

GOOD ADVICE FOR SERIOUS TOURNAMENT BRIDGE PLAYERS

Mark Horton is a top UK bridge player. In 2007 the American Contract Bridge Bulletin published his article ***Boy Scout Bridge – Be Prepared.***

“Having watched the last day of the Masters in Augusta, I have often thought how the scoring in golf reflects that in bridge. Why is it that a player can shoot 65 one day and 75 the next? How can you score 67% one day and 47% the next? If only a player could bring his best game to the course or table every time it was needed.

Well there are ways to give you a much better chance of getting your best game to the table. Next time you are due to play, try following this game plan.

- Don't eat a big meal before the game and don't drink! In his book, *At the Table* Bob Hamman describes how the Aces lost a match where they had a big lead because they wine and dined between sessions.
- Never arrive at the bridge table in a rush. Always allow yourself plenty of time, especially if any degree of travelling is involved.
- If you can, walk to the venue – the fresh air will clear your mind.
- Well before play is due to begin, take a look at your system, just to remind yourself about the key points. You will feel more comfortable, especially if you need to employ any relatively rare agreements. You don't think this is necessary? In a recent national teams final, the Rabbi (Leonard Helman) and I missed a slam because of a mix-up over the responses to Roman Keycard Blackwood- I couldn't remember if we were playing 1430 or 0314 !
- Arrive at the table a few minutes before game time and settle down. Check your bidding box to make sure you have all your bids. The idea is to get into a cocoon of concentration.

- When you are dummy-relax ! Apart from making sure partner does not commit a mechanical error, this is the chance to take a breather and get ready for the next deal.
- Never discuss a deal with partner or the opponents until the session is completed. Even if you want to discuss a bidding situation, the best time to do it is at the end of the session. Don't even think about a discussion during the hospitality break.
- As soon as a deal has been completed, erase it from your memory. There is nothing you can do to change the result, and the most important thing is the new deal that you are about to play. In a team game, there is always the chance that your other pair will cover for you. I recall an occasion when my partner and I bid to the worst of three possible grand slams and conceded minus 50. When we scored up the deal, our team mates announced 'Plus fifty'. “Oh were they one down in seven diamonds as well?” No they were one down in two spades.” (Ask me next time you see me!)
- In a pairs game, assume that during the session you will have four terrible boards-either because of your own mistakes or through the skill (and sometimes luck) of your opponents. That way you won't get upset about a bad result - you have already allowed for it. I once had a session when the first four boards were zeros. With those out of the way the rest was a breeze!

Mark Horton, born 1950 is British author, journalist and expert on bridge as well as a former lawyer and chess champion. He has been the editor of *Bridge Magazine* since 1995.

