



Talking Bridge

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Issue 8

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Real Bridge merger on the Norfolk coast

LOCKDOWN has become part of history and people are gradually returning to face-to-face bridge.

But it's been a struggle. There will undoubtedly be more pandemics and this has encouraged some to stay at home and continue to play online.

Some clubs are struggling to muster four or more tables and with room rents rising, table money has sometimes had to increase.

The face-to-face fight-back has been achieved in different ways. Teaching and supervised practice have become a more important factor than they were.

In the early months of the year, Hunstanton Bridge Club was struggling to get beyond five tables for its Sunday evening sessions.

This fact was noticed by players almost 150 miles away in the Newcastle-under-Lyme club and they suggested that the two clubs merge their Sunday sessions and play together online.

Master Points

It would make a bigger field, increase competition and make for higher rewards in terms of master points.

'We agreed to give it a try and got ten tables for the first Real Bridge session in April when the winners each got 42 master points,' says Hunstanton's Laurent Bernard.

There were only seven-and-a-half tables on April 16 and a disappointing five-and-a-half on April 30.

Interestingly in terms of competitiveness, different pairs won each of the first four sessions, all of them in April, with scores of 64.69%, 69.58%, 67.53% and 66.67%.

Once members got used to the idea of playing with another club online, the numbers stabilised and all through May there

were always between seven and nine tables when before the Sunday collaboration with Newcastle-under-Lyme there had been between four-and-a-half and five-and-a-half tables.

'It's still early days, but it looks like one of the ways forward for the game in future,' adds Laurent who thinks the Sunday evening session will draw new players from its Friday afternoon supervised practices, which typically get eight tables.

Play begins at 7 pm, there are 24 boards

and the table money is £1.50, £2 for visitors.

The club's Thursday evening session, which currently attracts seven or more tables, is unchanged.

Photographers please note: because

Hunstanton faces west across The Wash, it is one of the few places on the East Coast where the sun sets over the sea.

There are two sides to what is often called 'Sunny Hunny', the Victorian town with its Esplanade Gardens which invokes days gone by, and a lively family centre with a large beach, pony rides, candy floss and all that.

Hunstanton is 17 miles from Kings Lynn, but players in Cromer or Norwich have to drive over 40 miles for a game, not ideal on a misty November evening.

Fast Track Teaching

The club was founded 41 years ago by former Norfolk Contract Bridge Association chairman Robert Smith who is now honorary life president and gives him name to an annual competition.

It runs an active teaching programme spread over two years, although for the brave and those in a hurry, there's a fast-track option.



Looking back to the bad old days

Those of us who played club bridge in the last century will know the routine, writes **Graham Hardman**.

We arrive eager to scan last week's results, but questions linger. Were all the travellers filled in correctly? Could the director manage scores for 14, 16 or 18 tables?

Sim Pair events aside, there were no pre-dealt hands, no terminals to score on, no website for the director to upload results to, nor any emails with the results.

Master points were issued on slips of paper, which we saved up and submitted to EBU every now and again.

So we remove the cards from the boards used the previous week, give them a cursory shuffle and deal them back into the boards.

We move the boards on one table and remove the cards dealt at the next table, and someone invariably opens 1 No Trump. Then we grumble about how poorly shuffled the cards were. Random hands? Not really.

These days, most clubs playing face-to-face, and all clubs playing online have truly random hands.

Recently, playing face-to-face with three-board rounds and sitting West, the first hand I picked up was:

♠ J 9 8 6 5
♥ J
♦ Q 4 3
♣ A 5 4 3

Partner (of course) opened three hearts, which was the final contract. Given that the missing trumps split 5-0, partner did well to finish only two down.

The full deal was:

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

My second hand was:

♠ Q 4
♥ A 9 8 7 6 5 4 2
♦
♣ 10 6 3

Next Board

After a one diamond opening by South the obvious question was how many hearts should I bid?

I cannot recall precisely how long I paused, but at equal vulnerability I settled on a three hearts overcall.

This was followed by four diamonds by North, four hearts by East and five diamonds by South.

I decided to sacrifice in five hearts and expected to be two down. The full deal was:

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

I know now that when you are missing three cards the odds of a singleton king, is 24%, and when missing five cards, the odds of dropping the queen are 31%.

Lucky

North led the diamond ace, which I ruffed. I tried the heart ace at trick two and couldn't believe my luck. But then I failed to lead the club ace at trick four. I came to hand and tried to finesse for the club queen.

The defence then took their spade tricks and I had blown the chance of all thirteen tricks.

The lesson? It costs nothing to try a top card first just in case you find the singleton queen, and you may get a clue as to whether the queen is a doubleton.

My third hand was the miserable:

♠ K
♥ 10 8 6 4
♦ Q 10 9 6
♣ 8 7 5 2

Partner (of course) opened one spade and finished in three. The full deal was:

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

Oddly this was the same contract at every table. All declarers made nine tricks, except one.

Double Dummy says eight tricks is the maximum and I think North has to underlead their heart ace in order to get two heart tricks to go with their one diamond and two clubs.

So, three boards with an eight-card, a seven-card and a six-card suit. Would we rather have dull hands and one no trump openings?

Absolutely not.

If you've picked up a hand that you think deserves a wider audience, please send it to the editor at: db0110665@gmail.com

Pedalo Fixation

From the Diaries of Wendy Wensum

MILLIE AND I WERE sitting on the Riverside veranda sipping pre-bridge drinks as the River Wensum glided effortlessly past on its journey to the sea.

‘Pedalo,’ said Millie out of the blue.

‘Pedalo?’ I enquired suspiciously. ‘Is that what you’re drinking, a new French cognac?’

‘Pedalo,’ repeated my companion pointing furiously. ‘Over there, I’ve never seen one on this stretch of water before.’

‘Perhaps it’s from Great Yarmouth and lost its sense of direction,’ I suggested facetiously.

The pedalo made steady progress past us; clearly its occupants were not bridge players seeking membership of our club.

‘Perhaps they are illegal immigrants,’ suggested Millie playfully. I ignored her, realising that if I responded it might be difficult to avoid a political discussion.

We made our way to the bridge room for the duplicate pairs competition and naturally Millie took the opportunity to have her brandy glass refilled.

Evenly Split

Towards the end of the session, George and Sarah arrived and we turned our attention to the evenly balanced part score hand in the next column where each partnership has twenty high card points.

George opened a 12-14 no-trump. Using our recently introduced Multi-Landy-style defence, Millie bid two clubs nominally showing five-five in the majors; when not vulnerable a five-four shape was acceptable.

Sarah made a non-forcing diamond bid and I showed my support for spades by jumping to three, a game invitation which Millie declined.

George led the ace of his partner's suit, and followed it with the ten, which I won in hand. I led a small trump to dummy's queen, which Sarah took with the king. She returned a club, I ducked and George won with the ace.

Dealer West EW Vulnerable

Millie

♠ Q 9 8 4
♥ A K J 6 3
♦ 7 6
♣ J 9

George

♠ A 10
♥ Q 10 9 8
♦ A 10 9
♣ A 8 5 4

Sarah

♠ K 6
♥ 5 4 2
♦ Q J 5 3 2
♣ 7 6 2

Wendy

♠ J 7 5 3 2
♥ 7
♦ K 8 4
♣ K Q 10 3

I won the club return, played another trump and brought the contract home by claiming the remaining tricks. The defence allowed me to make the diamond king and I could have gone off with a different lead.

Admittedly, my three spade invitational bid had been optimistic, an opinion instantly and enthusiastically confirmed by Millie. When Kate and Jo played the hand, West opened a weak no-trump and Kate's simple heart overcall ended the auction.

East led the diamond queen and the contract was two off, declarer losing a club, two diamonds, two hearts and two spades. Finessing the jack of hearts could have saved her a trick; the traveller showed that some played and made two diamonds.

Later in our usual hostelry, the subject of the pedalo re-emerged.

‘I imagine pedalling a pedalo is rather like riding through a wide ford on a bike,’ said Kate. ‘Hard graft’.

‘A bit like playing bridge with some partners,’ said Millie, a general rather than specific comment. But with Millie who knows?

If you can't beat the Robots join them

IN THE LAST edition we looked at the Drury convention, which the Robots use on Bridge Base Online, writes **Rob Richardson**.

The Robots operate within the American 2/1 system, which uses five-card majors and a strong no trump, that is 15-17 points. In this issue, I'll look at another gadget they use.

Imagine that your partner, sitting South, opens one spade and you hold the following 17-point hand:

Hand A North

♠ K 10 8 2
♥ A K Q 5 4
♦ 8 3
♣ K Q

Looks promising, but should you be in four or six spades?

Jacoby

This is where the Jacoby convention comes into play. A jump bid to two no-trumps shows a fit for partner's major suit opening, enough high card points for game, and interest in a slam.

There are variations, but this is the way the BBO robots bid.

If the opener is a bit stronger than minimum it (not he or she, we are talking robots here!) can start cue bidding first round controls.

So with the following 17 points it would bid three clubs which shows first round control in clubs.

Hand B South

♠ A Q J 5 4
♥ J 2
♦ K Q 4
♣ A 10 4

When you respond four hearts, your partner will realise that you have no diamond control.

It hasn't got the ace, but possesses both the king and queen and the partnership can go on to six spades with only one loser.

Hand C South

♠ A J 7 5 3
♥ 8 7
♦ Q J 5 4
♣ A J

You're still holding the Hand A cards and respond two no-trumps, again showing the fit and game-going values. But this time South is weaker and opposite a 13-point hand with three losers. If declarer cannot find the spade queen, four spades is enough. So sign off there.

That's Jacoby in a simple form. The big benefit of the convention is that it allows you to investigate a possible slam below game level. As with all conventional bids, there's a price to pay for adopting it. In this case you lose the ability to use to no trumps as an invitation to three no-trumps when partner opens a major suit.

Is this really such a big loss? I don't think so; I would only use two no-trumps in this way as a last resort. There are more helpful bids available that will allow me to give my partner the necessary information.

Last Resort

Please note the BBO robots only appear to use Jacoby with a known nine-card fit. If you wish to add Jacoby to your system you may wish to discuss with partner whether or not it's usable with if an eight-card fit which becomes relevant if you play Acrol.

Jacoby isn't new. It goes back to the days when Contract Bridge as it's played today was beginning to ease out Auction Bridge. To see which was best, there was a big match: Oswald Jacoby headed the Auction Bridge team and Eli Culbertson the Contract players. Although Jacoby lost, his two no-rumps conventional bid was praised and lived on to serve today's bots.

Be nice to partner: a salutary tale

There are partners, partners drawn together by desire, habit, church, common law or a registry office. There are bridge partners. And there's a combination of the two, partner partners, writes **Douglas Bence**.

If you find this confusing, glance at the above sentence again and you'll see what I'm getting at: bridge partnerships .

Partners can and do last for years: playing rubber at the kitchen table, at a modest club or even ambitious international level like the Americans Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell, those powerful women of the 1960s and 70s, Rixi Markus and Fritz Gordon or even the Italian Giorgio Belladonna, who won 16 world championship titles with the Blue Team, playing first with Walter Avarelli from 1956 to 1969 and afterwards with Benito Garozzo.

Play for one off?

Regular partnerships develop when both players are temperamentally suited, of a comparable standard, their bidding systems either match, or at least have much in common, and both players have a common objective. Failure to achieve a balance on these grounds means the partnership won't last.

A balance can be difficult to find, particularly with partner partners. One player can be much better than their partner, or care more about the end result. Careless play or a simple mistake can generate irritable comments at the table, or develop into a row that ought to end when they get back home, but often doesn't. I don't know of a divorce case when bridge has been mentioned, but I'm sure there must have been more than one.

It has even led to murder. John Bennett was partnering his wife Myrtle in a social game with another couple, the Hoffmans. The time was 1931, the place Kansas City. He was sitting south and dealt the following hand:

Myrtle

♠ A 10 6 3
♥ 10 8 5
♦ 4
♣ A 9 8 4 2

Mr Hoffman

♠ Q 7 2
♥ A J 3
♦ A Q 10 9 2
♣ J 6

Mrs Hoffman

♠ 4
♥ Q 9 4
♦ K J 7 6 3
♣ Q 7 5 3

John

♠ K J 9 8 5
♥ K 7 5 2
♦ 8 5
♣ K 10

He opened a spade. West, Mr Hoffman, over called with two diamonds. Mrs Bennett, North, raised to four spades which ended the auction. Hoffman led the ace of diamonds, but switched to the club jack when he saw dummy's singleton. John won the king and drew trumps. He went one down.

Myrtle was incandescent, raced to her mother's bedroom, grabbed a pistol and shot and killed her husband. I have no idea what happened next, but she was tried for murder and acquitted. Some bridge players on the jury, perhaps?

While murder is probably the last thing on their mind, some couples sensibly refuse to play with their other halves, or only do so when there is no alternative.

I've only written this because of a few incidents I've either noticed or overheard in recent weeks, but the conclusion is obvious.

Always be nice to your partner, says Pakistan-born bridge professional Zia Mahmood. And I agree. Treat them as if they're the best in the world, which they are because they're sitting opposite you with thirteen cards in their hands and nothing can be done about it until the end of the session.

Why Augusta's nephew lost his cool

FROM MY FIRST visit to Paris as a student sometime before the turn of the century, I've always thought that the French capital was perpetually on the edge of revolution.

Not perhaps the Guilotine-riddled bloodbath kick-started in 1789, but compared with staid-old England, that takes in its stumbling stride the most outrageous outbursts of incompetence and mediocrity, still a revolution of sorts.

It may be an odd comparison, but I think the wonderful city of Paris, which is always about to explode over some minor iniquity or another, is very close emotionally to the temper tantrums of my Great Aunt Augusta.

Calm and Passive

Compared to her, no matter how bad her bridge, I was generally the exemplar of equanimity, as calm and passive as the Pacific waters lapping gently across the sands of a tropical paradise.

Some sort of reassessment became necessary after the spring foursomes when our performance was consistently mediocre so that 50% was a distant dream after ten boards and impossible after fifteen.

We took our seats for the last round. I was sitting South, Aunt Augusta as North dealt and opened a spade. East-West were vulnerable. I had the following cards:

♠ A 9 5 4 2
♥ J 9 6 5
♦ 7 2
♣ 6 5

East passed, I raised Augusta's opening bid to two and West doubled. Augusta gave West one of her special glares before bidding three spades which was passed round to West who bid four diamonds. When this came round to me I bid four spades.

This shut West up and Augusta passed, but East raised his partner to five. This was the full deal.

Dealer North East-West vulnerable

♠ K Q J 10 8
♥ 2
♦ Q 10 4
♣ A 9 4 3

♠ -
♥ K 10 8 7
♦ A K J 10 2
♣ K 8 7 2

♠ 7 6 3
♥ A Q 4 3
♦ 9 6 3
♣ Q J 10

♠ A 9 5 4 2
♥ J 9 6 5
♦ 7 2
♣ 6 5

Augusta led her singleton heart and I'd have done the same. Declarer won in Dummy and set about establishing his clubs before drawing trumps. He led the queen, and the next two tricks went as follows:

Q-6-2-3

J-5-7-A

My doubleton had been clearly signalled and now that Augusta had won with the ace I expected a club ruff for one off. But Augusta decided that if we had spade tricks to win, now was the time to cash in.

But West ruffed the spade, drew two rounds of trumps conceding a trick to Augusta's queen and claimed the rest. I was furious and lost my customary cool.

'It was classic. Lead the right card, which you did, and get them off at the start.'

'How was I to know he had no spades?'

'With ten of the suit between us, it was a distinct possibility. Anyway, why did you push them into game?'

'You were the one who bid four spades.'

'Why didn't you give me the ruff? If you missed my signal you should get your eyes tested. At your age you don't have to pay.'

Players find alternatives as Noverre axes face-to-face

NOVERRE BRIDGE Club's once popular Thursday evening face-to-face session is no more.

Before Covid it boasted up to 15 tables, but the numbers never fully recovered when the Covid-19 restrictions finally lapsed.

Part of the problem last winter was the lack of heating in the hall. Even so, face-to-face was run alongside Real Bridge online and the scores of both merged.

Some players were unhappy with this feeling that the results didn't present a realistic picture.

Some of those keen on face-to-face have started playing on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons at the Afternoon Bridge Club (ABC) where there are usually five or six tables.

Switched Allegiance

Others have switched their allegiance to Wymondham which has a Wednesday evening session getting up to eight tables.

Wymondham also plays online, using Real Bridge, on Tuesday evenings and has been getting the equivalent of four or five tables.

There were originally two clubs in Wymondham, one meeting on Tuesday evening, the other on Wednesdays. After lockdown it was felt wise to merge both clubs.



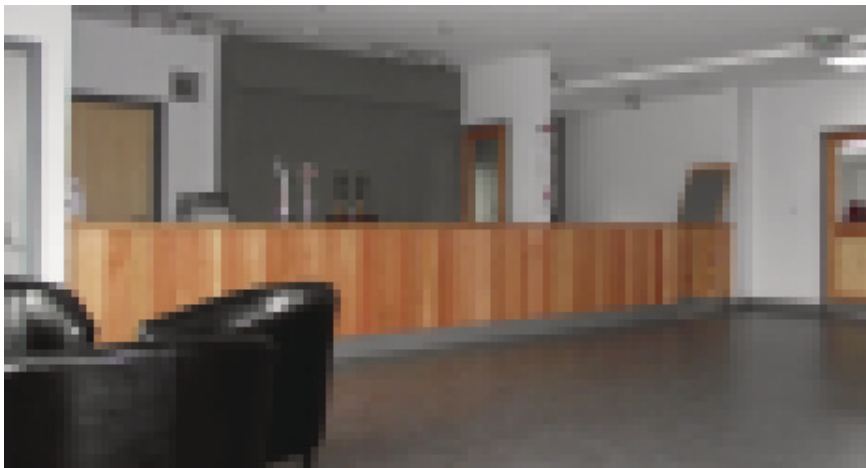
Lockdown was as big a problem for Wymondham as it was for other clubs, but their's was worse because of a premises issue.

They were no longer able to rent their long-established church hall premises and had to find somewhere else.

This they did and they now meet in Wymondham Central Hall (pictured above and below), a spacious and versatile premises which has inspired the club to look further into the future and think about developing further in terms of teaching and supervised practice.

Mixed Abilities

Players keen on face-to-face evenings should give it a try, £3.50 for members, £4 for visitors. Wednesday's sessions are attended by players of mixed abilities, from those who have played at a national level, down to pairs relatively new to duplicate.



Pictured above and left internal shots of Wymondham Central Hall

Last Word

Talking Bridge's this and that diary

AFTER A TENTATIVE start to the year, face-to-face bridge is at last thriving, at least in the afternoons.

As the weather has improved and Covid-19 slips into history, although never to be forgotten as the virus that changed the planet and brought tragedy to so many, the old regulars are tearing themselves away from their computer screens and going back to their clubs.

Meanwhile, the drive to bring new players into the game has intensified and we have news of two new initiatives, one at Great Yarmouth Bridge Club on Monday mornings in September, the other in Swaffham.

Rob Richardson has organised a four-week introductory 'Beginning Bridge' course which will cover declarer play, defence and club-standard bidding. If there is sufficient interest, he will follow this with three further four-week courses covering declarer play, defence and more bidding.

Swaffham Bridge Club's Rebecca Moore started with a table of four in her kitchen. When it quickly grew to three tables, she switched to the local bridge club.

Teaching the game is one thing, and getting them to play duplicate at a club is another, which is why Rebecca is now organising supervised practice sessions.

As well as appealing to competitive characters who are likely to take to duplicate, she is also catering for those who prefer a more relaxed approach.

'An afternoon of bridge with tea and cake or an evening with a glass of wine might be just the thing to wind down a busy week' she says.

Apology

While Rixi Markus's argument against the weak two featured in the Spring issue remains valid, it's so out of date as to be almost meaningless.

But the hand we used to illustrate her

case was both nonsense and a demonstration that proofreaders are like goalkeepers in that they get blamed when things go wrong. Our apologies. This is what the hand should have been:

Jack Odry (Belgium)

♠ QJ 7 4
♥ 5
♦ A QJ 9 7 6 5
♣ Q

♠ A 10 9 6 3
♥ K J 10 8 7 4
♦
♣ 9 8 7

♠ K 8 5 2
♥ 9 6 2
♦ 3
♣ K 10 6 4

Rixi

♠
♥ A Q 3
♦ K 10 8 4 2
♣ A J 5 3 2

West	North	East	South
2♥ (1)	3♦	4♥	4NT (2)
NB	5♦	NB	6♦ (3)
NB	NB	6♥	7♦ (4)
NB	NB	Double (5)	NB
NB	NB		

1. A weak-two bid
2. Blackwood
3. Rixi was convinced that seven diamonds was on, but was 'afraid that that seven hearts would prove to be fairly cheap for the opponents.' She therefore opted top play in six diamonds....
4. And rise to seven if pushed
5. 'The unfortunate East completely misjudged the situation. First he pushed us into a cold grand slam, and then he doubled it,' she wrote.

Kibitzer