

DBAA Lecture Series
Better Partnerships by Marty Nathan
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The Psychological Part of the Game

- What makes for a good partner? We'll go around the room and ask a few top players. Here is what I expect to hear:
 - Consistency
 - Being on the same "wave length"
 - Easy to play with
 - Technical Competence

I suggest these are for most experts in order of importance. Technical excellence certainly has its place but will matter on only a few hands at best. Consistency – trusting that partner will remember your system and will make the correct response or provide the right signal – is needed on one hand after another.

- Exercise: Teaching partner at the table
- Which hand do you want partner thinking about?
 - If it's the hand last played, be sure to:
 - Criticize the bidding/play of that hand
 - And don't drop it even when partner asks.
 - If it's the one to be played, I recommend
 - Saving critical comments for post-session or, if you really can't wait, until the break
 - Circle the board numbers on your scorecard as a reminder for which hands are to be reviewed. (You are willing to wait to teach partner but of course don't want to let the opportunity pass altogether.)

- Two types of issues that come up during a hand
 - System issues
 - "Partner, don't we play Drury in 4th seat too?"
 - "Didn't we agree on coded tens and nines only against notrump?"

Judgment Issues

- "Do you really think you had enough to invite"
 - Bridge translation – *"You must be crazy to think that hand was even close to 10 points."*
- "Why did you make the passive lead of a trump"
 - Bridge translation – *"Any idiot could see dummy had running diamonds and we had to get our tricks fast."*

You can discuss System Issues between hands and usually won't raise partner's blood pressure. Or yours.

It's the Judgment Issues that must be saved until the session has ended. Even if you are right, you'll win the battle (the argument over that hand) and lose the war (the event itself).

- There's a great story about the Italian expert Giorgio Belladonna. His partner in an international match miscounted trumps – Yes, it can even happen at that level – and gone down in a cold small slam. Belladonna stood up, walked around the table and planted a kiss on his partner's forehead. That's the Italian way of saying, "Forget about it, pard. Let's play the next hand."
- First-Time Partner
Best time to employ KISS – Keep It Simple Stupid. So often I've seen that first time pairs do very well because they don't make bids partner might misunderstand and their systems are "primitive." After a couple of rounds together, their more sophisticated systems likely will get them into all kind of trouble!

Minimize the pressure – the "Maureen Rule." I had hinted for months to my neighbor Maureen McGuire that we ought to play. Of course, I had maybe 50 points and she had over 1000. She explained her rule with first time partners, "No matter how we do or how we finish, we agree that we will play again." That removes a lot of pressure off the weaker player. And your partner is always the weaker player, right?

The Technical Side

Good partnerships have written agreements

The mere act of writing it down makes you both think about what's best for your partnership.

It should be a working document. You don't need to write down everything (such as A=4, K=3...) but just the stuff that might be forgotten or be viewed differently by each partner.

Mechanics

One person must be the secretary and maintain the "official version".

Otherwise you are each making changes and no one knows what is agreed to

The secretary must take care to mark any changes since the last version. Consider using different colors to highlight the things you are most likely to forget. E.g, Green for you, Violet for partner. Then in reviewing before a tournament, you each concentrate on the highlighted items first.

Keep long discussions out of the agreement. Consider moving any extensive topic – say, over half a page – to an appendix. Then you don't spend so much of your pre-tournament review time on it. Unless of course you want to.

Update as often as you make changes or clarify understandings.

Tip – be sure to address how each of your agreements is affected by competition. That's often overlooked in more casual discussions.

An example is attached.

Don't change your agreements in the month before a tournament. Remember that nothing is really part of your system until you each forget it at least once.

Common issues that often lead to misunderstandings. (See Sam Mark's lecture for 20 more issues.)

- Is 2/1 always game forcing, or are there exceptions? Over 1D? After responder's rebid of minor (e.g., 1♥-2♣; 2N-3♣? Can we get out in four of a minor if 3NT is not palyable?
- Is Bergen on over a double? After a 1S overcall?
- Is Drury on over a double? After a 1S overcall?
- Are inverted minors on or off in competition?
- Do we play systems on after a balancing notrump
- After Jacoby 2NT, is a jump to 4 shortness or second suit?
- How big is a 1st round splinter? Any? 9-12 HCP? 12-15? Other?
- What is Stayman and then 3m? Weak? Invitational? GF? Slammish?
- What is Jacoby Transfer and then 3m? Weak? Invitational? GF? Slammish?
- What is our minimum suit quality for a weak 2 bid? How if at all is it affected by seat position and vulnerability?
- Assuming you do play a reverse shows extra values, is this still true in a 2/1 auction?