



OCTOBER 2020 NEWSLETTER



NEW LIFE MASTER

Congratulations to **Cathie Lindler** for achieving this milestone. As I've said before, this is the one you remember, because it was the goal when you started your bridge journey.

Cathie is also the first ever to become a Life Master playing at our virtual games. When Stardust Week started on Monday, September 21st, she needed a whopping .04 Gold to become a Life Master. Well, she made it in style that very day, coming in first and earning 2.80 points of which .70 were the precious gold variety. **Congratulations Cathie!**

Cathie joins Sue Kline on our list of honorees for our next Life Master Party. The party is scheduled for, um, sometime and will be held at, um, someplace. Please make your plans accordingly.

Following is a rather meager list of members who have achieved new ACBL Ranks during the last three months.

Life Master:	Cathie Lindler
Advanced NABC Master:	Sherry Buck
Regional Master:	Doug Leader
Club Master:	Steve Gould

Congratulations to each of you

As for the rest of you, let's step it up a notch.

OCTOBER SCHEDULE

Once again, we actually know in advance what special games the ACBL has planned for us in October.

First of all, Thursday, October 15th through Sunday, October 18th is what the ACBL is calling

Fall into Bridge.

Continued next column

This appears to be another series of regionally rated games similar to those held in June and August. I have not been able to find a schedule of games for this event, but hopefully there will be one before the event starts.

The ACBL has also designated the last week in October, Monday the 26th through Saturday the 31st, as

Club Appreciation Week.

I have no idea what this is, but I'm sure we'll find out around the same time as they, yet again, change the name of the event. Whatever it is, we will probably have it.

For the rest of the month, we will just plod on with our usual three games a week awarding black points at 150% of the normal club rate.

Game Schedule - October 2020

Monday 1:30pm	Wednesday 1:30pm	Friday 1:30pm
		2-Oct Open Pairs
5-Oct Open Pairs	7-Oct Open Pairs	9-Oct Open Pairs
12-Oct Open Pairs	14-Oct Open Pairs	16-Oct Open Pairs
19-Oct Open Pairs	21-Oct Open Pairs	23-Oct Open Pairs
26-Oct Open Pairs	28-Oct Open Pairs	30-Oct Open Pairs

VIRTUAL CLUB REPORT

We have now been playing our virtual club games on BBO for half a year. Who knew! We have settled into a very nice rut of averaging 13 tables per game. Also, for the second month in a row our guest percentage was 8%, well below the allowable limit of 15%. I am really pleased with our results. When face to face bridge was cancelled I had no idea what was in store for our little club. I was afraid I might be the Manager who presided over the demise of the nicest bridge club on the planet. Not a happy thought. However, our members have, for the most part, adapted extremely well to the new environment and, due to their continued support, we are doing more than just fine.

OK, let's talk about some BBO related stuff.

Robots – last month we started using robots as substitute pairs to fill out half table movements. They are performing as expected. Unlike the random pairs we were using as substitutes, not once have they gotten mad and left the game, nor have they ever been disconnected, been timed out of a hand for slow play, or bitched at the Director. Also, as predicted, they have played quite well. During the month of September, we had substitute robot pairs in 10 of our games. Their scores ranged from 41% to 69%, averaging 57%. We will continue using robot pairs to fill out half table movements unless you object. Remember, the robots score is ignored in determining masterpoint awards.

Now that Stardust Week has ended, you can once again sign up to play in our regular games with a robot for \$.25. While I am not particularly fond of person/robot partnerships in our games, I do think they serve a useful purpose. If your partner cancels on you at the last moment but you really want to play, the robot is a good solution. Likewise, if you hadn't planned to play and change your mind, the robot is an alternative

So, while we will allow person/robot partnerships in our games, we are kind of discouraging it except for the special circumstances mentioned above.

Self Alerting – we seem to be getting better and better at this. This will, hopefully, be the last time we go through this in the Newsletter. On BBO, you should **self alert** any bid or announcement you would make playing F2F (face to face). To do this, press the "Alert" box in your bidding box, enter the description and then make the bid. The alert will be seen only by your opponents, your partner, as usual, remains in the dark. **Do not alert by chatting to the table** (which kind of defeats the purpose of the self alert – that the opponents know what your bid means even if your partner doesn't) **or to your opponents.**

If you need help with this, see our August Newsletter or Page 18 of the August *Bridge Bulletin* or take a look at this video.

[How to Alert on BBO](#)

House Rules -- for those of you playing Montreal Relay, Kennedy Club, etc., you must alert that 1 club could be short, that a one diamond response denies a five card major (and if it shows a 4 card major or not), and that a one heart or one spade response shows a five card suit.

It is no longer necessary to self alert a no trump range that falls within 15 to 18 high card points. There is also no need to alert Stayman or major suit transfers over no trump bids.

Continued on next page

Signed Up but Booted – we still have this happen once in a while. If you have signed up for our game and are not online or in the competitive area of BBO at game time, BBO automatically cancels your registration. I have discovered, since it happens to me, that you can be offline from BBO and not know it. If you are disconnected, your screen will in many cases still look like it did when you were connected. In other words, you can be sitting there waiting for the game to start looking at the BBO home page but really be offline. So, I recommend that a few minutes before game time, you try to do something like click on your friends list or look at your mail. If it doesn't work, you are offline.

In addition, sometime in October, the Directors will start using a BBO feature that will not allow the game to start until all those registered are available online. So, if you notice it is past game time and the game hasn't started, this is what's going on. The Directors will only wait a minute or three for the missing to show up. If they don't show up, the Director cancels their registration and the game begins.

Hopefully, these two things will reduce the number of those who sign up and get booted. We really hate it when this happens, as do the booted players, so if you have to wait a few minutes for some games to start, please be patient.

Claiming – yes, yes, yes, we do want you to claim on BBO whenever it's clear to do so. Every once in awhile, however, an erroneous claim gets inadvertently accepted. If you claim in the middle of a trick, the software may not properly indicate the number of tricks you are claiming. Yes, the opponents should carefully check your claim. But they don't. If this happens at your table, get agreement from your opponents as to what the real result was, call the Director and ask her to adjust the score. If you think you are entitled to tricks you can't get because the opponents accepted your bad claim, well, well.....

To help eliminate some of the busy work caused by misclaims, don't claim until the trick has been quitted, since the computer always gets it right in that circumstance.

Convention Cards – now that we all are pretty well grounded in the fundamentals of playing bridge online, it's time to move on to the niceties. Well, this one is much more than a nicety. As you know, in F2F bridge each pair is required to have a filled out convention card available for their opponents. Turns out that the same thing is true for online bridge.

One of the features on BBO is the ability to fill out ACBL Conventions Cards which will automatically be available to your opponents. You can (and should) have a completed Convention Card for each partner you play with. There are a few stock cards like SAYC and BBO 2/1 that you can modify with your and partner's preferences. So, how do I do this? Glad you asked. Here are some resources to help you.

- ➡ Page 20 in the September *Bridge Bulletin* has a graphic presentation showing how to complete a Convention Card on BBO. It is reproduced at the end of this article for your convenience, but is quite fuzzy.
- ➡ [Convention Card Video](#)
- ➡ [How to Make a BBO Convention Card](#)

- ➔ In addition, a team of ACBL Tournament Directors will be hosting regular drop-in sessions on completing and posting a convention card on BBO over the next few weeks. Below is the schedule – note that all times are Eastern;

Tues. Sept. 29 th , Oct. 6 th , 13 th	6 - 8pm	Jenni Carmichael	Click to join
Wed. Sept. 30 th , Oct. 7 th , 14 th	11pm - 1 am	Lynn Yokel	Click to join
Fri. Oct. 2 nd , 9 th	10am - Noon	Nancy Strachan	Click to join
Sat. Oct. 3 rd , 10 th	8 - 10 pm	Jeff Jacob	Click to join

Note that while the focus of these workshops will be convention cards, if time permits our TD's will be happy to help with any aspect of playing online.

If you wish to play more often, there are ABCL sponsored Support Your Club games every day at 10:00 am, 5:10 pm and 7:30 pm. These games are open to all players and cost \$6.00. The lion's share of the entry fee goes back to support your home club or clubs. That would be us.

BBO Help Desk How to complete a convention card

Convention cards disclose your partnership's agreements to the opponents in accordance with the rules of bridge. The ACBL requires that you and your partner make a completed convention card available. Your full names – first and last – should appear at the top. When you sit down to play or register for a tournament with a partner, BBO will see if your partnership has a convention card on file by looking at your list of Personal Cards for your partner's username. If it is there, you will be notified and the appropriate card is loaded when play starts. If your opponents follow this procedure, you'll be able to view their cards as well.

- After logging in, click on the Account tab along the right edge. Your profile will open as shown at right.
- Click on Convention cards. The Convention cards section will open.
- To fill out a new card, click on New ACBL Convention Card. If you don't want to start from a blank card, you can also select one of the Stock Cards.
- A blank convention card will appear. Widen the window by dragging the divider to the left. Click each blank line on the convention card to place your cursor, then enter the appropriate information.
- Continue filling in the card until it is complete. When the card is complete, click the "Save changes" button at top left.
- To view or edit a card after it is filled out, select it from the list of Personal Cards at the bottom of the Convention cards section.
- A prompt will ask you what you want to do with the card. Select view or edit as appropriate. In order for the card to be visible to your opponents, you must designate a partner. Enter your partner's BBO name as shown and click "Use".
- When you want to view an opponent's convention card during a game, start by clicking on the three bars.
- If the opponents have loaded their convention card, it will appear as a choice in this menu. Select NS Convention Card or EW Convention Card. The card will pop up in another window.

DON'T JUST THE BOX STAYMAN

This is the fifth article in our new series about commonly used, misused and abused conventions. You remember the scenario. Right? No. OK, here it is again. You have a bridge date with a new partner or one you haven't played with for a long time. You are meeting with her to fill out your convention card. You get to the part about one no trump openings, you both simultaneously say 15 to 17, and then, without really asking, you both just kind of check the Stayman box.

Ron, really! You cannot be serious! Are you really writing an article about a simple convention that everyone on the planet knows how to play? Well, yeah, I am.

By the way, this convention is named after Sam Stayman, who, I think, is the only bridge player to have two conventions named after him, neither of which he invented. Stayman was invented by Sam's partner at the time, George Rapee in 1944, but Sam wrote an article in *The Bridge World* the next year introducing the concept and people started calling it Stayman. The other convention named after Sam is Namyats (staymaN backwards) which was invented by Vic Mitchell, Sam's partner at that time. All three of these guys were superb players, dominant forces in their era, and original members of the ACBL Hall of Fame.

Sorry, off track yet again. So, where were we? You were wondering why I was writing an article about something everyone already knows. Well, I agree, everybody knows how they play Stayman, but do they know how their partner plays Stayman? That's the question. Remember, it's not terribly important what you play, but it is super important that you and partner are playing the same thing.

While there are numerous versions of Stayman on the market, we will limit our discussion to six of the more common flavors used by strong no trumpers.

- Traditional Promissory Stayman
- Traditional Promissory (one exception) Stayman
- Traditional Non Promissory Stayman
- Garbage Stayman
- Crawling Stayman
- Puppet Stayman

Let's start our discussion by defining Traditional Stayman. This definition applies to each of the three flavors at the top of the list. Starting with the clearly known to all, Stayman is a bid of 2♣ in response to a no trump opening bid, asking the opener if they have a four or five card major. Most importantly, it is an invitational bid showing 8+ high card points (HCP). Why? Well, like most questions in bridge, the answer comes from doing the math. If you and partner do not have a major suit fit, and you have only 8 points, you will often end up in 2NT. Even if partner also has a minimum (15 points), all is well since 23 HCP will usually produce eight tricks.

There are only three responses to the Stayman 2♣ bid. They are listed in the following chart. Please note, bids like 2NT, three of a major or any other such aberration are not in the Traditional Stayman program. After you open 1NT and your partner has bid 2♣, she has anointed herself boss of the hand and you best answer her questions. You need not worry that you have a maximum hand and she will pass your response. Why? Because 2♣ is invitational to game and the 2♣ bidder always (well, as much always as there is in bridge) bids again to give partner the opportunity to bid game.

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Opener's Rebid	Meaning
2♦	Denies a 4-card major.
2♥	4 hearts, may have 4 spades.
2♠	4 spades, denies 4 hearts.

The Stayman bidder is basically obligated to bid again after partner's response. Following is another chart listing all the possible rebids by the Stayman bidder. These responses assume you are playing

Traditional Promissory Stayman

Responder's rebids after 2♦

Responder's Rebid	Meaning
2♥	4 spades and 5 hearts, invitational. Non-forcing.
2♠	5 spades and 4 hearts, invitational. Non-forcing.
2NT	Invitational.
3♣	Game forcing with at least 5 clubs. Guarantees a 4-card major.
3♦	Game forcing with at least 5 diamonds. Guarantees a 4-card major.
3♥	4 spades and 5 hearts, game-forcing.
3♠	5 spades and 4 hearts, game-forcing.
3NT	Signoff.
4♥	4 spades and 6 hearts, signoff.
4♠	6 spades and 4 hearts, signoff.
4NT	Quantitative, invites 6NT.

Responder's rebids after 2♥

Responder's Rebid	Meaning
2♠	5 spades and 4 hearts, invitational. Non-forcing.
2NT	4 spades, less than 4 hearts, invitational. Opener can pass, sign off in 3♠ with 4 spades, or bid 3NT.
3♣	Game-forcing with at least 5 clubs. Guarantees a 4-card major.
3♦	Game-forcing with at least 5 diamonds. Guarantee a 4-card major.
3♥	4 hearts, invitational.
3♠	Game-forcing with at least 5 spades and 4 hearts.
3NT	4 spades and less than 4 hearts. Opener can pass or bid 4♠ with 4 spades.
4♥	Signoff.
4NT	Quantitative, invites 6NT.

Responder's rebids after 2♠

Responder's Rebid	Meaning
2NT	Invitational.
3♣	Game-forcing with at least 5 clubs. Guarantees a 4-card major.
3♦	Game-forcing with at least 5 diamonds. Guarantees a 4-card major.
3♥	4 spades and 5 hearts, game-forcing.

3♠	4 spades, invitational.
3NT	Signoff with 4 hearts.
4♠	Signoff.
4NT	Quantitative, invites 6NT.

Traditional Promissory (one exception) Stayman

The responses are exactly the same as Traditional Promissory, except that Stayman followed by a 2NT rebid does not guarantee a four card major. This wrinkle only applies if you play four suit transfers and thus 1NT – 2NT shows diamonds.

Traditional Non Promissory Stayman

Same chart, but substitute “Does not guarantee” for “Guarantees.” Why is this a good method?

I have no idea. It seems quite strange to make an inquiry about a four card major if you don't care if partner has one, but, what do I know.

Garbage Stayman

This should probably be called Shock Stayman, because after you bid 2♣ and pass whatever partner bids, she will be shocked. This is not really an agreement, it's just a unilateral action that you take because you have an awful hand and think the deal will play better in a suit contract. A typical hand for this kind of action would be:

♠ Qxxx ♥ Jxxx ♦ Jxxx ♣ x

The bridge logic for thinking 2 of a suit will fare better than no trump is that at least you may score a couple of ruffs in a suit contract and your hand may be basically useless in no trump.

Crawling Stayman

This method is very similar to Traditional Promissory Stayman with one glaring exception. The point count requirement to bid Stayman is zero. Your hand will contain two four card majors and seven or less HCP. If partner responds in two of a major, you will happily pass. If partner responds 2♦, you rebid 2♥ asking the no trump opener to pass with three hearts or bid 3♠ with three spades. What if the no trump opener has neither three hearts nor three spades? Well, they probably shouldn't have opened one no trump.

Note that when playing Crawling Stayman, 1NT -- 2♣ -- 2♦ -- 2♥ no longer shows 5 hearts and 4 spades and is not invitational.

Crawling Stayman is generally used with very weak hands where you think the deal will play better in a suit contract. If you have a balanced 5 to 7 point hand, probably best to just pass 1NT.

Puppet Stayman

Puppet Stayman is a method that allows you to uncover a 5-3 major suit fit after partner has opened one no trump with a five card major. Since opening one no trump with a five major is considered a felony by most of our players, probably enough said.

Other Stuff

Smolen Convention – as shown in the above charts, 1NT - 2♣ - 2♦ - 3♥/♠ shows five cards in the bid major and four in the other major. The Smolen convention reverses these meanings with 3 of the major showing four of the bid major and five of the other. So, in the sequence shown above, the 3♥ bid would show 4 hearts and 5 spades. This allows the stronger hand to declare if they have three cards in partner's five card suit.

Showing a five card major – if you are one of those criminals who open one no trump holding a five card major, you can sometimes show it. If you open 1NT and partner bids Stayman, respond in your major. If partner then bids 2NT, and you are accepting the game invitation, simply bid 3 of your major (forcing) and partner will raise to 4 of the major with 3 card support or bid 3NT.

Cardinal rule of bridge articles is that they should always include a deal. So, here we go. This hand actually occurred at the Croft House (remember that place?) a few years ago. In first chair, you pick up this nice but someone prosaic collection.

♠ Axx
♥ KJxx
♦ KJx
♣ Axx

After over stressing yourself with downgrades for 4-3-3-3 and no intermediates and upgrades for working Jacks and lots of controls, you open 1NT, just like you knew you would without the mental gymnastics.

Partner bids 2♣, you bid 2♥, and she bids 3♦.

So, it appears partner has 4 spades (we play Promissory Stayman) and 5 or more diamonds and we are forced to game. Having the other suits under control, you bid the obvious 3NT and get ready to be declarer.

But wait, partner now bids 4♥. What's up with that? Why didn't she just bid 4♥ over 2♥? Is she trying to play a 4-3 fit? Is she torturing me? No, it must be a mild slam try with four hearts and a nice diamond suit as a potential source of tricks. Well, I have a dead minimum, so I should pass.

Think again, your KJ of diamonds should solidify the diamond suit, and we have a heart fit. So we trot out Key Card Blackwood and partner admits to 2 Aces and the trump queen.

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Time to count. We have four trump tricks in one hand, 5 diamond tricks, two other Aces and a ruff in either hand, so we just bid 6♥. Yes, the chances of making seven are good if partner has a singleton, but how do I find that out? You don't. So, what was partner's hand?

- ♠ xx
- ♥ AQxx
- ♦ AQxxx
- ♣ xx

So there you have it, another lay down slam with 28 HCP. I'm sure all of you would have bid this ice cold slam, but I guess you were not playing that day because the slam was only bid once.

So, the moral of the story – don't just check the box, discuss the continuations.



NOTICE OF BOARD MEETING

The next meeting of your Board of Directors will be Monday, October 19th at 12:00 Noon. The meeting will be held via Zoom or a similar technology.

While the agenda is not yet complete, some of the items are:

- Financial Status as of September 30, 2020
- What to do about the upcoming election and Annual Meeting
- Holiday Party
- What's next for the Aiken Bridge Club

Remember, our Board Meetings are open to all members, so please join us if you are interested. If you have any items you would like to have included on the Board Meeting Agenda, just inform any Board Member.

If you would like to attend, please send an email to Steve at steve.banwarth@pobox.com. He will then email you a link (probably the day before the meeting) and instructions on how to join the meeting.

THINKING AND REASONING

BY JAY JACOBS

The best players don't necessarily do brilliant things on a regular basis, or even at all. They simply make the fewest mistakes. This article highlights some recent errors on BBO. This discussion is based on matchpoint (=duplicate) scoring, but generally also applies to IMPS (= teams). Of course, there are no situations without exceptions, but we're talking here about rational thinking and not playing for long odds.

As declarer, when the opponents lead a suit in which you have the jack in one hand and the queen in the other, play low. If they cash the ace and king, one of your honors holds up for the third round. If you play an honor on the initial lead, or are forced to lead the suit yourself, you are odds on to lose at least three tricks in that suit. This holds true whether your suits are 2 cards and 3 cards, 3 cards and 3 cards, 2 cards and 4 cards, etc. If you play an honor on the initial lead, it's pretty certain one opponent will capture it and lead through the other honor. Think about it – people do not generally underlead from AK, so as long as the honors are split, you guarantee a stopper by playing low. It is different if the QJx is in one hand. Now, you must split your honors. As long as the A and K are in different hands, you assure a stopper by playing an honor on the initial lead. Also, if you have to break the suit, lead toward the QJx. Unless the AK is behind the QJ, you will get a trick and/or have a stopper. But, leading the Q or J, unless you also have the 10 in either hand, will likely cost you your stopper. The opponent over the QJ will duck (unless they have AK) and let it ride to their partner, who will take the trick with the A or K, and then lead through your remaining honor.

Suppose you have both majors of equal length and partner opens one of a minor or doubles the opponent's one of a minor opener. If you are 4-4, bid hearts first (regardless of strength). Then, partner can support with four hearts, or bid spades with four of them. But, if you bid spades first, and partner does not have four of them, partner has nowhere to go with four hearts. If you are 5-5 in the majors, bid spades first, then rebid hearts, maybe even twice if partner does not support your spades or your first heart bid. By bidding hearts first, if partner has a minor suit oriented hand, you may miss a 5-3 spade fit, unless you reverse into two spades on the next round. Even then, partner will think you have 5 hearts, 4 spades, and a strong hand. You may still miss your 5-3 spade fit. Meanwhile, the bidding gets too high because you reversed and partner thinks you have a strong hand, or partner isn't sure of your suits and bids on in their minor. Similarly, you use Stayman over partner's 1 NT opener and partner bids 2H. You have 4 spades but not 4 hearts, do partner a favor and bid 2 spades over the 2H bid. Partner might be 4-4 in the majors and you don't want to miss the 4-4 spade fit. Extending that thought process, if you are the 1NT opener and have both majors, bid hearts first over partner's two clubs, increasing the likelihood of finding a 4-4 fit in a major. Yes, partner can always go to 3H after your 2NT after 2S, but now you are a level higher.

Many people misplay negative doubles. So, let's go through some of the ins and outs. An opponent opens one of a minor and partner doubles. Partner should be guaranteeing no less than 4-3 in the majors with tolerance for the other minor and/or a strong hand where they will later show their suit(s). If, after partner's double, the next opponent bids one of a major, your double pretty much guarantees the other major. If you bid the other major, you guarantee five cards AND, if you have to go to 2hearts to do it, you have enough to go to the two level. If the opponent passes the double, a bid of 1H guarantees 4 hearts but does not deny 5 hearts or 4 spades. A bid of 1S, guarantees 4 spades and denies 4 hearts, unless you later bid hearts, which then strongly implies 5+ spades and 4+ hearts. If the intervening opponent bids a major, you double to show the other major and partner does not support it, partner likely has no more than 3 in your implied major, but may have as many as 4 in the major the opponent bid. In such cases, do NOT bid your implied major yourself unless you have 5 cards in it or you like playing in 4-3, or occasional 4-2, fits. When partner makes a negative double and then bids their own suit, they should have a good hand and, likely, a self-sufficient suit of 5+ (probably 6+) cards. Suppose partner makes a negative double and your distribution is 4-3-3-3, with the 4 card suit being one the opponents have bid, or implied.

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With stoppers, consider NT. Otherwise, if you must bid, bid the lowest 3 card suit partner is known/likely to have four of. Otherwise, you increase your chance of playing in a 3-3 fit. If partner makes a negative double, a jump in either major shows a good hand and at least 5 cards if partner could only have 3 by the bidding. Over partner's negative double and the next opponent's pass, with 4-4 in the majors, cue bid their minor to tell partner to choose (since (1) partner may be 4-3, you want to assure a 4-4 fit and (2) it is probably better to have the stronger hand as declarer).

The opponents bid 3NT and partner leads the 3 of a suit. You have KQx and the board has two or three small. You play the Q and it holds. Boldly, you plunk down the K and it holds. No rational declarer with the ace and jack would not capture the K. Thus, Partner must have the ace and/or the jack. Continue the suit. Suppose partner follows to the second round with the 2. Since a good partner would lead 4th highest, following with a lower card promises at least a five card suit. (If you partner generally leads a doubleton 3-2 against no-trump contracts, get another partner.) Continue the suit and hope partner has the ace or an outside entry once you have knocked out declarer's ace.

Suppose partner opens one of a major and you have 3 card support. You should generally want to play in that suit rather than NT or another suit, absent a better fit or an obvious NT slam on great power. Doing otherwise is playing against the field. That doesn't mean you should not bid 1S if partner opened 1H and you have 4 spades, since partner may have 5+ hearts and four spades. But, once partner does not support your spades, you belong in hearts. Likewise, if partner opens one spade and you have five hearts, three spades, and either enough points to go to the two level or to make a forcing 1NT bid (if you play 1NT forcing), do so. You may find a 5-4 heart fit, which would play better than a 5-3 spade fit. There are times when you take the same number of tricks in NT as in a suit and you will get a top. But, most of the time, the suit contract plays one trick better, and is certainly a safer contract because it is less likely the opponents can run a suit. Certainly, there are times when you might play against the field: you need some good boards; you are playing against the best players in the room so you are less likely to get a good board, or you possess a sense of adventure coupled with a desire to self-destruct. But, playing against the field is top-and-bottom oriented. Unless you are a good evaluator, in the long run it isn't going to pay off.

If you have a two-way finesse for the queen, don't be in a hurry to take it. If you wait long enough, the opponents may lead, or be forced to lead, the suit, thereby eliminating your guess. Give them an opportunity to make a mistake, and accept gifts graciously. Further, as the hand progresses, you can observe the overall distribution and the opponents' signals. It is unlikely that the one holding 3 to the queen is going to part with cards in that suit or signal they have the queen. (Would you?) Indeed, the opponent tossing that suit probably does not have the queen. Eventually, they may throw enough cards in the suit that the queen will drop.

When you have a double fit, you should generally prefer to play in the more evenly balanced suit (for example, 4-4 vs. 5-3). This has two advantages, you can ruff shortness in either hand AND the long suit provides pitches of outside losers that the short suit does not. You would not generally choose a minor over a major (except perhaps at the slam level). But, a 4-4 fit in spades with a 5-3 fit in hearts should play in spades. We may get pitches on the 4th and 5th hearts. Playing in hearts provides no pitches on the spades. But, outside shortness in the dummy is a great plus. If you have AKQJx opposite xxx, you have 5 trump tricks. If you ruff in the long trump hand, you still have 5 trump tricks. However, if you can ruff in the short trump hand, you get the ruff and still have 5 more trump tricks. Soooo, when on defense with shortness in dummy, trump leads cut down on dummy's ruffing power.

Generally, trump leads are not good. They subject partner to finesses, lay bare the trump situation, and lose the offensive value of the opening lead. Yet, there are times when trump leads are very effective, indeed automatic.

When the opponents have bid 3 suits and still avoided NT, it implies highly distributional hands. That may mean a cross-ruff and screams for a trump lead. Leading the unbid suit may lose timing on the hand. Another time a trump lead is effective / necessary is when you have doubleton honors in unbid suits (or suits bid by the opponents), coupled with ace empty in the other suit(s), and your partner has not bid, or your partner is unlikely to have many points. None of these suits is an appealing lead, so a trump may be safest. Of course, declarer may take inference from such a lead. Note that opening leads away from an ace may be costly, but leading low from the ace of trumps may not cost anything, since you retain trump control. Another situation to consider a trump lead is when declarer has bid a suit multiple times, and their partner has finally (reluctantly) passed after bidding something else. Dummy is likely short in trump. A trump lead may assure no ruffs in the short trump hand. Sometimes passive defense is best and trump leads are as passive as it gets.

When partner and one of the opponents are both out of a suit, consider leading the suit. If the opponent's card is high, they lose their pitch because partner will ruff. Thus, they are forced to ruff a good trick. Sometimes, this promotes a trump trick for partner. If you have the high cards and dummy has to follow, lead your high card. Again, this may promote a trump trick for partner. If we have cashed all the defensive non-trump tricks we are going to get, giving the opponents a ruff-and-sluff loses nothing. Sometimes, it promotes a trump trick for us by shortening the trump holding in one of the opponents' hands or forcing them into leading from the wrong hand. Look for these situations – they do happen.

You don't want to sell out to the opponents at too low a level. Nevertheless, exercise greater caution when vulnerable. Taking the push and going -200 (down two) is almost always a bad board. On the other hand, -100 (down one) can be a good board when the opponents can make three of something. Just be sure you are not pushing them into game or giving them a no lose option (double or play). But, when you are not vulnerable, you can often afford to go down two (-100) and still get a good board. Be a little less adventurous when vulnerable or playing against top players. Learn to get a "feel" for when to go and when not to.

There should be no such thing as a hand that is too strong for a weak two bid and too weak to open. If your system allows that, change your system. If you are on the border, do one of them. If you are not sure, bid one (don't advertise weakness). Consider: A-K-10-x-x-x and an outside king (not a singleton) is an opening bid. If partner does nothing, you can rebid your suit and you are no worse off than if you had opened a weak two, except now the opponents don't know if you have that minimum or something better. If partner responds, rebidding your suit implies a 6 card minimum, which is what you have.

Squeezes are very difficult for most of us – pseudo-squeezes, not so much. You may be squeezing an opponent while being blissfully unaware, or they may think you are squeezing them when you are not. If the opponents cashed the AK of a suit and one of them holds the Q, but the J is on the board, don't be so quick to throw it away. Once you get rid of it, the person with the Q has an easy pitch. But, as long as you keep the jack on the board with a potential entry elsewhere, the person with the queen has to hold on to it, giving them fewer options for discards. The fact that you may not really be able to get to the board is irrelevant, as long as the person with the queen thinks you might be. Sometimes running your good tricks produces extra tricks because the opponents don't know what to hold and what to throw. Thus, if you are void in two suits, ruff in the suit they already know you are void. Then, they don't know which and how many of the other suits you hold.

You pick up a hand with 6 clubs to the Q-J-10, four spades to the K-10-9, and a worthless 2-1 distribution in the red suits. You are not vulnerable and are the opening bidder. Since you control two suits (in the sense that the opponents cannot run them), even with only have 6 high card points, I think an opening bid of 3C should be automatic (not everyone agrees). You have a good shot at making your bid if partner can support either of your suits.

Presumably, if you reversed the suits, you would have no compunction about opening two spades. Also, you have put the opponent's feet to the fire by gobbling up bidding space and forcing them to make a high-level decision on limited information. If you are in second position after a pass, now you may be equally likely to preempt partner than the opponents, and may reconsider. But, in third position after two passes, go for it. If you are vulnerable, the bid becomes higher risk. Take away one or both tens, and the hand becomes considerably less offensive. But, on a good day, when the stars are in alignment ...

We are all cannon fodder sometimes, but we avoid it more frequently than most people realize. Hopefully, we learn not just to fill our memory banks, but to think.

