IMAGINATIVE CARDPLAY

PART II: MASTER THE ODDS

TERENCE REESE & ROGER TRÉZEL

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION 5

Part I: THOSE EXTRA CHANCES 7

Part II: MASTER THE ODDS 67
Why Odds are Important 68
Probabilities of Distribution 70
Probabilities of Dropping a Particular Card 72
Chances of a Successful Finesse 77

Part III: SNARES AND SWINDLES 133
Part I: Deception in attack 135
Part II: Deception in defense 169

Part IV: THE ART OF DEFENSE 187
The Opening Lead 188
To Cover or Not to Cover? 191
Encouraging Signals 194
Distributional Signals 197
Suit-Preference Signals 199
Ducking in Defense 201
Blocking and Unblocking Plays in Defense 227
Trump Promotion and the Uppercut 231
Imagination in Defense 239

INTRODUCTION

The play of the cards at bridge is a big subject, capable of filling many large books. In the 1970s, Roger Trézel, the great French player and writer, had the idea of breaking up the game into several small books, each dealing with one of the standard forms of technique. He judged, quite rightly as it turned out, that this scheme would appeal both to comparative beginners, who would be able to learn the game by stages, and to experienced players wishing to extend their knowledge of a particular branch of play.

The English version was prepared in collaboration with Terence Reese, and appeared in eight small volumes. This new edition, updated and revised for the modern player, presents the eight original booklets as two larger compendiums, entitled *Accurate Cardplay* and *Imaginative Cardplay*.

PART II

MASTER THE ODDS

It is well known that mathematicians and bookmakers do not necessarily make good bridge players, but a good bridge player must possess certain of the skills of bookmakers and mathematicians. He must know the odds in his game and how to apply them.

This section differs from the rest of this book in that it begins with a certain amount of theoretical discussion. This part, we realize, may contain problems for players who are not used to odds in any form. All we can say is, read the introductory pages once, then study the examples, then return to theory with a much clearer idea of what it is all about.

WHY ODDS ARE IMPORTANT

Bridge is not a mathematical game, but mathematics can be applied to all the chances that arise. (One could say the same of poker.) To take the simplest example, the chance of an AQ finesse succeeding is 50%. Similar calculations can be made about the likely distribution of any suit and the possibility of dropping an honor card in one, two or three rounds.

The first part of this section is going to be mainly theoretical, because unless you know and understand odds you cannot plan the play of many hands intelligently. However, we will begin with a practical example:

♠ J 9 7
♥ 8 4
♦ 7 2
♣ A K 9 7 4 3

♠3 led

♠ K 8 2
♥ A K Q J
♦ A J 10 6
♣ 6 5

After two passes South opens 1NT. North raises to 3NT, which is passed out.

West leads the three of spades. East wins with the ace and returns a spade. West plays the queen and clears the suit, which is seen to be 4-3.

Now South has eight tricks immediately in sight. As there is only one spade winner to come for the defense, he can afford to lose a trick in clubs or diamonds. The question is, should he duck a club or plan to take the combination finesse in diamonds?

To give a precise answer to this question you need to know:

(a) What are the chances of a 3-2 break in clubs?
(b) What are the chances of developing an extra trick in diamonds by finessing the ten and, later, the jack?

Apart from the mathematical expectancies relating to those two chances, there is another factor that must be taken into consideration. West has led a spade from a four-card suit. This makes it slightly more probable that the club division will be balanced.

Now, your instinct and experience may tell you that to play on diamonds is the better chance. Because of the consideration just mentioned, there is not a lot in it. We will discover the exact odds later. For the present, let us make the problem a little more difficult by giving South ♦AQ9x instead of ♦AJ10x:

♦ 7 2

♦ A Q 9 4

If you can afford to lose a trick, the right way to play this suit is to begin with a finesse of the nine. You will finesse the queen later, if necessary, but you have given yourself the additional chance of finding East with J10x. With this diamond holding, should you look for your extra trick in diamonds or clubs?

To possess a ready answer to questions of this sort, you need to know:

(a) Probabilities of distribution.
(b) Probabilities of dropping a particular card.
(c) Chances of a successful finesse.

We will study these subjects in the abstract, as it were, and then see how you can apply your knowledge to the play of various deals.

PROBABILITIES OF DISTRIBUTION

Suppose that as declarer you see, let us say, seven spades in the two hands. It is possible to form an estimate of the division of the remaining six between the two defending hands. (Note, by the way, that the division of your own seven cards, whether 6-1 or 4-3, does not affect the odds.)

Calculations of this sort are subject to many influences, such as the bidding, the course of the play, and such intangibles as the behavior of an opponent. Nevertheless, these initial expectancies are the starting-point for any plan you make.

Table A

Opponents hold between them	Likely division	Frequency
8 cards	5 - 3	47%
	4 - 4	33%
	6 - 2	17%
7 cards	4 - 3	62%
	5 - 2	31%
	6 - 1	7%
6 cards	4 - 2	48%
	3 - 3	36%
	5 - 1	15%
5 cards	3 - 2	68%
	4 - 1	28%
	5 - 0	4%
4 cards	3 - 1	50%
	2 - 2	40%
	4 - 0	10%
3 cards	2 - 1	78%
	3 - 0	22%
2 cards	1 - 1	52%
	2 - 0	48%

Practical conclusions

By the time you have finished this book, most of these odds will be familiar. Meanwhile, some general tendencies are easy to remember. When an even number of cards is missing (8, 6 or 4) the most likely divisions are those just off center (5-3, 4-2, 3-1). An exception occurs when two cards are missing, 1-1 now being slightly more probable than 2-0. When an odd number is missing, however (7, 5 or 3), the most equal divisions (4-3, 3-2, 2-1) are distinctly more probable than any unequal division. In particular, a 4-3 split is twice as likely as 5-2, and 3-2 is more than twice as likely as 4-1.

Fluctuations during the play

It is not too early to emphasize that these expectations are *initial* expectations, existing before the play has begun to develop. In general, *the further the play has progressed, the more likely the even distributions become.* (As an extreme example, if you arrive at Trick 10 and there are still six cards of a suit outstanding, they *must* be 3-3.) Also, the even distributions within a particular suit become more probable as the suit is played and all follow. For example, you begin with

A K Q 5 4

3 2

If all follow to the ace and king, the 5-1 and 6-0 possibilities have been eliminated, and the relative chances of 4-2 and 3-3 are in the region of 57% and 43%. The fall of the cards, and the likelihood or otherwise that opponents have falsecarded, may affect these odds.

Note on a common misunderstanding

Players who like to think for themselves — and there is no better way to fix a subject in the mind — often dispute the figures set out above. They contend, for example, that a 2-0 distribution of two cards must be just as likely as 1-1, pointing out that wherever the first card has fallen it must be even money that the second card will fall on the same side. That sort of argument could be applied to the tossing of a coin, but a bridge hand is different, the reason being that the two defending hands both have to end up with thirteen cards. Thus, when one of two cards has been dealt to one player, the second player has thirteen unknown cards as against the first player's twelve. This accounts for the figure of 52:48 in favour of a 1-1 division.

It might be thought that, in the same way, 4-4 ought to be a more probable distribution than 5-3. If one were to calculate from the moment at which both players were known to hold three each, that would be correct, but of course the first four cards dealt might be divided 3-1. From that moment the player who held three would be favorite to end up with the longer holding.

PROBABILITIES OF DROPPING A PARTICULAR CARD

When you have a familiar holding such as A32 opposite KJ654, you may need to know what your chances are of making five tricks or four tricks, as the case may be. We look next at some of the commonest positions of this kind. In all cases Table A above, showing the probabilities of distribution, is the guide. We are really looking at the same figures in a practical setting.

You are missing two cards

As we have seen, 1-1 is slightly more probable than 2-0. In the absence of any special indication, therefore, you should be inclined to play for the drop when you are missing Kx.

You are missing three cards

First, take the situation where you are missing the king. You hold:

A Q 10 4 3 2

J 9 6 5

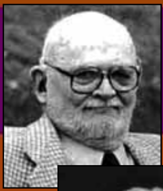
The odds, you will recall, are 78% for 2-1, 22% for 3-0. What do you suppose are the chances, initially, of dropping a singleton king on your right? The calculation is quite simple. The king is one of the three cards that might be singleton, so the chances of a singleton king in one hand or the other are one third of 78,

INTERMEDIATE

Learn from the Masters

In the 1970s, two of the best bridge writers of all time collaborated on a series of eight small books on a number of aspects of cardplay at bridge. These books have long been out of print, and are republished now in two combined volumes, edited and updated by BRIDGE magazine editor Mark Horton.

Imaginative Cardplay is the second of these two books, and comprises the following titles from the original series: *Those Extra Chances in Bridge*; *Master the Odds in Bridge*; *Snares and Swindles in Bridge*; and *The Art of Defense in Bridge*.



TERENCE REESE (1913-1996, UK) was a world champion and one of the best-ever writers on the game. His *Reese on Play* and *The Expert Game* are classics of bridge literature.

ROGER TRÉZEL (1918-1986, France) was a multiple world champion. His partnership with Pierre Jaïs is regarded as one of the greatest in the history of the game.

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