

Rick's Tricks

How Is Your Nose? Detecting Odors

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You hold the following hand at green vulnerability (white vs. red) in an IMP pair game.

♠- ♥KQxxxx ♦9xxxx ♣xx

As 5 counts go, this mitt is pretty exciting, especially when white. You are in 3rd chair and hear this auction:

PARD	RHO	YOU	LHO
1♦	P	1♥	1♠
2♥	2♠	?	

You play support doubles. Pard has at least 4 hearts. Your hand's offensive potential has taken off like a rocket ship from Cape Canaveral! Let's count the number of tricks you can contribute to a heart contract. You have 5 heart tricks. Your 5th diamond rates to be a trick. I think your other diamonds can help solidify Pard's diamond holding so let's confer your hand with a 7th trick of offense.

Let's look at the other end of the spectrum: your potential defensive tricks against a spade contract. Do you have a potential defensive trick? Yes, if hearts break 2-2. But, wait. Pard has promised 4 hearts. Those pesky opponents have at most 3 hearts. Alas, zero defense.

ODR is an acronym for Offense to Defense Ratio. Your hand has a sweet smelling OD(o)R when it comes to offense. Think Chanel. But, your hand's OD(o)R has the stench of rotten eggs when it comes to your defense. If you were a major league baseball player with this ODR, you would be the full-time designated hitter. If you were a little leaguer, you would have been the permanent right fielder. Math whizzes will tell you that 7/0 equals infinity. So, your ODR tells you that you desperately want to be declaring and not defending.

What to do? At the table, a competent player jumped to 4♥. From an offensive perspective, this bid makes total sense. Does that make 4♥ the correct bid? The opponents are at the table and they own at least half the deck's HCP. Confucius says that when you have a big two-suited fit, so do the opponents. Worse, one of their suits is Bruce Springsteen, the BOSS suit.

What happened after the 4♥ bid? LHO's 4♠ was as predictable as the direction of the sun in the morning. Pard doubled. Now, your bid: Your OD(o)R screams for a pull to 5♥. Alas, our hero

passes, possibly having flashbacks to a partner's previous diatribe, "Never pull my penalty doubles."

-990 later, Pard cattily points out that you could make 6♥.

The other hands:

RHO: ♠Kxxx ♥x ♦xx ♣AJ10xxx

LHO: ♠AQJxx ♥xx ♦Kx ♣KQxx

PARD: ♠10xxx ♥AJ10x ♦AQJx ♣x

Let's further analyze the auction. There is nothing terrible about the 4♥ bid. In fact, the call had the potential to work out really well. The opponents may well be reluctant to bid 5♠ after they got pounded in 4♠. Your jump to 4♥ also makes it really difficult for them to know that they have a two-suited fit. As an aside, after the 2♥ bid, a 4♣ fit bid by RHO, instead of the conservative 2♠ bid, would have left the opponents in a much better position to evaluate future developments.

Now, for your consideration, as Rod Serling might say: What about a 3♥ call over 2♠? This deliberately understates the offensive value of your hand. But, so what? Over the certain spade bids, your objective is to buy the hand at the cheapest level possible, hopefully 5♥. The parlance for deliberately understating your offensive potential in the auction is dubbed "Walking the Dog." Deliberate underbidding can put the opponents in the Twilight Zone.

Walking the Dog can work well against experts. In two Vanderbilt matches against the great Richard Pavlicek (both, predictably losses), the only time I got an upper hand against this underrated maestro was when I Walked the Dog. We held hearts while Pavlicek-Root held spades.

Earlier this year in Walt Schafer's invitational IMP pairs, Alan Watson and I were pitted against two of the USA's best young stars, Kevin Rosenberg and Finn Kolesnik. I was in 4th chair at green vulnerability. Finn opened 1♠ and Alan surprisingly bid 2♠, Michaels. I was looking at an anemic hand but I did hold Q-sixth of hearts. Kevin bid 3♥, limit raise or better. I did not see the point of bidding immediately so I passed. Finn jumped to 4♠. I finally came to life with 5♥. They collected +100 while being cold for +650.

In deciding to declare or defend in competitive situations, check out your OD(o)R. By employing this helpful ratio, you will rarely need to use room freshener. Your ODR will have an impact as to the strategy you employ in bidding your hand. SMELL GOOD! ♣