



Talking Bridge

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Andrew Robson Master Class seen as good deal

IF THERE WERE doubts that Andrew Robson could satisfy the ambitions of eighty keen-to-improve bridge players at his charity day Master Class last month, then they were quickly eliminated. The doubts, not the players, writes **Douglas Bence**.

The eighty participants arrived early, despite the sheeting rain, and as a result the day's timetable was kept perfectly. Andrew's informal teaching style and the content of his material was universally praised.

He circulated the room with a cordless microphone, encouraging everybody with praise or a joke and the audience responded. Retaining his enthusiasm for the game, along with the ability to pass it to others, is remarkable.

To split an initially miserable February day in two with the provision of a 'hot lunch' was welcomed, but sadly the reality didn't meet expectations and the food was harshly criticised. One comment I heard was that those opting for the vegetarian option got a better meal.

The Norfolk Contract Bridge Association is aware of the criticism and will do better next year. It says it was doing its best to keep costs down and the kitchen facilities at the venue unfortunately limited the options.

First Challenge

Dealing his specially-designed packs of cards was the first challenge of the morning. Coded in terms of colour and compass-points, these allowed the twenty tables to play with the same cards at the same time for a dozen different hands.

Each of the deals illustrated one of four points, grouped under three headings: Rules, Shapes and Acronyms. The four rules were those of 20, 17, 14 and 11.

Most duplicate players are aware and use the first and last of these, but the Rule of 17, which relates to rebidding one no-trump with a balanced 15-17 points, is less well known as is Rule of 14, a guide on whether or not to respond to partner's

opening with a new suit at the two level. Four different shapes of hand were considered: 5 3 3 2, open one no-trump whether the five-card suit is major or minor; 5 5, open the higher ranked suit first while hoping to bid the second suit twice; 4 4 4 1, open a club with a red-suit singleton and a heart with a black singleton; and 6 4, only bid the second suit if you can do so so cheaply

The four acronyms were S Q O T, a guide to determining, usually with eight or more high-card points, the strength of a five-card suit before overcalling. Add the number of cards in your suit to the number of its honours and only overcall if the total is equal or better than the level at which you bid. The acronym letters stand for the Suit, Quality, Overcall, Test.

Less Tortuous

A less tortuous acronym concerned take-out doubles, S O S. Double with Support for the unbid suits, an Opening hand and a Shortage in the opponents' suit. T I D Y was about voiding dummy's short suit and using the trumps on the table to ruff your losers. T I D Y: Trump In Dummy Yes

Finally F A S T, a way to find low point-count slams. Identify the suit in which you and your partner have a Fit of nine or ten cards, check that you have all but one of the Aces, look for Shortages, voids and singletons. Stop short of a slam if the opposition could use their ace and king to attack a Two-loser suit.

Andrew said at the end of the class that all those attending qualified for a free 30-day trial of his highly popular BridgeCast Videos which hits your in-box three days a week. No payment details were required, but you needed a mobile phone to photocopy his flyer.

The day raised £1,050 for The Matthew Project, a Norfolk-based charity that helps people with drug, alcohol and mental health issues. **Website:** matthewproject.org/

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Great Aunt Augusta defies my game force

MY GREAT AUNT Augusta's dalliances at the bridge table frequently ignite my wrath and my bellicose manner at times has attracted unwelcome glares of disapproval from other players.

These people don't know the full story and are totally unaware of my mother's determination to encourage my obscenely-rich great aunt to leave her a notable sum in her will. I want no part of this, but the family background has been repeatedly thrust at me from early childhood, it will be there forever and is an inevitable, if regrettable, influence on my behaviour at the bridge table.

Augusta's bidding, while uninspired, generally follows standard Acol. When the bidding choice is equivocal she will be overly cautious one day and ludicrously rash the next.

Last week was a case in point. I'd received a long drudge of weak hands but perked up when my thirteen cards had twenty high-card points. Here's the hand in full:

Dealer East: N/S Vulnerable

Dir: East Vul: N/S	♠ A J 10 9 7 5 4 ♥ 5 3 ♦ 9 6 ♣ 6 3	Optimum EW 6C,EW 6D: -920
♠ - - ♥ K J 6 ♦ A K J 10 5 ♣ A K J 5 4	NORTH 2 SOUTH	♠ Q 8 2 ♥ 9 8 4 ♦ Q 8 7 4 ♣ Q 8 2
5 20 6 9	♠ K 6 3 ♥ A Q 10 7 2 ♦ 3 2 ♣ 10 9 7	♣♦♥♠N N - - - 2 - S - - - 2 - E 6 6 1 3 W 6 6 1 - -

Sitting East, Augusta dealt and passed as did South. I wasn't sure what to do. Opening one didn't seem right and there was a risk that Augusta would pass. With

a void in spades I couldn't bid two no-trumps. Right or wrong, I chanced it and opened a game-forcing two clubs.

Over the first dozen or so boards Augusta's face had been glum, every time she'd bid my response had been a four-letter word: pass.

When I now looked in her direction I thought she was about to fall off her chair.

Correct Negative

Saddled with vulnerability, my left-hand opponent decided against a pre-emptive spade bid and passed. Augusta bid the negative of two diamonds. With just six points even I couldn't argue with that. As my first bid was conventional, when the time came I repeated my clubs showing her that was my suit. Amazingly, she passed.

The ace of spades was led which I ruffed before eliminating the trumps in three rounds, finishing in dummy. Then a heart to dummy's jack, which I finessed and returned to dummy with a diamond, before finessing the heart king and bringing the contract home with twelve tricks.

'Two clubs is forcing to game, Aunt. What made you pass?'

'You've had a grim evening, nothing has gone our way and I'm very weak.'

'I know that from your diamond bid. That's no excuse for passing. What's wrong with three no-trumps, and given the cards there's a risk that North-South could sacrifice in four spades.'

'At least you've played a hand and well done for making plus three.'

Most pairs played in five diamonds making six. The best score our way was four spades doubled going two off for 500. Our 170 was a bottom.

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Wally's bizarre no-trump

From the diaries of Wendy Wensum

WITH A GLASS OF CLARET in my hand, I followed Millie and her second brandy into the bridge room for a normal Duplicate Pairs evening. The tournament director had efficiently organised the movement thereby ensuring a prompt start so Millie and I set forth for a battle on the first board:

Dealer West: E/W Vulnerable

	♠ K Q J 10 4	
	♥ A 10	
	♦ A Q	
	♣ K J 6 4	
♠ 9		♠ A 5
♥ 8 6 4 3		♥ 9 7 5 2
♦ 10 8 6 5		♦ 9 4 3 2
♣ 9 5 3 2		♣ 10 8 7
	♠ 8 7 6 3 2	
	♥ K Q J	
	♦ K J 7	
	♣ A Q	

With twenty high card points and five losers I opened an artificial, Benjamin-style two clubs. Millie bid a positive two spades showing at least five in that suit. Neither West nor East had anything to say.

After my three spades, Millie cue bid four clubs suggesting a slam. Although cue bids would be more revealing, I had a flattish distribution and fantastic trump support and instead kept it simple with Roman Key Card Blackwood, RKCB. Millie showed one key card by bidding five diamonds. I thought it was probably the club ace and quickly bid the small slam in spades.

Only then did I realise that she might have the ace of spades and a void club. In that case cue bidding would have been better, but all was well. West led a small diamond, won by Millie who removed trumps and made the contract for plus 980

and a reasonable score. Six no-trumps would have been better, but I decided not to mention it.

When Kate and Jo played the board against Wally and Sam, their bidding was more dramatic. Wally as West opened one no-trump (yes, one no-trump!) which his partner revealed was a typical 12-14.

With her 20 points, Kate as North doubled and Sam bid two diamonds explained by Wally as non-forcing with four diamonds and four cards in at least one of the majors. Jo paused noticeably before doubling and the auction ended.

At this point Sam called the tournament director and explained that he thought Jo had hesitated before doubling. The tournament director asked other players and Kate and Wally both confirmed that Jo had not bid in tempo and she admitted that this was probably the case. The director said it was possible that unauthorised information had been exchanged and asked for the hand to be played. She added that she would return at the end of the board to make a final adjudication and did so.

Kate led the heart king and when dummy went down Jo, Kate and declarer were amazed. When Sam recovered from the shock, he thanked his partner without any enthusiasm. Declarer made four tricks: the ace of spades, the last heart and two ruffs, a club and a spade. The contract was down by four doubled: minus 1100 to North-South. Sam was not impressed by his partner's opener and suggested, in a most kindly way, that he wasn't just an idiot but a champion idiot.

Millie noted with some accuracy, 'Wally by name, Wally by nature.' She wasn't of course referring to all Walters, raised her empty glass and signalled for a third brandy.

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Dates for the Diary

THE HUDSON CUP, a green-pointed pairs event, will be held at the Costessey Centre on April 28 between 11 am and 5 pm.

It acts as a Norfolk Contract Bridge Association qualifier for the Corwen Trophy. Three pairs go forward.

If there are sufficient entries, after the first session the lower half of the field will play for the Hudson Plate.

Clare's Swiss Pairs

The blue-pointed 26th Clare Bridge Club Swiss Pairs will be held at Lavenham Village Hall on Sunday, May 5 at 10:45 for an 11am start.

Note that the £17.50 per player entrance fee includes a sandwich lunch.

Swiss Pairs & Teams

Great Yarmouth Bridge School is hosting a blue-pointed Swiss Pairs & Swiss Teams event over the May 11-12 weekend. Watch the website for details.

Stratified prizes are offered across Saturday's pairs competition; on the Sunday there's a handicap prize in addition to the main prizes.

Waveney Valley Pairs

The Waveney Valley Pairs, an event jointly hosted by the Suffolk and Norfolk County Associations, will be on June 2 at Ringsfield Village Hall near Beccles.

Lunch is included in the event which will run from 11 am to 5 pm.

Mid Anglia Pairs

The Mid Anglia Pairs is being held at Woodbridge on June 30 from 11 am. Scored by Cross IMPs and directed by Rob Richardson.

Orb Pacquot & NCBA agm

Alongside the Norfolk Contract Bridge Association annual general meeting is the November 17 Orb Pacquot Swiss Pairs. The venue is to be confirmed.

Barclays Bank Trophy

The Barclays Bank Trophy will be played at the Costessey Centre at 11 am on December 1. This is a two-session, Qualified Pairs event played over at least 36 boards.

Please note the following. The pairs qualify through heats held in clubs, but each club may hold only one heat for which double master points are issued.

Entrants must be members of the club and can only qualify from one club. So if they've already qualified they may not opt to try to qualify at another club.

The top third of the field in the heat qualifies for the December event. If some of the qualifiers in the top third are ineligible or do not wish to play, additional players may qualify provided they achieve 50% of match points in the heat.

A tandem event will be held with Real Bridge for clubs that either play exclusively online or hold regular online sessions.

Where a club hosts regular scheduled sessions at different times, online as well as face-to-face, then the online session can be designated as a qualifier.

For example, a club holding one face-to-face session and one online session weekly can have qualifiers for each event.

A pair which plays in both forms of bridge can play in each qualifying session held by the club, but a pair qualifying in both face-to-face and online must play face-to-face.

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Finding a slam on the Costa del Sol

A change is as good as a holiday, some say, so instead of lining up against a string of familiar faces, my partner and I opted to play bridge in Spain.

Have you ever considered playing in an overseas tournament? Playing for something different that is, not just as an alternative to your local congress, says **Rob Richardson**.

I stumbled over one in the Costa del Sol and, on the advice of the tournament host, booked a package tour to the hotel where the tournament was being held. This made the logistics easy and gave us a full week away from the winter rain.

Fuengirola is on the Spanish coast roughly halfway between Torremolinos and Marbella.

Governing Body

As the European Bridge League is the governing body for European bridge, the Fuengirola International Bridge Club Tournament was overseen by an authorised EBL director under international regulations. This means no Stop Cards and no announcements which was a welcome surprise for some players.

Players were asked to summarise their system at the start of each round, and have a convention card from their own country available.

The tournament was held over three days with 26 boards a day. The first two days were qualifiers with the top 14 pairs from the original entry of 54 pairs progressing to the final. The standard was roughly the same as an EBU Congress.

We finished just below half way, but got to play against enthusiasts from Bulgaria, Poland, Germany, Austria, Sweden, Holland, France and Morocco.

Frequently we came up against what was politely described as the Polish Club. It came as no surprise that this bore a striking resemblance to the Precision Club which is, of course, alive and well and still being used by some excellent pairs in the UK.

On the last day we played in the consolation event. Here are the East-West cards for one of the boards. What contract do you think you would have reached?

♠ A 10	♠ KQJ 4
♥ A J 10 9	♥ K Q 5 2
♦ K J 9	♦ 10 8 5 4
♣ K Q 10 2	♣ A

While a small slam in hearts is a strong odds-on, 12 tricks in no-trumps requires either the diamond finesse to work or the jack of clubs to drop in two rounds.

If the jack fails to appear you will have to try a third round of clubs, but this will give the defence a second winner when they take the diamond ace. If you're forced into the diamond finesse and that fails, the contract also goes off.

This makes the odds on six no-trumps slightly better than 50%.

Should the contract be played by West, there's a chance that North will lead a diamond, or even cash his ace if he holds it.

How Many for a Slam?

How many pairs at your club will bid a slam on these cards?

If it's around half, I believe that the safe six hearts is the best contract. But if the whole room is in slam, the higher scoring six no-trumps is the place to be.

Out of the 20 tables in the consolation final at the hotel venue in Fuengirola, one failed to reach slam and one found their way to seven hearts.

Of the seven in six no-trumps, five made it and two went off. Our opponents played in six hearts which gave us a defender's 53% for the board.

Editor's Note: Rob is currently teaching bridge at the library in Gorleston not far from the James Paget University Hospital.

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Congress closes pre-Covid attendance gap

There were more people at last month's Norfolk Contract Bridge Association annual congress than in 2023, but attendance remains lower than before Covid.

Numbers at the Wensum Valley Country Club on the weekend of March 2-3 were also boosted by England's U26 team which won the Junior Camrose in February.

Really Easy winners were John Dollimore and Stephen Rodgers, Swiss Pairs winners were Oscar Selby and Harry Madden; the Swiss Pairs B Stratification winners were Rosa Richardson (pictured right with president Jan Pooley centre) and Brenda Howlett (pictured right, but on the left), the Swiss Pairs C Stratification winners were Fred Davis and Maggie Neal and the Swiss Teams winners were Andy Cope, Jack Ronayne, Oscar Selby and Harry Madden (pictured).

Other Winners

December 4 was the day of the Barclays Bank Trophy final played on both RealBridge and face-to-face. The face-to-face winners were Adrian La Chapelle and Maria Budd. The RealBridge winners were Ian and Mike Walsh.

Winners of the green-pointed Eastern Counties Cup played on March 18 were Adrian and Imogen La Chapelle, John Dennis, Mike Walsh and Matt Millson

Runners-up were Peter Cotes. Tom Melvin, Mike Sabberton, Chris Mallon and Gary Putman.



Swiss Teams winners:
Andy Cope,
Jack Ronayne,
Oscar Selby and
Harry Madden



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To cover or not to cover: that is the question

COVER AN HONOUR with an honour. Along with all the other bromides, we've heard it many times: when declarer leads a high card from hand or dummy, it's often correct to cover it with a higher card - if you've got one.

This is because declarer will have to use two high cards to win the trick which will often promote a card held by the defence.

The following examples are taken from a little book called *Bridge Quiz* which was mentioned in the last edition of *Talking Bridge*. All four problems are about the correct play in no-trump contracts.

North

♥ A J 10 8

West

♥ K 5 4

South leads the queen of hearts. Cover or not?

Answer: Cover in case your partner holds four hearts to the nine.

Problem 2:

North

♥ A J 10 8

West

♥ K 5 4 2

Similar to the first, but this time you have four hearts. Again declarer leads the queen of hearts. Cover or not?

Answer: Don't cover. Your partner

might well hold the nine and three other hearts, but in that case South's queen is a singleton so nothing will be gained by covering.

Problem 3:

North

♥ 7 4 2

West

♥ A 10 3

This time both you and dummy have three hearts. Queen of hearts led. Cover or not?

Answer: Play low. If your partner holds the king, the defence will win three tricks.

Problem 4:

North

♥ A 7 4 2

West

♥ Q 9 3

This time declarer leads the jack of hearts. Cover or not?

Answer: Do not cover. Declarer might have led from K J 10. If so, he may go up with the ace and finesse for the queen through East, so there's nothing to be gained by covering.

If declarer holds J 10 8 the defence will lose a trick if you cover with the queen.

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How to trump your partner's ace and not get bawled out

It must have happened to all of us over the years and it would have been both a disastrous mistake and, at the time, totally unforgivable.

Your partner trumps the ace you led to beat the contract.

When something similar happened recently and I heard a howl of anger from the other side of the room, the thought occurred to me that there must be occasions when the correct play is to trump your partner's ace.

Junior Camrose

I managed to unearth the following hand, which was played 12 years ago at the Junior Camrose, a team-of-four home nations trophy which also involves the island of Ireland. All participants must be under the age of 26.

This was the deal:

Dealer East: E/W Vulnerable

<p>♠ A Q 9 8 7 2 ♥ 3 ♦ 7 5 ♣ Q 8 7 3</p>	<p>♠ 4 ♥ Q J 10 9 7 5 2 ♦ 9 2 ♣ A 10 9</p>
<p>♠ 10 6 3 ♥ A K 8 ♦ 6 ♣ K J 6 5 4 2</p>	<p>♠ K J 5 ♥ 6 4 ♦ A K Q J 10 8 4 3 ♣ Void</p>

The competition was first held in 1937, but it did not become the Camrose until the following year, when Lord Camrose, owner

of the Daily Telegraph, donated the trophy which was lost during World War II.

To avoid one team sitting out, since 2007 there have been six teams in the competition rather than the obvious five.

Until 2009, the additional team was the previous year's winners, but since then it has been a second team from the host nation.

Hosting operates on a five-year cycle and in 2012 the event was held in Scotland at East Kilbride over two weekends. England won.

The bidding was straightforward. East dealt and with six clubs and eleven high-card points opened one club.

With an eight-card suit, solid diamonds and no clubs, South went straight to five diamonds.

West doubled and led his singleton heart, taken by East's king. East continued with the heart ace. South followed.

Now the big moment.

West trumped his partner's ace beating the contract by cashing his spade ace.

But he didn't have to do it. Although I'm sure he enjoyed doing so, he didn't have to. On the second heart he could have discarded a club discouraging a switch to that suit which left spades as the one remaining option.

Why Wait?

Did he trust his partner to lead a spade? I'm sure he did, but why risk it? Why take a chance, and why wait until the next trick?

I'm told there's another example from the American player Alan Goren, but in order to get the hand I have to take out a subscription for the New York Times and I didn't fancy that.

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Last Word

Talking Bridge's this and that diary

LIKE OTHER SPECIAL interest groups, bridge suffered from lockdown. Those who wanted to play online did so happily, returning to their clubs when face-to-face sessions returned.

A year ago there was a steady flow back to face-to-face and it looked as if the new normal wouldn't be much different from the old.

But sadly, that did not prove to be the case. The steady move back to face-to-face slowed to a trickle and stopped. Some clubs are still struggling to get three or more tables and the reality is that the number of people playing now is lower than it was before Covid.

Inevitably there are repercussions one of which is slow play.

Understandably, club directors don't want to alienate slow players by urging them to speed up. Upset them and they may go away never to return.

As a result some sessions, both afternoon and evening, are finishing too late for some players who have other things to do. The Bungay Club that plays on Wednesdays has got round this by cancelling the last round to avoid playing after 10 pm.

So, if possible, speed up so that directors can say 'move when you can' rather than waiting until everybody has finished before calling the next round.

Trophies Missing

It's not the same as priceless artefacts being stolen from the British Museum, but late last year the EBU realised that it was missing 14 of its trophies and started hunting for them.

They include the Crockfords Plate, a championship restricted to those losing their first match in the Crockfords Cup, the

Gerard Faulkner Salver, a new but popular seniors knockout teams event, and the Corwen Trophy for the leading pairs of each County Association. Please note that the cup pictured, the Camrose, has not gone walkabout.

Avoiding the Deep End

Rob Richardson has found an interesting way to introduce beginners to the intricacies of duplicate.

Throwing students in at the deep end can be so humiliating that they play once and never repeat the experience.

Without wanting to, more experienced players destroy the confidence of those just starting; card by card, trick by trick, board by board and round by round.

This is what Rob does. When there's an odd number of pairs, he encourages his students to play the boards waiting on the table and to score them as if they were part of the session.

If there isn't a half table he sets the movement up with a relay table, so there are always a few boards waiting to be played.

The results so far have been encouraging and his classes are increasing in popularity. For those who may be interested, he's basing the next set of lessons on Paul Mendelson's book: 'Bridge for Complete Beginners'.

I remember my first time playing duplicate; I couldn't get used to moving after two or three boards and didn't know where to move. Chaos, confusion and bad scores.

After a couple of rounds my partner said we were doing 'extraordinary well'. This encouraged me, but subsequent rounds were all downhill.

Kibitzer

