

Learn from my mistakes

How (not?) to think about bridge



A bit about me

Like many of you, learning bridge as an adult

About halfway to my 10,000 hours*

A few “advantages”

- Able to afford really good coaching

- Obsessed with bridge - spend about half time on it, and work very hard

Bridge is hard

Playing moderately badly can put you in contention!

There is a lot to think about - it's hard to think about the right thing at the right time

There is not (even close to) enough time to think about everything at each play

Learning to think about bridge as an adult is hard

Goals for today

Share some of how I (try to...) think about bridge

Share some thoughts on how to develop your bridge thinking

Amuse you with some of my blunders

Have you play a couple of exciting hands

Problem 1

Your hand: 74 of clubs

You think your RHO has 8 of clubs and a high heart

Dummy has a small heart and a high spade

What do you do? (I got this wrong)

Lesson: Don't make plays that can't gain

Can playing the C4 ever gain?

Can playing the C7 ever gain?

Top two priorities

Make plays that can gain

When it is clear that one play gains more often than another play, choose the one that gains more often

Good news: doing this consistently will make you better than 99%+ of bridge players

Bad news: it's harder than it sounds

What does it mean for a play to gain?

Winning a trick that you were always going to win is not “gaining”

A play only gains if at the end of the hand you might take more tricks than the alternative

Newer players tend to be too worried about tricks now

When you make a play

Understand why you are making it

What are you hoping for / worried about

Try to be able to clearly explain what you are playing for

Lesson two

You are defending 4H after a Jacoby transfer auction.


You lead the CA, dummy plays small, partner plays the 2, and declarer the Q

What do you think declarer's clubs are?

What are you worried about?

Third: what to do next

W	N	E	S	North
	P	P	1NT	♠ KQ8
P	2♦	P	2♥	♥ AJ975
P	3NT	P	4♥	♦ J104
P	P	P		♣ 106
West				
♠	1076			
♥	108			
♦	Q62			
♣	AK853			



Declarer's clubs

Here are some possible club holdings for declarer


Q, QJ, Qx, QJx, QJ9x

Before you choose your next play:


Which are you “worried” about? What is your worry?

Which is most likely?

(in this case worried = something bad will happen if you cash your CK)

W	N	E	S	North
	P	P	1NT	♠ KQ8
P	2♦	P	2♥	♥ AJ975
P	3NT	P	4♥	♦ J104
P	P	P		♣ 106
West				
♠ 1076				
♥ 108				
♦ Q62				
♣ AK853				

Is your CK being ruffed “something bad”

W	N	E	S	North
	P	P	1NT	♠ KQ8
P	2♦	P	2♥	♥ AJ975
P	3NT	P	4♥	♦ J104
P	P	P		♣ 106
West				
♠ 1076				
♥ 108				
♦ Q62				
♣ AK853				

What are you playing for?

When you have a difficult decision try to think of at least one layout of the cards where your play gains.

If you can, think about whether you think this layout is likely and compare it to the layouts where the alternative play gains. Which is more likely?

All of this is easier said than done...

How to build these thought processes?

I wish I knew an easy way... or a reliable hard way

What helped for me: working on “double dummy problems”

Lots and lots of practice thinking through “what happens if”

Likely at first you have to be looking at the hand record

Over time if you work hard enough you will be able to do it in your head

Enough hard work... let's have some fun

Two exciting hands from the 2018 United States Bridge Championship R16

No pressure... just playing against Bob Hamman and David Berkowitz with an audience of 500 on vugraph, and if you get these right you advance to the the quarterfinals, but if you get them wrong there will be a bridge bulletin article by Larry Cohen describing your errors :)

Please bid the first hand and pause at the end of the auction

Discuss your auctions

Now play 6N by S

Our auction (no interference)

2C - 2D

2N - 3C

3D - 5N

6D - 6N

How did you do?

Did you take a club finesse?

Why?

Which way did you guess hearts?

Why?

See Larry Cohen's article in the May 2019 Bulletin

His main point is right, but he didn't explain clearly that the H8 is the critical missing card



The Real Deal

BY LARRY COHEN larryco.com

Logic trumps odds

For the fifth consecutive month, we visit a misplayed deal from the 2018 U.S. Team Trials. Watching online can frustrate me, as I expect more from the expert players. South held:

♠ A K Q ♥ Q 7 5 ♦ A K Q J 5 ♣ J 9.

Vulnerable against not, he opened 2♣ and after partner's 2♦ waiting, rebid 2NT to show 22–24 balanced. Partner used Stayman and then jumped to 5NT to offer a choice of slams. South suggested diamonds, but North was having none of that and corrected to 6NT. A low diamond was led:

♠ J 9 7
♥ K 10 9 6
♦ 9 8
♣ A Q 5 4

♠ A K Q
♥ Q 7 5
♦ A K Q J 5
♣ J 9

Dummy's ♦ 9 held. What are the odds?

You don't need to know them! You just need good logic. Can you figure out the best line of play? (Note: There is no 100% line.)

Start by counting top tricks. You have three spades, five diamonds and one club. One big conclusion is that you should disregard the club suit. Even if you were to win a club finesse, that would get you to only 10 tricks. You could later establish a sure heart trick, but would still need to find the ♥ J for a 12th trick.

Because you have to find the ♥ J regardless, there is no reason to take an initial club finesse. Contrast the club finesse plan to working on hearts (the right play). If you can find the ♥ J (which you always need) and take three heart tricks, you won't need a club finesse. You'd have the nine top tricks mentioned above and three heart tricks. So, it is only a question of how to play hearts.

You can finesse against either opponent for the ♥ J, but you should choose to finesse against West (LHO). Why? Because if he has the ♥ J – a 50% chance – you claim 12 tricks. If you play East for it and he has it, you are not home free. You still need a reasonable heart break or club finesse. Picture, for example, East with ♥ J x x or ♥ A x x. You'd lead the ♥ 10 for a finesse, but later, the ♥ Q and another heart would reveal that the suit isn't running.

In dummy at trick 2, lead a low heart (East could have a singleton jack). No

matter who has the ace, take the 50–50 finesse against West's ♥ J. Nothing is better. Certainly stay away from the clubs! This was the Real Deal:

Dir: North ♠ J 9 7
Vul: N-S ♥ K 10 9 6

♦ 9 8
♣ A Q 5 4

♠ 10 4 ♠ 8 6 5 3 2
♥ A J 8 4 2 ♥ K 3
♦ 10 7 4 ♦ 6 3 2
♣ K 10 2 ♣ 8 7 6 3

♠ A K Q
♥ Q 7 5
♦ A K Q J 5
♣ J 9

Declarer did actually work on hearts, but he played them incorrectly – running the ♥ 10 from dummy – for down one. The other table played in game, so this cost 26 IMPs, losing 13 instead of winning the same number.

Play in the 2019 World Wide Bridge Contest

The 2019 World Wide Bridge Contest will be held at clubs around the globe on June 7 and June 8. The contest, sponsored by the World Bridge Federation, is scored across the world to produce an overall winner. The Friday and Saturday games are separate events. This year, clubs may hold their game at any time during the day.

The contest provides a rare opportunity to play in a major event and compete with players from other countries. Participants receive electronic access to souvenir commentary, and winners ACBL-wide are featured in the Bridge Bulletin.

For more information, contact speialevents@acbl.org or visit ecatsbridge.com.



Second board:

Turn the board so that N has the E hand

Please bid the second hand and pause at the end of the auction

Discuss your auctions

Again play 6N by “south” (actually W)

Our auction:

(3D) 3N (P) 6N

How did you do?

A harder hand, but my line was clearly inferior

At the other tables top players got this right



The Real Deal

BY LARRY COHEN larryco.com

Best try for a 12th

For the sixth month in a row, our Real Deal comes from the 2018 U.S. Bridge Championships. South, vulnerable against not, held:

♠ K 10 3 ♥ Q 7 4 2 ♦ A Q 3 ♣ A J 2.

Right-hand opponent dealt and opened 3♦. As they say, "It is dangerous to bid, but it is dangerous to pass." South overcalled 3NT, raised to 6NT by partner. How should you play after a diamond lead?

♠ A 6 5 4
♥ A 5
♦ K 2
♣ K Q 9 7 5

♠ K 10 3
♥ Q 7 4 2
♦ A Q 3
♣ A J 2

In notrump, I recommend counting top tricks. Here, you can count on 11 (clubs are sure to run). How should you try for the 12th?

One declarer won the ♦ K and played the ♥ 5 at trick two. Do you like that play? The preemptor could have the ♥ K, but these days, a white on red preempt doesn't really show anything. It must be better to play on spades. Why?

If spades are 3-3 (or doubleton ♠ Q J), you have 12 tricks. Admittedly, a 3-3 break is less likely than the 50-50 ♥ K play. But even if spades aren't 3-3, there is a great second chance. If the player with long spades has the ♥ K, you will fall into your 12th trick. Here is the Real Deal:

Dr. East ♠ A 6 5 4
Vul: N-S ♥ A 5
♦ K 2
♣ K Q 9 7 5

♠ Q 8 7 2 ♠ J 9
♥ K J 8 6 ♥ 10 9 3
♦ 8 ♥ J 10 9 7 6 5 4
♣ 10 8 6 4 ♣ 3

As you can see, the declarer who led a low heart at trick two went down. West took the ♥ K and there were only 11 tricks. Declarer's team lost 13 IMPs (the other table was in game) instead of winning 13.

In a different match - all matches used the same deals - declarer led a spade to the 10 at trick two. It lost to the queen, and West returned a spade. Declarer won the ♠ K, cashed the clubs and the ♥ A, and then took his diamonds. This was the remaining position:

♠ A 6
♥ 5
♦ —
♣ —

♠ 8 7 ♠ —
♥ K ♥ 10 9
♦ — ♥ J
♣ — ♣ —

On the play of the last diamond, West has to abandon one of the majors. As long as spades were 3-3, or the player with the long spades had the ♥ K (as here), the contract makes. This is a much better shot than putting all the eggs into the ♥ K outside basket.



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Thanks, and good luck today!