

THE ONLY SEVEN CONVENTION YOU *REALLY* NEED TO KNOW—AND WHY

by Maritha Pottenger

Too many people try to memorize lots of new conventions, thinking that is the best way to improve their bridge game. In fact, too many conventions often have the opposite effect. With convention overload, it is easy for one partner to forget or for the two partners to interpret the same convention a bit differently.

Rather than saying: “Does this sound like a cool convention?” people should ask themselves: “**How often will I be able to use this convention at the bridge table?**” There are a number of truly wonderful conventions that only come up once every six months or so. By that time, there is a good chance that one or the other of you will have forgotten the convention.

So, here is the list of the Seven Conventions you should know because **they occur at least once every session or bridge, or every other session of bridge.** (Some come up more than once a session.)

1. Stayman
2. Jacoby Transfers
3. Support Doubles
4. New Minor Forcing
5. Negative Doubles
6. Roman Key Card Blackwood (1430)
7. A system which allows you to overcall the opponent's NT openings and show both single-suited and 2-suited hands. (This could be Hamilton/Cappaletti or DONT or Meckwell. The particular system does not matter. Just have a system.)

Note that **the first five conventions listed are all designed to help you and your partner find an 8-card major fit** when one exists. Getting to an 8-card (or longer) major fit is among your most important goals during the bidding process, so these conventions are extremely valuable.

Roman Key Card Blackwood is vital because **the King of your trump suit is as important as the four Aces when you are looking for slam**, and the **Queen of trump** is extremely useful as well. Key Card Blackwood will help you get to good slams and to avoid poor slams.

Bridge is a bidder's game, so being able to bid—relatively safely—over an opponent's opening No Trump bid is an advantage. “Mel's Rules” tell you whether or not you should venture into the auction. Once you have decided to bid, the best system is one which allows you to show one-suited hands AND two-suited hands—most or entirely at the 2-level. A “natural” system which simply shows one-suited hands is not near as effective as Hamilton, DONT, Meckwell, etc.

Among the conventions that only come up about once every three to six months (and I play almost every day!) are: Jacoby 2NT, Splinter Bids, Michaels, Unusual 2NT, Responsive Doubles, Gambling 3NT, Mini Splinters, Smolen, and showing 5-5 Major hands (forcing and invitational) with 3H and 3S over 1NT opening. The conventions which I have seen forgotten most often (by my partners and other partnerships) at the bridge table are Drury and “page 2” of Puppet Stayman (where 3NT over 2NT opening shows 5 spades and 4 hearts).

A number of conventions simply sow confusion. Partners aren't sure when one or the other is using them. They are not sure about follow-up actions. Among this are Gerber, Minorwood, Void-Showing Bids, and Kickback.

If you want a FREE handout on any of these 7 most useful conventions (and on Mel's Rules about overcalling NT), email me at maritha@pacbell.net and ask for the ones you want. Please put “Bridge” in the subject line or I won't open your email.