



# JUST FOR NEW PLAYERS

## Matchpoint strategy

By Bruce Greenspan

Bid aggressively. Duplicate pairs tend to bid “close” games and slams, so don’t settle for a safe part score if you think there’s a fair chance you can make game.

Choose the highest-scoring game. For game contracts, you should be most anxious to play 4♥ or 4♠, willing to play 3NT and reluctant to play 5♣ or 5♦. If you have game values and a club or diamond fit, consider playing 3NT instead.



Choose the safest part score. When you have minimum high-card strength, choose the safety of a trump suit. A major suit is still best, but if you’re deciding between notrump and a minor, play a suit contract if you have a fit and you’re in a part score.

Overall freely. Don’t be afraid to make light, lead-directing overcalls at the one-level – especially when you’re not vulnerable and your opponent opens 1♣ or 1♦. If you have to go to the two level to bid your suit, though, be somewhat cautious. For a two-level overcall, you should have a good suit – a strong five-carder or, better, a suit of six or more cards, especially if you’re vulnerable.

Raise partner’s suit freely. Even if you’re light in high-card points, stretch to raise partner if you have a fit for his suit, especially in competitive auctions.

Sacrifice more often. If you have a good fit, sacrifice freely if your opponents are vulnerable and you are not. Be very conservative when you’re vulnerable.

Don’t “sell out” too low. If the opponents stop at a low level, you don’t have to have a strong hand to balance back in. The best time to compete is when: (1) You’re not vulnerable, (2) the opponents have stopped in one or two of a suit contract (not 1NT or 2NT) and (3) you’re short in the opponents’ trump suit.

One of my early mentors, Sandy Drum, had a rule, “Nobody plays 2♥ unless I have hearts.” Basically, this means balancing if the opponents stop in 2♥ with a double or overcalling a five-card suit (preferably spades).

Double more part scores. If you bid to a part

score you think you could have made and your opponents bid over it, a double is sometimes necessary for you to get even an average score (be very careful in choosing when to use this tip).

Use a simplified form of the law of total tricks for competitive decisions. If your side has hearts, bid 3♥ over their 2♠, but hesitate to bid 3♠ over their 3♥ without a nine-card trump fit. If this doesn’t work out, send Larry Cohen a note.

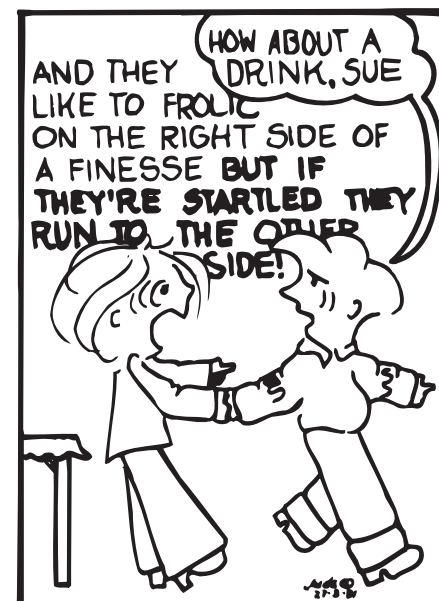
In the play, make normal opening leads. Don’t try for a top by choosing an unusual lead. Against most contracts, choose a safe, non-deceptive opening lead.

Look for overtricks. Unlike in rubber bridge, it’s sometimes right to make a risky play trying for the overtrick – especially when you’re in a normal contract that you think will be bid by other pairs.

Play it safe if you’re in an unusual contract. Go for the sure plus score if you’re playing or defending a contract that won’t be bid at most tables.

Fight for every trick. Don’t claim with an obvious loser. Play all your winners out. The defenders may go wrong and make a mistake in their discards. Besides, torturing the opposition is one of the two reasons I play bridge (torturing my partner is the other).

You must defend very well, fight for every



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

single trick. It’s the difference between winning and losing. You aren’t necessarily trying to beat the declarer at all times, just everybody else sitting in the same direction.

Taking your tops and trying to go average the rest of the time is the formula for success.