



how good is your  
**BRIDGE?**



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Danny Roth

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# AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Are you feeling thoroughly fed up?

You go to your regular club duplicate, week after week, and wait for the results at the end, only to hear the tournament director read out a list of winners' names in which yours is conspicuously absent!

Well, it is long overdue that you did something about it! The purpose of this book is to help you eliminate many of the basic errors, which, over many decades, I have seen committed by everybody from beginners to world champions. I have improved my game over the years after coming in for some scathing and well-deserved criticism and learning from my mistakes. Here's your chance to do the same.

There are three basic scoring methods for duplicate: matchpoints, IMPs and board-a-match, the last effectively being a two-table match-point game. I do not intend to make this book an extravaganza on the differences between the various methods. Where they apply, I shall certainly mention them, but the vast majority of mistakes I discuss are applicable to all methods.

This book is primarily orientated towards matchpoint play and I shall concentrate on play and defense.

I must make an important point on general ethics as it applies to this method of scoring. Most people take the view that, in teams' events, they are responsible to their partner and teammates, i.e. the other three members of the team, while at matchpoints events, it is just one person, their partner. I want to stress that this is *not* the case. Suppose you are sitting North-South. You would be very pleased if pairs sitting East-West played well (except for the round when they are at your table) to give your rival North-South pairs poor results, thereby making yours look good by comparison.

Effectively — and this is what very few people seem to realize — the East-West pairs are your teammates for almost the entire evening. They therefore have a duty to you and similarly you have a duty to them. A number of articles and books have been written giving example deals where one can go for tops by playing anti-percentage bridge based on what you reckon is going on at other tables. It is called 'shooting' and I strongly urge you not to have anything to do with it. Not only

is this bad bridge but, to my mind, it is demonstrably grossly unethical. To look at it from the reciprocal point of view, if you, sitting North-South, were doing well in a pairs event, you would, with full justification, bitterly resent it if East-West pairs at other tables were shooting. Most of the time they would be presenting your rival North-South pairs with good results and leaving you with undeserved bad ones. So make up your mind now that your only interest is sensible bridge and rest assured that your results, at least in the long term, will look after themselves.

The book is divided into two major sections of equal length — declarer play and defense. I do not need to remind you that, of the two, defense is twice as important. Unless you are a very greedy and/or aggressive bidder, you will, on average, defend two deals for every one you play. Nevertheless, as you probably enjoy declaring twice as much as defending, we shall split the book half and half.



section 1  
**DECLARER PLAY**



# INTRODUCTION TO DECLARER PLAY

We can sub-divide this topic into two groups, notrump and suit contracts. We shall be looking at a number of notrump hands, but experience shows that by far the majority of mistakes are made in suit contracts. Therefore, the emphasis will be in that department. In suit contracts, the following questions need to be considered:

- a) Should declarer draw trumps?
- b) If he decides to do so, how should he proceed?
- c) If he decides not to, what are his alternative approaches?

With no disrespect to those involved, current bridge teaching has a great deal to answer for in this area. Beginners are taught that drawing trumps is a first priority. Once they have learned this, they play deal after deal with this idea at the back of their minds, messing up one stone-cold contract after another.

Two somewhat disturbing articles appeared in the bridge press recently discussing the pros and cons of drawing trumps. The first one suggested that drawing or not drawing trumps is a question of 'style'. The 'tight' player draws trumps; the 'loose' player delays this to do other things first. We shall look at a typical deal and watch our two protagonists in action:

Dealer West

Neither Vul.

	♠ A Q 6 4										
	♥ Q 8 3										
	♦ A K 4 2										
	♣ Q 10										
♠ K 5 3	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 8
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ 9 7 5		♥ A K 6 2									
♦ 8		♦ Q J 10 9 5									
♣ J 9 8 6 5 4		♣ K 7 2									
	♠ J 10 9 7 2										
	♥ J 10 4										
	♦ 7 6 3										
	♣ A 3										

W	N	E	S
pass	1NT	2♣	2♠
pass	3♠	all pass	

East showed at least nine cards in hearts and a minor.

West leads his singleton diamond.

Mr. Tight wins in dummy and crosses to the ♣A in order to take the trump finesse. When it succeeds, he draws trumps and attacks hearts. He eventually loses two top hearts, a club and a diamond — just making.

At the other table, Mr. Loose also wins Trick 1 in dummy, but attacks the heart position. East wins the first round and returns a diamond. West ruffs and returns a heart, won by East. Another diamond is ruffed by West, but that is the end of the defense. Declarer will draw the outstanding trumps and, with the ♦K available to discard his club loser, he will hold his losses to the top two hearts and the two ruffs. Again, the contract is just made.

How strange! Despite conceding two seemingly unnecessarily ruffs, Mr. Loose has emerged with the same number of tricks as Mr. Tight. It is of paramount importance to understand why. You should have appreciated that the first diamond ruff was on a trick that belonged to defenders anyway. The second was merely an exercise in trading tricks. Declarer lost an ‘unnecessary’ diamond, but saved himself a club loser. The article concluded that ‘loose’ players tend to fare better in the long run. In fairness, it has to be admitted that more contracts are lost by drawing trumps than by failing to do so.

The second article was more dogmatic, indicating that drawing trumps should be considered a first priority ‘unless there is a definite reason for not doing so’. For me, this is getting warmer, but it has to be appreciated that there are plenty of such reasons lying around. Trumps are needed for ruffing losers, communication and keeping control, to name but three purposes. In any event, it has to be demonstrated that fear — paranoia with some people — of conceding unnecessary ruffs is largely illusory.

Suppose we consider a typical trump layout, spades again.

♠ 10 9 8 7  
□  
♠ A K Q J

Here we have eight solid trumps between us and suppose we find a normal 3-2 split. If we draw three rounds of trumps and make the two remaining trumps separately, we have scored five tricks and conceded none — five tricks ahead of the opponents. Now suppose we only draw two rounds and turn our attention elsewhere. If we concede a ruff and are able to make the remaining four trumps separately, we have scored six trump tricks and conceded one, still five ahead of opponents, i.e. we have broken even. Suppose we go one step further and draw only one round of trumps. Even if the roof falls in and we concede three ruffs, if we are able to take the rest of our trumps separately, we have scored seven trump tricks for three conceded, an advantage of only four. So the ‘mistake’ has cost only one trick rather than the apparent three. All of this does not take into account that the opponents’ ruffs may be tricks that were theirs anyway (as we saw in the example above) and our ruffing may help to establish a long suit.

I trust you see my point. My rule regarding drawing trumps is as follows:

*Do not draw trumps unless you are fully confident that you know exactly what is going to happen afterwards. If you are — and that includes being able to cater for a bad split — go ahead. If not, it is likely to be right to delay drawing trumps.*

The point here — and this applies to all declarer problems — is to have a mental run-through of the progress of play before playing a single card to Trick 1. It is amazing how often you will find that drawing trumps leads to loss of control, lack of entries or, quite simply, not enough tricks.

We will now consider the *way* we draw trumps. Again, bridge teaching bears a great responsibility. Beginners are taught a string of ‘parrot’ rules of which probably the best known refers to finding the missing queen of trumps: “With eight ever; with nine never!” This advice certainly echoes the *a priori* percentages, but totally ignores the considerations of the whole deal.

# RATE YOUR BRIDGE GAME

Forget masterpoints! This fascinating quiz book on declarer play and defense lets you make a realistic assessment of your own bridge game. . . while you are improving it. Each chapter presents a series of card play problems and assigns you scores based on how close to the optimum solutions you get. You can expect to increase your rating as you work through the book, painlessly learning as you go.

Praise for Danny Roth's *Challenge Your Declarer Play*:

*"A sound book to keep your skills sharp."*

- The Bridge World

*"An excellent mixture of hands to test your declarer skills in a wide variety of situations."*

- Bridge Plus magazine

*"If you don't improve your reasoning, visualization and overall card play after working through this book, we would be quite surprised."*

- The Toronto Star



**DANNY ROTH** (London) is the author of more than a dozen previous bridge books and is a regular contributor to various bridge magazines.

