

AN HONORS eBook FROM MASTER POINT PRESS

Rakesh K. Kumar

100 Bridge Tips for Club Players



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Master Point Press
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
(647) 956-4933
info@masterpointpress.com

www.masterpointpress.com
www.bridgeblogging.com
www.teachbridge.com
www.ebooksbridge.com

ISBN: 978-1-77140-379-5

Cover Design: Olena S. Sullivan/New Mediatrix

1 2 3 4 5 6 28 27 26 25

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INTRODUCTION

The players at my local bridge club enjoy their weekly or twice-weekly game. They probably enjoy the company of the other bridge players even more. Everyone is at least mildly competitive. However, as is true of club-level bridge everywhere, the standard of bidding, play and defence is quite variable.

For the last few years I have been writing short articles for the club website, discussing recently-played deals which I thought were instructive. Usually these were deals where few had reached the optimal contract, or where the play or defence had obviously fallen short, or where there was much variance across the field.

This book is based upon those articles i.e. most of these are real deals that were played at the club, although several have been modified for clarity. In the light of what actually happened during the session, the aim of this book is to offer club players some suggestions that might help them to improve their results. As most club sessions are duplicate pairs, the 100 tips presented here usually assume matchpoint scoring, although there are quite a few that are oriented towards IMPs scoring.

The tips are divided equally between play, uncontested bidding, contested bidding and defence. The auctions assume basic Standard American bidding (5-card majors, 15-17 1NT opening, 10+ hcp for a 2/1 response, weak two-bids other than 2♣) but would be equally relevant to a 2/1 game-forcing style. Only a few conventional bids are discussed. Leads are old-fashioned "standard" (including top of a sequence, high-low from a doubleton etc) and signals are either standard or reverse (low to encourage and low-high to show an even number) as indicated.

I hope at least some of these tips will help readers!

Rakesh K. Kumar
November 2025

PLAY

TIP 1: ESTABLISHING A LONG SUIT

At matchpoints, overtricks are invaluable, so you should always look out for opportunities to develop an extra trick or two. With that in mind, how would you play this 4♥ contract? West leads ♦5. East plays the ace and you ruff.

♠A762
♥QJ92
♦J82
♣AQ

♠K98
♥A7643
♦-
♣K9876

As always, your first steps as declarer should be to count your winners and losers, then develop a plan for the play. Of course you are going to finesse in hearts and hope for a 2-2 break. If that works, you have 10 tricks (5 hearts, 2 spades, 3 clubs). Two more diamond ruffs in hand with your small trumps would get you up to 12 tricks (4 trumps in dummy, 3 ruffs in hand plus the 5 tricks in the black suits) but you would still have a spade loser. Can you improve on that?

Indeed you can. Cross to dummy with a top club, take the heart finesse (successful) and draw another round of trumps (they break evenly). Now you can cash the other top club in dummy and when everyone follows, ruff a diamond and ruff a club. Then you ruff the last diamond back to hand and can cash ♣K and the established fifth club to discard 2 spades from dummy. That allows you to ruff your spade loser and make all 13 tricks!

Here is the full deal:

Dlr: N ♠A762
 ♡QJ92
Vul: NS ♦J82
 ♣AQ

♠J54
♡85
♦K109543
♣J2

♠Q103
♡K10
♦AQ76
♣10543

♠K98
♡A7643
♦-
♣K9876

West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♡
2 ♦	2 ♡	3 ♦	4 ♡
All pass			

When this board was played at the club, almost everyone was in 4 ♡. However, only one declarer timed the play correctly, which earned her a well-deserved top.

Next time you are in a suit contract with enough trumps between the two hands, take a close look at the possibility of establishing an extra trick in a 5+ card side suit.

TIP 2: RUNNING A LONG SUIT

On this deal, you are South, not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents. You open 2NT (20-21 high-card points – abbreviated hcp hereafter) and partner raises to game. West leads a fourth-highest ♠4 and you find yourself looking at:

♠Q95

♥65

♦98543

♣Q76

♠KJ6

♥K82

♦AKQ72

♣A9

Partner has been more than a little optimistic. Can you live up to her expectations? East plays ♠10 to the first trick, you win the king and now you cash two top diamonds, East discarding ♥3 on the second one – the opponents play reverse signals (a.k.a upside-down count and attitude). When you lead ♠J, West follows with ♠3 and East with ♠2. At this point you have 8 tricks: 2 spades, 5 diamonds and 1 club. Where will another trick come from?

You could believe East's encouraging low heart discard and lead up to ♥K, playing for the ace to be on your right, or lead a small card towards ♣Q, hoping for the king on your left. Can you do any better?

You should try the effect of running your long suit, while paying careful attention to the defenders' discards. On the diamonds, West discards ♣8, ♣4 and ♣2, a discouraging sequence which also suggests that if he does have a top honour outside the spade suit, it is more likely to be ♥A than ♣K.

That means your best bet is to get West to play the hearts for you. In case he has a fourth club, you cash ♣A – he follows with ♣10 but it looks like you have now reduced him to just spades and hearts. So at this point you play a low spade towards the queen.

West can win this and cash two more spade tricks as well as ♥A, but is then forced to concede the ninth trick to your ♥K. This was the full deal:

	♠Q95	
Dlr: S	♥65	
Vul: EW	♦98543	
	♣Q76	
♠A8743		♠102
♥A9		♥QJ10743
♦J6		♦10
♣10842		♣KJ53
	♠KJ6	
	♥K82	
	♦AKQ72	
	♣A9	

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	Pass	2NT
		All pass	

Running a long suit often puts the defenders under pressure and can sometimes – as on this deal – be quite revealing about the location of missing high cards.

This book offers club players a variety of suggestions to help them improve their results in both duplicate pairs and IMP events. The 100 tips cover aspects of play, bidding — both the uncontested and the contested auction — and defence. The focus is always on practical approaches, including sensible application of basic principles, good partnership agreements for constructive and obstructive bidding, as well as ways of achieving better co-operation in defence.

Some of the topics include:

- forcing the opponents to help you avoid a guess
- coping with a bad trump break
- bidding to show a fit and a shortage
- using a cue bid of the opponent's suit
- when and when not to bid one more
- off-shape and speculative bids
- not giving gifts to declarer
- when and when not to be active in defence
- better signalling

Almost all of the deals in this book come from real-life club play and the tips are usually presented as an at-the-table problem.



RAKESH K KUMAR (Mittagong, Australia) has been a keen tournament bridge player since the 1980s and has previously written three books for Master Point Press, the most recent of which was *A Swiss Teams Challenge*. This book switches focus and is based on the past 7 years of articles for the website of his local club.



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