

DANNY ON DUPLICATE (6)

Choice of Conventions and Treatments

If you want my appraisals of the options available to you in filling out convention cards, you may read my little book *Down the Convention Card*. I shall not repeat the material in that book here. Instead, I shall offer only very general pieces of advice.

(1) The default agreement is *natural*. If one partner wants to play a convention and the other doesn't, don't play it.

(2) Before adopting a convention, weigh its benefits (in particular the hands you can bid satisfactorily with it that you cannot bid satisfactorily without it) against its drawbacks (in particular the hands that you can no longer bid satisfactorily without the natural bids that the convention supplants).

(3) When choosing among conventions and treatments, prefer simple to complex, natural to artificial, descriptive to nebulous, unambiguous to multi-purpose, two-way ambiguity to three-way ambiguity, telling to asking, and calls designed for reaching your own good contracts to calls designed for interfering with the opponents' auction.

(4) Be aware that there are many versions of most conventions, and the version you know may differ from the one your partner knows. To name a convention is not to explain it nearly adequately.

For Club Owners and Managers

When you manage a duplicate bridge club, either for hire or as an owner of the club, your objectives should change. Though I hope you still come to the club daily to play and enjoy the game, your main goal should no longer be to win the "Ace of Clubs" award in your ACBL district, nor to attract students who will hire you to play with them, but to make your club the best in town, the best in your state, the best in the country. Anything other than pride of ownership and management must not only take a back seat but is likely a conflict of interest.

The directors you hire must also give priority to serving the patrons. You must not hire any director who plays regularly with any patrons lest he show favoritism to his partners. Most emphatically, you must not hire any director who plays "professionally" at your club or at any other club in town, as his conflict of interest will be most harmful indeed.

Some directors attempt to "seed" the sections so as to "balance" the fields. This is better than letting players choose their own sections and directions, but it is nonetheless not optimal. Neither the ACBL's masterpoint ratings nor a director's subjective judgments of the abilities of players measure skill accurately. Best is to assign sections, directions and seats randomly after making allowances for players who must sit North-South for medical or other reasons (such as the presence of kibitzers).

Nobody I know likes half-tables and sitouts, so a club should make every effort to avoid them. To fill a half-table, a club should have two or three *standbys* available. Perhaps members can be enlisted on a regular rotating basis (some every Monday, some every other Tuesday, and so forth). If needed to complete a half table, two standbys can play without fee; if not, they can kibitz and partake of the refreshments offered by the club.

Standbys can serve another purpose: to play with those who come to the club without partners and cannot be paired with each other. Every club has one or two patrons who are undesirable partners for one reason or another. You might suggest that Danny Dummkopf and Surly Shirley play with each other, but you should never foist them upon partnerless players who visit your club, especially out-of-town guests and newcomers. Instead, as an owner-player, you should offer your seat to any lone newcomer ... even if he arrives just when you would otherwise have the pleasure of playing with William Worldbeater.

Suppose, however, that you *are* William Worldbeater. Then you should arrange in advance with your less skillful partner to relinquish his seat to any stranger who cannot be paired happily with anyone else. By inviting a newcomer to play with you, you may gain a customer for life.

Need I add that if your club awards free plays to pairs that win section tops, the free plays should go not to you and your partner but to the pair that finishes second when you finish first in your section?