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It's Just MayHem

Rules of bridge — part 1

You are probably acquainted with some of the so-called “rules” of bridge. There are several different kinds, so you may find the word “rule” somewhat confusing. Let’s organize them into categories.

First of all, there are the rules we call regulations or laws. These are the rules found in the book entitled *The Laws of Duplicate Contract Bridge*. Those laws you can read on your own; the articles this month and next have nothing to do with them.

The second category of “rules” are mathematical or number-based and designed to help us in our play and bidding. We can call these formulas, but they are more widely known as rules with a number in them. They are usually helpful, and should be put to use. Here are some of them:

Rule of 2. With a double tenace, such as A–Q–10 or K–J–10, it is normally best to first finesse toward the lower honor.

Rule of 2, 3, 4. This is an expansion of the old rule known as the Rule of 2 and 3. It applies when deciding whether to preempt, and if so, how high. Basically it means that you can overbid by four tricks at favorable vulnerability, by three tricks at equal vulnerability and by two tricks at unfavorable vulnerability.

Rule of 4 and 4. This refers to the belief that it is usually better to play in the 4–4 fit rather than in a 5–3 or 6–3 fit (assuming both fits are of the same rank — majors or minors). The 4–4 fit is usually better because in that case you can use the longer side suit to sluff losers. This also affects the auction. For example, suppose you hold:

♠A Q 5 ♥K J 7 4 ♦A 8 6 3 ♣6 2,

and partner opens the bidding with 1♠. It is usually better to bid a new suit (in this case 2♦) instead of immediately raising partner in spades. There is the possibility that the partner’s rebid will be 2♥, and the partnership will find the (preferable) 4–4 fit in hearts instead of the 5–3 spade fit.

Rule of 5 and 5. This rule pertains to an ACBL policy issued in the Eighties that in ACBL-sanctioned bridge events (generally meaning tournament events where the General Convention Chart is in use), weak two-bids should not contain fewer than 5 high-card points and that the suit should be at least five cards. (Note: *The current Alert Chart indicates that the expected length for weak two bids is five, six or seven cards in the suit bid. If the range is greater than 7 HCP, no conventional agreements may be played — none.*)

Rule of 7. The rule of 7 is a guideline for the declarer in holding up an ace when declaring a notrump contract. If the declarer subtracts from 7 the total number of cards in the suit in his own hand and in the dummy, the answer is the number of times the declarer should hold up before playing the ace.

Rule of 8. This is a rule to help you decide when to compete over a strong 1NT opener on your right. If the number of losers you have (counting missing aces, kings and queens in suits of three or more cards) sub-

tracted from the number of cards in your two longest suits is two or more and you have at least 6 HCP, ($2 + 6 = 8$, hence the name of the rule) then you may make a two-suited overcall. Thus, you could show the majors (using whatever competitive method you prefer) holding:

♠A 8 7 4 3 ♥Q 9 8 4 ♦8 6 4 2 ♣

You have nine cards in spades and hearts. You have seven losers. You have 6 HCP. Nine minus seven is two plus 6 HCP equals eight. You have satisfied the Rule of 8 and can compete. (See page 49 of the December 2007 Bridge Bulletin for more details.)

Rule of 9. This is a guideline to be used when trying to determine whether to double the final contract of the opponents. It works like this: add the numeric value of the opponents’ contract to the number of trumps held in that suit and if the result equals nine (or more), then that player can double for penalty. If the result is eight or fewer, then the defender should pass or bid on. A simple example would be that if the contract is 4♠ and the defender holds five spades, then the total number equals nine, and that player should double for penalty.

Rule of 10. This rule pertains to opening leads. It applies when the opponents employ fifth-best leads, and it works against suit and notrump contracts. To determine the number of cards in the other three hands that are higher than the card led, subtract the number of the spot card led from 10. Reduce this count by the number of cards you see in your hand and the dummy and the result is the number of cards higher than the card led in the other defender’s hand.

Next month we’ll take a look at some more rules. Some will be number-based as above and some will be humorous.



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Rules of bridge — part 2

Last month we looked at some of the “rules” of bridge. Here are some more number-based rules that you may find helpful and some humorous ones.

Another Rule of 10. This is another guide to doubling. When contemplating a penalty double of a suit below game, add your expected trump tricks to the number of tricks the opponents are trying to take. If the answer is 10 or more, you have the right number of trump tricks and doubling is recommended.

Rule of 11. This rule is a mathematical calculation that pertains to opening leads. It dates back to the days of whist — the grandfather of bridge. The rule applies when the opponents employ fourth-highest leads versus both notrump and suit contracts. To determine the number of cards higher than the card led that are in the other three hands, subtract the number of pips on the spot card led from 11. Reduce this count by the number of cards you can see in your hand and in the dummy and the result is the number of cards higher than the card led in the non-leading opponent’s hand.

Rule of 12. This rule also pertains to opening leads. It applies when the opponents employ third and low leads (also called third and fifth) versus

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both notrump and suit contracts. If it appears that the original lead is the third highest of the suit, subtract the number of that card from 12. Reduce this count by the number of cards you can see in your hand and in the dummy, and the result is the number of cards higher than the card led in the non-leading opponent’s hand. (If it appears that the opponent is leading fifth best, however, use the Rule of 10 that was discussed last month.)

Rule of 15. With borderline hands in fourth position, the number of spades is crucial. The theory is that a holding in spades offers an edge in competitive bidding because spades is the highest ranking suit. This rule is more of a guideline and is useful in helping a player decide whether to open or pass the board out. He should add his number of high-card points to the number of spades held in his hand. That is sometimes called his Pearson Point Count. If the resulting number is 15 or greater, the bidding should be opened. (Some players feel you can open if the Pearson Point Count is 14, while some say you need 16.)

Rule of 16. When contemplating raising a 1NT opening to 3NT, count the number of high-card points and the number of cards that are 8 and higher. If the sum is more than 16, you should raise to 3NT. This avoids the need for the use of 2NT as a bid showing 8 HCP and asking partner to raise if at the top of his 1NT bid. One advantage of this method is that it frees up 2NT for use as something other than an invitational bid.

Rule of 20. This is a rule, suggested by Marty Bergen, that says you can open the bidding when the sum of your high-card points added to the total number of cards held in

your two longest suits totals at least 20. This guideline applies to bidding in any seat.

Rule of X Plus One. This rule is Culbertson’s formula for use in determining if a long suit can be established in a notrump contract. Estimate the number of tricks in the suit that must be lost before it is established, calling this number X. You then add one to this number, and that will give you the number of stoppers in the opponent’s long suit that are needed in order to accomplish this.

These last *rules* below are those tongue-in-cheek ones that come about as comic relief from a very serious game. You might say, then, that they are the *true* rules of the game.

Rule of Boston. This is a little know acronym for leading. It stands for **Bottom Of Stuff, Top Of Nothing.**

Rabbi’s Rule. A light-hearted rule that calls for playing the ace when the king is singleton offside.

No Lurker Rule. A rule that allows one to clarify the number of outstanding trumps by pulling an extra round in which both opponents fail to follow suit.

Trump Suit Unbid Rule. A rule that states it’s very hard to bid and make a slam in a suit that is never introduced into the auction.

Helpful (?) Partner Rule. A rule that says it’s permissible to injure a partner who overtakes your trick (when he has a choice) and then starts to think.

Queen-Finding Rule. If you have a two-way finesse for a queen, finesse the opponent you like the least. If you dislike them both, play for the drop.

Plus to Minus Rule. Do not pull your partner’s penalty double in favor of a minus score. □