

DANNY ON DUPLICATE (2)

Partnerships

Except in a rare form of contest, an "Individual," you will need a partner to play duplicate bridge. Acquiring and keeping partners is a social skill. I can offer no advice, for I am sorely lacking in social skills, which is why I spent most of my bridge career at (now defunct) rubber bridge clubs, where I could simply cut into "pivot" games in which everyone partnered everyone else for four-deal *chukkers*.

Partnership discussion must precede a session of bridge. Sixty or seventy years ago, partnership discussion was unnecessary, at least when both partners were American. Everyone had been weaned on the same methods: Ely Culbertson's, which Charles Goren soon translated from Honor Tricks to "point count" terms. You could assume that your partner knew and played Blackwood, Gerber over 1NT (16-18 HCP) and 2NT (22-24 HCP) openings, and (eventually) Stayman, with strong two-bids, forcing jump raises, strong jump shifts and strong jump overcalls. That bridge Eden didn't last very long. A tree in the garden sprouted Weak Two-Bids, Weak Jump Overcalls, "Five-Card Majors," "Limit Raises," Unusual 2NT Overcalls, Michaels Cue Bids, transfer bids, "Landy," "Ripstra," ASTRO and other Notrump Defenses.

Although you might meet your partner at the club half an hour before game time to discuss methods, it's better to do so before coming to the club. In our era of electronic communication, you needn't talk face to face but can exchange emails. After you have settled on a convention card that both of you can accept, you may want to revise it from time to time, perhaps because your opinions about methods have changed, but perhaps more often because you see that your partner can't handle the complexities of some convention he had agreed previously to play.

Convention Cards

Be sure to retain the convention card you have used with each partner, so that you don't have to fill out a new one the next time you play with him. It's equally important to discard an old convention card once you change your partnership methods and fill out a new one, else your partner might use the card you filled out in May while you still use the card you played last November ... with disastrous results.

Some players use translucent convention-card holders into which several cards can fit. I rate them as an invention comparable to traffic signals at freeway entrances and speed-bumps on city streets, and I advise strongly against using them. Even if neither smudged by dirt nor obscured by the "cute" stickers handed out at some big tournaments, they can produce glare that impairs the visibility of convention cards to the opponents. Worse still, they can harm your opponents (and your own side if a competent director is available to penalize you), as you may inadvertently display the "wrong" convention card.

For example, you might use three different ranges for 2NT response to 1♦ openings with three different partners (I do!): 11-12 HCP with Peter, 13-15 HCP with Paul, and 16-18 HCP with Mary. A simple 1♦-2NT; 3NT auction can lead to a director call if while playing with Peter you have your "Mary" convention card showing, and a defender who looks at it fails to find a risky shift to beat the contract. A competent director will decide any issues in favor of the non-offending side.

Does that mean you should bring only one convention card to the club?

No, I recommend that you bring at least two. Why? Because your partner may arrive late, fall ill or be called away on an emergency mid-session, or for some reason not show up at all, in which case you may find yourself partnered by a substitute. Your second convention card should be the *simplest* one that you are willing to play with any substitute. Let's call it your *Basic* card.

Is there any reason to have a third convention card? Yes. You might find yourself playing with a flexible and accommodating partner who agrees to use your very favorite methods, not the compromise convention card you use with Peter, Paul or Mary, but your *Druthers* card ... if you have one.