 ♥Q862 ♦AK ♣7
 (b) ♠AK1093 ♥A86 ♦52 ♣AK3
 (c) ♠AKQ93 ♥A83 ♦52 ♣AK3
 (d) ♠A54 ♥5 ♦AKJ64 ♣AQ103
 (e) ♠A10 ♥A54 ♦KJ742 ♣AK3
 (f) ♠A3 ♥2 ♦KJ98653 ♣KJ9

(Answers on page 74.)

Like most pros, the Unlucky Expert delivers instruction between boards and usually tries to make just one simple point about each deal. Sometimes, such impromptu advice is based on the lie of the cards or the result, instead of a thorough analysis.

Unlucky's biggest mistake may have been teaching Mrs. Guggenheim weak two-bids at all. *He* knows how to use them correctly, but I doubt she'll ever learn, and heaven help her when she has to cope with the problems attending the omnibus two-club opening that replaces the strong two's she has been conditioned to use during 20 years at her rubber-bridge club.

The 26-Point Three Notrump

Oscar and I encountered Solid Annie and her client late in the afternoon. With the opponents vulnerable, Oscar held:

♠ A Q 9 3 ♥ 7 ♦ A K Q ♣ Q J 10 9 5.

As dealer, he opened one club; LHO overcalled one heart, and I contributed one notrump. Oscar knew that I'm old-fashioned enough always to have my values, so he correctly placed me with 8-10 HCP (and, on my failure to double, fewer than four spades). Adding his 18 HCP to my minimum guarantee, Oscar could count at least 26 HCP in the combined hands, so he raised to three notrump.

The defenders knocked out my heart stopper, and when I lost a trick to Annie's ace of clubs, she ran hearts to beat me two. How many matchpoints

do you think Oscar and I received for minus 100 in our no-play game?

Would you believe six on a twelve top? This was as flat a board as you'll ever see. The bidding was the same at every table. Everyone in Oscar's seat was a point-counter. The best bidders are card evaluators. With:

♠ Q 10 9 3 ♥ 7 ♦ A K Q ♣ A Q J 9 6,

a deceptively similar 18-count, raising to three notrump would be right: opposite either a club filler plus a heart stopper or two heart stoppers (both normal holdings for a free one-notrump response), opener could count nine tricks. But with the actual opening hand, with only queen-high clubs, normal expectation for responder would not suffice, and the overcall made the likely course of the play easy to predict. Oscar could have hoped that three notrump might make, but it's too much to *expect* to make opposite a typical hand for partner.

Two spades is better bid with Oscar's hand. Holding a minimum hand, I would have rejected the ostensible game-try with a simple three-club preference (which Oscar could have passed for a cold top). With a stronger hand, responder would keep the bidding going and simultaneously refine the description of his hand.

The lesson from this deal demonstrates how deeper thinkers can get better results than rote performers: *Good bidding anticipates the play.*

Material about Bridge World Standard (BWS), the consensus system developed to aid casual partnerships and to provide a framework for the Master Solvers' Club, is available at our web site at www.bridgeworld.com