

MIKE LAWRENCE



BRIDGE TIPS

tips on

BIDDING



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PUBLISHER'S FOREWORD

When Mike Lawrence first suggested updating his 'Topics' series and republishing it, my first reaction was to search the bookshelf to see how many of the books I could get my hands on. The answer was five out of the original thirty-odd. Even Mike didn't really have a full set, but eventually he was able to scrounge the last few from a friend. The digital files, where they existed, were in pretty bad shape, so the next step was scanning and reviewing — and finally, we were in a position to start the project.

Much of the advice was as fresh as it was when first written over twenty years ago. But bridge has changed, and even some of Mike's own views have changed. As well, there were topics that were intended to be included in the original series but that somehow never got written. There were also some obvious gaps — for example, passed hand bidding and Drury — a convention on which Mike has some new and useful ideas.

Organization of the topics into books was another problem, since they had been intended as stand-alone booklets. Mike and I eventually decided on three books, broadly divided into the themes of constructive bidding, competitive bidding, and play and defense. (I say 'broadly', because, as you'll see, the topics didn't arrange themselves quite as neatly as this.)

Treat each chapter in this book as though you were taking a lesson from Mike — in particular, study the examples, and whether or not you come up with the same answer as the author, study his reasoning. No one writes more clearly than Mike Lawrence, and that makes it very easy to understand what he is trying to get across.

If you just pick up one key idea from each chapter, and remember to apply it when you're at the table, your results will improve noticeably.

Ray Lee
Master Point Press
January, 2015

In memory of Pat Golden.

You brought me into the world of computers when they had
screens the size of a toaster.

Thank you, my friend.

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1. AVOIDING COMMON ERRORS

All of the errors shown in this chapter are valid. I wish I were innocent of committing them.

NOT ACHIEVING YOUR GOALS

This one is simplicity itself. I won't spend much time on this topic. I will, however, emphasize it as strongly as possible. Bridge is a game. Look it up in the dictionary. But it is one of the most intense games you will ever play. It is also one of the most complex games you will ever play. We know intellectually that we want to have a good time, but in our hearts, we also want to win. Setting 4♠ doubled for +800 points feels good. Making 3NT by swindling someone you especially enjoy beating could be a stunning highlight to the afternoon.

But are these single triumphs what you are looking for? Do you strive for spectacular results or do you want to be a solid player in the long run? The fact that you are reading this implies you want to improve your game and be a long-term winner. You can undertake all the technical learning you wish, you can learn every nuance of dummy play and defense, and you can study all the conventions in the world. Still, technical perfection will leave you short of being a winner if you fail in any of the 'philosophical' aspects of the game. Here is a list of these areas. You have read about them and you have probably heard about them from your partner. You may even have preached some of them *to* your partner. Are you guilty of any of these?

1. Failure to pay attention. Do you ever find yourself wondering what card your partner played three tricks ago? If I asked you at Trick 10 how the bidding went, would you know?

2. When your partnership has a disaster, do you accept that you might have been partially responsible or do you find a way to blame partner?
3. When you get a bad result, do you dwell on it for half an hour or do you address the new hand in front of you?

Keeping your wits about you in good times and in bad times

The following article encapsulates all of the points above. It is based on a real story which is familiar to everyone. The name of the article is “Ecstasy”. It encompasses all kinds of emotions you will experience at the table.

In 1991, I was asked to write a tip for the BOLS contest, a competition which featured short articles on bridge that had a concise point to make. The rules were simple: make the article no longer than 800 words.

If you have ever written something with a deadline, you know the pressures. Writing something with a deadline and with a limit on how long it can be is doubly difficult.

The topic was easy to come up with. It is one of my favorites. I know from experience that the topic is pertinent to everyone, a view that I expect you to share with me after reading this.

My original draft came in at about 1100 words. Being warned that the length rule was going to be adhered to, I undertook the arduous chore of removing words, one at a time. Truly a painful task as anyone who has written a note, let alone an article, can relate to. Finally, after many fits and starts, the word total came to the required 800.

When I received a copy of the other articles, prior to hearing of the voting, I was surprised to see that the average length was close to 1500 words, some of the articles reaching as many as 3000 words. They were all good articles, leaving me to wonder how my original 1100 words would have fared by comparison.

But it was all moot. The judges rated this the best of the entries in spite of its having been trimmed to size. Since I believed then that this article is an important one, I can offer it to you now with the same satisfaction that I had when the contest was held.

ECSTASY

Almost everyone I know will admit to the following mishap. You are declaring, say, 3NT, and due to unfortunate circumstances, the defenders are running their five-card suit so you are going down at least one. Being depressed about the bidding, you discard poorly thus messing up your entries. Suddenly, your eight remaining tricks become only six when the opponents take advantage of your sloppy carding. Three down. It's bad enough you're getting a zero, but even with your head hung half-way to the floor, you catch a glimpse of partner whispering to his kibitzer. Sound familiar?

Bad news is infectious. It brings with it emotions ranging from disappointment to sadness to depression, any one of which can distract and cause muddled thinking.

Most players know that it is important to keep your wits when things go sour. The trick is to recognize when your concentration is failing and to get your thoughts back together.

The tough player does this automatically. The good player struggles, but usually succeeds and the rest of the world does it occasionally, but not routinely.

You say, "I know that"? I agree that you probably do know 'that', but do you really know it on a usable conscious level?

Strong negative emotions. They do obstruct our thoughts. Is there anything worse for our emotions than bad news? Try this:

The bidding goes 1NT - pass - 3NT. You lead fourth best from ♠KJ8642. Dummy has two small spades and 12 HCP.

Have you led into the ♠AQ? No. Partner plays the ace and starts to think. Does he have another spade? Is he thinking of switching? Partner, lead a spade! Please! Partner leads... the ♠10. You are now in charge, with six running spades which you proceed to take. Each one a little firmer than the one before, you pound out your remaining spades, the last one being especially satisfying because it is getting you +200. You're feeling a little ecstasy mixed with a little power as you turn the final spade. Feels good, doesn't it?

Now what? Cutting through a euphoric glow, you reconstruct the last four tricks. Let's see now. Partner discarded the.... What did he discard? I know his last card was the $\heartsuit 7$. But the one before that, and the one before that.... Come to think of it, what did dummy discard, or for that matter, declarer?

Do you think you're going to get it right? What if partner has another ace and you don't get it? Can you stand to see partner talking to that kibitzer again?

Ecstasy plays no favorites. It muddles your bidding judgment, your declarer play, and your defensive awareness with equal facility.

West	North	East	South
			1 \heartsuit
pass	2 \clubsuit	pass	2NT
pass	3 \heartsuit	pass	3NT
all pass			
\spadesuit 9 5 \heartsuit K Q 6 2 \heartsuit A 10 \clubsuit A J 9 6 3 <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> \spadesuit Q J 8 \heartsuit J 9 5 \heartsuit K Q 7 3 \clubsuit K Q 4			

West leads the $\spadesuit 6$ to East's ace. This is your basic dull contract which looks like a routine nine tricks. Perhaps you have been unlucky to get a spade lead. For instance, if North hadn't bid 3 \heartsuit , you might have got a heart lead, allowing you ten tricks. Therefore, when East returns a spade, ducked by West, you have to consider whether to finesse the $\heartsuit 10$ in order to try for ten tricks.

First, just to put your mind at ease, you cash the $\clubsuit K$. West pitches the $\heartsuit 3$.

Eight fast tricks. Not nine. So where is the ninth coming from? You have two possible plays.

1. Play on hearts and hope spades are 4-4.
2. Finesse the \spadesuit 10.

Which play is right?

The answer depends on your opinion of the spades. If East returned the two, the suit rates to be 4-4, in which case you should play on hearts. If East returned a higher spade, then spades are likely to be 5-3, in which case you have to hope for the diamond finesse.

The issue here is very simple. Either you paid attention to the spade spots and made an educated decision or you didn't pay attention to the spade spots and therefore had to make an uneducated guess. If you allowed the comfort of nine apparent tricks to cloud your vision, you're in trouble. Conversely, if you ignored emotional intrusions and paid attention to the cards, then you were able to determine rather than to guess the correct play.

My BOLS TIP is: Any time you feel yourself succumbing to an emotion, whether sadness, depression, irritation, COMFORT, ELATION, or ECSTASY, you should fight it off. STOP AND PAY ATTENTION!

FAILING TO RAISE PARTNER'S ONE-LEVEL RESPONSE WITH THREE TRUMPS

Anyone who has followed my writings knows how strongly I feel about this. When you open and partner bids a major suit at the one-level, you should consider raising partner's major with three-card support if you have the correct values for the raise. (You can find much more on this topic in the chapter on raising with three trumps and in my *Workbook on the Two Over One System*.) Here are some example hands. You open 1♣ and partner responds 1♥. What is your rebid?

♠ A 9 7 ♥ K J 3 ♦ 7 2 ♣ K Q 10 7 3

Raise to 2♥. Do not rebid 2♣ or 1NT. Your side wants to find a fit. Rebidding 2♣ is not a step in this direction. Rebidding 1NT gets notrump played from your side, which you don't want to do.

♠ 8 3 2 ♥ A Q 8 ♦ 9 4 2 ♣ A Q J 6

Raise to 2♥! If partner has a good hand, he will bid again. If notrump is the right place to play, you want partner to declare it. You have two unstoppable suits. Do you want to see West lead the ♠Q or the ♦J? Why be a notrump hog?

♠ A 10 7 3 ♥ Q J 4 ♦ 8 2 ♣ A K 9 5

Rebid 1♠. You will raise partner's major suit on 65% of the hands that have three-card support and 13-15 support points. This hand has four spades, which have a higher priority. Partner could have 4-4 in the majors.

♠ J 8 3 ♥ A Q 6 ♦ Q 7 2 ♣ K Q 10 4

Rebid 1NT. With balanced hands you raise when you have good support and are worried about the unbid suits. On this hand you have good support but you do have something in spades and diamonds.

You open 1♦ and partner responds 1♥. What do you rebid?

♠ K 8 3 ♥ Q 9 6 ♦ A K Q 6 ♣ 6 4 2

Rebid 1NT. This hand is rather close. The reason I am putting this hand here is to show you the range of things you have to think about. You have 4-3-3-3 shape. That suggests you rebid 1NT. Your heart support is only fair. It doesn't suggest 1NT *or* 2♥. Your clubs are terrible, though. They scream for a 2♥ rebid. Taking all the factors into consideration, you have a choice of rebids.

My experience is that this distribution suggests notrump pretty strongly. Bidding 1NT gets my vote.

Note what happens if you make some small changes. Say that your ♦K were the ♥K instead (but keeping the same distribution). It would be clear to raise to 2♥. Say that your ♦K were the ♣K instead (but keeping the same distribution). In that case, it would be clear to rebid 1NT.

In my opinion, your partnership should look very seriously at the idea of raising with three-card support if you are not already doing so.

♠ 4 ♥ A Q J ♦ A J 8 6 3 ♣ K 10 9 4

This is an important hand. What should you rebid? In support of hearts, you have 17 points. I would count it as 18 points if I had a fourth heart. 3♥ is a possible rebid but it violates one of the most sacred bridge rules, which says you don't make jump raises without four trumps. 2♥ is also a possibility but it is very conservative. A better way to bid this hand is to rebid 2♣. You hope partner won't pass 2♣ but if he does, it won't automatically be a bad spot. Your intention is to raise hearts on the next round. Say partner preferences you to 2♦. Now you will bid 2♥. This is an auction you need to discuss with your partner. You should play that this sequence shows 16 or 17 points with three-card heart support. If you had four-card support, you would have raised directly to 3♥ and if you had 13-15 support points with three-card support, you would have raised to 2♥ the round earlier. Learn to recognize this sequence. It is a useful trick.

REBIDDING ERRORS AFTER PARTNER MAKES A TWO-OVER-ONE RESPONSE

There are three common errors made by the opener when rebidding after partner has made a two-over-one response. Note that this discussion applies after a *major-suit* opening bid. This is the bidding in the following examples.

West	North	East	South
pass	2♦	pass	1♠ ?

What should opener rebid?

Error 1

It is wrong for opener to rebid 2NT without a stopper or at least a near stopper in all suits.

♠ A J 6 5 2 ♥ 7 6 2 ♦ K 9 ♣ K Q 7

Rebid 2♠. Rebidding 2♠ does not promise a six-card suit. This is true even if you play five-card majors. It doesn't even promise a good suit. Bidding 2NT gets the hand played from the wrong side. That is potentially awful.

Error 2

It is wrong for opener to rebid 2NT with a singleton in partner's suit.

♠ Q 9 8 7 3 ♥ A Q 6 ♦ 6 ♣ K Q 6 3

Rebid 2♠. If you rebid 2NT, partner will assume you have a doubleton diamond at least and will bid accordingly. Once in a while you can break this rule if your singleton diamond is an honor and your spade suit is terrible.

Error 3

It is wrong for opener to rebid a new suit at the three-level without a good hand.

♠ K J 8 7 3 ♥ A Q ♦ 6 ♣ Q 10 8 7 3

Rebid 2♠. Whether playing Standard or whether playing Two Over One, 3♣ shows an ace more than a minimum.

Other opinions exist

There are players who disagree with the above. Some players believe that if you rebid your major, you promise six of them, and they are adamant about it. So, in the interests of fairness, I researched hands from important events where excellent players were involved. I found that way more of them followed the guidelines above than not. Of particular interest is the fact that there were very few examples of players breaking these guidelines. I put all of these examples I could find into an article in the *ACBL Bulletin*. Here is one:

West	East
1♥	2♦
?	

♠ 5 3 ♥ A Q 7 6 4 ♦ 7 ♣ K Q 7 6 4

Half a dozen expert players held this approximate hand and they rebid 2♥. You can find fuller details in that article. If you have old *Bulletins* you can find two articles in the February and March 2013 issues discussing rebidding a five-card suit after a two-over-one response when using the Two Over One system. Perhaps you can find them online on the ACBL site.

MISUSING MICHAELS AND THE UNUSUAL NOTRUMP

There are two areas of confusion associated with these conventions. The first area is one of values.

What is the minimum range for a Michaels bid or an unusual 2NT bid?

My suggestion is that if not vulnerable, you need a reasonable 8 points for a Michaels bid, with most of your values in the major

suits. For an unusual notrump bid, you need about 10 HCP, with most of them in the minors. Remember that a Michaels bid only commits you to the two-level. An unusual notrump bid commits you to the three-level.

Mini-maxi ranges

Is your partnership allowed to make one of these bids with any range of points (with an eye to the vulnerability) or do you play mini-maxi ranges?

Mini-maxi means that when you make a Michaels bid or an unusual notrump bid, you show a lower range and an upper range. There is a middle range in which you are directed to start bidding your suits. For instance, if not vulnerable, you might play that you use Michaels when you have 7-12 HCP or when you have 15 or more HCP. With 13 or 14 HCP you are directed to overcall in spades and then bid hearts. Different players have different ranges for this treatment.

Most players use Michaels on any hand that is strong enough for a minimum range Michaels.

Which agreement does your partnership use?

This is my opinion. I think that you should use Michaels or the unusual notrump on any strength hand that is suitable at the given vulnerability. I do this because I get my shape across quickly and I give the opponents more problems. My opinion is not universal. Some players use the divided range for these bids. They feel that the divided range will allow partner to make better decisions. I agree that this may be useful but there are good reasons not to use this divided range.

- I give the opponents more problems because I am using Michaels or the unusual notrump on many more hands.
- If I have a 14-point hand, I will always get to show my suits by using the appropriate convention. If I overcall, it may not be safe to show my second suit later.
- If I have a 13- or 14-point hand and bid spades and later bid hearts, my partner won't know for sure that I have 5-5 in spades and hearts. It is reasonable for me to bid this way with five spades and four hearts. Using Michaels tells partner that I have 5-5 shape.

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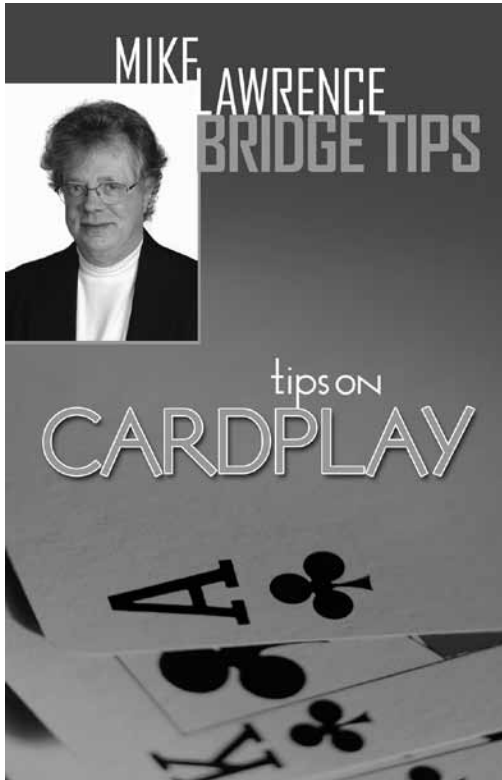
FROM MASTER POINT PRESS



The second volume in a three-book series based on Mike Lawrence's *Topics on Bridge* series for intermediate players first published twenty years ago. All the material has been completely revised and updated. Topics include Four-card Overcalls, Bidding over Preempts, Balancing and Takeout Doubles.

COMING NOVEMBER 2015

FROM MASTER POINT PRESS



The third volume in a three-book series based on Mike Lawrence's *Topics on Bridge* series for intermediate players first published twenty years ago. All the material has been completely revised and updated. Topics covered are Defense — including opening leads, signaling and third hand play — Declarer Play — including endplays, simple squeezes, loser on loser plays and timing — and also a general discussion of the mistakes we all make in cardplay but need to avoid.

TIPS FOR BETTER BIDDING

Twenty years ago, Mike Lawrence published a series of short booklets entitled *Topics on Bridge*, offering tips on various aspects of cardplay and bidding for intermediate players. Now this material is being republished as a three-book series — revised, updated, and with new topics added. Included in this volume:

- ◇ Avoiding Common Errors
- ◇ How Long is Partner's Suit?
- ◇ The Three-card Raise
- ◇ Reverses
- ◇ The Splinter Bid
- ◇ Bidding after an Opponent's Takeout Double
- ◇ Weak Two-bids
- ◇ Preempts
- ◇ Drury
- ◇ Passed Hand Bidding
- ◇ The Fine Art of Hanging Partner

MIKE LAWRENCE (Tennessee) has Hall of Fame credentials both as a player and a writer. An original member of the Dallas Aces, he has won three world titles and eighteen national titles. Several of his books are widely regarded as classics of the game.

