

Rick's Tricks

THEY SAID IT

By Rick Roeder

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Some axioms are so time-tested that they devolve into cringe-worthy clichés. For example, “two heads are better than one” or “a stitch in time saves nine.” However, if you fully embrace each of the following adages attributed to various bridge stars, past and present, your game will improve. PROMISE!!

Barry Crane: *The even levels are for us. The odd levels are for the opponents.*

Edgar Kaplan: *Take out doubles are meant to be taken out.*

More Kaplan: *Don't preempt when you have a good dummy for 3 suits.*

Bob Hamman: *Knockout matches are like a heavyweight fight. In contrast, matchpoints is a game where the objective is to knock out the drunks faster than the competition.*

On a similar theme, Mike Smolen opined, *In matchpoints, sometimes you have to make bad bids, in order to induce the opponents to make worse bids.*

More Hamman: *Don't play me for the perfect hand. I don't have it.*

Last, “Hamman's Rule”: *If 3NT is a feasible contract, bid it.*

However, a bit of blowback from Jim Backstrom: *It is often not right to bid 3NT when your only stopper in a suit is the Ace.*

You are in 4th seat after the auction, 1 \heartsuit -*-2 \heartsuit : Alphonse Moyses said, If you are allowed to make a responsive double with 4 hearts, a responsive double morphs into a responsive straight jacket.

Jeff Rubens: *After an enemy preempt, the objective is not to reach the best result possible so much as the best practical result.*

Nobody knows who wrote a handful of classic songs such as the original version of *The House of the Rising Sun*, that the Animals remade into a #1 smash in 1964. Similarly, the authorship of certain bridge axioms are unknown to yours truly. After an enemy preempt, the lack of a clear action suggests the following axiom: *When fixed, stay fixed* (as opposed to diving off a cliff into water of unknown depth).

Play the card you are known to hold.

Don't double the only contract you can beat.

Another nugget of unknown origin is *Game before slam*. This covers territory where a cue bid may not be a slam probe but instead says to partner, *I am not sure of strain. I need you to pick*.

Some axioms are not always accurate: *8 ever, 9 never* in regard to finessing a queen.

One ever-present axiom looms large in the more aggressive world of 21st century bridge, adhering to the law of total tricks: *It is safe to bid to the level of your total trumps, irrespective of the number of your high card points*. The authorship of this invaluable advice is a bit complicated. Frenchman Jean Rene Vernes wrote an article on this topic in the 1950's. S.J Simon indirectly referred to this general concept in his 1945 classic book, *Why You Lose At Bridge*, when he opined, *When in doubt, bid one more*. Which, in turn, relates to another bridge axiom, *Bridge is a bidder's game*.

In practice, Crane was well ahead of his time as he used such a principle to assist in his unparalleled matchpoint successes. He would repeatedly open hands lighter than the standards espoused by the Gorens and Roths of his era. Such initial actions helped him get "in and out" of auctions quickly, predicated in no small part on the degree of trump fit.

In more modern times, the one-time partnership of Marty Bergen and Larry Cohen paid religious homage to THE LAW. The Bergen convention mandates that when you have 4 card support for Pard's major suit opener and lack the values for a Jacoby 2 No Trump response or a splinter, you make an immediate descriptive bid at the 3 level. Cohen has relentlessly supported THE LAW in his works. The complicated authorship of this important principle reminds me of *You Keep Me Hangin' On*. Motown's Supremes recorded the initial #1 smash. In 1968, Vanilla Fudge's version offered a very different psychedelic take. Two decades later, Kim Wilde's #1 remake introduced the classic to a new generation.

Ifti Baqai: *Trump leads are most effective when they can be followed up with further trump plays*.

Ron Andersen (arguably the most colorful commentator ever during knockout matches vugraphed at the Nationals) on claiming, *Show it before you blow it*.

Erik Paulsen: *If you bid an unusual 2 No Trump, you should plan on playing the hand. Otherwise, declarer will have a blueprint in the play*.

Eddie Kantar: *If the opponents never make a doubled contract against you, you are not doubling enough*.

Evan Bailey: *A stiff King is a big No Trump card*.

Rick Roeder: *A stiff King is the Viagra card*.

Marc Rothblatt, a deceased San Diego expert who tragically passed way too young: *When faced with various reasonable options, play for the story!*

Phil Read (from his legendary list of 36 rules): *If you have a play or bid of equal merit, make the play that is easier for partner*.

More Read: *If your right-hand opponent opens with your best suit, you pass*.

More Read: *An opponent who fumbles with his cards does not have the Queen of the suit lead.*

Last and far from least from Phil: *Look for opportunities to give your partner honest praise.* We miss you, Phil!! (The San Diego expert retired from active bridge 20+ years ago). I urge all of you to google his 36 rules. If you do so, you will be very well read!

My mom: *It is a good idea to pull two of declarer's trumps with just one of yours.*

My grandmother: *It is good to have just a little bit more than what you have.*

After playing bridge for over half century, one would think that these rules would become rote for yours truly. I assure you, this is not the case. For example, whenever I have a difficult bidding decision as to whether to bid at the 5 level in a competitive auction, I always think of Barry's adage. Thanks to all these bridge stars for making the game a bit easier for the rest of us! ♣