

Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

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7. How to grow up to be a Turkish Dinosaur

First, some *glossary*:

Dinosaur: Generally older Bridge players with exceptional card play skill (both in declarer play and in defense) but atrocious, ineffective, old style bidding skills. These players think complex bidding systems is a nuisance (“just bid your hand, okay?” is their favorite saying to partners whatever that means) and that catching all your tricks is all there is to this game, however poor the contract might be. These players work hard to figure out the shape of the declarer’s hand in defense. They know exactly when to play second hand *high* and third hand *low*, when to apply *surrounding plays* in defense, and are skillful in using *intra-finesse* and other *squash plays* as a declarer. These players, however, bid slams rarely if ever because they just do not have the confidence and the tools to bid one.

Young Turks: Younger Bridge players who spend all their time and energy in learning complex bidding systems (what Bob Hamman calls building a better mousetrap) but are not good card players. These players know all the relay systems, Gazilli convention, and often settle for unnatural bidding systems such as Canape or Precision systems. However, they have not taken the time to learn the nuances of card playing either as a declarer or as a defender.

The bottom line? Young Turks are often in excellent contracts going down for a horrible board and Dinosaurs make a plus score in a poor contract and win the event. That kind of consistent winning reinforces the Dinosaurs’ view that catching all your tricks is all there is to this game. However, if you ask the *real* experts you will hear a different story. In the foreword of his excellent book *365 Winning Bridge Tips*, Danny Kleinman estimates that 65% of winning bridge is bidding (among experts he estimates 80% of winning bridge is bidding as card play skill is largely presumed).

What does it all mean then? It means that to be a **complete** Bridge player you must learn all the card play techniques and at the same time master a detailed and complex bidding system. Such complete bridge players whom we will call **Turkish Dinosaurs** (a name coined by Elizabeth Jankord), are rare. A terrific example of a Turkish Dinosaur will be Eric Rodwell. The story goes that Rodwell and Meckstroth (fondly known as Meckwell in the Bridge world) have an 800+ page set of bidding agreements mostly developed by Rodwell. And now, to show his expertise in card play, Rodwell has written arguably the definitive book on card play techniques.

As a first step toward help developing our readers into Turkish Dinosaurs, I have been writing on various card play techniques. Obviously, not everything can be covered here but my plan is to discuss topics that will have the most impact on your results. With an eye to that, I will spend the next few articles on how to play suit combinations, particularly discussing various **safety plays-- a typical play in which you give up a trick to make sure that you do not lose more than one trick.**

Safety Play when K and J missing

One such situation showed up in a recent Regional knock out event. I am in a 6S contract and I can lose only *one* trump trick holding:

A 8 7 x (North)

Q T 9 x (South)

How do I play the suit so that I do not lose more than 1 trick and bring the slam home (that is the essence of safety play)? There are two possible lines that I can take:

Line 1: Play the Ace and then lead low to the Q.

Line 2: Try repeated finesse by playing the Q or T from South hand.

Line 1 loses when West has KJx or KJxx

Line 2 loses when East has KJx or KJxx.

So if I cannot guess who has this KJx(x) holding, both lines seem to be equally good or equally bad. Their success rate is about 78%. But there is an *extra problem* with Line 1. Suppose that East holds either Jxx or Kxx and accordingly West holds either Kx or Jx. I play the ace; they both follow with small cards. In the next trick, I play small from North and East plays small again. Now what? Now I *have to guess* whether to play the T or the Q from the South hand. If I guess wrong I lose 2 tricks and my teammates are going to be very unhappy. When the K and J are split in two defense hands, this guess can be avoided by running T or Q from South before playing the ace. Running the T is a tad better as this caters for a stiff K with West in which case I do not lost any tricks.

There is an interesting variation to this line if we **know** that *East would play the K holding Kx when a small card is lead from North for the first time*. If we know this psychology of defense, then a good play will be to lead small from North (before playing the Ace) and declarer's problem might be solved if East plays K from Kx. If East plays small, we play the T.

Now this raises an important issue while *defending*. Note this combination and *plan ahead* to play small, holding Kx as East when a small card is first played from North (before playing the A). If the declarer plays the Q over your small card and then play the A (quite foolishly, of course) your partner and teammates will be sympathetic. Because your teammates know that **the worst kind of criticism is the one based on faulty logic**.

References

1. Danny Kleinman, *365 Winning Bridge Tips*
2. Eric Rodwell with Mark Horton, *The Rodwell Files*