

PLAY OF THE HAND

Lesson #1

Greed Works

We've looked at the mechanics of scoring at bridge, yet quite a few players are loath to take the plunge in bidding games and slams due to concern about going down in their contract. But it's a missed opportunity when you're in 2H making five, reaping a mere 200 points that could have been 450 or 650 depending on the vulnerability.

One of the guiding principles of bridge is expressed in the movie *Wall Street*, by Michael Douglas in his role of Gordon Gekko, in a speech he makes at a group of shareholders. His exact words are:

“The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed—for lack of a better word—is good.

Greed is right.

Greed works.

Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit.

Greed, in all its forms—greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge—has marked the upward surge of mankind.”

He is eloquent and stirring in his message, but what justifies greed in bridge? What do you need to venture a game or slam in the auction?

As those of you that that have taken bridge lessons or read in books, a game requires in the neighbourhood of 25-26 points between the two hands. If you bid a slam, you'll need to take 12 tricks and that requires a fair bit more.

What sometimes happens in the early stages of learning the game, however, is the contract going down even though the numbers would suggest that it can make. It's usually a case of not using all the assets at your disposal. Not many contracts have enough winners off the top, but there are possibilities to gain additional tricks.

There are four basic methods that you'll be relying upon when playing a hand. In some of them, you'll know precisely how many tricks you can get, whereas with others, it's going to depend on the layout of the missing cards.

Take ‘n’ Make

This is an expression that recalls the Shake‘n’ Bake label for meat breading and coating.

“Take” refers to having all the high cards in a suit, but being careful enough to take them in the proper order without getting stuck in the wrong hand.

If both hands have the same number of cards, you won’t have any problems in cashing your winners. But when one hand has more cards than the other, that’s where you want to be when you’re playing your last card out of the companion hand. There is a helpful piece of advice to steer you in the right direction, “high card from the short side.

A few examples will illustrate the concept. Let’s put out these cards in spades:

Dummy: AQ4

Declarer: K7

Play the King out of declarer’s hand, then low to dummy. That way, dummy will have the lead when you’re out of cards and you can duly take the third trick in the suit. If you win the second spade in hand, you won’t be able to cash your third winner right away. Sometimes you’ll have a way of getting back to dummy and it won’t matter. But on other occasions you won’t ☹. That’s why it’s important to get into the habit of taking your high cards in the proper order.

Dummy: AJ6

Declarer: KQ83

This time, the correct sequence is to play the two honors from dummy, the Ace and Jack, and then a low one to the KQ so that you’ll be in declarer’s hand as table’s last card is played and you can go ahead and take your fourth winner.

Dummy: KJ1098

Declarer: AQ

For this one, it takes the recognition that you have all the high cards in the suit. Because of that, you can afford to play the Ace out of declarer’s hand and then overtake the Queen with dummy’s King and are now on board to take the last three tricks in the suit.

“Make” deals with situations where you **don’t** have all the tricks in a suit, but can promote your honors into winners by driving out the higher cards. In these situations, you might have to lose a trick (or sometimes two) to the opponents, but those were tricks you were destined to lose in any event and by having the courage to play on the suit, you’ll get extra winners in return. Again, we’ll look at some examples:

Dummy: QJ7
Declarer: K82

Here you have the chance for two tricks, since you are missing the Ace, but have the next three honor cards. So you play one honor out of one hand and a low one from the other until the opponents' top card is dislodged and you'll then have two tricks in return for the inconvenience of having to give up a trick you were always bound to lose.

Dummy: Q1064
Declarer: J972

It's a bit more disconcerting to start the suit here, as you'll have to give up the lead not once, but twice. Still, it's a worthwhile course to pursue, especially if you're short of the tricks you need, as you get two winners once the Ace and King are driven out. If you get cold feet and leave this suit until the bitter end, then you still lose those two tricks without getting anything in return.

Dummy: QJ109
Declarer: K6

Here again, you can develop three tricks by knocking out the Ace, but the opponents may not be so co-operative as to take their Ace right away. Because of this, the first card played should be the King out of declarer's hand, then a small one to dummy so that you can persist in the suit without interruption. Now you'll just need one entry to dummy to take your extra tricks. If the King is played on the second round instead of the first, the opponents will just let you have it and now you're marooned in hand.

Developing Tricks

With Take'n'Make, you're dealing with certainties, knowing what tricks you can get and what you might have to give up. It doesn't matter where any missing high cards are.

There are two additional ways of finding the extra tricks you need. They are long suits and the finesse. There is more uncertainty involved, however, as you won't know how successful you're going to be until one or two rounds of the suit have been played. While they are a bit more nerve-wracking, you shouldn't shy away from them as those techniques are sometimes the only route to the tricks you need to make your bid.

The finesse is a way to try and take a trick with a card that is a **possible** winner, rather than a sure one. In a finesse, you will lead towards that card from the other hand. Whether you come up smelling like roses is going to depend upon where the card that beats your honor is located. Here are a few examples of finesse situations:

Dummy: 85
Declarer: AQ3

The Ace is a certain winner. The Queen **may** be, depending on who has the King. So you'll get to dummy and lead a small card. If RHO follows low, you put in the Queen. If the cards are sitting favorably, you'll hold the trick and get two instead of one. If LHO wins, you at least have the consolation that you had a 50-50 chance of success and he was never going to lead away from his King anyway.

Dummy: K96
Declarer: 73

Here, you have no chance of winning a trick by playing the first card from dummy. The only hope of getting something is to lead low from declarer's hand and seeing what LHO plays. If it's a low card, rise with the King and you'll score a trick if the Ace was sitting in front of it.

Dummy: KQ6
Declarer: 742

This holding offers a choice between two techniques. You can ``make`` an extra winner trick by leading an honor from dummy, but the opponents will take the Ace and then also get the third trick in the suit.

You have the potential for two tricks in the suit, assuming you can get to declarer's hand twice. Lead ``low towards big`` from declarer's hand towards the KQ, playing an honor only after the player on your left has followed low. Then you get back to hand and repeat the process.

Dummy: 85
Declarer: AQJ

Here again, you can promote two tricks in the suit by playing the Ace and another, but on a good day, you can get a third winner by finessing twice. Begin with a small card from dummy and play the Queen if RHO follows low. Then go back to dummy and lead the remaining card towards the Ace and your remaining honor. If all goes well, you'll take all three tricks in the suit.

Long suits are also a chance to reap additional tricks, but how many is going to depend upon the split of the missing cards between the opponents' hands. Occasionally, you'll be able to run your long suit without interruption, but you typically will have to surrender the lead at least once in the process.

Dummy: K752

Declarer: A643

You have two certain tricks, the Ace and King. There are five missing cards, and the fourth card will become a winner if they dived 3-2. However, you'll never get that length trick unless you're willing to play on the suit and give the opponents the trick to which they're always entitled. And once you do that, the earlier you do it the better, while you still have the suit that they are going to be playing under control

Dummy: K75

Declarer: A6432

Same cards down to the last spot, except that I've taken away one from dummy and added it to declarer's hand. Now instead of a one-for-one trade, you can get two tricks in return for the the one you will have to lose, if the suit divides evenly.

Dummy: K7

Declarer: A6432

Now there are only seven cards between the two suits, and experience has proven that while an odd number of cards will usually divide evenly, you're more likely to get an adverse split when the opponents have an even number of cards.

You might have to play this suit if you are a trick or two short of your goal and there is no other way to get them. However, you should be looking at your hand and dummy to see if there are more attractive options.

The PLAN

Most books on declarer play emphasize making a plan after dummy comes down and before you play to the first trick. In the Audrey Grant lesson series, each letter of the word contains a piece of advice:

P Pause to consider your objective—how many tricks you need to make

L Look at your winners and losers

A Analyze the alternatives—which one is best for accomplishing your mission

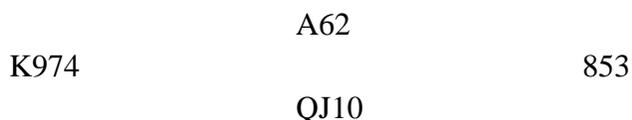
N Now put it all together

Many contracts go down because declarer plays too hastily on the first trick. Try and go through all the stages of the PLAN to decide on your line of play before calling for dummy's card.

Most textbooks suggest that in suit contracts, declarer try to count the number of possible losers and then look at what dummy has in the way of assistance. If there are still too many, then you want to determine if there are possibilities for reducing the number of tricks you have to lose. In addition to the techniques described above, there are also two other methods for getting rid of your losers, namely ruffing them on dummy or pitching them on extra winners,, and we'll have a closer look at those in subsequent lessons. The spotlight at the moment will be on finesses and how they can be used to bring home a contract.

More on Finessing—When is it right to lead a high card?

In the play of the hand textbook, it mentions that the best course is usually to lead towards the high card you are hoping to score with a finesse. There is another type of finesse, where you do have to lead the high card. Let's peruse some of the more common positions:

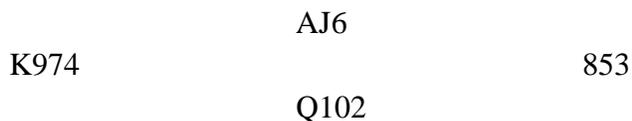


In general, you lead the high card itself when you have all of the “neighbors”, i.e. the touching high cards.

Here you are assured of two tricks in the suit, no matter how the cards lie. You can score three tricks when West holds the K of spades, by finessing in the suit. It would be no good to lead towards the QJ10 because the defenders would be certain to win a trick with the K. Instead, you should lead the Q from your hand. What can West do when he holds the missing honor? If he covers on the first round, you will win with dummy's Ace and score two more tricks with the Jack and ten. Suppose he ducks his king instead. You will play low from dummy as the Queen wins the trick. You can then repeat the finesse by leading the Jack.

Putting it another way, you can think of your QJ10 as an executioner's block. When the king's head appears, the axe (dummy's Ace) will fall.

This is a similar position:



Again, you have the two cards (the Jack and the ten) that are neighbors to the Queen. By leading the Q of spades, you'll score three tricks in the suit whenever West holds the King. Why would you want to start with the Q, rather than play a low card to dummy's Jack? The reason is that by leading the Q, you will still be on lead in the South hand to repeat the finesse if West decides not to cover with the K. If you led a small card towards dummy, then you'd have to find a way back to your hand to continue your finessing ways.

If you are uncertain whether to lead a high card or a low card when taking a finesse, ask yourself this question: Will I be happy if I lead a high card and it is covered? Here is a combination where declarers sometimes make a choice that is really not the best one.

	AQ72	
K8		1095
	J643	

Suppose you need all four tricks in the suit. What chance is there?

It can only be done if West holds a doubleton King in the suit. You must first lead a small card to the Queen on the first round. When you continue with the Ace on the next round, LHO's King falls and your Jack will capture East's 10 on the third round.

The crucial point to remember is that you can never make four tricks (against correct defense) if you lead the Jack on the first round. West will cover with the King and you'll win with dummy's Ace. That will leave you with only one high card in the suit, the Queen, and the defenders will be certain to win the third round.

Now let's put the 10 of spades in the South hand, making the layout:

	AQ72	
K8		965
	J1043	

Now you're in possession of **all** the high cards except for the King, so you can play the suit by leading the Jack from the hand, as you'll have all the tricks regardless of what your LHO does.

A Couple of Bidding Topics

Did you know.....

Not every big hand is worth a jump shift in response to an opening bid

What a lot of people don't realize is that if you have a lot of points and want to be in game or maybe even slam, you don't have to crowd the auction and take up valuable bidding space when partner opens. Because a new suit is forcing for one round, partner can't drop you until you've made a limiting bid.

However, there are some hands that **are** worth a jump shift and the ones that do have the benefit of trump certainty. Suppose partner opens 1C and your collection of baubles is:

S—AQ984 H—AJ1072 D—AJ C-- 8

Should you jump to two of a major on this hand? The answer is no, as both spades and hearts are potential trump suits and you don't know at this point if and where the best fit is. So respond 1S, the higher-ranking of two five-card suits, and then bid hearts twice (still forcing as you are introducing a new suit).

S—AQ H—KQJ10975 D—K108 C—4

This hand qualifies for the jump shift to 2H, as you're going to follow up with 3H, telling opener that your suit is going to be trumps regardless of what his holding is.

S—A4 H—AQ1052 D—7 C—KQ964

This hand also meets the jump shift requirements, because if partner doesn't raise your hearts, you'll support clubs at the next bid, so the trump suit will then be confirmed.

Regardless of system, a 2-level response by responder promises a second bid.

When you bid a new suit at the two-level when partner opens, that requires 11 or more points. In addition, while responder may not be strong enough to venture game, he guarantees a second bid. That won't get your side overboard, as 23 combined points will still be enough to make a nine-trick contract.

Here's an example, with you having been dealt:

S—54 H—9752 D—KQ75 C—AQ8

The auction has gone:

Partner	You
1S	2D
2S	?

Can you pass?

Not on your life. Partner's 2S shows a minimum, but all that means is that he's in the 12-15 point range. If he's at the top of his bid, then you'll be missing a game.

Opener has repeated his suit and will have at least six of them. So boost him to 3S and let him make the final decision. He will in fact proceed on to game and the lead is the 2 of clubs.

	North	
	S—54	
	H-- 9752	
	D—KQ75	
West	C—AQ8	East
S—10		S—K632
H—AJ84		H—Q106
D—A932		D—J108
C—10752	South	C—943
	S—AQJ987	
	H—K3	
	D—64	
	C—KJ6	

Your potential losers here are:

Spades--	one
Hearts--	two
Diamonds--	one
Clubs--	none

The red-suit Aces cannot be avoided. Looking at just the North-South hands, there may not be a trump loser and the Ace of hearts could be onside, allowing the King to take a trick. But what if there is a spade to lose and the Ace of hearts is sitting on your left. Is all hope lost?

No, there is one way of maybe getting rid of the second heart and that's if the Ace of diamonds is also in LHO's hand. Win the club in hand, and play a diamond toward dummy

immediately. West will duck, and now you can get back to hand in a black suit to repeat the finesse. That creates a second trick in diamonds, providing a resting place for the small heart.

Hand 2

East dealer

North

S—A84
H—83
D—J653
C—K952

West

S—QJ103
H—A962
D—K104
C—63

East

S—96
H—KQJ105
D—A97
C—A84

South

S—K752
H—74
D—Q82
C—QJ107

Auction:

North	East	South	West
	1H	pass	3H
pass	4H	pass	pass
pass			

With 10 HCP and four-card support, responder jumps to 3H, inviting game. Opener has 14 HCP with a great suit and sure outside winners, so hi pushes on to game.

The Play:

South will lead the Q of clubs from hir high-card sequence in that suit.

East counts the possible losers and there are five of them; two spades, two clubs and possibly a diamond trick as well. The third club can eventually be trumped in dummy, and the spade suit offers possibilities for establishing an extra winner on the dummy.

Declarer can win the Ace of clubs, play two rounds of trumps and then the 9 of spades from hand to drive out one of the two top honors. Hi can win any continuation and persist with another round of spades. Once the defense wins that trick, dummy's remaining honors are promoted into winners and the losing minor-suit cards can be tossed on them.