

We had nine tables at the last CHAT bridge session!! We had 6 mentors. Some of the CHAT participants attend every session they can. Some neophyte bridge players are attending their first few CHAT sessions. Many have played party bridge for some time and now they want to try the “real thing” (my words). For newcomers, there are a variety of anxieties that surface during the sessions. Getting used to the bidding boxes has pained more than a few of our CHAT players. When are alerts needed? Should we reshuffle the hand before returning the cards to the board? Etc...

One anxiety that we see regularly is Slam bidding/play. There is a lot of nervousness about slams. I am called over to a table to help East with a bidding quandary. We come up with a couple of bids and then partner just jumps to 6 spades. This was exciting, but I hear:

“You get to play it partner. Good luck.”

“Oh no! I can’t play a slam. I have never done that before.”

I offer help: “No problem, you can do it. All you have to do is take 12 tricks.”

“I don’t think so. This makes me nervous.”

“Your partner has shown confidence in you. She bid it knowing you would play it. Come on, I’ll play it with you.”

The opening lead is made and the dummy comes down. We pause a moment.

“OK, we need a plan. Let’s count the tricks we have right off the top. Let’s see, we will get 6 spade tricks, and 1 heart trick, 4 diamonds and 3 club tricks (4 if the finesse works). Looks like we have 14 tricks. That’s encouraging!”

“I am still nervous.”

“Don’t be. Our plan is simple. Start with trump and just take tricks. Skip the finesse.”

The hand is played and makes 7 spades. The table celebrates (including the opponents). See, playing slams isn’t all that hard!

At another table I am asked to help West (declarer) with the play of a hand. The contract is 3 diamonds. Six tricks have been played. Declarer took 4 of those tricks and needs 5 of the remaining 7 tricks. At first look, it appears to me that declarer might be able to get two more tricks; getting 5 tricks is not going to happen.

Declarer is looking a bit bewildered. "What can I do?"

I try to be helpful: "Are you religious? Prayer is the only possibility I see."

That didn't seem to help anything, so I suggested that we start over and see if we can bid the hand differently and get to a better contract. This is the beauty of CHAT. You get to feel the pain of a bad bidding mistake and then press the UNDO button and try it again. Some of this pain is useful. You say to yourself, "I'm not making that mistake again!" Voila! Your game has just improved a bit.

It is easy to see that the CHAT group is strengthening their games. The questions they ask are getting harder. I find myself consulting with other mentors more often on the answer to some questions. The mistakes I am seeing now are at a higher level. Overall understanding of the basics is growing. I am being challenged/corrected more often. My "expert" status seems to be taking a hit.

But, I am sticking to my story. I make these mistakes on purpose. I am sacrificing my credentials for the greater good. It facilitates good discussion and helps build confidence. Noble!

Have fun,

*Arne Fockler*

**There are three kinds of bridge players:**

- those who can count, and
- those who can't.