

2 Interesting Boards: Opening 1NT versus a Major, and Communicating "Attitude" During Play on Defense

Bruce Thompson

To return to the "Esther Bridge Lessons," CLICK:

<https://esther-bridge.com/index.html>

Interesting Board #1: To Major or No Trump???

Board #4

Friday P.M. "Shark" game, 10/02/20

This Board is an excellent example of sorting out whether to bid a long Major, or 1NT, which is a fairly common dilemma.

Dealer: WEST

Vul: BOTH

		NORTH		
		S: 5 2		
		H: T 9 8 3		
		D: J 7 3		
		C: 9 8 7 4		
	WEST		EAST	
S:	K J 8 4		S: Q 9 7 6 3	
H:	K Q 6 4		H: A J 7	
D:	8 5 2		D: A T	
C:	J 5		C: A T 3	
		SOUTH		
		S: A T		
		H: 5 2		
		D: K Q 9 6 4		
		C: K Q 6 2		

Bidding

W: PASS N: PASS E: ???

WEST has 15 HCPs. Both WEST and NORTH passed. Should WEST bid 1S, or 1NT? WEST must decide whether to prioritize showing 15-17 points, or holding 5 Spades. Spades is the "premium" suit: (1) a Major yielding higher bridge scores for a given number of tricks versus a Minor, and (2) the Major that can control the auction at a given level if the auction becomes competitive.

In this case, showing points is probably preferable. First, because WEST is a passed hand, WEST will need to know about the strength of EAST's hand to help decide whether the hands are game going. Bidding is all about giving partner information: Given partner accurate information, and focus on giving partner what is situationally the most important information. Second, EAST's Spades are not of super high quality: 1 honor, only 5 cards, but with some intermediate "beef" (9, 7, 6).

Don't forget the beef when you are evaluating your hand! Holding K, T, 9, 8, 7 really is **better** than holding K, 6, 4, 3, 2. And holding *touching cards* in **sequences** in the high or intermediate card values is also important!

Marty Bergen, a 10-time national bridge champion, is also famous for his bridge books. In his extremely popular book, Points Schmoints!, Bergen says (*emphasis in the original*), "Whenever you have a balanced hand and the appropriate point count, open 1NT. **There are absolutely no exceptions. Do not be distracted by a five-card major**" (p. 9).

This competition in the Shark Tank involved 14 pairs sitting in both directions. It is instructive that 8 of the 14 E/W pairs opened the bidding with WEST bidding 1NT! Obviously then, 6 of the 14 Shark WEST players opened the bidding by bidding 1S. It is highly instructive that 7 of the 8 E/W pairs in which WEST opened 1NT ultimately **bid and made 4S**, while only 2 of the 6 E/W pairs in which WEST opened 1S bid and made 4S!!!!

Interesting Board #2: **Hand Re-Evaluation and Defense**
Board #9

Tuesday P.M. 49er game, 10/06/20

This Board is an excellent example of (1) re-evaluating your hand each step of the bidding process, and (2) the importance of communicating "attitude" when playing defense.

Dealer: NORTH
Vul: E/W

	NORTH	EAST
	S: 9 7 6	S: A T 8
	H: Q 4	H: 8 6 2
	D: K Q J 9 8	D: T 7 4
	C: T 7 5	C: 9 4 3 2
WEST	SOUTH	
S: K Q J 5 4	S: 3 2	
H: 5	H: A K J T 9 7 3	
D: 6 3 2	D: A 5	
C: A K Q 8	C: J 6	

#1. Hand Re-Evaluation During Steps of Bidding

Let me share my thought process throughout the initial stages of bidding while sitting SOUTH on this Board. Both NORTH and EAST will pass. I have (1) 7 Hearts in an almost perfect sequence (sequences near not at the bottom of the suit are very, very important), (2) 2 Aces!!!, and (3) 13 HCPs. I am pretty excited. What should I bid to open?

My Opening Bid

Open 4H? I think I can see 8 tricks in my hand alone: probably 7 Hearts, and 1 Diamond. I am missing the Heart Q, but with 7 Hearts in my hand there is some likelihood that (1) partner holds the Q, or (2) I can drop the Q by playing my A, K. Arguments in Favor: (1) You can open at the 4 level if you think you have 8 tricks. (2) You are not vulnerable. Arguments Against: Your hand is too strong. Bid lower when you "have more to talk about," and thus more to learn.

Open 2H? No. You hold 7 Hearts. You are only showing 6. I might bid a weak 2 with 7 cards (unlikely), but not with 13 HCPs plus 7 trump.

Open 3H? Probably not. On the one hand, you will jam E/W with this high level bid. And you are showing your 7 cards. But you are too strong when holding 13 HCPs, 7 trump, and 3 doubletons with 1 Ace.

Open 1H? Yep. You can show your length later, if that becomes suitable.

WEST Bids

WEST bids **1S**. No question. 15 HCPs, and very nice Spades indeed. How does WEST's bid impact my re-evaluation of my hand. It is important to re-evaluate your hand after each bid!!!

Once WEST bids, I would like my hand more. I hold a doubleton in E/W's suit, plus long trump (a nice combination). Of course, this is not unexpected, because with 3 doubletons, it was inevitable. (I might like my hand even more if WEST had opened **2D**, since I hold a doubleton plus an Ace in Diamonds.)

NORTH Bids

NORTH holds 8 HCPs, 2 of my Hearts, including the Q (VERY important), and a lovely sequence of 5 Diamonds. **Sequences are very important!** Normally I wouldn't shift suits at the 2 level unless I had 10 HCPs, but any NORTH that fails to bid **2D** on this hand doesn't deserve to have you as a partner.

Once NORTH bids **2D**, I like (love) my hands tons, and tons, more! NORTH has some points! NORTH does not have 3 or more Hearts, but I can still hope for 1 or 2. And NORTH has 5+ Diamonds, with some honors!!! And I hold Ace small in Diamonds. Our hands **fit** (if NORTH also holds some Hearts)!!!!

If I was playing SOUTH on this board in real human bridge, before the pandemic, in the Bridge Center, before the Bridge Center burned down, I would be so very excited that I would wet my pants. This, of course, would be a strong violation of the ACBL "Laws of Bridge" Law 16, "unauthorized" or "extraneous" information. I have supplemented my bidding with "extra" information by telling partner that I am extremely excited.

Fortunately, when we play online bridge, partner will not be aware of my excitement, and so I have not violated Law 16. Who says that the pandemic doesn't have any advantages?

EAST Passes

My Re-Bid as SOUTH

Bid 2H? I would be showing 6 (but not 7) trump. Partner would then bid **3H** to show that we have at least 8 Hearts, showing 2 Hearts. I would then bid 4H.

Bid 3H? I would be inviting to game if NORTH has any Heart support. But partner will not know for sure about the length and the strength of my Hearts, and not know that I hold the Ace of

Diamonds in a doubleton. Partner is a passed hand. Will partner leave me in 3H? If I was willing to consider a 4H open, would I really at that point bid 3H?

Bid 4H. There is an important saying in bridge, "He who knows, goes!" I think I know. This is what I would do in this sequence.

#2. Playing Good Defense

In the actual 49er competition on this Board, 2 pairs bid 4H, and 1 pair bid 2H. Two N/S pairs made 5, one N/S pair made 3. Look at the holdings of E/W. The E/W pair holds 2 Spade winners, and 2 Club winners. How is it possible that that 2 of the 3 N/S pairs were able to make 5, when it **looks like a sure thing that N/S will be down at least 1???** It is all about defense, and communicating with partner on defense.

Ask any Shark: Defense is the hardest part of bridge. It is **essential** that partners on defense communicate (1) "attitude" ("I like this suit" or "I do not like this suit"), (2) suit count (odd or even), and (3) suit preference. Doing the last 2 takes a very long time to learn and master. But showing "attitude" is ABSOLUTELY CRITICAL from day #1 at the bridge table (or bridge computer).

Some players play such that if I play a high card on your lead (7 or higher), or I play any card of any denomination, but play high, then "echo" later low, then I like your suit, either because I have winners in the suit, or I am soon going to be able to trump this suit.

For various secret reasons, I personally prefer "inverted" attitude. "Low" = "Yes"; "Hi" = "No." But whatever you plan to play with partner based on your partnership agreement, you MUST communicate "attitude."

On this Board, every player sitting WEST led the Ace of Clubs, thus promising the King. If I was sitting EAST, I would play my 9 on the Ace, saying I do not like this suit. And the reason I would be saying this is because (1) I have no honors in this suit, and (2) I am long in this suit, and so I can't trump it, and (3) if you are long also in this suit, N/S are going to quickly trump in.

At that point, sitting WEST, I would either play the King of Clubs, and if it won, move to play the King of Spades. If WEST stayed with the Clubs by playing the King, I sitting EAST would then "echo" with the 2, which says to partner, "No. Really. Try something else." Or sitting WEST I would move to the

King of Spades. And we would take our 4 tricks off the top to set the contract.

Now, if WEST played 3 Clubs in a row, sitting SOUTH, I would trump the Queen of Clubs, play the A, K of Hearts from my hand, play the 3 of Hearts to the Q on the Board. I would then play the 8 of Diamonds to the Ace in my hand, play the 5 of Diamonds from my hand to the King on the Board. I would then play my Diamond winners from the Board, and "dump" my 2 Spade losers in my hand on the K and Q of Diamonds on the Board. Remember: in suit contracts, **sloughing or trumping losers is the name of the game**. Which is why I wet my pats to start with, during the bidding (which is not OK in in-person human bridge, but is OK in on-line bridge).