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It's Just MayHem

I love gimmicks — part 1

I'm a sucker for ways to improve my bridge bidding. I need tools, so I like to try various things that I hear or read about. I add some of them to my convention card while I discard others. The gimmicks that follow are not original with me. They are ones that I have been introduced to along the way, and, of course, I like them or you wouldn't be reading about them.

Keycard asking over three-level preempts

Occasionally your partner will preempt (they love to do that!), and you have a *really* good hand with controls in the other suits. You'd like to investigate slam but you're not sure of the suit quality in partner's long suit. Here is a method to find out at a low level.

In order to ask for aces after a preemptive bid at the three level, 4♣ becomes a form of Roman Keycard Blackwood. The responses are:

- ❖ 1st step (4♦) = 0 keycards, no trump queen,
- ❖ 2nd step (4♥) = 0 key cards, but you have the trump queen,
- ❖ 3rd step (4♠) = 1 key card, but no trump queen,
- ❖ 4th step (4NT) = 1 key card with the trump queen,

❖ 5th step (5♣) = 2 key cards.

If the preemptive bid is 3♣, 4♦ becomes the RKC ask, again with step responses, but one level higher. If you need to know more, you're on your own.

Here's an example. Partner opens 3♣ in first position and you hold:

♠AK874 ♥AK4 ♦KQJ ♣K2.

You would bid 4♦ to ask about key cards and get one of the following responses:

4♥ shows 0 key cards and no ♣Q, so sign off quickly in 5♣,

4♠ shows 0 key cards, but includes the ♣Q. Again sign off in 5♣,

4NT shows 1 key card but no ♣Q. Normally you should sign off in 5♣ (but you could gamble on 6♣ if you need a top board),

5♣ shows 1 key card with the ♣Q. Bid 6♣,

5♦ shows 2 key cards. This is an unlikely response and creates a problem. Your best chance seems to be 6♣ because your partner doesn't rate to have two aces and a queen — that would be 10 high-card points. If your partner makes strong preempts, however, you could try 5♥ to ask about the ♣Q in order to reach a grand slam.

Balancing in the passout seat over opponents' auctions that end with 1NT

Whenever the opponents' auction stops after a 1NT rebid by opener, you should think about balancing. The following is a convenient and usually effective way of belatedly getting into the auction. It's a form of DONT and it works like this:

(1) 2♣ shows four or more clubs and another four-card suit,

(2) 2♦ shows four or more diamonds and another four-card suit.

(3) 2♥ shows four cards (or longer) in each major.

(4) Double is intended as penalty and asks for the lead of the suit bid by right-hand opponent.

Example No. 1:

West	North	East	South
	Partner		You
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1NT	Pass	Pass	?

You hold:

♠Q843 ♥63 ♦KJ8 ♣KJ87.

You can bid 2♣ intending to bid 2♠ over partner's 2♥ bid, but to pass if partner bids 2♦.

It does not matter that the suits you bid with this DONT method have already been bid by the opponents; it's still quite effective. It may even work best with suits exactly four-cards long because partner will be unlikely to play you for a five-card suit that you could have bid earlier. It's amazing how often you can find a playable fit at the two level.

Example No. 2:

West	North	East	South
	Partner		You
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1NT	Pass	Pass	Dbf

The double is penalty. You may hold this hand:

♠A5 ♥KQJ1073 ♦K73 ♣43.

You truly do want the heart suit led!

Next month, we'll look at some more bidding gimmicks that you may wish to try.