

PINOCHLE – SINGLE DECK – PARTNERS

ADVANCED STRATEGY

Documentation

The documentation I have made available is not available, to my knowledge, anywhere else. It is based on over 35 years experience and countless hours of putting it down on paper. It is there for your benefit and you should consider using it. We will set up a pinochle strategy group to help the players along.

<http://sbirnbaum.hnccorp.com/pinochle/>

Overview

Pinochle is a very difficult game to play and even more difficult to master. The more you play the more you realize how you must change your thinking during the game to be effective. There is only one method to raise your level of play above amateur, and that is to put in the time required studying the game. Playing regularly and a small amount of study will raise your level of play. You will never be more than an amateur if you only show up once or twice a week to play, without dedicating a little time to study the documentation provided on the website. In addition, you will be able to follow the discussions at the end of a game that always occur. Pointers made by better players will make more sense. You will be into the game on a different level than that of just a player.

Hand Setup

An important part of advanced strategy is to set up your hand quickly, and play the hand quickly. A quick smooth flow of the game helps you remember the point count, and what cards were played. In order to do this you must pick up your cards all at once or in the groups of three as they are dealt. First make sure you know the score. This is a very important step. Then quickly separate the colors, and sort them down by value. Now you see a group of cards color separated and value separated.

From the Hand Evaluation Flowchart (HEF) <http://sbirnbaum.hnccorp.com/pinochle/strategy.php> on the website there are only a few decisions to make at this time. Using the Pinochle Hand Evaluator (PHE) Program <http://sbirnbaum.hnccorp.com/pinochle/phe.php> will help you recognize patterns of cards. These two aids should be used as study material and time given to develop knowledge of the game.

You must be able to visually see the pattern of meld. If the cards are in order, and they should be in the same order every time, you will rapidly see any pattern that represents meld. If you are first, second your partner is in the game because they did not bid yet. So, in order, you would give a bid of a Run, Aces or 100 in meld. Seeing the Run or Aces takes a fraction of a second and counting meld slightly longer. It should take no longer than 10 seconds to give the bid after the last card is picked up. But, this only can be done if you know the score, and are aware of who dealt before a card dealt. In other words – pay attention to the game.

As soon as you know what you are going to bid, you start evaluating what you would do if your partner passes or give a bid back. Will you be able to bid for a star without your partners help in the event of a pass? Will you be able to go for a star if your partner bids? Will you be able to push when your partner closes out? Our quick evaluation 20 pts a trump and 20 for outside aces will tell you this very quickly. If the number is nowhere near a closeout or push an automatic pass is warranted. By going through this exercise in the same order every hand, you will be bidding very quickly and the flow of the game will be more enjoyable to everyone. The other

documents on the website discuss in detail how to bid, however, later in this document we will fine tune that process.

Playing the Hand

Trump

OK, so your team has the bid, now you have to play the hand. Before any card is led you must evaluate a number of things which change depending on if you are named trump or your partner named trump. Also, when your team did not take the bid another set of decisions will come into play.

First, you or your partner names trump. When you take the bid, you name trump. This should give you an immediate advantage against your opponents. But, to take advantage of that, you must be able to control the trump. You control trump by having more power in trump than your opponents. Since trump wins over the other suits, having more of them gives you that advantage. But, using that advantage takes knowledge of card distribution, observing what was melded and knowing when you leave it in the game or take it out. In order to not have your opponents hurt you during the play, reducing the number of trump in their hand should be a goal. You do this by playing trump.

The number of points you need to make determines how you will work your trump. How powerful you are in trump comes into play. In the ideal situation, you want to get the trump out of your opponents hand while leaving it in you and your partner's hand. When you play trump you will take them out of your opponents hands, but you will also remove trump from your partners. You must try to determine that trade off. Distribution comes into play.

Bidding Evaluation

Evaluating a hand is the first thing to address. On the first round of bidding you want to pass information on to your partner describing your hand. You will evaluate if you have 100 pts. in meld and if you do you will bid 20 pts. over the last bid. If you have four Aces in four different suits you would bid with a 30 pt. jump. Lastly, if you have a run (A,10,K,Q,J must be in the same suit), you would bid a 50 pt. jump. When a bid jump lands on 250 you always take it for the bid, not closeout. To close out at 250 or 300, and that bid would confuse your partner, bid an odd amount above that. For example, the bid comes to you at 220 and you have aces, you bid 250 a solid 30 point jump. When you bid before your partner, this is the only thing to address; if you have one of those bid opportunities

Opening for the Opponents

There is much controversy on this subject. However, you have to consider when to do this. The normal thought is you never open for your opponents unless you can make the bid, 200 minimum. This way if you do, your partner will respond with either a meld bid or a push bid. The problem with this is when you have a very strong hand and are just shy of the bid. For instance, let's say you feel you can make 180. You would normally let this go. But if your partner has anything that bid is attainable and should be considered. You would not do this when the game is even because the risk/reward ratio is too high. Looking for a star could jeopardize the game. But if you are down by over 200 points you may consider this strategy to get back in the game. If you are around 800 and the opposing team is 650-700, you have a good chance of going out and not getting into a bidder's out situation. Remember you deal next so, if you have a strong hand now the likelihood of you getting a weaker hand than you now hold is higher.

Remember, you have to assume your partner can make 180 if they open for the opponent. So, you only give a push bid if you hold better than 70 points in your hand. This way, if your partner should hit 250 with your additional 70.

Maximizing Your Partners Hand

When you name trump your only concern is to get your partner in the lead before the opponents have a chance to ruin your strategy. In this situation you *must* play your aces and lead trump unless you have two A's in a 4 or 5 piece suit with the 9 or Jack for the definite double Ace lead back. You can then not play that suit and play trump back to your partner. It is then up to your partner to see look for that double. The rule of thumb is if you cannot make the bid, you look for that lead back, you have no other choice. They will use that knowledge in their evaluation on what to play.

But, in normal conditions you play your aces and lead back in trump. The reason for this is twofold, first your partner has the opportunity to either throw off 10's or hold them if setting up a suit. Second, you will rarely make A 10 combinations good if a low card is led in that suit before the other ace is played, and you have no idea where that other ace is. You have to sacrifice your hand to give your partner an opportunity to set up their hand. This holds true even if you did not take the bid.

This is a game of continuing knowledge. At first other than the meld that was put down and how the bidding went, you have no idea where cards lie. If you get the lead and don't show your partner some information, they are in the dark. The team that named trump has an advantage from the start. Giving up your hand will more likely give your partner enough information to maximize their hand. Not doing this will more often help the other team who will play the normal strategy because they have the advantage. By hiding your hand you give your partner no option to set up their hand. In effect, instead of one person being in the dark (you) by not playing this way both of you are in the dark. There is no faster way of losing all the tens in your hands than trying to hide your hand.

Now, there are some situations you wouldn't do this, but if you are not sure of this play the above strategy will be correct. This is extremely important in close games. Weak players will more often lose by 5 or 10 points or let the other team make the bid by 5 or 10. 30-50 point swings are not uncommon when you get your 10's caught.

As the partner that didn't name trump the only way you would take control is if your partner names a weak suit and you just happen to have the power in that suit. Then you would take over the control and your partner would switch rolls with you. This happens occasionally but not often enough to consider.

Opening For Your Partner with 5 Trump

The concept here is that there is a greater probability that you will be dealt 3-3-3-3 or 4-4-4 or a combination with the greater suit being 4 pieces. In that case opening for your partner with 5 should result in the long run a better possibility of making the hand. As we have been explaining in all this documentation, communication is the key to winning. When your partner opens for you, they are communicating they have a minimum of 5 trump. Remember you know what you have in your hand your partner doesn't. If you feel you have a better hand, or you know you can make 210, you take it back. In that case your partner should pass. If your partner has at least 70 in meld and one ace they can push you to 250. But, always be aware that when you partner takes it back it is not necessarily because they can make 210 but they may only have a better suit than 5. Do not try to take it back for 220, it usually is not worth it.

You cannot have a bid for every situation so we don't try. You use a strategy that works *most of the time*. In this case, passing is the wisest choice.

Lead Backs

When playing the hand, you need to convey to your partner your strengths and weaknesses. Lead backs are the methods to convey this information. Here is a summary of lead backs and what they mean.

- You melded a marriage and you partner plays and Ace. The Queen indicates you have the Ace in that suit, a King indicates you do not. This is a *definite* lead back and always means the same thing.
- Your partner plays and Ace and you put on that a 9 or J (non-pointer) indicates you *may* have the Ace. If that is the only cards you have you had no choice. So, a 9 or jack is a maybe but not a definite. However, if you melded a 5 point card, Q or K in that suit and play a 9 or J, then you indicate you *do* have the Ace. Indicators like that are the subtleties of pinochle; the detective work.
- You place an A on your partners A indicates you *may* have the double 10 but it could mean your Ace was on the roof i.e., the only card you had in that suit.
- Your partner is pulling trump either from the beginning or in the middle of the game. If you have a double Ace you play a 9 or J of that suit indicates you have the double Ace. Although, you may only have 9's & J's which is unlikely. If you play a 5 pointer that is an indication you have the A of that suit. If the other A is out, a 9 or J would indicate you have the A - 10, or a double lead in that suit. You may consider, if your partner is pulling trump and you have A-A-10, to play an Ace on your first void card to indicate you have the A-10 behind it. You do this if you do not have a 9 or jack as the definite indicator card. This done normally when you are trying for a trickless and the game is already made. Keep in mind the information you are passing is conveying where you have strength or winners.

What you are trying to accomplish is consistent information transfer during the play of the game. This information is always between the person naming trump and their partner. Opposing players not the bid winners may use signals but more often will not. So, when you did not win bids passing this information is usually not effective. The bid winner's partner always is the signal giver and should not depend on perceived signals from their partner, or the bid winner. More often than not, the bid winner is trying to set up their hand for end play and will throw out cards for that reason only.

The importance here is the bid winner's partner ("dummy hand") not to try to figure out how to help their partner. This will not work in the majority of hands because the bid winner is not following these outlined rules; they are trying to set up their hand.

The Six Rules

1. Calculate what your hand is worth, know if you have a chance to make the bid or not. The quick count will suffice until your play gets better. Count 20 pts. For each trump if you have the Ace in trump and 5 or more trump. 15 pts. per trump for 4 or less then count 20 pts. for each outside Ace (count 25 for the two if you have double ace).

See how close you came to making those points after the game is played. If you are off try to determine why, use that knowledge as a learning experience. Why did you make more? Why did you make less? Slow the game down in order to ascertain that information. Do not just ignore why things happened, try to figure out why they did. If your partner had more than 3 Aces you should make a lot more than calculated. If you partner has none you should make less. Remember these are averages!!!

2. Count trump – if you can track what trump is out, that is better. But, you have to know the trump count. If counting points interferes with counting trump do not count points.
3. Watch lead backs (both teams) and protect your partner's aces in order for 10's to be made. Lead backs let you know what is in your partner's hand. Once you know that they have a winner in a suit, your focus should be to leave it in their hand. They can then set up their hand knowing you will go after trump. This is usually the rule if you have the bid or not. It is known as transferring control to your partner. You do that after you either control trump or get it out of the game. You transfer control, or try to when you determine you cannot make the bid in your hand. If the other team gets in the lead and plays 4, 5 Aces and you cannot make the bid you must play trump out of the game completely hand hope your partner can win the rest. If your partner sees this, they will try to preserve their 10's.
4. Break up opponents lead backs and/or destroy opponents trump suit by leading trump if necessary. Leading the suit they are using as in the lead back sequence before trump can be pulled is usually a good play. Leading trump in that scenario is not a good play because that is exactly what your opponents want to do. By leading the lead back suit you reduce the chances the person naming trump can get back to their partners strength.
5. Learn when and how to transfer power to your partner. As said earlier in order to transfer power you must play trump out of the game. Once you determine you should do this the sequence in to play trump until the opponents have none. You play all your Aces and Ace – 10 combinations that are good. Once that is done you play the rest of the trump out of the game. I mean play all of the trump out of the game. Then you give up control to your partner. In the case of a "maybe" lead back and you have determined you cannot make the game in your hand, you follow the same line of play.
6. Play your Aces at the first opportunity. If your team took the bid and you have the opportunity to get in the lead you do it and then play every ace in your hand.

If you did not take the bid you do the same. If your partner already had the lead, hold onto aces and try to get the opponent out of trump. If the suit with your ace is the only way to accomplish that - play it even if it gets trumped. Trying to save 10 or 5 point cards in the attempt to throw those points off on your partners winning tricks is incorrect for more reasons that I want to discuss here. This is a common mistake of Auction Pinochle Players trying to play 4 Handed Partner Pinochle.

Every hand is a mystery and that mystery is different in every hand. That is the intrigue of pinochle. Playing the game just to throw out cards is not really playing pinochle. It is just throwing cards.

Playing the Game

After the bidding is done and you know what you have to make, you must determine if you can make the game. If you determine you cannot make the game using the evaluation in this documentation, you must lead trump. If you have K and the A you should lead the K to try to force the A. If you do not have the A lead a 9 or J. Doing this will communicate to your partner your strategy. It is important for your partner to try to make 10's good in this case because he knows you are struggling.

So, you need 150 and determine you can only make 110, you lead trump. You need 150 and determine 170 is in your hand, you lead a loser you showed on the table during melding. In this case you are preserving your trump in an effort to make last.

The 5 (or more) - 4 Split

You hold 5 or more trump and 4 of another suit you can calculate you can make 130 - 140 on that split plus 20 for each outside ace not in one of those suits. Playing this type of hand once you determine you can make the game, after playing any "A" on the roof - you lead the "A" in the 4 piece suit if you have it. You watch the lead back from you partner and if it is a definite "A" lead back (Q from a marriage or 9,J if they melded Q's or K's) then you switch to pulling trump to protect your partners "A" and possibly using that as a second suit. You determine if you want to lead that suit a second time, but remember the opponents may trump your partners winner.

Without the "A" in that 4 piece suit you lead a 5 point card. Your strategy is to strengthen your trump suit by getting someone to trump those losers. You also want to make one of those losers into a winner because the 4th lead will usually win a trick once you clear trump. You will clear trump once you have accomplished making that suit stronger. This 5-4 split is very effective in setting up your hand to win last and that trick usually has a good count.

Keep in mind, all these evaluations are averages and best guesses and the actual totals you get could swing 20 points in each direction. Play conservatively and back down the bid for safety, unless it is a bidders out and you are forced to push the hand.