



## Ask Jerry

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Dear Jerry,

**I notice most of the really good players at our club do not keep score sheets. Having amassed all of 87 masterpoints, keeping a score sheet on the play of each board slows me down, causing me to fall behind. Would you advise someone of my level to do away with the score sheet, and simply look at the hand record after all play is completed?**

Mike

As long as you have the goal of constantly improving your bridge game ... Absolutely not! I'll start with a bit of advice from Ely Culbertson, in 1946, from his book "Bidding and Play in Duplicate Contract Bridge":

"Duplicate bridge is the finest of all teachers. The casual bridge player does not always remember the hands he has played. In duplicate bridge, he need not remember them; they are all preserved intact so that he may look at them and study them after he has played them. Thus he can draw conclusions as to what he might have done for greater profit, and when the same type of hand comes up again, he will know better."

Although I, along with others, may not be in complete agreement with Ely's observation about who is the finest bridge teacher currently, this pearl of wisdom was then, and still is, valid.

Many players, especially newer ones, have no idea which specific actions led to any of their results, good or bad. To my students, I recommend: Keep a private score and accurately record the

results of every deal played.

In the "Points Estimated" column next to each result, record a guesstimate of how well you did. At first it can be as simple as T for top, G for good, B for bad, and a zero for the worst possible result. As you gain a little experience, refine it to a 4-3-2-1-0 scale, where 4 is a result you think is extraordinarily good, 2 is average, and 0, when something terrible seems to have happened. You can even use halves for slightly above or below the grade you predicted. At the conclusion of a game, add up your scores and find out whether you think you finished above or below average.

Grab a hand record. If a personal results sheet is available, get one. If one is not, in most duplicate games now, you can access your results online. If all else fails, copy your results from the posted recap. You are now harnessing a duplicate game as your own personal tutor.

On each board, compare your guess with the actual matchpoint result. For example, on Board 1, if you bid 3NT and made four, for plus 430, and you think you did well, you may have assigned yourself an above-average 2½ out of 4. After checking the results, and seeing a near bottom, it's time to investigate. Was 3NT the predominant contract with most of the field taking 11 tricks? If this was the case, it appears your declarer play may need work. Did most other pairs score plus 450, playing in a major suit, suggesting a bidding problem? Was there a scoring

mistake where something was entered incorrectly?

On Board 2, the opponents played 4♥, making four, which you estimated as average, but your actual score was significantly below average. Were you "fixed" by an abnormal action by the opponents who reached their game while most everyone else stopped in a partscore for plus 170? Did 4♥ go down several times? If so, should one of us have overcalled to secure a better opening lead? Unless you look and analyze, how do you know?

By doing these estimates, then comparing to your actual results, you can greatly enhance the learning process. You may determine that declarer play is the biggest problem, or your bidding, or your defense or (worse) perhaps all facets need improvement. Each session you play can be productive regardless of how you score.

The hand records available in all tournament games and many local duplicate clubs make this process easier. Don't be afraid to occasionally ask for advice from a more experienced player whose opinion you value.

Postmortem discussions following a session of bridge can be both enjoyable and fruitful. Rather than burying my head in the sand and ignoring the things that led to less-than-desirable results, I try to learn from each experience. Someone once said to me, "Some people have played bridge for 20 years, while others have played one year, 20 times." I prefer to make each deal, each game and every year meaningful. ■