

EVERYTHING I KNOW ABOUT BRIDGE, I LEARNED AT THE RACETRACK

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How did race tracks become home to me? My father was a (very) small-time horse owner and trainer. His day job was a veterinarian and I guess he didn't get enough of animals that way, so he indulged his passion by breeding, training, and racing Standardbreds. These, by the way, are the horses that run in harness pulling racing bikes, Trotters and Pacers.

We were lucky enough to live in the country, so my sisters and I couldn't escape if we wanted to. My formative years were spent in barns and around horses and horse people. Everything I know about life and people I learned at the racetrack, of course. I'm eager to share this (questionable) wisdom with you.

There are two horse worlds. There's the track, where people who *think* they are gamblers put their money where their mouths are, and behind the scenes, where the *real* gamblers are. Consider: for every 100 foals registered, only 10 ever make it to the track. The other 90 either don't have the speed or aren't sound... physically or mentally able to win. Of the 10 who make it to the track, only one will ever make enough money for its people to cover its expenses. (By the way, those in the know refer to a horse's owners as "his people.")

And the people who plunk down their two bucks think *they* are the gamblers?! What delusional thought process would lead an owner to think *his* horse is the 1% winner?

Our BRIDGE tie-in: You gotta believe!!

Actually, it's the same delusional thinking that makes me believe that this time, contrary to my entire bridge experience, "8 ever, 9 never" is going to work. For me it never has, but I continue to do it anyway... hoping this time will be *the* time.

It's the same thought process that makes me think that this time, my partner will remember we play transfers. It's the same misplaced faith that leads me to believe that this time, maybe my bids actually reflect the hand I'm holding. It's the wishful idea that maybe they *won't* double my insane phantom sacrifice. (My Faithful Readers know I'm the Queen of the Phantom Sacrifice. You'll be happy to know that I continue to hold the title. Sigh.)

This delusional thinking isn't limited to me. Here's an email I recently received:

"Marti, I wonder if you would give me some bidding advice. (Silly question. Of course I'll give advice. Will it be right? You judge!) No One was vul. As South, I held:

♠AKx

♥xx

♦Qxx

♣AJ1075

The bidding went:

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
		<i>1♣</i>	
<i>P</i>	<i>1♥</i>	<i>2♦</i>	<i>P</i>

3♦ 3♠ P ??

What does North have and what should I have done next? If you don't help us, we'll be arguing about this for days. Signed, Tormented in Tennessee"

Let's analyze this. First, it seems to me there are an awful lot of points floating around this table, so obviously some must be from distribution. East's 2♦ overcall promises 10+. West's raise to 3♦ must be preemptive, showing lots of support. With your 14 HCP and East's promised 10, if North is the Big Horse you bet on when you paid your entry, West rates to be totally broke. North baffles me though. He bid the hearts first, so he MUST have more hearts than spades. If he were 5/5, he would have bid his spades first. To continue the bidding with a new suit at the 3-level with his 3♠ bid, he must have at least 5 spades. So he's gotta have 6 hearts, 5 spades and a very nice, chubby, game-going hand. I have to admit the same confusion as you, though.

So, I suggested to Tormented that if he BELIEVED in his horse, uh, partner, I would consider bidding 4♠. (With two 8-card fits he should choose the one that offers him more ruffing values to cover any losing hearts.

Sounds like good advice, no? Here's what I heard back from Tormented.

"Well, Marti, that's what I thought also. But here's what he had:

♠Jxxx
♥KJxxx
♦xx
♣Qx

We got slaughtered. We were doubled. We were toast! But, he forgives my lapses and I certainly have no trouble returning the favor. Thanks for giving me the ammunition I needed to win the postmortem, though. If you can't win the hand, you want to at least win the postmortem, right?"

Glad to help, guys!!

Oh my. Still, you gotta believe in your horse, and your bet. You place the best bets you can with the information you have...and then you tear up your tickets after your Big Horse turns out to be a nag. I read that one of the marvels of the human mind is that it can hold two conflicting views at the same time. You gotta believe that this is your 1% day. It's this delusional thinking that makes life worth living.

There you have it, straight from the horse's mouth. Let me hear from you... no belief is so strange that I'm not eager to hear it.