



Notes From A Club Player

New Year's Resolutions

by Dar Webb

Let's face it, New Year's resolutions can be pretty tiresome. After resolving to eliminate junk food, cut down on drinking, and be nicer to your in-laws, **what's left?**

There's always bridge, and **if you are like me, there's a lot you can improve.** With that in mind, I began asking the players at my club (the wonderful St. Petersburg Bridge Club) what resolutions they would recommend for typical developing club bridge players. There was a surprising amount of agreement from the good players at my club, as to what the average player (for example, me) should work on.

So here goes. In 2017 I resolve to:

1. Double for penalty more. Why should I let the opponents push me around, even if they have stratospheric numbers of masterpoints? **Good players will take chances on risky contracts if they don't respect your game. Make them pay! If I double their contract and set them, it's probably a top board. If I double them into game and they make it, it's probably a bottom board. But if I don't double, the result is probably going to be average at best. I'm going to take a chance and see if I can burn them a few times. They may just have a little more respect for me the next time I sit down against them.**
2. Take advantage of the situation at the table. I will be more aggressive in the third and fourth seats and I will balance whenever I can. **I won't let** the opponents play in two of a fit – ever! No more will I ignore the difference between responses by a passed and an unpassed hand. I

promise to be compassionate to my partner when he or she makes a situational bid in the third or fourth seat.

3. Call the director. Goodbye meek and accommodating me! No more deferring to the other players at the table. There is only one director for **each game, and she's probably not sitting on my right or left.** If an opponent tries to claim a hand by throwing in the cards without giving me **a look at them, I'm calling the director. And I'm going to hope the director will be on my side, because I'm politely calling, "Director, Please!"**
4. Play with a new partner as much as I can. I developed some bad habits when I played with the same partner every game. If we are both average players, how will we ever learn anything new? For example, I discovered that learning to signal in a disciplined way is really tough when both partners are **trying to learn it at the same time. I didn't really learn about signals until I played with a much better player who demanded disciplined signals. I need to get out of my comfort zone and play with people who will challenge me, and in 2017 I'm going to do it.**
5. Be a more aggressive bidder. One of my mentor partners asks me, **"Whose hand is it? Ours or theirs?" I promise that if it is our hand, I'm going to bid. If I find myself wondering if I should go to game, I'm going to go to game. I'm going to support my partner when I have support, even if I am shy on the points. Here's a big one:** When I am responder I promise to bid again unless partner calls me off or I have a true stinker. This is not written down in any rule book, but serious players are counting on their partners to bid again.
6. Be a more conservative bidder. **"Aggressive" doesn't mean "dumb."** If my partner opens in third or fourth seat, or balances, I promise to temper my enthusiasm. Full disclosure: I have been overbidding at the three level! So I solemnly swear that I will have extra trumps or some really juicy distribution if I take a bid that high. I also promise not to bid a new suit at the three level unless I have a true big hand with playing values.

Do we have a misfit? **I'm stopping the bidding** as soon as I can. My final **"conservative" resolution is the toughest one:** I will no longer fall in love **with my hand. A long, beautiful suit doesn't justify going to game when my** partner keeps putting down the green card. Sigh!

There you have it: **My New Year's Resolutions.** In a few hours I will be playing the first hand of 2017. I doubt that my game will improve today. But if I stick with it, these resolutions may guide me to a better understanding of the game I love.

Wouldn't that be great?