



## ***Issue 7: 2006 BridgeHands Newsletter***

**Aye-aye, Captain**

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**Dear Bridge Friends,**

Welcome to ***Bridgehands*** eMag Newsletter, issue 7. In this issue, we will discuss the much maligned Bridge principle known as captaincy. Indeed, you are the captain when your partner has made a signoff bid. When this happens, it's up to you to steer the partnership to the best contract. Thus, it's paramount the partnership be able to differentiate between signoff, invitational, and forcing bids.

The [Rule of 4](#) is a nice reminder to consider when finding the best trump fit with your partner. It turns out on some occasions the longest suit in one hand does not always make the best contract – after all, Bridge is a *partnership* game.

***BridgeHands*** has joined the "Web 2.0" crowd, adding multimedia audio and an interactive blog (that's short for a weblog) to our site. We hope you will find these additions useful and enhance your stay at our site.

Note: Viewing the hands below requires your EMAIL reader to use "fixed fonts" (not proportional). If you have problems reading this document, please view our [online web-based copy](#) or [Adobe Acrobat PDF file](#) suitable for printing.

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## The Principle of Bridge Captaincy

### Aye-aye, Captain!

Before we begin, let's regress to a bit of nostalgia. Did you know the term "Aye-aye" originated with the crew pledging allegiance and devotion to their captain? It seems the Vikings were a rough bunch who grabbed prisoners and would vote on whether or not their captive would be allowed to become a shipmate - always the best option for the prisoner's longevity! Hopefully, the ayes win! If "invited", the prisoner could then affirm his oath by pledging to the captain "aye-aye."

Fortunately, our game of Bridge is more civil. Yet once the partnership agrees on who is the captain during bidding, it's definitely "mutiny on the bounty" when a shipmate tries to take charge. Okay, let's get into what this captaincy is all about.

In the beginning there were three types of bids – forcing, invitational and signoff. As we've learned early in our Bridge career, most bids in a new suit are forcing, sometimes known as demand bids. Take note that forcing bids do not involve Notrump calls or bidding a previous suit. Here are a few basic examples:

#### **1C – 1H;**

Responder's strength unlimited (6+ points)

#### **1S – 2C;**

Responder's strength unlimited (10+ points)

#### **1H – 1S;**

When opener makes a strong jump shift to the 3C 3 level, the bid is game-forcing (promising 19+ playing points); after all, responder's bid only promises 6 points with a 1 level bid.

#### **1D – 1H;**

#### **1S – 2C;**

Opener's 1 level new suit rebid is "almost" forcing, showing up to 18 points (the opponents are not bidding so it's rare to stop at the 1 level). When responder wishes to keep the auction "alive" but not make a draconian bid, bidding the fourth suit is a convenient way to make a forcing bid. This allows partner the opportunity to continue the description of the hand.

Invitational bids suggest continued bidding, usually for game, when partner has extra values not disclosed on a prior bid. Notice that these bids do use a jump in Notrump or partner's suit:

#### **1N – 2N;**

Our garden variety game invite.

#### **1H – 3H;**

Most players prefer to use the jump raise to invite game in partner's major suit. Many play a similar treatment in the minor suits.

**1D – 2N;**

The common treatment for a jump raise from partner's minor suit opening to 2 Notrump is invitational. Many years ago folks played both this bid and the above major suit jump as game forcing but since responder could simply bid game directly, the modern treatment is to play these calls as inviting game.

**1D – 1H;****2C**

Hmm, this time it's the opener who bid a new suit. When the rank of the second suit is lower than the first, it is not forcing. Instead, the second suit shows a two-suited hand (nice description, eh?)

Now let's consider signoff bids. Generally, a player signs off by:

1. Bidding partner's suit at the lowest level
2. Rebidding own suit at the lowest level
3. Bidding Notrump at the lowest level

Let's checkout some signoff bids. A signoff bid signals that the partner holds minimum values and does not have an interest in further bidding:

**1H – P;**

Opener bids 1 Heart and partner passes, showing less than 6 point – definitely a signoff!

**1C – 1N;**

Responder bids Notrump, wanting to signoff with 6-10 points. With 16+ points, opener may invite game with an appropriate rebid, or directly bid game with 19+ points.

**1C – 1S;****2C**

Opener rebids original suit, a signoff request with 12-15 points held by opener. Responder should pass with 6-9 points, invite game with 10-12 points, or force game with 13+ points.

**1D – 1H;****1N**

Opener's Notrump rebid also shows 12-15 points; With a better hand, opener would have opened with a 1 Notrump bid. The responder has the same choices here as the prior hand.

**1C – 1S;****2C – 2S;**

Opener's 2C rebid is a signoff request, usually with a 6+ card suit or a 5 card suit with side-suit shortness. Responder persists bidding 2S, showing a 6+ card suit as well, requesting signoff.

**1S – 1N;**

**2S**

Responder tried to signoff with 1 Notrump but opener rebids own suit, also a signoff bid. What's going on here? Apparently opener has a decent 6+ card suit and would rather play in opener's own suit.

Thus, when either player limits their playing strength by making the cheapest Notrump or suit rebid, it's up to partner to place the contract. As we have seen above, the partner has the following options:

1. With minimum values, pass or rebid own suit with extra length.
2. With extra values yet not enough to promise game, make an invitational rebid. Invitational rebids include jump rebidding at the 3 level in either your suit or partners, rebidding 2 Notrump\*, or temporizing by making a bid in a new suit.
3. With game-going values (25+ points for partnership), bid game. Here's a situation where a cliché works well – “the one who knows, goes!”

\* A jump rebid of 2 Notrump by opener is almost game forcing, showing a hand stronger than a 1 Notrump opener.

**1D – 1S;**

**2N**

\* However a jump rebid by responder is merely invitational, showing less than a full opener.

**1D – 1H;**

**1S – 2N**

Now let's turn our attention to the “dark side” where a player ignores the principle of captaincy, perhaps confusing a few basic tenants. For instance, partner's signoff bid is a request, not a mandate. When you have extra strength as captain, you can still make invitational or forcing rebids. In essence, invitational bids are a “shared captaincy,” asking partner to pass with minimum values, or make a forward-going bid with extra values. A classic example is:

**1N – 2N;**

While the 1 Notrump opener promises a nice hand, Notrump opening bids typically limit the hand to a 3 point range (15-17 points or 16-18 points, depending on partnership agreements). So responder's call shows invitational values, asking partner to rebid 3 Notrump with values near the top end of partner's range.

Unfortunately, some players either forget or refuse to relinquish captaincy. At best, such an action does not instill partnership confidence or trust. Hopefully neither you nor your partner are guilty of these mutinous bids (opponent bids are in parenthesis):

**1H – (P) – 1N - (2S);**

**P – (P) – 3C – (P);**

**P - (3S) – 4H !**

After partner opened 1 Heart, responder gave up captaincy bidding 1 Notrump signoff denying Heart support and showing a minimum hand (6-9 points for responder). However, when the opponents entered the auction finding a Spade fit, the responder ignored the captaincy principle by making a 4 Heart bid. Certainly the 3 Club bid was reasonable, wanting to compete in responder's long suit but the 4 Heart bid was completely unwarranted. In another situation, a weak argument might be made about taking a sacrifice with favorable vulnerability, but not here. Quite possibly the opponents have pushed too high by bidding 3 Spades, particularly since the opener-responder probably have half the points in the deck and a suit misfit. Secondly, responder is under no obligation to "save" the contract when partner still has another opportunity to bid; see "[free bids](#)" for details explaining extra strength requirements to make an option call in the direct seat (when partner still has an opportunity to bid). Perhaps the opener will bid 4 Clubs or, better yet, Double the opponents for penalty. Thus, responder's 4 Heart bid at best shows a misunderstanding of captaincy. Let's look a few variations involving the often maligned preempt:

**3C – 3N;**

**4C !**

When a player makes a preempt bid, they are limiting their hand. Obviously, they are relinquishing captaincy for partner to place the contract or guide the ship/bidding in the best direction based on their hand. So on the first hand, why did the opener pull responder out of a 3 Notrump contract? The opener has fully defined their hand – knowing this, responder is at least captain (if not admiral)! When opener ignores responder's sound bid and unknown values, partnership trust suffers – to say nothing about the quality of the final contract. Note from Ms. Manners: when your opponents make such unsound bids, try not to smile. Here's another variation:

**3C – (P) – P – (3S);**

**4C ! – (4S) – P – (P);**

**5C ! – (X)**

Have you seen this one before? Hopefully it was the opponents bidding - you and your partner should refuse to pick up such bad habits. Again, opener has relinquished captaincy, trusting partner to steer the contract. Yet apparently opener fell in love with their hand, pressing onward to 4 Clubs and even 5 Clubs as if captain! This is a real no-no; save such heavy handed tactics for solo games.

In summary, remember that a player surrenders captaincy by rebidding either their own or partner's suit at the lowest level, or bidding Notrump at the lowest level. After that, it's up to partner to guide the ship to a safe harbor and final contract (excepting shared captaincy).

## Rule of 4 – Who gets your vote (5-3 or 4-4)?

Continuing our “Rules of” discussion, let’s explore the [Rule of 4](#). One of the basic Bridge bidding is to locate a “golden fit” – an eight card major suit fit with partner. The most common bidding theme is when partner opens 1 Heart or 1 Spade and we hold 3 trumps in partner’s suit. After locating a fit, the partner then steers the partnership to the correct contract level (see above article on Captaincy). Once in a while, you will be lucky enough to have two eight card fits in the majors with a 5-3 fit in one suit and a 4-4 fit in the other major. So when you have enough points to bid game, which trump suit generates the most tricks?

Intuitively, a player might reason that holding a longer suit in one hand is better than two shorter suits in each hand. Actually, in some situations the declarer can make more tricks (and points) playing in a 4-4 major suit contract than a 5-3 major suit fit. How can this be true? To begin, let’s consider the declarer’s typical strategy – to draw trump. Holding 8 cards in a suit, the opponents’ 5 cards normally are split 3-2 between their respective hands. Thus, the declarer plays at least two rounds of trump, carefully watching that both opponents followed by playing cards to the second trick. If so, only one trump is outstanding. As you’ll recall several months ago, the declarer can use the [Rule of 1](#) to determine whether or not to pull the last trump. For this example, let’s assume the declarer has the remaining top trump honor and pulls the final opponent trump to avoid losing to a ruff. So where we would stand playing in a 4-4 versus a 5-3 trump fit?

Playing a 5-3 trump fit, after drawing 3 rounds of trump the declarer has 2 remaining trump and a 4-4 side suit. Since the secondary suit has identical length in both hands, the declarer does not have any opportunities to score extra tricks (ruffing or long suit promotion). However, playing a 4-4 trump fit, the declarer has the opportunity to use a promotion strategy to pitch losers (from the opposite hand) on that pretty 5 card long suit. Let’s try a hand to illustrate this point:

	<b>S K Q J 2</b>	
	<b>H K 10 9</b>	
	<b>D 6 5 4</b>	
	<b>C J 10 9</b>	
<b>S 7 6 5</b>		<b>S 9 8</b>
<b>H 8 7</b>		<b>H 6 5 4</b>
<b>D Q J 10 9 8</b>		<b>D A K 7</b>
<b>C A 8 7</b>		<b>C K 7 4 3 2</b>
	<b>S A 10 4 3</b>	
	<b>H A Q J 3 2</b>	
	<b>D 3 2</b>	
	<b>C Q 5</b>	

Let’s say North ignores the possible benefit of the 4-4 trump fit (Spades here), instead focusing on partner’s Heart suit. The bidding might go:

**1H – 3H;  
4H**

West will likely lead the top of the nice Diamond sequence, the **DQ**. If the opponents miss the Club switch, after two Diamond winners the declarer wins the third Diamond with a ruff. While the declarer can win the next 8 tricks (4 each in majors), the opponents set declarer's 10 trick contract, winning 2 Diamonds and 2 Club tricks. Now let's take a look at a Spade contract with responder looking for a 4-4 trump fit over the 5-3 trump fit.

**1H – 1S;**  
**2S – 3H;**  
**4S**

Before looking at the result, let's focus on the contract itself. Notice how the responder did not initially show Heart support, instead showing a 4 card Spade suit. This does not mean responder cannot support Hearts – responder's new suit bid is forcing, simply exploring for a possible 4-4 Spade fit. Opener South is happy to support Spades, bidding 2 Spades. With 10 points, North next wants to make a forward-going bid and 3 Hearts provides a perfect description, belatedly showing Heart support – with a few more points responder could jump to 4 Hearts. At any rate, our opener appreciates the value of a double fit and accepts the 4 Spade game. Okay, now let's look at our result in a 4 Spade game contract (hands repeated)

	<b>S K Q J 2</b>	
	<b>H K 10 9</b>	
	<b>D 6 5 4</b>	
	<b>C J 10 9</b>	
<b>S 7 6 5</b>		<b>S 9 8</b>
<b>H 8 7</b>		<b>H 6 5 4</b>
<b>D Q J 10 9 8</b>		<b>D A K 7</b>
<b>C A 8 7</b>		<b>C K 7 4 3 2</b>
	<b>S A 10 4 3</b>	
	<b>H A Q J 3 2</b>	
	<b>D 3 2</b>	
	<b>C Q 5</b>	

Again, West leads the **DQ**, winning two tricks with declarer ruffing the third Diamond. But look what happens here – declarer has a plan to pitch two Club losers from the dummy North hand. The declarer begins by playing 3 rounds of Spade trumps, clearing trump. Next declarer plays a small Heart to the King to unblock the suit; recall our [prior lesson about unblocking](#) by initially playing the high card from the short suit side. After winning the King, declarer plays a low Heart to the Ace and then cashes the Queen, watching opponents play their last Heart (another 3-2 split). So the declarer's remaining 2 Hearts have been promoted to winners – how nice! Playing the Heart 10 and 3 provides two pitches from dummy. Rather than take a chance on losing 3 Club tricks (when the opponent's Ace is behind the King – held by West), the declarer pitches two Club tricks from the dummy on the Heart winners. This reduces the Declarer's Club losers to one trick, enough to make the close game. Excellent – we've found that on these hands, the 4-4 trump fit prevails to make game where the 5-3 fit goes down.

In summary, the Rule of 4 is a nice aid to consider when exploring for a 4-4 trump fit over a 5-3 trump fit. As we noted, the strategy works when the declarer can pitch losers

from the hand opposite the 5 card suit – a promotion play tactic.

## **BridgeHands** present "Web 2.0" applications

At long last, **BridgeHands** has joined the so-called "Web 2.0" crowd. Actually, the Internet web itself hasn't changed over the years. Yet in the last few years, the industry buzz has been new Internet applications that greatly enhance the usability of the web. Enter multimedia and blog applications. Multimedia integrates audio and video applications with web pages to enhance the user's experience. Our **BridgeHands** home page now has two multimedia applications, found in the lower-left corner of the screen. By double-clicking on the play button of the **BridgeHands** Audio Intro widget, you can listen to an overview about our website through your computer speakers. Soon, we will be adding more audio channels about Bridge itself. And while we have some exciting ideas up our sleeve, we would like to hear your ideas on audio topics you would like to see added to **BridgeHands**. This brings us to our second widget.

At the bottom of the home page, we have added a VoiceMail player. In addition to providing another method to submit your recorded message, you can actually leave us your own voice mail right through your computer's microphone! That's right, by clicking on "Record your message," you can send us free voice mail right from your computer. Even better, if you would like to have us make your voicemail public so others can hear it, just let us know and we will add your recorded message to the list in the VoiceMail widget.

Okay, now let's look at the mysterious "blog". A blog is a shorthand way of saying a weblog. Originally, blogs were used by webmasters as an electronic journal to share information with others. The idea quickly caught on and as blogging software became easy to manage, soon millions of mere mortals were hosting their own blogs to share information about their personal lives with others. Our [BridgeHands blog](#) is designed to enhance your interactive experience with us - while our website will continue to offer thousands of pages on Bridge, our blog provides an easy way to communicate with you. That's right, you can post your constructive comments right here on [our blog](#) and we will be happy to post them! As you know, **BridgeHands** works hard to keep things organized so it's easy for you to locate important information. Accordingly, [our blog](#) is organized by the following categories:

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[Issue 2 - Notrump Leads](#)

[Issue 3 - Leads Against Suit Contract](#)

[Issue 4 - Trump Power](#)

[Issue 5 - Trumps are wild - Part 1](#)

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We hope you are enjoying the BridgeHands website and eMag Newsletters. As always, we look forward to hearing from you with your comments and suggestions.

Best wishes,

***BridgeHands***

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