

Fred Parker

WIN AT DUPLICATE BRIDGE

Bid Difficult Bridge Hands
Like an Expert

An Honors eBook from Master Point Press

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Dedication

I dedicate this book to my wife Mary-Anne who keeps me happy, healthy and sane.

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this book is to improve the bidding of intermediate duplicate bridge players. The reader is expected to be familiar with duplicate bridge conventions and Standard American Bidding.

The most valuable lessons in the book deal with bidding difficult hands like an expert. This would not be possible without describing what you already know. Be patient when you read sections in the book that are familiar to you, they form the basis of the nuances that you need to learn in order to sharpen your skills.

Conventions described are ranked according to their frequency, usefulness and complexities. You do not want to play conventions that occur infrequently, are not very useful, or are overly complex. **This book will teach you which conventions are worth playing and how to play them.**

For every line that you fill out on your Convention Card, there are many implications and partnership agreements that need to supplement it. You will find chapters that describe everything you need to know about these nuances.

Each chapter contains system notes and “rules”. These are difficult to memorize. Therefore each chapter is followed by a quiz. Answers to the quizzes explain the reasoning behind each problem. By answering the questions correctly, you will reinforce the learning experience. The best way to learn the “rules” is by highlighting those questions that you answered incorrectly, and later re-visiting the highlighted areas in the book. This will reinforce your learning experience. The general philosophy throughout the book is conservative. Duplicate players should avoid “tops and bottoms”. They should rely on their ability to play the hands well. If you believe that you

play and defend as well as most of your opponents, there is no need to make bids that have a low percentage of success. **Conservative bidding does not mean timid. Often your best bet is to get in early and then get out of the bidding. This book will show you when to do this successfully.**

Sometimes when you make the correct bid it turns out badly. That is because the best practice bridge bidding is based on winning percentages. If you make the right bid that succeeds 60% of the time, than 4 out of 10 times this may give you bad results. Do not let that change your bidding style. **Stick with the best practices described in this book and you will be a winner.**

If you are an intermediate player, and learn the “rules” in this book, you will become a better bidder than most of your opponents. Guaranteed!

Although this book is about bidding, Chapters 23 and 24 cover Leads, Signals and Card Combinations which is a bonus that will be useful to intermediate players

CHAPTER 1

HAND EVALUATION

I apologize to experienced duplicate bridge players if they find this chapter too basic and mundane, but it is necessary to fully understand what is meant by point counts. I am sure you will find it educational to refresh your knowledge. Also you can use this chapter as reference when evaluating point counts in later chapters.

In some cases I will refer to “good points” and “bad points”. I will try to keep these references to a minimum. You should arrive at your point count using the guidelines below, and only in borderline cases should you base your judgment on what you consider good or bad points.

The “rules” below will help you in analyzing hands:

- If you are rich in Aces and Kings, add $\frac{1}{2}$ to 1 point.
- If you are rich in jacks and queens, subtract $\frac{1}{2}$ point.
- For a singleton K, Q or J, subtract $\frac{1}{2}$ a point from their value, unless partner bids the suit.
- If you are the opener do not add distributional values for short suits, only to your long suits. That is, because once you added values to your long suit, the fact that you will trump with them is already accounted for (see below).
- As opener, for each of your long suits that have more than 4 cards, add 1 point for each card over 4 (e.g.

for a 7 card suit add 3 points for distributional values).

If you are supporting partner's suit with three trumps, add 1/2 point for doubletons, 2 points for singletons, and 3 points for voids. If you are supporting with four trumps, add 1 point for doubletons, 3 points for a singleton and 5 points for a void. With Ax or Kx count both points and distribution, but with Qx or Jx only count the honor.

If you are bidding or supporting NT, deduct 1/2 point, if you have no Aces. Also deduct 1/2 point with 4-3-3-3 distribution. Add 1 point for any 5 card suit and an additional point for 6 card suits.

You will also have to use inferences based on the bidding of your opponents. For example, your king becomes more valuable when opponents bid the suit in front of you, rather than behind you. Point count bidding is not a science, and cannot be reduced to mathematical equations. In borderline situations where you are in doubt whether to bid or not, let the 10's and 9's decide whether your hand is worth bidding. Also consider the internal strength of your long suit.

References will be made to counting losers. Each suit has three potential losers. When you are counting losers, deduct your Aces, Kings and Queens from your loser count in each suit. With Qxx count 2-1/2 loser, but with QJx or Q10x only count 2 losers. With a singleton King count one loser. With Kx also count 1 loser.

Quick tricks are useful when responding to preempts or slam invitational bids, where they are the only help that partner is interested in. The definition of quick tricks is as follows: A=1, AK=2, KQ=1, AQ=1-1/2, and K=1/2. (Some books also refer to quick tricks as defensive tricks when used in context of competitive bidding).

Throughout the book mention will be made of point counts and loser counts. In my experience (and in references in the book), it is best to **use point counts** in most situations, and use **loser counts** only when preempting at the three level or above, or in slam bidding situations.

Evaluate the following opening hands for point count.

- | | | | |
|-----------|----------|---------|--------|
| 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. |
| ♠ AQ10986 | ♠ AQ1043 | ♠ A984 | ♠ Q |
| ♥ 863 | ♥ 6 | ♥ A7 | ♥ K983 |
| ♦ A7 | ♦ A8642 | ♦ A1065 | ♦ QJ72 |
| ♣ 94 | ♣ 74 | ♣ 743 | ♣ KJ94 |
- 5.
- ♠ KQ7
 - ♥ KQ83
 - ♦ KQ5
 - ♣ QJ6

1. 12 points. Your spade suit is worth 2 extra points
2. 12 points. Your two 5 card suits are worth 1 extra point each.
3. Ever heard the expression “Aces and Spaces”? Forget it. Aces are worth more than 4 points. This hand is worth 12-1/2 points.
4. This hand is worth 11 points, after deducting 1/2 point for the singleton Queen and another 1/2 point for having no Aces.
5. 17 points. Deduct 1/2 point for distribution in NT and another 1/2 point for having no Aces. You would open this 18 high card point count hand with 1 NT after re-evaluating it.

CHAPTER 2

CONVENTIONS

In order to become a successful duplicate bridge player, you must learn modern conventions. This book assumes that you are an intermediate player, and are familiar with most modern conventions. However, familiarity is not enough in order to become a winner. You cannot play all conventions in existence. You must choose carefully which conventions give greater benefits, and then you must fully understand all nuances of those conventions that you decide to play.

It is better to play fewer conventions well, than to play many without full knowledge of all aspects of the convention that both you and your partner understand. For a small advantage that does not occur frequently, it is not worthwhile to have a misunderstanding, which will not only cost you dearly, but could ruin your game and your partnership.

Unfortunately, as bridge becomes saturated with “expert” advice, the experts have been trying to outdo each other by inventing new conventions, to spark interest in their work. With computer simulation that has been used for years, I doubt that any new conventions will surface that will be more useful to the experienced player, than the ones you find in this book.

When you fill out your convention card, you must agree with your partner on how to treat each line on that card. Some of these are conventions: others are systems. Some stand on their own: others are connected with each other. You should not play any system or convention, unless you know all the intricacies connected to them.

I classify bridge conventions and systems into four categories.

1. Fairly frequent occurrences, where you will certainly lose points if you don't play them. Category 1 conventions are mandatory for duplicate bridge players who want to win.

2. Not very frequent occurrences, where you may lose points if you don't play them. Category 2 conventions are highly recommended for experienced partnerships.
3. Infrequent occurrences where the conventions are very complicated. Even though they are useful, they should only be played by seasoned partnerships willing to make the extra effort for diminishing returns.
4. Infrequent occurrences where you are not likely to lose points. Even if you don't play these conventions, it very often does not make any difference to the score. The reason these conventions exist at all is because "experts" who write about bridge are always trying to find new wrinkles. Don't play these.

Described below are conventions in the four categories. Category 1 should be on your card. Category 2 should be entered into only with experienced partnerships that make the effort to learn each "wrinkle". Category 3 should only be played with partnerships that play together very often and seldom have misunderstandings.

If someone tries to talk you into a convention that is not described in the three top categories, assume that it is Category 4, and give it a wide berth.

Full descriptions, and quizzes with answers will be given of the more complicated conventions in the first three categories. Some conventions that are simple will only be mentioned, in order to make sure that you fill them out on your convention card.

Sometimes the reader will come across a flier, or talk to some local "expert" who describes conventions or systems in more detail than what is given in this book. It is my belief, that there is no need to enhance proven good conventions with bids that happen so infrequently that you will never remember them, let alone expect your partner to remember it.

I wish to illustrate this with an example of the Drury convention. This was invented to find out whether partner who opened in third or fourth position has a full opener, or not. The Drury bid is a limit raise in partner's major suit. Once you find out what kind of hand opener has, the bidding can proceed on common sense lines – no

need for more things to remember about this convention. Yet when I picked up a flier on Drury, I found 4 different asking bids by responder, and 12 different responses by opener. Very few people can remember all of these. It is better to rely on common sense bidding. After partner tells you that h/she has a limit raise, both players should have enough experience to proceed and properly bid the hand.

The conventions in the four categories below are not listed in any particular order. I tried to follow the convention card format as much as possible.

Category 1: Highly recommended for intermediate players, who want to improve their duplicate winning percentages

1. Two over one. This is an exception to “must have them”, but if you want to improve your game, you should learn it and play it. Many players who played Standard American have converted to this modern system. It is most useful on both matchpoints and team games.(See Chapter 13 for full description)..
2. Negative doubles. Play it through 3 Spades.
3. Responsive doubles. Play it through 3 Spades.
4. Support doubles and redoubles. Play it through 2 Hearts. Play it for minors as well as majors (See Chapter 10)
5. Defense against NT. There are many systems available. The two best ones are DONT, and Modified Hamilton (See Chapter 14). Make sure that you not only agree on what conventions to play, but also which one to use against strong NT and weak NT.
6. Roman Key Card (See Chapter 12.)
7. 5NT asking for Kings. Specify whether you play number of kings or specific kings.
8. Gerber (See Chapter 12).
9. Jacoby 2NT over major openings. Play it only with 4 card support. If you have an opening hand or better and 3 card support, temporize by bidding 2/1, and then bid 4 in opener’s major (See Chapter 15).
10. Jordan 2 NT convention. Play it over both majors and minors.

11. Response after Opener's 1 NT bid. The Standard American approach of 3 hearts or 3 spades is game forcing. I recommend playing 3 hearts as 5/5 in the majors and invitational, and 3 spades as 5/5 in the majors and forcing.
12. Splinters. Make sure to mark it on your card. Mark it in both places under major and minor openings. There are many sequences where a splinter can be used.
13. After 2 club opening have an agreement as to what convention you play. There are four choices:
 - 2D waiting, and after that the second minor is negative.
 - 2H= negative
 - Steps or point count
 - Controls.

The best choice is the conventional 2D waiting. The second best is Controls. There are significant disadvantages for playing 2H negative response, or playing Step Response.

14. Over interference of the 2 club bid, play double as a bust and pass as waiting. Put that on your card.
15. Over weak two and weak three bids, new suit should be forcing, except in competition.
16. New Minor Forcing (See Chapter 16).
17. Fourth suit forcing. Play it forcing to game, but exception is to stop at the three level for majors, or four level in the minors, when there is a total misfit.
18. Notes on your convention cards:
 - If they double partner's 1 NT opening bid, you must ask what the double means. If it is for penalty you should agree with partner how to handle the run-out. I prefer that a redouble is relay to 2 clubs to enable responder to bid a 5 card suit. Put this agreement on your convention card.
19. Unusual 2NT. Play 2 lowest unbid suits – not Minors only. Play only in direct seat. In the balancing seat it is 18-19 points and a balanced hand.
20. Weak Jump Shifts. Play it over interference only. This means that without interference you should be playing strong jump shifts.
21. Smolen.

Category 2: Frequent occurrences, but well worth learning and playing.

1. Maximal doubles (See Chapter 10).
2. Over weak 2 opening, cue bid asks for stopper (E.g. 2H – 3H asks for stopper in hearts. This usually indicates a long solid minor suit with 7 or 8 tricks).
3. Inverted Minors (See Chapter 17).
4. Help suit game tries (See Chapter 18).
5. Lebensohl after interference over 1NT. This is a complicated convention, but worth learning, (See Chapter 19).
6. Lebensohl after double of a weak 2 opening bid. Play it only over a direct double only (See Chapter 19).

Category 3: Conventions that do not offer a lot of advantages. Only seasoned partnerships should play these.

1. Puppet Stayman. Has a problem with responder having 5 Spades and 4 hearts. This can be overcome but it is not worth the complications and effort to make it a Category 1 or Category 2 convention in my book (See Chapter 19).
2. Sandwich NT. Play it in both un-passed and passed hands, but play it only with 5/5 distribution. It is similar to unusual NT at the one level. Note that if you have 5/4 or 4/4 in the unbid suits, you will use the take-out double. This way your partner will be able to compete or defend the hand better, knowing whether your distribution is 5/5 or less.
3. Namyats. Must be played in conjunction with 3NT = Broken Minor (See Chapter 20).
4. 3NT openings. Play it as Broken Minor if played in conjunction with Namyats (See Chapter 20). If you do not play Namyats, use the 3NT opener as “Gambling 3NT”, showing an 8 card solid minor suit.
5. Asking bid for the Queen of trump after response to the RKC. Make sure you know the ramifications of this convention and if you play it.
6. Negative double at the three level, after 1NT opening by partner. (E.g. If partner opens 1 NT - R.H. opponent bids 3 diamonds, a double is negative for take-out).
7. Drury convention. Play reverse Drury, and play it in both third and fourth seats. Don't overcomplicate with 2-way Drury.

- Play it on, over 1 spade or double. If opponents play Drury, don't let them stop at the two level, bid something in the balancing seat. They will almost always bid three.
8. Defense against strong club opening. There are several systems available. I invented one myself, and have the chutzpah to call it the Parker Convention. (See Chapter 11). Any system against strong club requires partnership agreement.
 9. Leaping Michaels over weak two major openings. This convention calls for bidding over a weak two major opener with a two-suited hand containing a minor and the other major. Write it in space over take-outs over weak 2-s. It means that over 2H or 2S, jump to 4 of a minor is a game-going hand containing at least 5-5 of the minor, and the other major. Partner should either raise the minor to play in 5, or bid the other major. (E.g. 4 Clubs over 2 Hearts means 5 Clubs and 5 Spades and is game forcing).

Category 4. Not worth considering let alone playing.

1. Roman Key Card Gerber. This rarely comes up, and is often no better than ordinary Gerber.
2. Minor Suit Stayman. Many people will not agree with my assessment that it belongs into Category 4, but would put it into Category 3. Under no circumstance play it as Category 1 or 2. It is overly complicated, the responses are even more so, and the occurrences are very infrequent. When it does occur, it is not certain that the end result will be beneficial, although it is true that in some situations it is the only way to reach a minor suit slam.
3. Bergen raises. These bids are part of an aggressive preempting scheme that some professionals are teaching. It was popularized by Bergen's book "*Points, Schmointz*" and relies on the law of total tricks. While there is some value to the "law" unfortunately it has many faults. When you play Bergen raises you give up some bids, and while preempting your opponents at times, you also get into trouble at other times. Stay away!

What you will learn from this book:

- What conventions you need for a winning edge.
- How to bid conventions like Lebensohl, New Minor Forcing, Inverted Minors, Jacoby 2NT, etc.
- When to overcall with 8 points, but pass with 16.
- How to respond with borderline hands. When to raise partner's suit rather than bid your own suit.
- When to open 1NT with a 5 card major.
- When to preempt, and at what level.
- How to respond to a take-out double, a negative double, or a responsive double.
- The type of hand you need to have to balance. How to bid difficult hands in competitive situations.
- How Two over One differs from Standard bidding systems.
- When to use 4 Clubs as a Gerber bid. When to ask for Aces or Key Cards, and when to cue bid.
- Modern and best practices for leads and signals.

Each Chapter has Quizzes with fully descriptive answers, in order to enhance the learning experience.



FRED PARKER was born in Hungary. He survived the Nazis, escaped from the communists and made a career in the United States as an executive in Hi-Tech electronics manufacturing. His lifelong interest in bridge led him to his second career as a bridge writer and player.