

Contract Bridge: Bidding Tactics and Psychology

By Victor Champion

Victor Champion was not only Australia's greatest player in the 1930s and 1940s. He was also a very good writer. At a time when columnists tended to focus on highly technical and often obscure bidding and play problems, he would talk with great clarity about the bigger picture. Matt Mullamphy's article on overbidders and underbidders in partnership attracted a lot of interest. So I thought it would be useful to put Champion's take on the issue from 1937.

Part of any competitive card game is "playing your players", and to gain any intrinsic value from such tactics have to be considered. The subtle and tricky bids of the No. 1 player are too involved to be adequately described on paper, but there are many simple situations where a few seconds' reflection will enable a player to get the best out of his partner.

While, as a general rule, victory goes to the holders of the top cards, many a rubber has been saved and many hundreds of points gained by the intelligent use of poor cards and an applied knowledge of the strength and weaknesses of partners and opponents.

The situation that often has to be faced by the average steady player is how to vary his game either to curb an optimistic overbidding partner or to encourage an under-valuing pessimist. The fallacious idea that with an underbidder be aggressive and with an optimist be conservative, is quite out of date, for paradoxically enough the exact opposite is true.

Let an overbidder once find out that you are underbidding your cards with him and his future bidding will to even greater heights to compensate for your supposed timidity, while one or two overbids or over-raises will frighten the conservative player out of his wits and drive him further and further into his shell.

Therefore, to get the best out of either type, they must be met on their own ground. With the aggressive player bid your hands to the maximum and you will find that, as soon as he realises you are playing his own game, he will come back closer to solidarity. The conservative player must be given confidence and, to do that, bids and raises must be strong and sound. Then when you have instilled trust in the pessimist he will gradually expand.

