



Talking Bridge

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Contents

Don't dither before going through hell	Page 2
Join the Bots with Cappelletti	Page 3
Wendy's Cornish Jaunt	Page 4
Club News	Page 5
Opening no-trumps with a five-card major	Page 6
Augusta fails to hold her big diamond	Page 7
Easing the duplicate road for beginners	Page 8
Rob Richardson's teaching targets	Page 9
Kibitzer's Last Word	Page 10

Go though hell if you have to, but don't dither

'He who hesitates is lost' the old saying goes. We know it's old because, without going all fashionable and woke, it should now read 'he or she who hesitates is lost.'

It may be an ancient cliché, but it's still as true as it was.

I don't know whether or not Albert Einstein (pictured) played bridge, but he had a view on dithering: 'Even if you have to go through hell, go without hesitation.'

It's certainly true at the bridge table and usually arrives during the bidding: you're slightly stronger than you've told partner and dither in raising his or her two no-trumps to three, three of a major to four or passing.

When after an inordinately long delay you pass, your partner can't really bid or the director will be called

Although it doesn't happen often, I'm sure most readers will have at least once been in that or a similar position.

The worst case is when a player hesitates and then passes as this suggests that they were going to bid rather than pass.

Hesitation can occur in other situations, too, but these are less likely to end with a call for the director's intervention.

I was sitting South recently and playing in four hearts. Although East had said emphatically 'no questions partner', West worried for ages over the opening lead, his fingers fluttering over the cards for an age.

Opening lead at last

West eventually produced an opening lead, his partner won the trick and returned the suit which West won.

Then came another lengthy pause, it seemed at least twice as long as the opening

lead, but probably wasn't. We still had five more tricks to play when the move was called so I had run out of time through no fault of my own.

I raced through the next three tricks and conceded the last two for one off. Although other tables had made the contract on the same lead, some had also gone off. I wasn't happy, but there wasn't anything I could do about it.

Gamesmanship

This may not have been such a case, but there are those who play more slowly than they need to solely for gamesmanship reasons.

It doesn't happen often, no one much likes it and there's little that can be done. A little friendly barracking often does the trick: 'come on, Partner, are you asleep?'

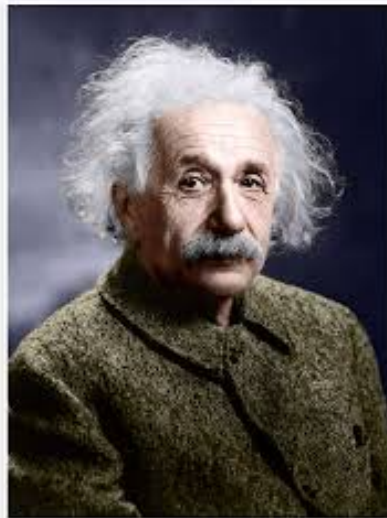
The American consultant Robert K. Greenleaf made the following point about hesitation: 'On an important decision one rarely has 100% of the information needed for a good decision no matter how much time one spends or how long one waits.'

But if you wait too long, you have a different problem and have start again.

'This is the terrible dilemma of the hesitant decision maker' says Greenleaf.

Hesitation in bridge is against the spirit of the game; players should do their best to play at an even tempo or rhythm.

A quick reminder of the rules: A player who pauses for a long time before bidding or playing to a trick is guilty of undue hesitation. The player's partner must ignore any unauthorised information that may be gained from hesitation. If they fail to do so (or if you have doubts) call the director.



Joining the robots with Rob Richardson

Let's continue to explore some of the conventions played by the robots on Bridge Base Online. They are also used in the American 2/1 system, with five-card majors and a strong, 15-17 point no-trump.

Cappelletti is a defence to a one no-trump opening bid by the opposition. It covers almost all single and two-suited hands.

A double is still for penalties, and shows a willingness to defend. In the BBO Robot's system, it shows sixteen or more high-card points.

All two-level bids are based on the premise that you wish to compete for the part score. It uses the two-level bids as follows:

- 2♣ I am only interested in one suit
- 2♦ I have hearts and spades (5-5 or better)
- 2♥ I have five hearts and four or more in a minor
- 2♠ I have five spades and four or more in a minor
- 2NT 5-5 or better in clubs and diamonds

All of these bids need to be alerted, even under the recently updated Blue Book regulations.

Please note that there are minor variations to the above in common use. For example, it is common for two hearts and two spades to show a five-card minor. Some partnerships agree that two diamonds shows 4-4 in the major suits.

What about the responses? After two clubs, partner is expected to bid two diamonds, which has to be alerted, passed or corrected.

- 2♦ Hearts and spades (5-5 or better)
Partner should show preference for a major
- 2♥ I have five hearts and four or more in a minor

Pass or bid two no-trumps to ask the over-caller to show their minor.

- 2♠ I have five spades and four or more in a minor.
Two no-trumps shows 5-5 or better in

clubs and diamonds. Opener should show preference for a minor. As an alternative, responder can bid a six-card suit of their own (or pass the two club bid with six or more clubs).

Examples

Nobody vulnerable. Your right hand opponent, the dealer, opens one no-trump, announced as 15-17 points (as played by the robots)

♠ QJT732
♥ A
♦ KJT
♣ AJ2

With this hand you wish to play in spades, so you will bid two clubs, expecting partner to bid two diamonds. Then you can show your suit by bidding two spades. Do not bid spades first as this shows both only of them and a four-card minor.

♠ 97632
♥ AQJ74
♦ KQ
♣ 5

With this hand bid two diamonds, showing both majors. Partner will bid his better major.

♠ K5
♥ AQJ74
♦ 98
♣ QT92

Bid two hearts. Partner will know you have five hearts. If they don't like it they can bid two no-trumps. This should be alerted as it asks you to bid your other suit.

As a defensive gadget Cappelletti is widely used in the US, where the strong no-trump is almost universal. It's even more useful against a weak no-trump as the high-card points are evenly divided, and the need to compete for a part score becomes even more imperative.

A Cornish Jaunt

From the Diaries of Wendy Wensum

SPOUSE AND I TOOK a short holiday in Cornwall, the county where the most common road sign is a cow in a red triangle.

Cattle there appear to have more traffic lights enabling them to cross roads than school children and senior citizens combined.

A good thing too, one wouldn't want to compromise the providers of the essential ingredient of Cornish Clotted Cream, easy on the palette, but challenging for one's figure.

On the only totally dry day we visited the Lost Gardens of Heligan, strolled through the formal gardens and along the woodland paths, a walker's delight.

The following day saw us at the Eden Project, its enormous domes glinting in a weak sun. The viewing gallery at the top of the large biosphere was open and gave us an inspiring vista of the plants below. But Spouse said it was all just a big greenhouse made of bubble wrap. Looking at what's pictured right, it's difficult to disagree.



Dealing can either be regulation or goulash. Dave and Spouse said they were ready when each had a pint of beer. On the first deal, this spectacular distribution appeared:

Causeway

I was keen to see the tidal island of St Michael's Mount, but next day a bitter wind greeted us as we ambled across the causeway and, when the tide turned, we had a bouncy ferry ride back to Marazion.

Enjoyable as these excursions were, there had been no opportunities for bridge. It was no coincidence that Dave and Sally were also in Cornwall, with their walking club.

We arranged to meet them after their day's trek and stay for a few nights at the same hotel. As we arrived, a minibus was discharging its weary band of windswept rambles.

Sally, Dave, Spouse and I were soon reunited and the two males immediately went to the bar and got grips with the real ale.

While the remaining walkers entertained themselves with karaoke, we settled down for our version of Rubber Bridge.

This involves four deals maximum and, if necessary, we score as an unfinished rubber. We then switch partners and start again.

Spouse

♠ A
♥ A 10 9 8 6 2
♦ A Q J
♣ 8 3 2

Dave

♠ K 10 8 6 5 4 3 2
♥ 4
♦
♣ K Q J 7

Sally

♠ Q J 9 7
♥ K Q J 5 3
♦ 5
♣ 10 5 4

Wendy

♠
♥ 7
♦ K 10 9 8 7 6 4 3 2
♣ A 5 4

As dealer of the goulash I now had to decide how to open my nine-card diamond hand. The low point count made me choose five diamonds.

With only four losers, Dave overcalled five spades. Spouse, with three aces, had

....Sally's seven diamonds

the best hand. He assumed that I probably had an outside ace or void for my opening bid and punted seven diamonds. Unusually for Sally, she thought for ages before passing.

On Dave's lead of the king of clubs I realised I had two losers in that suit. One could be pitched on the ace of spades, but the other one clearly needed to go on a heart. Dave's overcall and lead suggested he didn't hold many red cards.

Ruffing finesses might bring the contract home, but sufficient entries to dummy could be a problem. Winning the first trick, I naturally enough played my singleton heart to the ace and then discarded a club on the ace of spades.

Ruff with a six

Next I led the ten of hearts, Sally played the jack and I ruffed with the six in case Dave had a void.

A diamond to the ace removed the only trump not in my possession, and I then led the nine of hearts from table on which Sally dutifully placed the queen and I ruffed

Repeating the procedure I went back to

dummy with a trump and played the eight of hearts.

Sally obligingly played the king and I ruffed. The losing club was dumped on the master heart, and the grand slam came home to much celebration and calls for more beer from the men.

Considered Doubling

While they went to the bar Sally noted that for the contract to make it needed to be played by south, as a diamond lead would cut off a vital entry to the hearts if played by north. She said she'd considered doubling for penalties or sacrificing in seven spades.

We played three partial rubbers, one with each partner. Sally was the overall winner. Two more pints of beer for our men soon made them forget the insulting slur on their manhood arising from a female victory.

As we finished, an inebriated bunch of walkers returned to the bar from their session of karaoke. A noisy end to the evening was inevitable. A number of ramblers had sore heads in the morning. Dave and Spouse were uncharacteristically quiet.

Bridge Club News

Swaffham and Hunstanton's bridge clubs have organised a new face-to-face, team- of-four event, the Carolean Cup, designed to mark the beginning of the King Charles III era. It is being played over two Sundays; the first was on October 15 at Swaffham, the second on November 19 at Hunstanton. Start time 1.30 pm.

The Noverre club's face-to-face evening sessions are on again at the Old Fakenham Community Centre in Harwood Road, Norwich NR1 2NG. On Fridays, they are being run jointly with the Norfolk & Norwich club. Be there at 6.45 pm for a 7 pm start. The table money of £2.50 (cash only, please) will include light refreshments. Noverre's Thursday on-line Real Bridge sessions are unaffected.

When to open no-trumps with a five-card major

OPINIONS ARE DIVIDED among 12-14 point no-trump openers on what to do when they have a five-card major. Some always open one no-trump, others never.

The following hand was dealt at a Norfolk club over the summer and strengthened the argument of those who see the potential advantages of opening one no-trump with a five-card major.

North		D	V
♠ J 9 7 5 3			
♥ 9 4			
♦ A K 4			
♣ A 10 2			
West	NV	East	NV
♠ A 10 8 6		♠ K 2	
♥ A K		♥ Q 6 3	
♦ 10 7 5 2		♦ Q 9 8 3	
♣ 9 7 5		♣ K Q J 8	
South		V	HCPs
♠ Q 4			12
♥ J 10 8 7 5 2			11 13
♦ J 6			4
♣ 6 4 3			

After North reached for the bidding box and laid one no-trump on the table, East's bid was stolen and, without a five-card suit, he hadn't got a bid and had to pass.

South bid two diamonds, a weak take-out to two hearts, which was passed out. It went down one but earned North-South a good score.

Possible Double

Some Wests might double South's two diamonds. Would partner take this as lead-directing or invitational? With his ace-king and North about to bid Hearts, surely invitational?

Although West only has ten points, the weak take out suggests that his partner has opening values. So West could double and next time pass partner's three diamonds or two no

trumps. Only one East-West found two no-trumps and made three. Four East-Wests played in two diamonds, making one or two overtricks.

If North opens one spade, it's a different story. East should double, and West can bid diamonds or, with four spades to the ace, the preferred two no-trumps.

Break the Rules

Some players might suggest that East breaks the rules, courts disaster, takes advantage of the favourable vulnerability and opts for the unusual no-trump asking West to bid his his best minor. I hope not, not with only four cards in the minors.

Before you and your partner agree on how to open the bidding with a five-card major, examine the strength of the five-card suit and think how it might affect your next bid.

For example, if you open one heart on this hand what do you do if partner responds a spade?

♠ 7 6 2
♥ K J 7 6 4
♦ A Q 10
♣ A Q

You're too strong for one no-trump and not good enough for two. Bidding two of a minor is out of the question and your hearts are poor. Best to open one no-trump and hope it doesn't happen again soon. If it does it will have to go on your convention card or risk being seen as a psyche.

One heart is better with these hands:

♠ A 2	♠ A J 6
♥ K 9 7 6 4	♥ K Q J 9 7
♦ K 5	♦ 9 2
♣ K Q 5 4	♣ K Q 9

In the first you have an obvious one no-trump rebid; in the second, while you have the values for one no-trump, your diamonds are exposed. But as your hearts are stronger, you can safely bid two.

Augusta keeps ace for a three-trick disaster

ALTHOUGH WITH A whisker over 50% Great Aunt Augusta and I were in the top half of the local club's weekend ladder, we were only just there and in need of couple of good weeks in order to finish the quarter in a more respectable position.

Things started well enough. We were playing East-West because Augusta was so late she lost her favourite North seat. Her driver had gone down with Covid and she had to drive herself. I chose not to comment, but wondered about keeping Death off the roads.

Sound Defence

North-South had the balance of the high-card points, but on the first round our defence was sound. We defeated declarer on the first board, held two others to their contract and on the fourth board limited the overtricks to one.

When the bidding started on the fifth board, Augusta pursed her lips and I knew that it was only a matter of time before she started complaining about 'never' being declarer with computer-dealt hands. Utter nonsense, of course.

North		D	V
♠ Q 9 ♥ A J 5 ♦ K Q J 10 7 6 5 ♣ 4			
West	NV	East	NV
♠ A 10 8 3 ♥ 9 7 3 ♦ 9 8 ♣ K 7 6 2		♠ J 6 5 2 ♥ 2 ♦ A 4 3 ♣ A Q J 10 8	
South		V	
♠ K 7 4 ♥ K Q 10 8 6 4 ♦ 2 ♣ 9 5 3			
		HCPS	
			13 7 12 8

North dealt and, realising that thirteen points made her hand too strong for a preemptive three, opened one diamond. Augusta glanced at the vulnerability and bid

two clubs. South came in with a rapidly-bid three hearts, I passed and North, after agonising, raised to four.

I led the club two which Augusta took with her ace. Seeing that dummy had a singleton club she returned a small spade suggesting that she had an honour. I held back my ace and let declarer's king hold the trick. This should rule out the spade queen as an entry to dummy's long diamonds, I thought.

It looked as if trumps split three-one because if declarer had seven hearts he would surely have gone straight to four. Declarer tested the water by leading towards the jack of hearts and sighed when Augusta discarded the trump continuation.

Winning with the heart ten she led towards to the diamond king which Augusta ducked. Declarer continued with the diamond queen, Augusta played her ace which was ruffed.

Declarer played the heart eight to the ace and ran off the diamonds discarding her two losing clubs and spades for plus two. She should have been held to nine tricks.

Incandescent

When Augusta grunted 'well played' I was incandescent.

'Why did you duck the diamond king and not take your ace?' I said. 'Surely you can she has a singleton diamond.'

'I didn't want to set up dummy's diamonds.'

'But if you play it properly she can't get to dummy. Simply take the ace and lead anything but a diamond. A club will do. Declarer ruffs with the ace and plays the diamond queen, throwing a losing club. She continues with the diamond jack which she ruffs with the queen.'

'Now she's doomed. She's got three trumps left, but because of my ace she can't get back to dummy and we win the last two spades for one off.'

Use duplicate nightmares to ease the road for beginners

THE INCREASED NUMBER of teaching options that have emerged during the year suggests that the future of bridge doesn't just depend on getting new players, but developing them to a level that allows them to appreciate the advantages of playing duplicate at their local club

Although I've been playing duplicate for half my life, I still remember the first time my partner persuaded me to join one of the weekly sessions at the Acol Bridge Club in London's West Hampstead, writes **Douglas Bence**.

Chris Dixon ran the club and computer-dealt hands were in their infancy. We had score cards, travellers and curtain cards, but no bidding boxes or Bridge Mates.

Cranked Up

All this created a whirl in my head which soon cranked itself up to vortex level. With difficulty I eventually made myself comfortable, but then we had to move.

After two rounds, my partner Adrian looked at me with a smile and said: 'We're doing rather well.'

He couldn't have said anything worse. It was steadily downhill from then on, but I obediently moved from one table to the next in something like a confused fog.

I found myself competing against a string of frighteningly good players, some of whom had been on the edge of the England team, played for Scotland, or reached the final of the famous teams event, the Gold Cup.

Some of the declarer play made my jaw drop in admiration. I must have looked like a half-wit.

On one board my partner, sitting with five trumps including three of the top five, doubled what looked like a disastrous four-spade contract. I was void.

Declarer spotted the disastrous split when he led a spade and without apparently pausing for thought, sailed into a brilliant trump elimination play and brought the contract home for a top.

At the end of the evening my partner looked like a rheumy-eyed Labrador denied his tin of Pedigree Chum; I felt as if I'd gone through a shredding machine. We were both humiliated.

But thanks to a couple of shared tops, we still managed to muster a whisker over 40% which my partner believed was a half-creditable performance. Part of me said 'never again', but my damaged ego decided to return the following week and do better.

I've dragged up this sobering memory in an attempt to urge established duplicate players to be extra kind to new pairs emerging from no-fear or supervised-practice sessions.

It's a big problem for them coming up against players with more master points than there are planets in the milky way.

We've all had to start somewhere and I've yet to find a player who thoroughly enjoyed his or her first twenty-four duplicate boards.

Nervous newcomers generally hope for a gentle start, flat hands of under ten points where neither they nor their partners have to do much.

But it doesn't often work that way. I was told that some years ago a local couple played their first ever duplicate board at Wymondham and took an age to correctly bid a makeable slam.

Calling the director

By the time they got there the move had been called, so West immediately summoned the director and said the hand couldn't be played.

He may have been right, but the way he did it was unacceptable. I don't know who it was and I don't care, but that pair are still playing, remember the early days and will as a result both encourage and be tolerant to newcomers.

New players are the future of the game. We need them all to keep the game and the clubs alive.

Making the bridge bug infectious

EVERYBODY REALISES that to get face-to-face duplicate bridge back to where it was before the Covid-19 pandemic, there needs to be more players.

It's generally agreed that the way to do that is more teaching and also to increase the number of user-friendly opportunities designed to lure beginners from their kitchen tables to one or more of the bridge clubs scattered across different parts of the county.

There are a number of new teaching initiatives, one of which is being run by **Rob Richardson**. The prime aim of his four-week introductory course is modest: he simply hopes that those joining the course will 'catch the bug.'

Spreading the word

He spread the word round three of his local clubs, had a two-hour slot on Harbour Radio, a variation of Desert Island Discs, and used Gorleston's community Facebook page.

'We kept the cost low at £5 per two-hour session with the aim of just covering costs' he says.

'There were sixteen at the first lesson, with three more who couldn't make it joining the following week.

'One pupil came for a taster knowing that he couldn't make the other three lessons, but planned to join an evening group starting later in the year.'

Progress needs to be fast or newcomers get bored, says Rob. They need to be playing the game as soon

as possible, whatever the standard. At the end of the first lesson he hopes to have hammered home the following points:

1. How to deal a pack of cards in order to play bridge
2. How to sort your hand into suits and ascending order within each suit
3. How to value your hand using high card points, one for a Jack, two for a Queen, three for a King and four for an ace
4. How to conduct an auction using bidding boxes.
5. How to work out who is declarer, who is dummy and who leads the first card
6. At the end of the auction, what is the trump suit, and how many tricks declarer has contracted to make
7. The basic procedure in playing out the hand
8. How to find the score on the bidding cards
9. What is a major suit (Spades and Hearts) and a minor suit (Diamonds and Clubs)
10. Know that a contract can be played in no-trumps, that is without a trump suit.

Rob underpinned his course with YouTube footage, notably Pete Hollands' 'Learn to play bridge in five minutes'. It lasts for nearly six minutes, but here's the link: https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=learn+to+play+bridge+in+five+minutes

There are plans for more formal lessons later in the year.

Last Word

Talking Bridge's this and that diary

THE MOVE FROM Acol and a weak no-trump to a bidding system based on five-card majors and a strong no-trump shows no sign of slowing down.

While the US has generally favoured systems based on five-card majors, all kinds of variations have appeared over the years.

Current favourite is the so-called two over one, or 2/1. When your partner opens at the one level, and you have enough points for game, you bid two of a new suit and the auction continues until you get there.

Some say that the increasing popularity is because it's a better system, others that it's due to an online course run by The Times bridge correspondent and international player, Andrew Robson, who maintains that it's currently the world's most popular bidding system.

His version incorporates a number of gadgets, including check-back Stayman and support doubles. Even those who have no intention of changing their bidding system should learn the rudiments in order to better defend against it.

Unwanted Publicity

Bridge rarely hits the headlines, and when it does the effect is usually negative.

There was some unwanted publicity during lockdown when people were forced to play exclusively online and the EBU was rushed off its feet weighing evidence of alleged cheating and coming down hard when necessary.

One of the most obvious situations occurred when a partnership was playing on different computers in the same house. It was too easy to shout down the stairs and say, for example, 'lead me a spade'.

While a mass of enquiries were investigated, the evidence was frequently too thin to condemn and amounted almost to nothing when compared to the poisonous outburst of 1965 when two

internationals, Terence Reese and Boris Schapiro, were caught signalling to each other during the Bermuda Bowl in Buenos Aires.

A tournament disciplinary panel ruled that Reese had cheated and passed its findings to the UK authorities. Both players were cleared after a year-long inquiry by Sir John Foster QC, but the international governing body wouldn't accept that and they were both were banned for three years.

Reese's defence was not that he didn't do it; he neither admitted nor denied that, but claimed that the original hearing was flawed.

Two books were written about the affair, one by Alan Truscott, which argues that the finger signals, witnessed by many, were unlikely to be coincidental, and the other by Reese himself, a man with a formidable intellect who was said at the time to be the world's best bridge player.

One passage reads: 'The basis of the charge (of cheating), as everybody knows, is that Schapiro and I communicated length in hearts to one another by means of illegal signals. If you want to support that charge by reference to the hands played, what you have to show is that a number of illogical, uncharacteristic, and implausible bids or plays were made that can be explained only on the basis that the players had improper knowledge of one another's hands.'

Some say that the finger signalling was part of an experiment to prove that cheating was possible. Schapiro, the only player to have won both the Bermuda Bowl (the world championship for national teams) and the World Senior Pairs championship, died in 2002 without ever admitting anything.

My occasional partner Rob Richardson had a copy of one of these books. He can't remember who he lent it to and it has never been returned. If anyone has a copy please email me on db0110665@gmail.com.

Kibitzer