

Lesson 30

Playing Against the Field

Gino's Comments

We discover the true character of a winner when something goes wrong. Recognizing that a mistake cannot be undone, a winner will not “cry over spilled milk” but instead will use the unfortunate situation as a new opportunity. In other words, a winner does not dwell on the past, but thinks ahead to the future.

Lesson 29 dealt with analyzing the expected results of the field at matchpoint scoring, drawing conclusions and playing accordingly, dealing with the situation in which you bid a clearly better contract than others. You may need to ensure a good result by making a safety play, a rare practice at matchpoint.

Lesson 30 should be read in conjunction with Lesson 29. Each lesson discusses opposing situations. In this lesson I discuss a **situation where your partnership fails in the bidding stage**. To achieve a

good result now, you must play against the field, and against the odds. Be optimistic!

One afternoon playing matchpoints at the Chicago Duplicate Bridge Club, two nice ladies came to the table exclaiming: "We know who you are, but we will try to beat you, because that is all we can do," showing a wonderful attitude toward the game. I admired them for it. I replied: "I'll try to win too, because that is all I can do." I picked up these cards:

♠A4 ♥A54 ♦KQ863 ♣K73

Take my place now. You open 1NT. The opponents pass. Your partner thinks and bids 2♥, as a transfer. Dutifully, you bid 2♠. Partner bids 6♠. All pass. The opponents lead the ♦9. Dummy comes down, as follows:

♠A4	♠KJ1083
♥A54	♥K6
♦KQ863	♦AJ4
♣K73	♣AQJ

You are in 6♠. The game is scored at matchpoints. How should you play the hand?

Analyze the expected results for the field

You are playing in an inferior contract. Two other contracts are better than your contract. One is almost impossible to bid, 7♦, but easily made. No one will bid 7♦. What should worry you is the better 6NT contract which, if bid, should be made with an overtrick if the declarer succeeds in capturing the ♠Q. At matchpoint scoring, the difference between 6♠ and 6NT will be crucial: 10 points dramatically change your score on this board.

You need **meta-analysis** at matchpoint scoring. This analysis considers the expected results at the other tables. Remember that your ultimate goal is not only to make as many tricks as possible, but to beat other pairs holding your cards. Therefore, analyze what is likely to happen at other tables.

Your analysis should be straightforward: you realize that **most other tables will play 6NT**. With 12 top winners and a successful finesse against the ♠Q, declarer might make 13 tricks. How will other players play spades? Probably cash the ♠A and then finesse North for the ♠Q which is the best percentage play with this spade combination. In short, most of the pairs in the field will make 13 tricks in 6NT when the ♠Q is in the North hand, and 12 tricks when the ♠Q is in the South hand.

How does meta-analysis affect your play in 6♠?

The normal play to maximize your winners in spades is to play according to the odds. Cash the A♠ and then finesse North for the ♠Q. You also need a 3-3 break if you wish to win all 13 tricks. Virtually everyone will make the **same play** in 6NT.

Playing this way, you will always lose to other pairs playing in 6NT. The NT players score an additional 10 points for playing in NT. If you score 1430, others will score 1440. Even if you score 1460, others will score 1470. A bottom score for you. Is the situation lost? Never!

To win, play against the odds

The 6♠ contract is not in danger unless spades divide 5-1. Your only chance to achieve a good result is to **play against the odds**. Playing in an inferior contract, you must play against the field to win. You win only if you make 13 tricks in 6♠ for a result of 1460 when the rest of the field wins only 12 tricks in the better 6NT contract for a result of only 1440. Therefore, choose an alternative line of play in spades. **Finesse South for the ♠Q** playing the opposite way of everyone else. This play of the hand is your only chance to win the board.

Playing the hand

You win the ♦A. Then play the ♠J from the dummy. South plays a low card. You finesse. The ♠J wins. You play to the ♠A. You get to dummy with the ♥K to play the ♠K. The queen drops. You make all the tricks! You score 100%. No one else makes 13 tricks.

The whole hand:

	♠972	
	♥109732	
	♦95	
	♣1052	
♠A4		♠KJ1083
♥A54		♥K6
♦KQ863		♦AJ4
♣K73		♣AQJ
	♠Q65	
	♥QJ8	
	♦1072	
	♣9864	

You accurately analyzed the field results. Out of 12 tables in the competition, 7 bid and made 12 tricks in 6NT. If you adhere to the normal play in spades, you only win 12 tricks to score 20%. Of course, you were lucky. The cards lie well for your line of play (3-3 with ♠Q in South), but you had no choice. Otherwise, just making 6♠ you lose to all the others who bid the better 6NT contract. Be extra-optimistic when needed!

A note on East's bidding

<u>West</u>	<u>East</u>
1NT	?

East's hand: ♠KJ1083 ♥K6 ♦AJ4 ♣AQJ

Let's revisit East bid. With 19 points and a 5-card suit, opposite an opening of 1NT, the practical bid for East at matchpoints is just 6NT. E/W has 34 HCP. Both 6♠ and 6NT are expected to make, but at matchpoint scoring there is a crucial undeniable, obvious advantage to the 6NT contract. 1440 beats 1430.

Sometimes the hand plays better in spades. How does East find out about the spade fit? Not an easy matter. With such a strong hand, after the transfer, there is **no natural forcing bid available**. 3NT and 4NT are both NF bids.

East's best solution to this problem is to improvise. After the transfer to spades, East should bid 3♣ (or 3♦) which shows a real minor suit in addition to spades and is forcing. How does this bid improve the situation? If the opener has a spade fit, he/she will bid 3 or 4♠. Then East uses RKCB to decide whether to play 6♠, 6NT or perhaps 7♠. On the other hand, if the opener does not have a spade fit, he/she will bid something else, perhaps NT or even support the fake minor suit. In this case East returns to the original plan to bid 6NT.

Bidding a fake minor suit is a useful tactic in slam bidding. When additional information is needed, and no forcing bid is available, fake a **minor suit** as a forcing bid to gather more information. However, the player who uses this technique must have a plan if partner supports the fake suit.