



JUST FOR NEW PLAYERS

How to improve your game

By Bruce Greenspan

Someone defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result. So you're hooked on bridge and have a burning desire to get better. There are a number of ways to improve your game.

Bridge is an experiential game – the more experience, the better. Experience comes in different forms. I inhale the Bridge Bulletin every month. Sometimes the bidding of the world-class players leaves me shaking my head. Some bid on absolutely nothing and yet they land on their feet. There are numerous sections with hints to improve your game and the world's best players and teachers are there to guide you.

Playing at home on the computer is a great way to practice counting. Reading and taking lessons are also excellent.

Of course, there is no substitute for playing, but the work begins after the game is over. One of the best things you can do is analyze your results. After the results are posted, go over to the recap sheet. All your scores are posted and the matchpoints you won on each hand are listed. The pair number goes across the sheet and the board numbers run up and down. Copy the number of matchpoints you won on each board on your convention card. On the recap sheet it will tell you what score is a top on a board. Half that number will be an average score.

Now get a copy of the hand record if they are provided. Look carefully at deals on which you did not score well and also note what you did really well. Are there any common themes to your bad scores? Do you frequently underbid or overbid? Do you do well at trump contracts and poorly at notrump contracts. Remember, your rebid must show your range not your shape.

In trump contracts, the first thing you do is count your losers (ex-spouses aren't included) and decide whether to draw trumps. There are several occasions where you must delay drawing trumps. If you need dummy's trumps for ruffing or transportation to a long side suit, don't draw

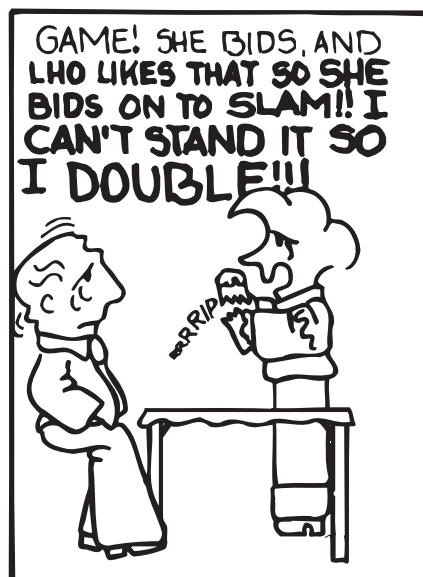
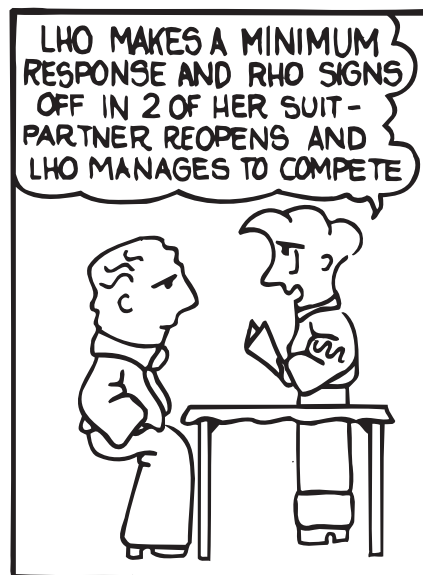
trumps until you ruff your losers or set up dummy's suit. If you have too many losers and don't have control of the trump suit (if you hold K-Q-J-10-9-8 of the trump suit, you do not have control of the suit) delay drawing trumps until you've gotten rid of one of your losers.

Are notrump contracts the problem? Do you know the rule of seven? Notrump is a race between declarer and the defenders to set up their long suits. The rule of seven tells you how many times to hold up (not win) if you only have one stopper in a suit.

Say dummy has the 7-6 and you hold A-5-2 of the suit that's led. Add the number of cards you have in dummy to the number in your hand and subtract from seven. In this case, you have five between your hand and dummy. Five from seven equals two, so hold up twice. This cuts communication between defenders. If the leader held five cards in the suit, your right-hand opponent will have three and will be unable to return the suit if he is on lead. When do you not use the rule of seven? If you have a weaker suit the defenders may switch to, ignore the rule of seven.

Is defense your weak area? Pay attention to partner's signals. Do you have agreements about leads and discards? If not, discuss them and pay attention. Eventually, every card should have a meaning. One important caveat: Never give

information through your signals that will be more helpful to declarer than partner.



Cartoons Jude Goodwin, from the book *Go Ahead, Laugh*, published by Master Point Press.