The Rule of 40 - The art of figuring out what partner has!

1. If the opponents are in 3NT, what card should you lead from this hand?

S AQ53 H KJ85 D KJ C 952

2. A good guideline is 4th highest from your longest and strongest, but is that a good idea here?

3. Usually, when you lead from a long suit, you are trying to set up tricks in the suit, and you do this hoping partner can help.

4. So, if you lead the 3S or the 5H, you are hoping that P has a high card that will help set up the suit. Your hope is to lose only one trick to Declarer. Or that P can get in later, to lead through Declarer.

5. What are the chances that partner can help in this case? This is where the Rule of 40 comes in. Have you heard about this one before? The Rule of 40 is based on the total number of points in the deck.

6. You know how many points you have. If you can get a general idea of the points held by your opponents, you can use arithmetic to figure out how many points that leaves partner.

7. How many points are required between 2 hands to make a reasonable play for game? If the opponents have bid game, assume they have around 26 points.

8. Say you have an 8 point hand, and the opponents are in game (so have around 26 points) how many points does that leave for partner?

9. The Rule of 40 says Take 40 (total points in the deck) minus (opponents' likely total points) minus (your points) = partner's points. 40 - 26 - 8 = 6 points.

10. When you have this information, you can start to try to figure out which 6 points partner has. But that's a topic for another day!

11. Let's go back to our original hand and use the Rule of 40. The opponents are in game, so likely have around 26 points; you have 14. How many does that leave for partner? 40-26-14= zero!

12. So you know right away that partner can't help you set up one of your suits. What's going to happen if you lead away from your Spades or your Hearts? You are going to give Declarer free tricks. If you don't lead those suits, and you let Declarer play the suits, there will be finesses into your hand where you will win those tricks. There's nothing worse than giving Declarer a trick they don't deserve!

13. So what should you lead? The 9C. This is called a 'passive lead'. You are letting Declarer take their tricks, and waiting for Declarer to give you your tricks.

14. To use the Rule of 40, how do you figure out how many points the opponents are likely to have? If the opponents

(a) stop at the 2 level, they usually have about 20 points.

(b) bid 2NT or at the 3 level, they have about 23.

(c) are in game, 26.

(d) are in a small slam 33.

15. So let's use the Rule of 40 with the same hand, but this time the Opponents are in 2N. What does partner have? 40-23-14 = 3 points.

16. Partner might have a Q and J, or a K. Now there is some prospect P can help you set up a suit, or even get in to return your suit. Now you might risk leading from one of your major suits.

17. Let's try one more hand:

S KJ643 H KJ98 D 654 C 43

You are West. The opponents bid

Ν	Е	S	W
		(1NT)	Р
(4NT)	Р	(6NT)	All pass

What should you lead? What does the Rule of 40 tell you?

40 minus (the opponents points) minus (your points). 40 - 33 - 8 = -1 Partner has less than nothing!

What do you do when P has nothing? Probably best to make a passive lead. Lead the 6D.

18. But what about if the bidding goes

N E S W (1NT) P (3NT) All pass

What does the Rule of 40 tell you? 40 - 26 - 8 = 6

Now what should you lead? The 4S. Why? Because now Partner has something and can maybe help you set up tricks in your suit.

19. Always use the Rule of 40 when you are defending. It will help you look through the backs of your opponents' and partner's cards! You can even use it when you are declarer.

(This is based on Barbara Seagram materials - watch for her new book **The Magic of Defense** available probably in July this year!)