

Rick's Tricks

MINUS 2800

By Rick Roeder

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Bridge bidding has evolved in significant ways since the days of Edgar Kaplan, Barry Crane, Alfred Sheinwold and Alphonse Moyses. Clearly for the good! I believe that most above-average partnerships bid better than the very elite pairs of the 1960's. Read an old Bridge World or reports of ancient World Championships to check out whether this is just more Roeder hyperbole.

A case in point: The auction proceeds:

1NT – P – 2♣ – DBL

Until recent years, most expert pairs ignored the double if the 1 No Trump opener held a major. Lacking a major, you might have a hand like:

♠AQx ♥Kxx ♦KJ10xx ♣Qx

You have a nice 5-carder in Diamonds and can make a descriptive 2♦ bid. A pass transmits more information to Partner than if Righty had passed 2♣. I held this hand in Walt Schafer's IMP game:

♠AQx ♥KQx ♦QJ10x ♣Jxx

After the double, I passed. No problema.

Now, let's discuss the modern wrinkle. In the 21st century game, a pass over the double denies a Club stopper in expert bridge. If partner still wants to hear if you have a major, he will redouble in passout seat. Now, the tricky part: Pard may have a Club holding he wishes to protect on opening lead. Thus, your responses after the redouble need to be modified to accommodate such possibility.

2♦ 4+ Hearts. Less than 4 Spades

2♥ 4+ Spades. Less than 4 Hearts

2♠ Neither Major.

2NT Both Majors.

Let's take a look at a layout where this treatment is a God send (even for atheists).

PARD:

♠KQxx

♥Axxx

♦xx

♣Kxx

YOU (the 1NT opener):

♠J10xxx

♥KQ

♦AKQ

♣Jxx

After the double, the 1NT opener passes over the double of 2♣. When the Stayman bidder redoubles, the correct response by opener is 2♥, showing 4+ Spades. The Stayman bidder bids 4♠. The ♣K is protected at trick 1. If the 1NT opener is declaring 4 Spades, the opponents will take the first 2 club trucks when Righty shows up with the ♣AQ. With a ruff at trick 3, you are quickly down 1, unless you are skilled enough to avoid the loss of the trump Ace. If North is declarer, your chances of a make are much, much better.

Go back and review the hand I actually held. Pard redoubled the double of 2♣. The auction had never come up in my partnership with Alan Watson. Absent this new toy, 2♣ redoubled is an offer to play. I passed. Way back when, I forgot our discussion of this sequence. We wanted to join the 21st century, baby! Except I zoned out and thought I was wearing bell bottoms, circa 1969. Pard held:

♠K1098 ♥xx ♦Q9xxxx ♣x

Alan made an aggressive and questionable Stayman call. What would he have done over a 2♥ call? Regardless, amnesia by yours truly triggered the catastrophe. Down 6 for -2,800! 21 IMPS lost! The largest loss I have ever incurred on a single board.

As a reformed pessimist, I noted that three good things resulted. Our catastrophe was early in the session so we had time to recover. Neither one of us said a word after our disaster. We were not vulnerable. We played quite well the rest of the session, winning first overall.

Conventional gadgets are like power saws: Fantastic in the right hands, but very dangerous if misused. If your partnership(s) employs a lot of 21st century conventions, I offer two suggestions. Have a written set of notes that is regularly reviewed and updated. Updated notes are NOT enough. Regularly have conversations with your partner about your more esoteric methods. Conversations are particularly useful if your partner plays one of your pet toys that is not standard. I used to play with some frequency with a guy who tartly said, "Read the notes" when I inquired about a bidding nuance. While a quality player, I do not go out of my way to play with him anymore.

I wish to emphasize that we were not vulnerable when catastrophe struck. If red, my brain fart would have resulted in a 3,400 point set. Our partnership is disciplined. We never go for over 3,000. ♣