

play bridge

A section designed with the newer player in mind.

Alphabet soup

It's March and the snowbirds are still flocking down to sunny Florida.

Lots of bridge players means lots of different types of games. We often hold three different events at the same time, so there is a lot of confusion with stratification, section letters, overall points and section points. Let's see if I can make some sense of it for you.

Whether you are at a tournament or a club game, you will be assigned to a section that includes other players in your event. In our club in season we may use sections A, B and C for the open game. This means anyone can play here, whether they have 50,000 masterpoints or zero points. Within that open event, we stratify the game with the letters A, B and C. Each group is called a stratum. Instead of using the long word stratification, we sometimes say strat for short. Confused yet?

This stratification is based on the person in each pair who holds the greater number of masterpoints, so if a player with 2000 points played with a player with 20 points (don't you wish!), they would be stratified as an A pair. In tournaments, the numbers for stratification usually are published before the tournament. A typical tournament stratification based on masterpoints might be: A = 1500+, B = 500–1500, C = 0–500. If you are thinking of attending a tournament, check the flyer or ad for the strata.

If you don't have a flyer, you can check the ACBL web site. Look for the word "Play" in the center near the

top. Under that, click on "Tournaments," then "Tournament Schedules and Results – Click Here." Find the month and year, and then the tournament you are interested in. They are listed by date, then alphabetically by state. When you locate the tournament, click on the word "Info" next to it.

At our club, as at many tournaments, we run a limited masterpoint game along with the open game. We call ours a non-Life Master (NLM) game. Everyone who plays in this event must have fewer than 500 masterpoints and must not be a Life Master. The section letters for this event might be D and E, and within the event there is still stratification. Typical strats might be: A = 300–500, B = 100–300, C = 0–100.

Sometimes you will see a 299er, 199er or 99er event advertised at a tournament. This simply indicates that it is a limited masterpoint event, and no one higher than these figures is eligible to play in that game. Even a 99er game is likely to be stratified. The strats are still referred to as A, B and C, even though your game might be held in section F. Whenever we have enough players to run a good event, we run a 99er section.

The purpose of stratification is to give everyone competition on his own level. A 500-point player is not likely to be able to compete successfully with a 5,000-point player. It is equally true that a 5-point player does not feel comfortable competing with a 150-point player. With stratification, you are competing against your peers.



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If you are in the lowest stratum, you have the capability of not only winning your own strat, but may even win or place in the A or B stratum.

After you finish an event, you can check the recap sheet for your section. At a tournament, the sheets showing the final scores will be posted in the playing area under your section letter.

If you see a masterpoint award next to your name, there will also be a letter designation. This is confusing to many of our members who wonder what (OC) means or (SB). The "O" indicates an overall award, and the "S" means you placed in your section. The letters A, B or C indicate the stratum in which you won masterpoints. You might be third in A, second in B and first in C. The masterpoint award you receive will be the largest of the three. No, you do not get to add all of them together. It is very likely the greatest masterpoint award will come from placing third in the A stratum.

Next time I'll discuss the various team events and team strategy. □

Notes from ACBL Accredited Teachers