



Matthew Thomson

**BID MORE, PLAY
MORE, ENJOY
MORE, WIN MORE**

EXPANDED AND UPDATED

AN HONORS EBOOK FROM MASTER POINT PRESS

Text © 2016 Matthew Thomson

All rights reserved.

Honors eBooks is an imprint of Master Point Press. All contents, editing and design (excluding cover design) are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Master Point Press
214 Merton St. Suite 205
Toronto, Ontario, Canada
M4S 1A6
(647) 956-4933

Email: info@masterpointpress.com
Websites: www.masterpointpress.com
www.bridgeblogging.com
www.teachbridge.com
www.ebooksbridge.com

ISBN: 978-1-55494-569-6

Layout and Editing: Matthew Thomson
Cover Design: Olena S. Sullivan/New Mediatrix

Preface

Everything I've included is accessible to the bridge player who plays primarily for enjoyment, mental stimulation and social interaction. Adaptation of these strategies into your game will, I'm confident, make a quantum leap in both your results and enjoyment of the game.

Personally, I would happily play all that follows – “I only teach what I would play”. I share with you advice, accrued over 40 years of successfully enjoying bridge.

The updated and expanded second edition includes; two-over-one as a game force, competitive bidding strategies, passed hand responding, sharpening your tools, winning against experts and details of my favourite Aspro Two openings.

May all your finesses win !

♠ Matthew Thomson

As a 5 year old, I spent the best part of a year in hospital where I played cards daily. My hospital hi-light was mastering of the poker school. It didn't take much encouragement to join the newly forming Brisbane Water Bridge Club in early 1975, the beginning of my bridge career.

International Bridge Highlights

I first represented Australia in the 1989 Pacific-Asia Teams (Jakarta). John Roberts was my partner in the 1995 World Teams (Beijing) and in the 1996 Olympiad (Rhodes). I was a finalist in the 2000 Olympiad (Maastricht), beaten by eventual gold medalists Italy, and 5th in the 2003 World Teams (Monte Carlo), again beaten by the eventual gold medalists Italy.

After playing in the 2005 World Teams (Estoril) I took a break from competitive bridge. Returning to competitive bridge in 2012, in partnership with Avi Kanetkar, I represented the Australian Open Team in the 2013 World Teams (Bali). Recently after returning from Poland, where I played with Cathryn (my wife) in the Australian Mixed Team at the 2016 World Bridge Games, David Beauchamp and I won the right to represent the Australian Open Team at the 2017 World Teams (Lyon).

My partners when representing the Australian Open Bridge Team have been: Peter Newman, John Roberts, Bobby Richman, Paul Marston, Avi Kanetkar and David Beauchamp.

Matthew Thomson
35 Trelawney Street
Eastwood 2122
Sydney
Australia

November, 2016

Getting the Best Out of the Book

I recommend this book, a smorgasbord of advice, be employed as a constant companion, it includes:

1. Individual “evaluation” and judgement advice, including in competition.
2. Individual strategies; for better leads, declarer play, how to play against experts, and in combination with your partner, better defence.
3. System and Partnership Agreement recommendations that may best be introduced over a period of time.

For less experienced players, I first recommend you “sharpen your tools”, working through the chapters on declaring and defending before putting an edge to your bidding.

The bidding system proposed is holistic and consistent, a system I would happily play at any level, but the “best” system is one both you and your partner agree on, and are comfortable with.

I’ve indicated when clear partnership agreement is required and indicated where recommendations have common alternatives.

Under the headings of “Why?”, I explain why I recommend a particular system treatment. Understand the “Why?” and you will understand how the recommended system fits together.

In addition to standard weak twos, I have included sections on the “dreaded” mini-multi 2♦ and “Aspro Twos”, my favourite. Playing the mini-multi is a good fun alternative and will cause problems for even the best opponents. You may never play the mini-multi, however it’s important to understand how such bids work, removing the mystery of playing against them.

Whatever your system choices, most important is to: “evaluate” your hand, be confident in your judgement, be confident in your strategies, and be confident in your partner. Enjoy your bridge, and you’ll enjoy better bridge.

Contents

Bidding

Hand Evaluation - “Tricks not Points”	1
Opening Balanced and Unbalanced Hands	6
Superior Responses to an Opening Bid	19
2-Over-1 Game Force - Standard and Modern systems	28
Opener’s and Responder’s Rebids – Essential Agreements	47
Shape Before Strength – “evaluation” to better contracts	57
Opening Twos – 2♦, 2♥ and 2♠ Weak and hand analysis	61
Mini-Multi 2♦ and hand analysis	76
Aspro Twos - My Favourite	91

Competing

Strategies of Competing	99
We Open – They Compete	107
They Open – We Compete	137

Sharpen Your Tools

163

Declaring:

Win More Tricks in NTs	165
Win More Tricks with Trumps	185

Defending:

Lethal Leads and Reading Partner’s Leads	206
Partnership Defence - Signals	236

Winning Against Experts

267

System Summary – Today’s Standard Bidding

271

Bidding

Hand Evaluation - "Tricks not Points"

The single, most important piece of advice I can give you, is to "evaluate" your hand.

Bridge is about *winning tricks*, not counting high card points (HCP). The strength of a bridge hand is its trick winning ability.

Evaluate a hand's trick winning ability from its:

- Shape,
- Points, and
- Location of its honours.

This is your hand's strength. Evaluate to determine whether to; bid more or bid less.

Hands with "**Shape**" are unbalanced hands. Unbalanced hands have a higher trick winning potential. When the long suits of an unbalanced hand fit with partner, their higher trick winning potential is realised.

Points are based on our HCP. We could adjust our points to better reflect a hand's trick winning potential to:

Ace	= 4.4 points
King	= 3 points
Queen	= 1.8 points
Jack	= 0.8 points.

But rather than complicate point counting:

- with "quacks" (queens & jacks), especially in your short suits, be conservative, and
- with two (or more) aces be aggressive.

Aces in unbalanced hands are gold. Aces give you control and reduce the risk of ruffs (eg: the opponents lead a singleton). An ace opposite a singleton means no loser.

Points and HCP

"HCP" is strictly the high card points in a hand, however "Points" means the value of a hand after we "evaluate" it. For example, a hand with 14 HCP and a "5332" shape we evaluate as 15 points because of its five card suit (and as we will see, open 1NT).

Location

If partner bids two suits, honours in those suits increase your partnership's trick winning potential, but honours in the other two suits may be wasted. If partner shows an unbalanced hand with diamonds and spades, compare these two hands:

♠ K9		♠ 94
♥ A10852	and	♥ A10852
♦ Q9		♦ 92
♣ 9754		♣ KQ87

Your points and shape are the same, the only difference between these hands is the "location" of their points outside the heart suit. I would expect partner to win at least two more tricks opposite the first hand with its honours in partner's long suits.

Location of honours in your long suits means you will win more tricks, compare these two hands:

♠ K853	or	♠ A1096
♥ K5		♥ 85
♦ K752		♦ AQ109
♣ K74		♣ 974

If we simplistically count HCP, the first hand is better (12 to 10) however the second hand will win more tricks. The second hand is a better hand - it has: all its points and tens & nines in its long suits, and two aces.

10's & 9's Count:

Tens and nines ("intermediates") in your longer suits and in partner's long suits mean extra tricks.

On a bad day you will win no tricks, with

♣ K763 opposite ♣ J84

But you are guaranteed to win two tricks, and three tricks if your finesse of the ♣Q wins, with

♣ K1093 opposite ♣ J84

Having the ♣109 working with our ♣KJ is worth about two tricks.

Tens and nines may allow you to survive when the suit divides poorly. For example:

♠ QJ10963 opposite ♠ 84

has two losers if spades divide 4-1, however

♠ QJ6532 opposite ♠ 84

may have four losers if spades divide 4-1.

Hand Evaluation Summary

The strength of a hand, its trick winning ability, is determined by its: Shape plus Points, and the Location of its points. And how the hand fits with partner's hand. "Evaluate" when bidding, to better assess the trick winning ability of your hand.

Hand "Evaluation" Examples

In each set of hands, our points and honours are the same, but once a trump fit is found, we use our shape to determine how high to bid.

You
1♦

Responder
1♠

What do you bid ?

♠ K982
♥ 74
♦ AQ103
♣ A96

Bid 2♠, balanced hand, minimum opening strength.

♠ K982
♥ 7
♦ AQ103
♣ A962

Bid 3♠, unbalanced hand, but no long side suit.

♠ K982
♥ 7
♦ AQ1032
♣ A96

Bid 4♠, unbalanced with a good long side suit.

Our points and honours are the same, but once a trump fit is found, we use our shape to “evaluate” how much to bid.

You

1♠

Responder

2♠

What do you bid ?

♠ AQJ82

♥ 532

♦ 83

♣ AQ9

Pass, balanced hand minimum opening strength.

♠ AQJ82

♥ 532

♦ 3

♣ AQ98

Try for game (3♠), unbalanced, but no long side suit.

♠ AQJ82

♥ 52

♦ 3

♣ AQ983

Bid game (4♠), unbalanced with a good long side suit.

You are the dealer, what do you bid ?

♠ A108

♥ KQJ9864

♦ 4

♣ 86

Open 1♥, a strong long suit, an ace, and a singleton make this too strong to open 3♥. If partner responds 1♠; with a strong fragment in partner’s suit, “evaluate” your hand upwards and jump to 3♥.

But if your hand was:

♠ 4

♥ KQJ9864

♦ A108

♣ 86

Over partner’s 1♠ response, with a misfit in spades, rebid only 2♥.

Opener
1♥

You
What do you bid ?

♠ Q82
♥ K974
♦ A93
♣ J62

Bid only 2♥, although you have four card heart support you have no shape - no shortage, no side suit.

♠ QJ82
♥ K974
♦ A93
♣ 62

Try for game (3♥). Four trumps, some shape (doubleton), and good honour location. Our "quacks" are working together in our spade side suit.

♠ QJ862
♥ K974
♦ A93
♣ 2

Bid game (4♥). Four trumps, an unbalanced hand with a five card side suit and a singleton.

Our points and honours are the same, but once a trump fit is found, unbalanced hands win more tricks. Use your shape to "evaluate" how much to bid.

Opening Balanced Hands

Standard opening bids for **balanced** hands are:

"Points"	
22+	Open 2♣
20-21	Open 2NT
18-19	Open 1 suit
15-17	Open 1NT
12-14	Open 1 suit

Half (49%) of hands are balanced (shapes are: "4333", "4432", "5332"). As our shape is limited, points are our dominant guide in the bidding. Balanced hands normally require 12 HCP to open.

When opening one of a suit (12-14 or 18-19 points), opening 1♦ promises four diamonds unless exactly 4-4 in the majors, and 1♣ promises at least three clubs.

With 4♣s and 4♦s, Open 1♦

"Why?"

When we open 1♦ partner assumes we have four diamonds but knows we will often have three clubs if we open 1♣. Opening 1♦ positions us better when they bid.

♠ 87
 ♥ A43
 ♦ A1084
 ♣ KJ92

<u>You</u>	<u>LHO</u> ¹	<u>Partner</u>	<u>RHO</u>
1♦	1♠	X	pass
2♣			

We comfortably rebid 2♣, however if we opened 1♣ we would need to rebid 2♦. By starting with 1♦, partner can stay at the two level in whichever minor they prefer.

¹ LHO = left hand opponent, RHO = right hand opponent.

		♠ 987
		♥ 43
		♦ A1084
		♣ AQ92
<u>Partner</u>	<u>RHO</u>	<u>You</u>
1♦	2♠	3♦

You bid 3♦ as it is likely partner has four or more diamonds, the same assumption could not be made if the opening bid was 1♣.

Do You Open the Bidding ? - Hand "Evaluation

♠ QJ3
 ♥ K64
 ♦ K842
 ♣ QJ5

Although it is unusual to pass with 12 HCP you may do well to pass. You have no ace, no intermediates, and the worst trick taking "4333" shape.

However with:

♠ 983
 ♥ KQ98
 ♦ AQ107
 ♣ 64

As dealer open 1♦ - concentrated points, plus a 10 and 98 in your long suits (♦ and ♥), and you want a diamond (or heart) lead. Too much trick winning potential to pass. In third seat open 1♥.

Open 1NT and 2NT More Often

One difference between "experts" and club players is that experts strive to open 1NT and 2NT whenever they can whereas club players avoid these openings.

Opening 1NT

The 1NT opening is a great bid. All balanced and almost balanced hands with 15-17 points open 1NT. Opening 1NT gives partner a good description of your hand and makes it difficult for the opponents to disrupt you.

Open these hands 1NT:

- any “5332” shape with 14 or 15 HCP,
- 2-2-“54”¹ shapes (54 in minors) with 14-16 HCP
- plus some “semi-balanced” hands.

Hands with 17 HCP and a five card suit are too strong for a 1NT opening. Treat these hands as having 18-19 points, start by opening the five card suit.

♠ KJ4
♥ A75
♦ AQ974
♣ 84

With 14 HCP and a five card suit open 1NT, if you open 1♦ you allow a 1♥ or 1♠ overcall.

Tip: Never be concerned about a weak doubleton, if you have a balanced hand and the right strength open 1NT.

♠ AJ432
♥ A94
♦ KJ3
♣ Q9

With any “5332” shape and 14 or 15 HCP open 1NT. If you open this hand 1♠ and partner responds 1NT you “must” reluctantly pass. Opening 1NT best communicates the nature and strength of your hand to partner.

¹ 2-2-“54” means exactly 2♠s and 2♥s, and 54 either way in the minors. Other examples: “4333” means 4 cards in any suit, 3 in the others; whereas 3-4-3-3 means exactly 4♥s, 3 cards in ♣,♦,♠. “5431” means any hand with this shape whereas 5-“31”-4 means exactly 5♠s and 4♣s with either 3♥s & 1♦ or 1♥ & 3♦s. The suit order is always ♠♥♦♣.

However with a five card major and 16 HCP you are strong enough to open one of the major, planning to raise a 1NT response to 2NT:

♠ AJ432
♥ A94
♦ KJ3
♣ K9

Open 1♠ planning to raise a 1NT response to 2NT.

This is a maximum 1NT opening.

♠ K4
♥ Q87
♦ A92
♣ AQJ98

With 17 HCP and a five card suit you are too strong to open 1NT:

♠ A4
♥ Q87
♦ A92
♣ AQJ98

Open 1♣ planning to jump to 2NT over a 1♥ or 1♠ response.

♠ 83
♥ K8
♦ AQ95
♣ AQ972

With all 2-2-“54” shapes and 14-16 HCP open 1NT. You are poorly placed if you open 1♣, and you invite the opponents to overcall 1♥ or 1♠.

♠ 83
♥ Q8
♦ AQ953
♣ KQJ9

Open 1NT, just do it, you have the right strength and trick winning ability to open 1NT. Do not consider opening a hand such as this 1♦. Opening 1NT pre-empts the opponents, preventing a takeout double for the major suits or an overcall in a major suit at the one level. Make life difficult for your opponents, open 1NT.

Semi-Balanced hands you should Open 1NT

♠ K3
♥ Q82
♦ AQ9532
♣ A9

This is essentially a balanced hand, open 1NT. If you open 1♦ you have ugly rebid choices. For example, over a 1♠ response a rebid of 2♦ misrepresents your hand – you are too strong for 2♦ and your hand is a NT hand, not a diamond hand.

Opening 1NT avoids rebid problems with some hands:

♠ Q8
♥ QJ82
♦ AQ753
♣ A9

Open 1NT. If you open 1♦ what are you going to rebid over the likely 1♠ response? You are too strong for a 1NT rebid and not strong enough for a reverse of 2♥. Opening 1NT is best.

♠ A864
♥ A1082
♦ K
♣ KJ86

Open 1NT. If you are to achieve full value for your singleton ♦K it's likely to be in notrumps with yourself as declarer. Often your singleton ♦K will win, whereas if you open 1♣ then raise partner's response of 1♥ or 1♠ your singleton ♦K will be exposed in dummy. If do open 1♣ and partner responds 1♥ or 1♠, do you raise to two or three? If your ♦K is valuable you are worth a raise to three, but if worthless a raise to only two is best. Also opening 1NT will make you declarer if a major trump fit exists, and your singleton ♦K will be concealed. My evaluation is that opening 1NT is best with this hand.

Opening 2NT

Balanced and semi-balanced hands with 20-21 points open 2NT. Open these shapes 2NT:

- any "5332" shape
- any "5422" shape
- most "6322" shapes
- some "7222" shapes with an A, K or Q in each of its doubletons.

By opening 2NT (20-21 points) you give partner a good description of your strength and hand type. Semi-balanced hands with about 20 points are better opened 2NT than one-of-a-suit, and they are too weak to open with a strong two bid (2♣).

♠ KJ4
♥ A75
♦ AQ974
♣ AQ

A balanced 21 "points", a classical 2NT opening.

♠ AKJ432
♥ A9
♦ KJ3
♣ K9

With a "6322" shape tend to open 2NT. The "6322" shape plays well in NTs. Opening 2NT gets your strength and hand type across to partner in one bid. If you open 1♠ it will be difficult to describe your hand to partner.

♠ AK98
♥ AKJ93
♦ K3
♣ Q9

With a "5422" shape open 2NT. Superior to any other choice of opening bid.

♠ K4
♥ K8
♦ A2
♣ AKJ8532

For some "7222" shape hands 2NT is the best opening. This hand is worth about 21 "points" and can be opened 2NT.

This expanded and updated second edition includes: two-over-one as a game force, competitive bidding strategies, passed hand responding, sharpening your tools, winning against experts and details of the author's favorite Aspro Two openings.

EXPAND YOUR BRIDGE HORIZONS

Adoption of the bridge advice and strategies presented in this book into your game will result in you bidding more, declaring more, winning more, and enjoying your bridge more. The author's advice is to always *evaluate* your hand, and to show your "shape before strength". Better contracts and better bridge will be your reward.

The book is best employed as a constant companion. It provides individual advice, partnership strategies, and system recommendations that are consistent and holistic. Enjoy!



MATTHEW THOMSON is a current member of the Australian Bridge Team, and has been a finalist in both the Olympiad and the World Bridge Teams. A bridge professional and teacher, he lives in Sydney, Australia with his wife, Cathryn, three adult children, Jeremy, Stephanie and Dominic, and with "Chubba" his Welsh Terrier.



AN HONORS BOOK FROM
MASTER POINT PRESS