

The Most Common (and Dangerous) Bidding Errors

Inability to relate scoring to playing.

Imagine trying to play any other game without knowing how the scoring is done and what is required to win. Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? But too many players simply don't know enough about scoring to enable them to make fundamental bidding decisions. Sacrifice? Bid that risky game or slam? Double the opponents' aggressive overcall? If you don't already know how to calculate the score for any possible result, learn immediately. Otherwise, you will end up...

Not respecting vulnerability.

When you're vulnerable, be careful. Pushing the opponents with one more raise can cost a bundle. Learn to score, and you will begin to respect your vulnerability (and abuse your vulnerable opponents) as appropriate.

Playing too many conventions with too little understanding.

So you love to add a new convention every week. You're not alone. It seems to be a natural attraction. But be careful of new conventions. Make certain that a new convention doesn't conflict with others with which you're already enamored; and don't add a new convention until you're totally comfortable with the ones you added yesterday and the day before. Too many players think that because they know what a particular bid means, that suggests that they can play the convention. Most conventions involve a bid, a set of responses, and numerous possible rebids and re-responses. Know them all before you start playing the convention. And be prepared for a couple of disasters before you're really comfortable with your new toy. In short, don't complicate your game too quickly, and expect to pay a price for each new gadget. Pick conventions that really add value to your game, and not just ones that look good on your convention card.

Overvaluing high cards and undervaluing distribution.

Everybody likes face cards; they look good in your hand. Aces look even better. And aces and kings are somewhat

undervalued in the Goren point-count scheme. Queens and jacks look good, too, but they are overvalued in the point-count system. But face cards often don't take tricks, especially in suit contracts. Short suits prevent high cards from winning tricks, so they are to be valued. And long suits take tricks long after the aces and kings are face down. A hand with two long suits will have two short suits, and is a particularly strong holding. Bid aggressively with distributional hands; be careful of the balanced hand with a lot of "pretty" cards.

Bidding your own hand exclusively.

*When you're bidding, you can see only one hand. So it's natural to judge the whole world (at least for this deal) by your particular holding. But don't fall into the trap of thinking that it's you against the world. That person sitting facing you is your **partner**. Listen to her bid. Especially listen to her **passes**. If you've bid a suit once, assume that your partner actually heard (or saw) that bid. It's not necessary to bid your suit three times to get your partner to understand that you really have that suit. If your partner bids a different suit than the one you happen to hold, don't assume that you must outbid your partner to prove your superiority.*

Inability to visualize all of the hands from the bidding.

Getting a totally accurate picture of what everyone else is holding is not easy. But it becomes easier if you spend more time listening to your partner and your opponents' bids, doubles, and passes, than if you dwell on your own hand. Picture what each person is holding. Sometimes you'll be wrong, but at least you will have something on which to base your bids and your subsequent play. If you actively practice this, you may actually get better at it over time.

Not being able to pass when required.

Knowing when to pass is the most difficult challenge for most players. Practice it often and practice it hard. Re-evaluate your hand based on each call at the table. Sometimes you will be encouraged to bid more, but often the clues will tell you to pass smoothly. Don't sacrifice against contracts that don't make; don't push opponents

into games that they were perfectly content to miss; don't put cards in your partner's hand that he can't possibly hold from the bidding. Live to fight another day; just pass.