

Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

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20. All the Marbles @ Matchpoints

After couple of weeks' hiatus, I am writing for my column again. This will be a special column, breaking the repeat sequence of bidding, defense, and card play that I try to follow in my regular columns.

We have recently competed in the District 15 NAP (Bracket A) event in Wichita. It was a fun tournament with 12 very strong pairs participating. As you know Matchpoint is a funny game as there are multiple ways to get all the marbles. If you are a serious student of Matchpoints, I can point you to the best book ever written on Matchpoints --- Kit Woolsey: *Matchpoints*. Kit of course is an ACBL hall of famer and has made seminal contributions to the bidding theory of the game.

I have two example hands from the district NAP where we got tops and they are just so different in style and composition. My partner Elizabeth suggested that I write about these two disparate hands, one played in 7S and the other defended in 1S both producing tops for us.

Hand 1. To get a top, bid a grand slam (7S) and make it too

First chair I picked up this hand shown below in bold (Partners's hand is also shown to the right for you to follow the bidding sequence)

Q J 5 3 2	A K 6
K	A T 5
A T	Q 8 7 6 5
A Q 6 5 3	K 9

Our bidding progresses thusly [Note: I am taking some poetic license here as we bid 7S via a much more peculiar auction at the table. I messed up the bidding because at my age I cannot distinguish between a spade card and a club card but Elizabeth brilliantly put us in 7S nevertheless. However, that real life auction would confuse the readers irreparably]:

1S [1]	2D [2]
3C [3]	3S [4]
4C [5]	4H [6]
4N [7]	5H [8]
5N [9]	6C [10]
7S [11]	Pass [12]

Notes on the bidding sequence:

[1] A very nice hand and I open 1S with anticipation.

[2] 2D is game forcing (GF) and *guarantees* 5+ Ds; with GF balanced hands we will bid 2C over 1S denying 5H and 5D. Sometimes in the near future I will write a column on modern, sophisticated 2/1 GF structure --- it will be worth your while to follow a modern structure; trust me.

[3] 3C shows 4+ Cs **and** extra values. *With all minimum hands I would rebid 2S unless the hand has extreme distributions.* The purpose of the 2/1 structure is not to help you bid game. You can bid game easily with Standard American bidding, no problem there. 2/1 GF allows to probe for slams and a clear way to distinguish minimum hands from hands with extra values is critical for accurate slam biddings.

[4] 3S is slam try showing exact 3 card spade support. In 2/1 auctions, game bids show weaker hands following the principle of fast arrival.

[5 – 6] *Italian style cue bidding*: showing Ace, King, Singleton, or Void (AKSV) *up the line*. In this case we had the aces but we would bid exactly the same way showing Kings. Ultimately, we will check out the key card situation with key card asking bids. Note that Elizabeth's 4H bid denies 1st or 2nd round control in diamonds.

[7-8] Key card ask and showing 2 key cards in spades without the Q.

[9] 5NT asks for the *lowest King*.

[10] I have the King of Clubs; I might also have other higher ranking kings.

[11] Now I can see 13 tricks.

[12] If you bid that like that, you have to make the hand --- which I did, without too much trouble.

Hand 2. Or Pass their 1S bid

I told you Matchpoint is weird. Here is our other top board:

They are red and we are white and the bidding goes

LHO	Elizabeth	RHO	Me
P	P	1S	?

I decided to pass with

QT4
KQJ6
A2
JT32

We play Equal Level Conversion (ELC) double (topic of another future column) but even then I cannot double spades with clubs and hearts ---- if I do not have tolerance for all three suits I must have the top two suits i.e. diamonds and hearts. So my pass was following the system strictly.

At the balancing chair, Elizabeth passes with:

K3
A973
QT85
Q98

which was more difficult in my view. But her logic is this: if partner cannot come in with a bid over 1S, then the opener is either strong or going to have trouble making 1S vulnerable. She usually does not have too many pass cards in her bidding box but I am glad I had refilled the box with many green cards at the halftime.

The four hands together look like this:

	K3	
	A973	
	QT85	
	Q98	
876		AJ952
T54		82
J963		K74
K54		A76
	QT4	
	KQJ6	
	A2	
	JT32	

We can make 3H, so the top score depends on setting them 2 tricks in 1S, red. The play that mattered most is when a small D was played from the dummy (West in this diagram), Elizabeth was attentive and played the 8 of D and not the 5. That was that. +200 for a clear top.

As they say, all good boards in Matchpoints are on the verge of disaster!