

Why are fewer and fewer playing in many Duplicate Bridge Clubs – whilst the game is growing in popularity at a social level?

Online bridge is undoubtedly taking people away, but the fact that friendly, welcoming Duplicate Clubs are all thriving points to the different reason. I fear that a few regular duplicate players put newer players off by their rude, officious, critical even intimidating behaviour. The chasm of difference between the encouraging classroom is too much for many. They quickly back off and play with their friends. Lost to Duplicate Bridge. Forever.

I'm far from alone in thinking this. Fellow Bridge teacher Harold Schogger has asked me to tackle this subject and so today, tomorrow and Thursday I will be doing my bit to help educate and reform.

Experienced duplicate players should be welcoming new players to the Club, not frightening them away. At my Club I operate a zero tolerance rule: no bad behaviour of any sort is allowed. Ever. You should greet new opponents with a cheery hello, smile a lot and thank them as you finish the round. I know I'm largely preaching to the converted. But it only takes one bad experience to put a new player off for life.

Today's deal is an optimistic 7NT from the US Fall Nationals in Providence, Rhode Island. Declarer, Monaco's Fulvio Fantoni, won West's king of diamonds lead with the ace and rattled off six rounds of clubs. He saw West follow to four rounds and East two and threw red cards from dummy.

Dealer: North, Vulnerability: Neither

Pairs	♠ A J 6 5 3 2		
	♥ A Q 4 3		
	♦ A 6		
	♣ 8		
♠ 10		N	♠ Q 8 7
♥ 10 9 7 6 2		W E	♥ K 8 5
♦ K Q 5		S	♦ J 10 9 8 7
♣ 10 7 6 2			♣ 9 4
	♠ K 9 4		
	♥ J		
	♦ 4 3 2		
	♣ A K Q J 5 3		

S	W	N	E
		1♠	Pass
2♣	Pass	2♥	Pass
3♦ (1)	Pass	3♠ (2)	Pass
4♣ (3)	Pass	4♦ (4)	Pass
4NT (5)	Pass	5♣ (5)	Pass
7NT (6)	end		

- (1) Fourth Suit Forcing – “we’re going to game, please tell me more”.
- (2) Showing the six-four shape.
- (3) Natural (but could be interpreted as a cue bid agreeing spades).
- (4) Ace-showing cue bid – but are clubs or spades agreed?
- (5) Roman Key Card Blackwood, but which black suit is agreed? Probably clubs (South would have to bid 4♦ over 3♠, not his own clubs, to agree spades). Luckily South holds both black suit kings so knows partner's 5♣ response shows three genuine aces.
- (6) Hoping for spades to run.

Contract: 7NT, Opening Lead: ♦ K

Playing East for longer spades, declarer crossed to the (crucially ten and) ace of spades, then led back a spade to his... Nine (key play). West duly discarded so he could cash the king felling East's queen, cross to the ace of hearts and follow with winning spades. 13 tricks and grand slam made. Phew.
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