# DISCOVERY 

EXPERT TIPS TO IMPROVE YOUR CLUB BRIDGE SCORES


## DISCOVERY

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## ENGLISH BRIDGE UNION

in association with
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Welcome to the third issue of Discovery - a publication designed to provide tips and tricks that will help progressing players improve their club bridge scores quickly. We have great articles explaining which doubles are for takeout, which are for penalties; and some invaluable tips on play - both as a defender and as declarer. We have tried to address the pitfalls which so many players fall into when participating in club bridge.

One thing an online-only magazine has allowed us to do is have interactive hands which you can play. If you, like me, find it quite difficult to follow a hand from a diagram, you can click on the deal, where shown, and play the hand yourself, or see how our expert played it. You will need to be online.

Lou Hobhouse, Editor

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When is a double for penalty?

It's the million-dollar question: what does partner's double mean?

You may have heard that a double is takeout (asking partner to bid one of the unbid suits) if it is below 3NT, while above that it is penalties (expecting to take the opponents' contract down).
But let's look at an auction with an example hand where this rule does not work:

1

- KJ32
- AQ 32
-AJ4

- 54

40 is above 3NT, yes: but why would double be penalties? This is your first opportunity to get into the bidding with a good hand
and you might be unable or unwilling to commit to bidding a suit for the first time at the four level. The double just shows strength with no clear action.
So, we could try modifying the rule. Early on in the auction, double is takeout; later in the auction, double is penalties.
But...
2

## - K 3 <br> - AJ 104 <br> - QJ10 9

| W | N | E | S |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
|  |  | 1NT | Dble |

- A Q 5

Double is your first opportunity to get in the auction... but how can it be takeout when the opponents haven't bid a suit? How does your partner know which suits you have? So a double of 1 NT is different. It shows $16+$ points (if the 1 NT was $12-14$ ) and is suggesting penalties.

Let's try a new rule:
Early on in the auction, double is takeout when a suit is doubled; later in the auction or when no trumps is doubled, the double is penalties.

## But...

3

## - K 3 <br> - AJ 104 <br> - QJ 109

| $\mathbf{W}$ | N | E | S |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| 1 $\mathbf{~}$ | Pass | 1NT | Dble |

- AQ 5

1NT is unlikely to be the contract the opponents end up playing in, so attempting to penalise it does not seem to be the best use for the double. Instead, doubling here is takeout of spades (the suit that opener bid).

So . . . simple rules are not going to cut it! As always in bridge, using logic is the key to remembering what a bid or call means.

## B

## Penalty Doubles

Here is a set of guidelines for when a double is for penalties with the logic behind each one explained.

## A

| ¢ AKJ 10 | W | N | E | S |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| - A 763 |  |  | 17 | Pass |
| -63 | 14 | Pass | 49 | Dble |
| \% 764 |  |  |  |  |

After some discussion, the opponents have settled in a game. This is the best-known type of penalty double. Why would you suddenly decide to force your partner to bid at the five level? The opponents intend to play in this contract, so you want to be able to punish them when you think they are making a mistake!


When the opponents have just bid no trumps naturally, a double must be for penalties. The doubler cannot be asking partner to pick any suit except no trumps as that would limit it to $4 \cdot 3 \cdot 3 \cdot 3$ hands and these are not powerful hands for declaring, nor are you very likely to find an 8-card fit. The double of 1 NT is much better used to punish the opponents for attempting to take more than half of the tricks! Almost all hands with $16+$ points, any shape, should double a weak NT opening to attempt to collect a penalty. We looked at an example on the previous page which was quite flat while the example hand here is another type with the requisite $16+$ points. Both should double a weak 1 NT opening by the opponents.

## C



| $\mathbf{W}$ | $\mathbf{N}$ | $\mathbf{E}$ | $\mathbf{S}$ |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
|  |  | $1 \boldsymbol{v}$ | Pass |
| 1NT | Pass | $2 \boldsymbol{V}$ | Dble |

Here South has already had the opportunity to make a takeout double on the first round, and has not done so. If they were not able to double the first time, why would they double this time? Answer - it is handy to be able to penalise the opponents when you have a decent hand and a strong trump holding. They may not have a fit and have nowhere to run.


After your partner has pre-empted, a double is for penalties. Partner has already told you which suit they want to play in, so why would you ask again?


You and your partner have already found a trump suit - in this instance hearts - so there is no need for a takeout double. This double shows a strong hand and invites partner to decide whether to defend 34 doubled to collect penalties, or whether to bid on to $4 \vee$.

## F



| W | N | E | S |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
|  | $1 *$ | Dble | Redble |
| 1 | Dble |  |  |

The redouble promises nine or more points and suggests that E/W have nowhere to run! Simply put, this is your hand. If the opponents steal the partscore away from you, you can punish them if you think you will score more points that way.

Quiz overleaf


## QUIZ

D
ecide whether South's double is for takeout or for penalties:


## ANSWERS

1. Takeout. You have not yet had a chance to act and the opponents are both preempting... You might well have a game!
2. Penalties. 1NT was a natural bid. It showed a balanced hand with a specific HCP range. If you have $9+\mathrm{HCP}$, you know that you and your partner have more than half of the HCP between you - time to draw blood!
3. Penalties. You both already know that hearts is your suit. Doubling for penalties might be necessary to 'protect your partscore': if you are making +110 in $2 \boldsymbol{V}$, collecting +100 for 3 going down one (vulnerable) or two (non-vulnerable) is no good, so doubling is necessary to make that a better result.

Continued overleaf


## When can I pass my partner's TAKEOUT DOUBLE?

You may have been told that if the intervening player passes, you are obliged to respond to your partner's takeout double even if you have 0 HCP. This is true, with one exception.

If you have very good reason to believe that your opponents won't make the current contract, you can choose to penalise the opponents' contract, in which case your best bet is to pass - your partner has already done the doubling! (But such situations occur very rarely, so don't make a habit of doing this.)

Here are some things to think about when choosing whether to pass for penalties:

## How robust is your trump holding?

You need to be especially careful here
when you are sitting under (to the right of) the player who has indicated the strong trump holding. If you hold KJ9x, Declarer can keep taking finesses through you and your trump tricks disappear; this is even more likely once your pass has told declarer that you have good trumps. A holding such as KQJ10, however, will always provide you with at least three trump tricks.

## How long is your trump holding?

Generally, the more trumps you have, the more control you have over the hand. Not only that, it also makes it less appealing to try playing in a 7 -card fit elsewhere or to bid no trumps. If you pass with only four trumps, they should be robust and your hand should be unsuitable for playing in no trumps.

## Who is vulnerable?

This is especially important when you think you and your partner might have a game. If the opponents are vulnerable and you are not, passing and trying to take a penalty looks more appealing; if you are the vulnerable pair, it might be difficult to get a big enough penalty to outscore your missed game.

## What is the alternative?

Will you be plumping for NT, which shows some points but can seem risky? Or if you have a very weak hand, will you instead be bidding a 3-card suit? How attractive is the alternative compared to passing? Sometimes, passing a low-level doubled contract without much hope of a penalty can actually be the best option, even if it makes, due to the way the scoring works.

Y
ou are sitting South. What would you call now?


| Love All |  |  |  |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| $\mathbf{W}$ | $\mathbf{N}$ | E | S |
| $3 \mathbf{S}$ | Dble | Pass | ? |



| Game N/S |  |  |  |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| $\mathbf{W}$ | N | E | S |
| 1 | Dble | Pass | ? |



## ANSWERS

1 Pass. With your left-hand opponent holding seven spades and you five, the most dummy can have is one. Therefore, even if your holding were less robust, declarer would not be able to take repeated finesses through your hand. Moreover, 3NT looks like a tall order: you would need a lot from partner to take nine tricks.

2 1NT. With 10 HCP and a balanced hand with comfortable diamond stops, you can easily imagine making 3NT. In 1 doubled, however, you have a slightly delicate trump holding with declarer's finesses onside and only one sure trick outside of trumps, so they might be able to scrape seven tricks. And even if they do go down, your penalty will be small if the opponents are non-vulnerable.

3 1V. This might feel weird... but how likely is it that 1 doubled is going down? Your trumps are robust but still only guarantee one trump trick. You are not strong enough for 1 NT (which shows around $8-11 \mathrm{HCP}$ ) so, if you are to bid, what else can you choose? Try to play in a 4-3 heart fit. In reply to a first-round double your bid shows $0-8$ points - so partner should not get too excited.

Continued overleaf

## How do I double a low-level CONTRACT FOR PENALTIES?

Sometimes, you find yourself wishing you had a penalty double available when your double would be takeout. In these situations, how can you best get this contract doubled for penalties?


Earlier, we saw an auction where the opponents later repeated their heart suit and the player in South was able to double for penalties at that point. That would indeed be a pleasing development for you; but there is a more likely possibility.

Remember that you and your right-hand opponent both have heart length. This makes it very likely that at least one of the other players has a heart shortage. If that player is your partner, you may well find that, if you pass, the auction continues as follows:

| $\mathbf{W}$ | $\mathbf{N}$ | $\mathbf{E}$ | $\mathbf{S}$ |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
|  |  | $1 \vee$ | Pass |
| Pass | Dble | Pass | $?$ |

This is your dream! Partner has provided you with a double. They want you to bid something; your job is to convert it from takeout into penalties by passing. Passes such as the initial pass you made over the 1 bid are called trap passes: you are trying to trap the opponents into getting doubled.


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One of the simple reasons why the expert player finds the bidding so much more satisfactory than the average player is because they start from the right place. If your initial opening bid is poorly judged it is often hard to recover and accurately describe your hand to partner.
One of the skills to develop is knowing when to stretch the rules slightly.
Beginners are taught that when you open 1NT you have one of three hand shapes, $4 \cdot 3 \cdot 3 \cdot 3,4 \cdot 4 \cdot 3 \cdot 2$ or $5 \cdot 3 \cdot 3 \cdot 2$. However, once you have been playing for a while you realise that there are a few awkward hands that don't really fit in with anything and should be lumped in together with 1 NT as the 'least of evils'.

Compare and contrast these hands you see before you:

| $\begin{aligned} & \text { Hand 1 } \\ & -72 \\ & - \text { AQ1043 } \\ & \text { K } 532 \\ & -A 8 \end{aligned}$ | $\begin{aligned} & H a n d 2 \\ & \uparrow 43 \\ & \vee \text { K } 764 \\ & \text { AQ1082 } \\ &+ \text { A } 2 \end{aligned}$ |
| :---: | :---: |
| Hand 3 <br> - K 3 <br> - K653 <br> - A7643 <br> - K 3 |  |

Hand 1 is nice and easy, open $1 \mathbb{V}$, no problems. Whatever partner says you can rebid 2 and describe the fact that you are 5-4.

Hand 2 isn't quite so easy, but still a 1 opening seems clear since you can rebid 2 over 1 or from partner, describing a minimum hand with at least five diamonds. It's true if partner has, say, $5 \cdot 4 \cdot 1 \cdot 3$ shape with not enough points to
bid again then you might end up going off in when 2 would make, but this is quite a specific hand type and we don't need to worry too much about it.
Hand 3 is much more awkward. If we open 1 and partner bids or we will have to rebid 2 which is simply unattractive. You have a poor 5 -card suit and lots of points outside. If partner has a hand such as

## 

then you might find yourself going off in 2 when you can make plenty of tricks in hearts (perhaps even game!).
The other bad thing about opening $1 *$ and rebidding 2 is that if partner has enough for game and elects to bid 3NT on the second round then the lead will come through whichever of your kings the opponents choose to attack, and things will generally be less pleasant.

| Hand 1 | Hand 2 |
| :---: | :---: |
| - 72 | - 43 |
| - AQ 1043 | - K 764 |
| - K 532 | - A Q 1082 |
| - A 8 | \& A 2 |
| Hand 3 | Hand 4 |
| - K 3 | - AQ |
| - K653 | - K743 |
| - A 7643 | - 96532 |
| \& K 3 | * KJ |

Hand 4 continues the theme but takes it to more extreme lengths. Your diamonds are grotesque and you have only three of your 13 points in your long suits. The last thing in the world you want to do is to bid diamonds once, let alone have to rebid them over a 14 or 2 response from partner.
The wrong-siding issues we talked about in respect to Hand 3 are made doubly worse here - the club and spade tenaces simply cry out to be declarer.

On balance the solution is clear, open 1NT on Hands 3 and 4. This will get you to the right partscore or game, and it will also ensure the lead comes around to the right hand.

Note that this is perfectly sensible and legal bidding, and anyone that tells you that you can never open 1NT with two doubletons is living in the Victorian age. Remember bidding doesn't take place in an isolated vacuum, you always have to consider your choices and choose the one that hurts the least. When weighing up your opening bid, think about your rebid and what possibilities await you. Normally starting on the right foot will leave you well-placed for the rest of the auction. Try the quiz on the next page.

Quiz overleaf


## QUIZ TIME



## ANSWERS

Hand 1 should open 1NT. A queen doubleton is a holding that cries out to be declarer because you want the lead coming round to you to give you an extra trick. Opening $1 \mathbf{1 0}$ will work out fine if partner responds 1 (as you can bid $1 \vee$ ) but if partner bids 14 (much more likely as the major suit takes priority) then you would have to rebid which is unlikely to be a success.

Hand 2 by contrast should open $1 \boldsymbol{2}$. The difference here is that your second suit is spades, which means whether your partner
responds or $1 \checkmark$ you can rebid $1 \checkmark$ and show two suits to partner, so you will always end up in the right fit. You don't really have any tenace holdings that cry out to be declarer (the opponents are hardly going to lead your 4-card suit when you are short in two others) so if a no trump contract is correct then partner should play it.
Hand 3 is a perfect 1 NT opener, with poor suits and tenaces galore. Again, opening $1 \underset{\sim}{2}$ will be fine if partner responds $1 \leqslant$, but 1NT will work out well whatever partner has.

Hand 4 is a tricky kettle of fish, but don't be put off by the lack of honours, just open $1 \downarrow$. Holding a 6 -card suit makes a big difference as having the suit as trumps will often be right, even if partner just has two small, and sometimes a singleton will be OK. Your values are all sharp (aces and kings, and one supported queen) so there is no need to distort the bidding.
Hand 5 should open 1NT, not because the clubs are dreadful (they are perfectly average) but because it describes the character and nature of the hand well. Opening $1 \boldsymbol{1}$ and rebidding over a major suit response from partner suggests you are more interested in clubs than you are and, even if it doesn't lead to rack and ruin, it will often discourage partner from trying for game when they have a singleton club, a holding that would actually fit well with you.

## Ranked games on IntoBridge: A new way to play bridge online

Bridge players looking for a new way to play online should check out IntoBridge's Ranked Games feature. This exciting new mode offers a rating system similar to chess, allowing players to rank themselves against others while still providing an equal opportunity for all players to participate.

The idea behind Ranked Games is to provide a more exciting and engaging way to play bridge online. There's no doubt that the Covid pandemic forced more people to play bridge online, but now players don't always have the time for long tournaments. We crave a quick buzz and the thrill of an instant board with instant results, but with the flexibility to leave and return to a game if something crops up. IntoBridge's solution is a head-tohead match where you choose the number of boards allowing for shorter sessions, and the possibility to leave in the middle of the game and return later to finish it.

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Overall, Ranked Games is an exciting new way to play bridge online and offers a more engaging experience for players looking for a challenge. If you're a bridge player looking for a new way to test your skills, be sure to check out IntoBridge's Ranked Games feature.

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## ASBIF

This acronym stands for Any Silly Bid Is Forcing! Of course, partner's bid may not be silly at all, but it just looks strange and you don't understand its meaning. The rule tells you not to give up and pass, but to continue to describe your hand as best you can.

The most typical 'silly bid' is the bid of a suit that the opponents have already shown. Most of the time, partner is unlikely to want to play in a suit that the opponents are known to hold, so the bid must have some other meaning, and partner doesn't want to be left there! Let's look at a few examples:

Remember: ANY SILLY BID IS FORCING
If you can't remember what your partner's 'silly' bid means DON'T PASS!

On the first example, the bid of $2 \boldsymbol{}$ is a Michaels' cue bid, showing five spades and a 5-card minor. Partner will not have many hearts at all and certainly doesn't want to play there. If you can't support spades, you can call inviting partner to pass or correct. With values you could bid 2NT asking which minor partner holds.

On the second example, the bid of $3 \square$ is asking if you have a stopper in hearts for 3NT. Partner will hold a source of tricks, for example a solid 7-card minor, and just needs you to stop the hearts once in order to run nine tricks. Bid 3NT if you have a stopper, or else you have to think of something else to do, but this doesn't include passing!

On the third example, partner has just bid the suit that East holds at least five cards in for the transfer, and West at least two for the 1 NT opener. It is inconceivable that partner wants to play in this suit. Partner is asking you for your best suit of the remaining three, so show it.

## Club Bidding Quiz Questions

I
n this summer's special bidding quiz, you are South playing match-pointed pairs at Love All.




$4 \sqrt{V}$. Although your Fourth Suit Forcing bid of $2 \boldsymbol{\alpha}$ obliged your partner to bid, $3 \boldsymbol{\square}$ must show secondary heart support i.e. a $1 \cdot 3 \cdot 5 \cdot 4$ shape. A $4-3$ fit should play well because any spade ruffs will be in the short trump hand. Unless partner's spade is the ace, 3 NT will only make if spades are 4-4 and everything else is solid.


Pass. Since your change of suit rebid after the 2-level response was forcing for one round, partner had to do something, and may be giving false preference with only a doubleton heart. While you are unsure that hearts is the best denomination, you should not continue with 2 NT : that would be a game try rather than simply trying to improve the contract.

14. With a 5 -card spade suit and fair values, a 1 overcall is certainly an option. A takeout double, with the singleton club, is not an option. Nor, if you play a cue bid as 5-5 in the majors, as many people do, should you bid $2 \downarrow$. You might get a chance to show the hearts later.



Pass. When the opponents open your longest suit, you often have no suitable positive bid. You cannot double - that would be for takeout. Nor can you bid $2 \downarrow$ - in the old days that showed a very strong hand but nowadays it usually shows 5-5 in the majors. You might get a chance to bid the diamonds naturally at your second turn.


1NT. With over half your values in the doubletons, a 1 NT opening gives a more accurate description of your hand than opening 1 and quite possibly having to rebid $2 \downarrow$. A further factor is that your holdings in the black suits suggest having the lead come up to them.

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Context is everything and not long into your bridge course, you discover that bids have many meanings depending on when they occur in the auction. Any misunderstanding of a bid could land your partnership in trouble and this is especially true of double. Is your partner asking you to bid or is it a penalty double? Here we take a look at some doubles and how they may be interpreted after a suit bid or a no trump bid.

Have a look at these examples. You are sitting West:

1


```
4 876
\bulletKQ1085
- 654
% K2
```

Bid 2v. Your partner's double shows an opening hand which is likely to be short in diamonds. They will have tolerance for
any other suit so you are sure of a heart fit. With eight points and your good 5-card suit you should jump one level.

2

| $\mathbf{W}$ | $\mathbf{N}$ | $\mathbf{E}$ | $\mathbf{S}$ |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| 1 | $1 \boldsymbol{L}$ | Dble | Pass |
| $?$ |  |  |  |

```
\DeltaQ8
* KQ65
* A J 1074
&5
```

Bid 2V. Yes, you found another heart fit! Did you correctly recognise that partner's double shows the other major? It is called a negative double and it is still a takeout double. You are supporting a suit which partner has shown so you are not bidding 'above your barrier'.

3 Can you identify the meaning of the doubles in this auction? Does partner expect you to bid or pass?

| $\mathbf{W}$ | $\mathbf{N}$ | $\mathbf{E}$ | $\mathbf{S}$ |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| 1NT | Pass | Pass | Dble |
| Pass | Pass | $2 \boldsymbol{2}$ | Pass |
| Pass | Dble | Pass | Pass |
| $?$ |  |  |  |

There are two doubles shown, and both are penalty doubles. South has a strong hand with at least 16 points so is not expecting partner to bid (although that's allowed with a very weak hand if declarer may make the contract). The second double of 2 is after East has tried to escape the pain of 1NT doubled. Once 1NT has been penalty doubled, all subsequent doubles are penalties. (North will have at least four clubs and knows the partnership have the majority of the points). West would be expected to pass.


4 Is West expected to bid or pass?
Normally, a double of a no trump bid is for penalties but not here! This exception is because the 1NT bid does not show a balanced hand but could be a weak hand which is not worth a bid at the two level. So East's double is a takeout double.

Beginning Bridge book one introduces doubles and Continuing Bridge book two goes into more complex scenarios such as What does a second double mean? and introducing the use of redouble.


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## 1



West and East each dropped a card.
Can you find the missing cards?


Re) RealBridge

## 2



West and East each dropped a card.
Can you find the missing cards?

## ANSWER

West is missing the A. To justify bidding game after the single raise the hand requires 18 points in high cards with some shape. While the would also make the hand strong enough, the correct opening with $5-5$ in the majors would be 14. (The hand would be worth only a game try if the missing card was the $\downarrow$ J.)
East is missing the $\vee$ K. The hand needs a third heart to have adequate length to raise the suit - and the heart needs to be a high one rather than a low one to make the hand worth responding at all.

ChatGPT is an AI thingy which will answer questions on any topic. Students have used it to produce course-work essays that have received B+ grades. I wondered how much it knew about bridge.
I started by asking it about the differences between the Acol and Standard American bidding systems.
'Acol and Standard American (also known as SAYC) are two popular bridge bidding systems used by players around the world.
Acol is a system that originated in the United Kingdom and is still widely used in Europe and parts of the Commonwealth. Acol is based on a four-card major suit system, where a bid of 14 or shows a four-card suit and 12-19 high card points.
SAYC is also a natural system, but it uses a five-card major suit system. A bid of $1 \mathbf{1}$ or $1 \mathbf{~}$ shows a five-card suit and 12-21 high card points. SAYC includes a variety of artificial
bids, including the Jacoby transfer, Stayman, and Blackwood conventions.'
Hmm. Surprising that Acol is widely used in Europe without bids like transfers, Stayman and Blackwood, but never mind. How would it handle a couple of specific questions on defence or bidding, I wondered.
First I asked it about the best method of signalling on your partner's opening lead. The reply started well, including the assertion that high encourage, low discourage was an ideal choice for novice players. A shame that it followed by recommending upside-down count: A high card indicates an odd number of cards, while a low card indicates an even number of cards. It then gave a sensible definition of Suit Preference.
Then I asked what it would open with this bridge hand A864 K 975 A42 KQ65, and got this answer:
One popular bidding system is Standard

American, so let's assume we're using that. With 16 high-card points (HCP) and a balanced hand, you could start by opening 1NT. This bid shows a balanced hand with 15-17 HCP.
Well, it counted its 16 points correctly, but failed to count its 15 cards. Maybe I should have asked what it would 'call' on this hand rather than 'open' or bid'. The answer to that would be 'Director!'
I thought I might be able to get some help with my articles, so I asked if it knew any bridge jokes and was given the following:
\% Why did the bridge player take up gardening? He wanted to learn how to finesse a spade.
$\therefore$ What do you call a bridge player who doesn't cheat? An honest dummy.
So maybe humour isn't its thing. What about poetry? I asked for a couple of limericks about bridge and got these:

In a world where bridges are played, Strategies carefully laid. With cards in their hand, They form a strong band,
In bridge, a triumph is made!

In a cozy bridge club's embrace, Players gather with smiles on their face.

With cards they compete, Each trick is a feat, In this game, challenges they chase!
A mixed bag, so far. I decided to get ChatGPT's view on a controversial topic Are women better at bridge than men? It replied with a straight bat:
Bridge playing ability is not determined by gender but rather by individual skills, experience, and dedication. It is important to appreciate and celebrate the diverse talents and achievements of players, irrespective of their gender.
What about questions about people in the bridge world? What has David Bird contributed to the world of bridge, I asked.

David Bird is one of the most prolific bridge writers in history, having authored or coauthored over 140 bridge books covering a wide range of topics and skill levels.

Not bad so far; it's actually over 160, and he is by far the most prolific. But it went on:

Writing the 'Abbot' series of bridge mysteries: Bird is the author of the popular 'Abbot' series of bridge-themed mystery novels, which feature the amateur detective and bridge player, Edward Abbot.
This is pure fantasy! The so-called 'Abbot' series is about bridge-playing monks. I have passed the idea on to David - maybe it will inspire him to move in a new direction.

I asked a similar question about myself, and was given numerous incorrect facts. None of the following is true, or even vaguely true:
\& he has won several national titles;

- he won a silver medal in the World Bridge Games in 2016;
$\because$ he designed and developed several bridgerelated apps and websites, including the
popular Bridge Baron app and the BridgeWebs website hosting service;
\% he wrote 'Aces and Places: The Bridge Player's Guide to Winning Strategies'.
Unbelievable. It would be nice if some of them were factually correct, but they aren't. (Aces and Places is a bridge book and it was written by Rixi Markus.) I decided to challenge it with a direct question: Do you ever make up answers? The chatty one replied.

No, I do not make up answers. I am programmed to provide helpful and accurate responses based on the information available to me. If I am unable to provide a helpful response, I will indicate so, rather than providing false or misleading information.
So there you have it - a liar and in denial. The technology will no doubt get better over the coming years, but for the moment take everything you read with a pinch, no, make that a bucketful, of salt.

By the way, if you want one more example of text produced by Artificial Intelligence, I can refer you to the upcoming editorial in September's English Bridge.

This article is more about tactical play than pure cardplay technique. Let's start with a simple example:


You, South, are playing in no trumps and West leads the J against your contract. For various reasons, you want to win trick one in your hand rather than in dummy which card would you select? The king or the queen - and why?
Many players would automatically select the king as being the more deceptive play, but that may not be best, especially if you are going to lose the lead to East. Why is that?
Well, East knows that you have the queen as the opening lead of the jack denies that card; playing the king, therefore, shows clearly that you started with the king and
queen. Best play is to win the queen, the card you are known to hold, leaving open the possibility that West has led from ※KJ10xx.

Let's see how East might go wrong on the following layout. You (South) open 14 and rebid 2NT over the 2 response, North raising that to game. West leads the J and here we are...


You win the club lead in hand and run the $\checkmark 10$ to East, who has to find the $\vee \mathrm{K}$ switch to beat the hand. How might he do that? Well, if you have taken trick one with the ※K then East can deduce the club layout. Returning a club at trick three would bring to mind a phrase involving dead horses and flogging.

However, if you were to take trick one with the e , East may well play his partner for five clubs headed by the KJ 10 and the ace of diamonds. If that were the case a club return would be fatal for you but would allow 3 NT to make on the actual layout. Playing the card you are known to hold makes it tough for the defenders to know what to do.

Overleaf you can compare this deal with the one where East would be right to return a club:

Continued overleaf


In both deals West leads the J. In both instances South plays the Q . In Hand 1 East, on winning the Q , must switch to a heart, whereas on Hand 1A East must return a club. By playing the Q on the first trick in Hand 1 declarer masked which hand he held.

The principle works against inattentive defenders as well. After a rapidly bid 1 NT 3NT, West leads the to East's king. Naturally enough, East returns a spade, the ©5. How might you plan the play?

| Hand 1A. 3NT by South. West leads the <br> - Q 4 <br> - 1087 <br> -KJ853 <br> \& A6 3 |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| $\begin{aligned} & \text { \& } 85 \\ & \text { A642 } \\ & \text { A6 } 1097 \end{aligned}$ | Click here to play hand Press 'Play’ to have a go Press 'Next' to see Paul play | - 109762 <br> - K Q 3 <br> - Q 2 <br> \& 854 |
|  | $$ |  |

At the table, you may just have followed suit in spades without much interest to the first two tricks, but you should try a small swindle.
East's play of the $\boldsymbol{\mathrm { K }}$ at trick one categorically denies the queen, so West knows you have possession of that card. On the second round you must nonchalantly play Her Majesty as it's the card you're known to hold. West, should he have started with five spades, should duck that to preserve communications, but there are many players whose eyes will light up on seeing the queen and will play the ace in the hope that the suit is theirs to run. If not, they can always clear the suit...

Let's look at the full deal overleaf.

| Hand 2. 3NT by South. West leads the $\uparrow 6$ <br> - 84 <br> - A Q 10 <br> -KJ42 <br> Q QJ4 2 |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: |
| $\begin{aligned} & \text { A9763 } \\ & \bullet 9853 \\ & 7 \\ & \text { K } 105 \end{aligned}$ | Click here to play hand Press 'Play' to have a go Press 'Next' to see Paul play it | - K 52 <br> - 7642 <br> - A 93 <br> - 863 |
|  | $\begin{aligned} & \text { Q QJ10 } \\ & \text { KJ } \\ & \text { Q10865 } \\ & \text { A97 } \end{aligned}$ |  |

The correct defence, as mentioned above, is for West to duck the $\varphi \mathrm{Q}$ at trick two, allowing you to hold the trick. When you knock out the A, East has a spade left to lead to his partner and East-West take four spades and a diamond to defeat your game. Had you followed at trick one with the $\mathbf{~} 10$ and then at trick two with the $\boldsymbol{J}$ the winning defence should have become obvious.

West doubtless will claim that he thought the K was a sure entry to his spades, but here he was sadly mistaken. You don't need the club finesse to make your contract as your initial Count and Plan revealed sufficient winners without it (one spade, three hearts, four diamonds and the ace of clubs).

Should West have recognised the spade layout? Indeed, he should if he asked himself who held the $\boldsymbol{2}$. If East started with $\mathbf{~ K J J 5 2}$ why would he lead back the 5 at trick two? The only rational explanation was that East started with $\uparrow \mathrm{K} 52$ and that South was up to some monkey business, but not enough defenders think that way.

Quiz overleaf

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## QUESTION 1

H ow might you play in 3NT after the following auction?

| $\mathbf{W}$ | $\mathbf{N}$ | $\mathbf{E}$ | $\mathbf{S}$ |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| Pass | 3NT | All Pass |  |



## Preliminary analysis

West leads the 4 to his partner's $\boldsymbol{~} \mathrm{K}$ and East returns the $\mathbf{~} 8$. Your Count and Plan reveals plenty of winners (one slow spade, three hearts, three diamonds and four slow clubs). The danger is that East-West might set up four spades and the before you get to cash your winners. How might you throw some sand in the defenders' eyes?

## ANSWER

There is no guarantee of success here, but you mustn't make it easy for the defenders.

On this one, West is aware that you have the Q as soon as East produces the king at trick one. With the $\mathbf{~} \mathbf{J}$ on the table, the $\mathbf{Q} 10$ are equals, so on the spade return you must play the queen. This is the card you are known to hold and may tempt West into parting with his $\boldsymbol{A}$. If he does do that, the spade communication would be lost and you'd make an overtrick. Here's the full deal:


No one should be fooled, you say? Well, you may get away with an impossible contract when the cards lie as follows:


After a spade lead to the king and the $\$ 7$ (note) return, an inattentive West may let the queen hold the trick, assuming you started with $\mathbf{\perp}$ Q103.

Question 2 overleaf

## QUESTION 2

H


## Preliminary analysis

West leads the $\mathbf{~} 6$ to the $\mathbf{8}$ in dummy and East's $\geqslant$. East returns the 55. Your Count and Plan reveals plenty of winners (four spades, one heart, one diamond and four slow clubs). The danger is that East-West might set up four hearts and the before you get to cash your winners. How might you deflect the defenders from their aim?

## ANSWER

As before, the opponents could get you down, but you may fool them into making an error. As soon as East plays the king on dummy's 8 , it is obvious to West that you have the ${ }^{\mathrm{J}}$. Thus, when East returns a heart at trick two, you must play the VJ as it's the card you are known to hold. West should duck this but may feel that his $\diamond \mathrm{K}$ is a certain entry and, in any case, may not have followed the spot cards in hearts.

If he takes the $\vee \mathrm{A}$, believing the hearts are his to run, you will make your contract if the deal is as below.


Sometimes you can spot two possible chances of making a contract. You must then either choose the better chance, or look for some way to combine them. We will start with a fairly easy example:


You open and quickly reach 6 . West leads the K . How will you play?
You have eleven top tricks and two clear chances of a twelfth. A successful finesse of the Q would give you the slam. That's
a $50 \%$ chance. If the hearts split $3-3$, you could discard your club loser on the thirteenth heart. The probability of a 3-3 break is only $36 \%$. You win the club lead with the ace and play the AK, East discarding a diamond on the second round. Over to you!
Suppose you cross to the Q , drawing the last trump, and finesse the Q . This will lose and West will cash a club trick for one down. It will be too late to combine your second chance - that of a 3-3 heart break.
Instead, you should draw the last trump and play the ace, queen and king of hearts. When the suit breaks 3-3, you can discard your club loser on the established $\vee$ 7. You try for an overtrick with a diamond to the queen, but end with the twelve tricks that you needed.
It was right to play hearts before diamonds. If that chance failed, you would not lose the lead (as you would by finessing in diamonds first). You could therefore fall back on the second chance.


Point to remember: When combining two chances, you must often take them in the right order. Start with the chance (perhaps finding a good break, or dropping an honour) that will not lose the lead if it fails.

TThe next deal offers two different finessing chances. What do you make of it?


How will you give yourself the best chance in 6 when West leads the $\mathbf{J}$ ?

You have a certain loser in trumps and must therefore avoid a club loser. One chance is to finesse the successfully,
which is around a $50 \%$ proposition. Another is to cash the $A$ and reach dummy to run the $Q$ through East (a ruffing finesse). Again, this is a $50 \%$ chance; you will need East to hold the $\downarrow$ K.

You cannot combine the two finessing chances, since you will be down immediately if the first finesse loses. Can you, nevertheless, see a way to combine two different chances?

You win the spade lead and play a trump to the king and West's ace. After winning the spade continuation in dummy, you return to the V Q and cash the minor-suit aces. You then cross to the K . This gives you the worthwhile chance of dropping the Q in two rounds (in fact, around $18 \%$ ). If the club queen fails to appear, you will take your second chance, that of the ruffing diamond finesse. By combining these two chances, your prospect of success is better than either of the single finessing chances.

## 6A by South. West leads the K .

```
^ AK6
\vee 1043
-QJ5
&K763
`KQJ9872
* A
* AJ4
```

- J1092
- A 5
-K9863
- 25 Press 'Next' to
- Q 5 \& 10982

Point to remember: It is usually better to combine two chances, rather than relying on just one. Sometimes, you have to combine the second-best chance in one suit with the best chance in another.

C
an you spot the second chance on this deal?


You reach yet another slam, 64, and the 10 is led. What chance(s) can you see of avoiding two heart losers?

Leading towards the $\vee \mathrm{K}$ is an obvious one, hoping that East holds the ace. There is a second chance lurking in the diamond suit. If the suit breaks $4-3$, perhaps you can establish the thirteenth diamond for a heart
discard. After you have unblocked the A , you will need four entries to dummy three to ruff diamonds in your hand, and one more to reach the established $\$ 10$. Do you have four entries to dummy? Yes, two in trumps and two in clubs.

The first step is to win the club lead with your ace, leaving dummy's two club entries intact. You then cash the $A$ and draw trumps with the king and jack. You ruff one diamond in your hand, cross back to the A and ruff a second diamond. When both defenders follow, you know you will make the slam. Hurray!

You return to dummy with the Q and take a third diamond ruff in your hand. Finally you cross to the e K and play the $\operatorname{good} \leqslant 10$, discarding the 8 . The slam is made.

If diamonds had not broken 4-3, you would have used dummy's second club entry to lead towards the $\geqslant \mathrm{K}$. Your line combined the chances offered in hearts and diamonds.

- AJ 2
- 76
- 107632
\& K Q 7
- 108
- AJ 94
-K95
42 10984

| Click here to <br> play hand <br> Press 'Play' to <br> have a go <br> Press 'Next' to <br> see David play | - 4 <br> -Q10532 <br> - QJ 84 <br> - 32 |
| :---: | :---: |
| \& KQ97653 |  |
| - K 8 |  |
| - A |  |
| A 65 |  |

Point to remember: A frequent technique in suit contracts is to establish a long suit in dummy by taking ruffs in your hand. Sometimes it is the only hope to make a contract. Here it was a second chance - one that allowed the contract to be made.

Extract from David Bird's latest

> book on declarer play Twelve Important Bridge Lessons


This is a rule for declarer, used when there is only an ace between you and damnation in no trumps! The Rule of Seven will help you calculate how many times you should hold up your ace. Subtract the number of cards you hold between the two hands in the suit from seven, and this will tell you how many times to duck. It cuts communication between the defenders if the lead is from a 5 -card or longer suit.


Put yourself in the South seat as declarer. West leads the $\boldsymbol{\Phi} \mathrm{K}$ and you make a plan you can make one spade, four hearts, one diamond and three clubs. These tricks are not, however, 'off the top'. You may lose the $\$ \mathrm{~K}$ if it's in East's hand.

Let's use the Rule of Seven to work out how many times to duck the spade lead.

You hold six spades between your two hands. Deducting this from seven leaves one. Therefore you should duck this trick once only. Here's the logic.

Assuming the worst - that East has the king of clubs, you must run East out of spades before letting him win the $\$ \mathrm{~K}$. When you take the spade on the second trick you have left East with either no spade to lead back or the suit is splitting 4-3 and is not a danger. The defence can take three spades (in total) and the N before you are back in, and can run nine tricks. Here's the full deal:


On the next page the deal is altered slightly, and this time you are missing the * A. .

Continued overleaf


Once again West leads the $\boldsymbol{~ K}$ and you count your tricks - one spade, four hearts, one diamond and three clubs once the A has been played.

There is no guaranteed way to make this contract, but you can give it the best chance. Once again you use the Rule of Seven and duck the first spade, winning the continuation. If East has three spades the
suit is splitting 4-3 and no danger. If it is 5-2 you have to hope West has no entry. As long as East has the you can still make your contract as, in this instance, East has no spade to return. If West has the A , you are doomed!

What would have happened if you had taken the first spade trick? When East wins the A he still has a spade to return to his partner who can then cash four spade tricks - down one.

What would have happened if you had ducked twice. West would probably have continued in spades and you would have been OK, but a clever West might switch to diamonds - a low 3 to suggest an honour. If dummy ducks East can play the 10, and return a diamond. When East gets in with the $\mathrm{A}, \mathrm{E} / \mathrm{W}$ will end with two spade tricks (ducked twice), two diamonds and the club ace. Down one. Here's the full deal.



TThe Rule of Eleven will help you to calculate the exact layout of the suit led. Subtract the spot value of the opening lead from eleven and this will tell you how many higher cards in the suit lie in the remaining three hands. Since you can see your own hand and dummy, you can work out how many higher cards the remaining hand holds. This applies whether
you are declarer, or the defender not on lead, but for now we will concentrate on the rule from declarer's point of view.
Put yourself in the South seat as declarer. West leads the five of clubs, dummy plays the seven, East the ten and you win the king. Let's use the rule of eleven to discover the layout of this suit.

Five (they led the five) from eleven leaves six higher cards remaining between dummy, East and your own hand. We have seen three of them contributed to the first trick, and the remaining three are all in dummy. East, therefore, has no further cards in the suit higher than the five, and it is safe, indeed necessary, to take a double finesse of the jack-nine to bring this suit in for four tricks.
The Rule of Eleven does not work unless the card led is fourth highest. For example an honour lead will be top of a sequence, or a 'spot' card might be from a
short suit if their partner has bid the suit, or a defender may lead second highest from small cards.

On this occasion you can be sure that the lead is fourth highest since, looking at the three and two in your own hand, you know that it cannot be second highest from four small.


Continued overleaf


As declarer you are faced with an almost identical problem to the last one. Your cards and dummy's are identical only this time the lead is the six of clubs instead of the five. Dummy plays the seven, East the ten and you win the king.

Working through the Rule of Eleven six from eleven leaves five. We have seen three of these five on the first trick, and there are three more in dummy. Whoops! Has something gone wrong? The rule doesn't work, what can we deduce from this?

The only answer can be that the lead was not from fourth highest. It could, however, be 2 nd highest from a suit headed by the nine-six.

This time you must cross to a top club in dummy, felling East's J10 doubleton, and later re-enter hand to take the finesse.

What a difference one small spot card makes. However the Rule of Eleven enables you to find the winning line both times.


Brian Dorey wrote: I wonder if one of the learned folk at the EBU could explain a probability question. I read in an unimpeachable source (my EBU diary, no less) that the odds on the disposition of four cards held by the opposition are:
4-0: 9.6\%
3-1: 49.7\%
2-2: 40.7\%
So, in a contract with a queen missing, and knowing the odds marginally favour $3-1$, I play a top card and both the opposition follow suit. I then play another, low towards the KJ, and second seat follows, but not with the queen. I would have thought this implied he/she held three cards and I should take a finesse. But no - a recent article in the magazine says I should assume 2-2 and play for the drop. Where's the logic in this?

The answer is 'vacant places'. Let's take this suit:


You cash the ace and the opponents follow with the eight and nine. You lead the two and West produces the 10 . We now know two of West's cards that aren't the queen of spades, but only one of East's cards that isn't. West therefore has 11 cards that could be the Q while East has 12 . Think of these 'potential queens' as empty slots, or vacant places ready to contain cards in the opponents' hands. Then any missing card is more likely to be in the hand with more room for it.
You may object that by the time we, as declarer, come to tackle this suit, we will have seen at least two and maybe more cards from the opponents - after all, West must have led something and East must have followed suit before we had a chance to play spades. Should we not count these
cards? The short answer to this is ' No '; the long answer is 'Yes, but they mean so little that for practical purposes we might as well ignore them.'
So, East is a 12 -to-11 favourite to have the $Q$ by the time we arrive at the moment of truth in our problem.
'Eight ever, nine never' they say, and this is why they say it.
By the way, our enquirer notes that a 3-1 break is around $50 \%$ while a 2-2 break is around $40 \%$. But remember that a 3-1 break is actually two divisions of the suit: $3-1$ and $1-3$, and each of those has a $25 \%$ chance. The most likely number of spades for West to have is two ( $40 \%$ ), then three or one ( $25 \%$ each), then four or zero ( $5 \%$ each).

Thanks for your informative reply. However, I'm not sure you've factored in Sod's Law - the one that says whichever course of action I choose, the other one would have been right.

Brian Dorey

In each of the following hands, you are sitting South, and will face a situation that commonly goes awry for aspiring players. Imagine that you are playing in a duplicate with matchpoint scoring. You should make a plan to give yourself the best chance of favourable comparisons with other N/S pairs.


You are in $2 \downarrow$ having opened $1 \mathbb{V}$. West leads the $\$ 8$. Plan your play.


You are in 1NT doubled, after West doubles your opening bid. West leads the Q . Plan your play.


You are in 6 after West opened a Weak $2 \downarrow$.
West leads the e . Plan your play.

## Hand 4

- 9
- 87632
-A854
- 863

- 106
- A 94
- 12
- AKJ754

You are in 5 doubled at Game All. East opened 14, and West raised to $4 \mathbf{4}$. West leads the $\mathbf{K}$ overtaken by East's A, and East returns the 2 . Plan your play.


You are in 2 having opened 1V. West leads the $\$ 8$. Plan your play.

You have four top tricks (two spades and two diamonds). You hope to make four extra tricks in hearts, but have to contend with the issue that playing in a seven card fit might make it impossible to draw trumps before attempting to cash your established hearts.
When your opponents alight in opener's second suit in a preference auction, dummy will usually be short in declarer's first suit, so it is often a good idea to lead a trump at trick one. When West leads the $\$ 8$ you can preserve entries to hand by winning with dummy's $\star$ K. If you now continue drawing trumps, you will have six top losers if diamonds split 4-2, so you should first attempt to force out the $\vee \mathrm{A}$.

In this case, when you lead the

4 from dummy, you can play the $\vee 10$, and West wins the $\vee \mathrm{A}$. He is now likely to lead a second trump, won by the $A$. If you lead a third round of trumps, you still run the risk that trumps split 4-2, and the defenders now win three tricks in clubs to defeat your contract. However, if hearts split 4-3, you can afford to lose two trump tricks and retain a level of trump control if you simply play your winning hearts.

East can trump the fourth round of hearts, and play the Q to draw two of your trumps, but you still have a trump remaining to prevent the defenders winning more than two club tricks. Winning two spades, three hearts and three diamonds allows you to make your contract exactly.


Continued overleaf

| Hand 2 |
| :---: |
| -10653 |
| - 873 |
| - 172 |
| - AJ3 |
| $\left\langle w^{N}\right.$ |
| - Q 72 |
| - AK2 |
| - Q 1096 |
| +K104 |

You are in 1NT doubled, after West doubles your opening bid. West leads the $\vee \mathrm{Q}$. Plan your play.

You have four top tricks (two hearts and two clubs). You can definitely make two extra tricks by force in diamonds, and an extra trick will be available in clubs if you can locate the s Q .

If West has five hearts, then the defenders can establish seven winners before you can, so you have to hope that hearts split 4-3. You can win the first trick with the $\vee \mathrm{K}$, and lead the $\uparrow$. In this case, West will likely play low, and East wins with the $\downarrow K$, and returns a heart. If you duck this trick, West will continue hearts, so whether you win this trick or the next, you can continue with the Q. West wins the $A$, and cashes his remaining heart(s).

What should you discard from your hand on the fourth round of hearts?

At this point, assuming that West has around 16 points for his double of 1 NT , you can make an assumption about the location of the AK and the Q .

Since East held the $\uparrow K$, West is assumed to hold the $\Phi A K$ and $\stackrel{\otimes}{\mathrm{Q}}$. If you throw a spade then the defenders are likely to have three spade winners, so you should throw the 4 . However, since West is assumed to hold the 2 Q , this still leaves you able to finesse clubs through West.

West will likely make a passive diamond exit after cashing his heart(s), so you should win this trick, cash your fourth diamond, then play the K followed by the $\boldsymbol{2} 10$. When West plays low, you try dummy's \& , and when this wins the trick, you cash dummy's A to make your contract.


Continued overleaf

```
Hand 3
- 543
- 87
- AKQJ9 4
- 82
```



You are in 6 after West opened a Weak $2 \boldsymbol{V}$.
West leads the Q . Plan your play.

Fearing a heart lead from East, and hoping to score more points in a major suit slam, you chose to play in 64 rather than 6 . As it happens, partner's diamonds were strong enough to make 6 NT the top spot, but you may still score well enough if you can make $6 \mathbf{4}$.
West leads the Q , and you count 12 top tricks, with the possibility of making all 13 tricks if spades are 3-3. However, if spades are $4-2$, then you will need to be careful to ensure that you win all six diamond tricks given the lack of an outside entry to the dummy.
You win the first trick with the ${ }_{2} \mathrm{~K}$, and have to decide when and how to play trumps.

Since West's lead could be a singleton, and due to the possibility of making an overtrick
if spades are 3-3, you start by playing the $\$ \mathrm{AKQ}$. If spades were 3-3, you would make 13 tricks, and if they were 5-1 (or 6-0) you would be defeated, but what happens if they split 4-2?

Missing a higher trump, it is generally sensible to leave this trump outstanding and work on any remaining suits. However, if you now start playing diamonds, East will be able to trump the fourth round, and you will be unable to return to dummy. There is however a $100 \%$ solution that allows you to win all six diamonds. Can you see what it is?

If you play your last trump now, East will win this trick, but you can win any return, and with no trumps outstanding, can cash all six diamonds to make your slam.


| Hand 4 |
| :---: |
| $87632$ |
| - A 854 |
| +863 |
| $\left\langle w^{\mathrm{N}} \mathrm{E}\right\rangle$ |
| -106 |
| - A 94 |
| - J2 |
| * AKJ 754 |

You are in 5\% doubled at Game All. East opened 14, and West raised to 4ヘ. West leads the K overtaken by East's A, and East returns the 2 . Plan your play.

You have no possibility of making your contract, but need to determine what your actual trick target should be. This is often the case when your partnership has sacrificed against an opposing game (or slam) contract. Given that both sides are vulnerable, EW stand to score at least 620 if they make 4s, so you need to make sure that you are defeated by no more than two tricks if you are to concede less than 620 points (one down doubled will cost you 200, and two down will cost 500 points, but three down would be 800 - yikes).

You also have to assume that 4 can be made, since any penalty is likely to lead to a disappointing score if you could have defeated their 4e contract.

When East switches to a club at trick two, you have an immediate decision whether to risk the J or win with the 2 K . It is not necessary to risk losing to a singleton e Q in West's hand, so you win the K , and West follows
with the 9 . Should you now cash the $\&$, hoping for a 2-2 split, or plan to finesse clubs on the next round?
In isolation, the decision is very close, but in the context of your sacrifice being worthwhile, can you see a compelling reason to either finesse or drop?
If clubs are 2-2, you have four defensive tricks, so you will have to assume that clubs are 3-1, and to avoid a club loser, you will need East to have the two remaining clubs. You should therefore trump the 10 in the dummy at trick three, then lead the 8 at trick four. East will play the 10 , and you should try the ${ }^{2}$ J. If this loses to the $\underset{\sim}{2}$, you will lose 800 points, but you were already in a bad position since $4 \boldsymbol{4}$ would have been defeated on a 2-2 club split. However, if West discards, you can now play the and you will be defeated by two tricks. Losing 500 points will allow you to outscore any N/S pairs whose opponents bid and made 4.


When should you 'lead safe'? As a defender, our primary goal is to beat the opponents' contract. But many defenders take this too far, attacking every possible suit and often giving away tricks in the process. Leading away from a king or queen can be good if there's a chance of setting up tricks, but it isn't so good if it gives a trick away unnecessarily. The following hand is typical.


Partner begins with the $\mathbf{7}$ (2nd highest) and our A wins the trick. So, what to play at trick two?
Typically, we don't lead back partner's suit after a second highest lead. After all, partner has told us that they have led from a bad suit. But what suit should we switch to? Both of our red suits look strong, but is that really such a good idea? Leading away from an honour works when partner can help out with honours of their own. But here a diamond and a heart are both fraught with danger.
With the QQ in dummy, what are we hoping to achieve by attacking the suit? Even if partner has the ace, it won't be especially helpful since dummy has four hearts. It's more likely that declarer has the ace and that leading a heart will give away a trick that we could have made by waiting for declarer to play a heart to the queen in their own time.
What about a diamond? A diamond looks more appealing than a heart as the suit in dummy is shorter. But it's still not very safe.

South has shown 15-16 points. If we add that to our hand and dummy's, we can confirm that partner has $3-4$ points. On a good day, that could be the $\$$, but even then, what is the reason to switch to a diamond? The A will eventually score a trick no matter what we do, and we will still be missing the $\downarrow$, making it impossible to score more tricks in the suit.
With both red suits out of the picture, it may seem obvious to lead a club, but even that is a dangerous proposition. You may think that we can't possibly give a trick away since we aren't underleading an honour. In a way, you would be right, but you may still help declarer.
Declarer opened a club so they must have at least four of them, and they could very well have a guess in the suit. If the cards are as above, declarer has a guess to make. They do not know who to play for the and could very well go wrong. But if you play a club, they just need to play the jack or ten and the finesse will take itself.

You might think the solution to these problems is to tear up your cards and leave the table, but there is still one suit left to consider. And that suit is spades. The spade suit in dummy is so good and so sturdy, there are no tricks to be won and no tricks to be given away.
You are unlikely to beat the contract by returning a spade, but you are guaranteed not to give a trick away.
Partner did well to find such a safe lead. Well done partner.

## WHEN TO LEAD AN ACE

Aces are cool. They are, after all, the most powerful card in the deck. Only the mighty trump can fell an ace and, as such, they should be held in great respect. They should also be held onto for as long as possible.
A common mistake I see frequently is leading unsupported aces. 'Aces are there to catch the kings', and if you're the one leading the ace, your opponents aren't exactly going to throw their kings under it.


In the first two example layouts, it is clear why it is wrong for West to cash the
In the first example, cashing the ace sets up declarer's king for free. It is much better to wait until partner is on lead - that way they can lead the queen through declarer's king - or wait for declarer to lead the suit from either hand.

The same is even true in the second example. If we cash the ace, declarer's queen will hang over partner's king.

Clearly, leading an unsupported ace is not all it's cracked up to be, but this still begs the question. When should you lead an ace?


In the second two examples, with the king backing up the ace, we don't run into the same problem. In deal 3 we can't continue spades after leading the ace, but the lead itself hasn't set up a trick. The king still hovers over the queen and we can wait for partner to get in to continue the suit.
In example 4, partner can encourage the lead and we can take the first four tricks (in no trumps).
AK leads are very good for cashing tricks against NT contracts, but how do they fare against suit contracts?

Continued overleaf

You pick up the West hand and must find a lead against $4 \boldsymbol{s}$ after the following auction:


On the face of it, any lead could be right.
A trump lead could work when declarer needs to ruff a suit in dummy. A top heart could work when we need to give partner a ruff. And either minor jack could work when we need to lead through dummy's holding (like through a king when partner has AQ).
With so many possibilities, you may as well pull a lead out at random. Let's look at the full hand to see what was right:


On this occasion, the was the best lead. With the king in dummy and partner with the AQ , we can score three easy tricks and later come to a heart trick for one down.

You might call it unlucky if you had led a trump. After all, declarer might have needed to ruff the heart suit in the dummy. You
might also call it unlucky if you had lead the © J, rather than the \% J. After all, the diamond suit was slightly better.

But would you have called it unlucky if you had led the $\vee$ A? Sure, on this hand, there was nothing to be gained from a top heart lead. There were not many tricks to be cashed and there was no ruff to take in partner's hand. And while that may be true, there is still one thing left to consider. You are still on lead.

The almighty AK lead is the best in the game because it gives you a second chance because even when it's wrong, it allows you to find the right lead at trick two. On this deal, it doesn't matter what the best lead is. Lead the ace from AK, take a look at the dummy, and then figure out what's best.
When else should you lead an ace? Probably against 7NT. That would be a good lead, I think.

## When to lead a singleton

When should you lead a singleton? The simple answer is as often as possible - as long as it isn't a trump and as long as you aren't defending against no trumps.

If declarer is in a trump contract, it means they want to ruff things in one hand or the other. As much as they may dislike this fact, declarer isn't the only one who can do this. The defence are just as capable of giving each other ruffs and should do so whenever possible.
Leading a singleton is the simplest way to score a ruff - which in turn is the simplest way to score a trick. By leading your singleton at trick one, you get off to the best possible start and, if you're lucky, partner will have the ace and can give you a ruff.
Scoring a ruff is the only way to beat the contact on this deal:


On this hand, we could try leading a spade (4th highest of our longest and strongest after all), but what do we need for that to be right? First, we need partner to have some good cards in spades, and then we need to be able to cash those spade tricks, which isn't super likely since declarer will be able to ruff them eventually.

On the other hand, we could lead our singleton. For that to be right, we only need to ruff once.

On a club lead, partner will win with the ace and give us a ruff, confident that your lead was a singleton when declarer follows to the trick.

On this deal, we were a little lucky that partner had the A, but leading a singleton can even work when partner doesn't have the ace. Let's make a small adjustment to the previous hand.


This time partner's ace is in spades rather than clubs and the contract is still beaten on a club lead. After winning trick one, declarer plays a heart to our ace and we need to find partner with an entry so they can give us a ruff. We can clearly see the $A$ in dummy, so the only possible entry is in spades. And
would you know it - partner has the $\boldsymbol{A}$ and can return a club for a ruff.

Of course, you don't have to make such a killing lead at trick one.


Partner leads the $\mathbf{~} 3$ (4th highest) and we win with the ace.

Years of training have taught us always to
lead back partner's suit - the memories of partner's annoyed glare remain fresh in our minds - but we shouldn't let such things affect how we play at the table.
A heart return does not look good because declarer will be able to ruff the hearts eventually. There is little to be gained by returning the suit, and there is much to be gained elsewhere. Our best chance of beating the contract is to find partner with the A and switch to a club straight away.
When you don't lead back a heart, partner should appreciate that you must have a good reason. After scratching their head for a couple of minutes, they figure out that you must have switched to a singleton and plays one back.

Declarer looks quite annoyed when you ruff, and then looks even more annoyed when you play a heart back to partner's king for a second ruff. Two down and all you had to do was switch to your singleton.
Bridge is a simple game really.

Books and articles on opening leads often tend to focus on two themes - good opening leads and teams (IMP) play. But life is rarely as simple as that. On a lot of hands there is no good opening lead, and most of the time you find yourself trying to decide between four suits, any of which can be bad on any given specific hand, so you have to decide what is the 'least bad'.

If you play mainly club bridge, then you will be playing almost exclusively pairs (matchpoints). Leading at pairs is very different from leading at teams. At teams, all that matters is beating the contract. If you are on lead against $4 \boldsymbol{\wedge}$, all your thought should be on what lead is most likely to break the contract. It is more or less
irrelevant whether you take two or three tricks (1 IMP) or whether you take four or five tricks (2-3 IMPs) but very IMPortant as to whether you take three or four tricks (10-12 IMPs). At pairs, assuming the opposition are in the 'normal' contract, every trick is more or less the same. It is no good taking four tricks against 4 if everyone else is taking five tricks; it is no good taking two tricks if everyone else is taking three tricks. You will get the same bottom in those scenarios just as much as if you take three tricks and everyone else is taking four thereby beating the contract. So in this article I am going to concentrate on defending against suit contracts in pairs play. Try and pick the best lead from the five hands on the following page.

| Hand 1 |
| :--- |
| 6 |
| Q9742 |
| A 72 |
| J532 |


| Hand 2 |
| :--- |
| K1054 |
| A5 |
| AJ42 |
| Q93 |


| Hand 3 |
| :--- |
| J J 65 |
| AJ73 |
| KJ4 |
| Q 106 |



## Choose from:

(a) 66; (b) a heart; (c) a diamond; (d) a club


Choose from:
(a) a spade; (b) a heart (c) a diamond; (d) a club

|  | South | West | North | East |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | 1NT | Pass | $2{ }^{1}$ | Pass |
|  | 24 | Pass | $3 \stackrel{1}{2}^{2}$ | Pass |
|  | 44 | All Pas |  |  |
| 1 | Stayman; | 2 Invita |  |  |

Choose from:
(a) a spade; (b) a heart (c) a diamond; (d) a club


| South | West | North | East |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  |  | 1 * | Pass |
| $2{ }^{1}$ | Pass | $3 \$^{2}$ | Pass |
| $34^{3}$ | Pass | 44 | All Pass |

${ }^{1}$ Strong, natural; ${ }^{2}$ More diamonds;
${ }^{3}$ More spades
Choose from:
(a) a spade; (b) a heart (c) a diamond; (d) a club


## ANSWER

The opponents have had an uninformative auction. You don't know whether they are stretching or have values to spare, only that responder has an invitational hand.
(a) 46: 1 mark. An old adage used to be 'When in doubt, lead a trump'. It is a terrible adage. It general, it is not right to lead trumps against suit contracts - you need a good reason to do so. Think about this - when you are declarer, what is the thing you most often do when you gain the lead? Draw trumps. So if it is generally right for declarer to lead trumps, how can it be right for the defence to lead them all the time? This is triply so with a singleton trump. Unless you are defending against
an obvious sacrifice a singleton trump is usually a very poor lead. It does not set up tricks and worse than that will carve up any holding in partner's hand: Qxx, KJx, AJx and lots of other holdings are likely to make fewer tricks if you lead your singleton trump. It is true that you do not have a very attractive lead outside of trumps, but that does not mean that you should give in and refuse to make a decision by leading your singleton trump.
(b) a heart: 10 marks; (YQ: 1 mark). This would be my choice, both because I need slightly less in partner's hand for it to be right and because I have more length in the suit so I may need to set up a trick before declarer can get a discard and because it is less likely to give a trick away simply because declarer is likely to have fewer combined cards in the suit. You should of course lead the card your partnership style says (4th highest or 5th highest or whatever). Leading the queen will confuse everyone, but more likely partner than declarer.
(c) a diamond: 2 marks ( $\downarrow$ A: 4 marks). If anyone reads the column in the printed magazine you will know that it now has
computer simulations run by Nathan Piper. You will also know that Nathan's computer 'loves' ace leads, and it would not surprise me if the computer led the A on this hand. However, it needs to be remembered that both the computer leader and the computer declarer will always play double dummy so, for example, it will always take two-way finesses the correct way, etc etc. In real life, I believe a diamond lead is extremely likely to give a trick away, and I would avoid it. But if you must lead a diamond, at least lead the ace. You hold the lead and can often tell whether to continue or what to switch to.
(d) a club: 7 marks; (J): 1 mark). A club is, in my view, slightly more dangerous than a heart. There are many holdings in partner's hand that a club lead will help declarer play the suit to advantage ( Kx , Qxx, Ax to name but a few) and gain more tricks than they would do left to themselves. Hence, I regard a club as inferior to a heart, but better than either pointed suit (spades and diamonds). Again, lead whatever card your partnership leading style tells you to.

Y ou are sitting West. Choose your lead:

| Hand 2 |
| :--- |
| K 1054 |
| 85 |
| AJ 42 |
| Q 93 |


| South | West | North | East |
| :--- | :--- | :--- | :--- |
| $1 \%$ | Pass | $1 \boldsymbol{~}$ | Pass |
| 2 | Pass | 2 | All Pass |

## ANSWER

Here we know more about the hand. Declarer has 5+ hearts and 4+ clubs and not enough to try for game, and dummy has $4+$ spades, at most three hearts (and quite likely two), not four clubs (or very unlikely) and a fairly weak hand (at most about a 10 count or they would have made a game try).
(a) a spade: $\mathbf{1 0}$ marks. On auctions such as this, it is often right to lead dummy's suit.

Yes, this could be disastrous (dummy having Axxx and declarer Qx for example, or dummy having AQxx and declarer either void or Jx) but so could anything else be disastrous. It is far more likely that this will give nothing that declarer could not have done for themselves. Declarer is often very short in dummy's suit on these kind of hands (they will almost never have three cards for example) and so this can often start a 'forcing defence' against declarer which could well be successful making declarer ruff enough times they end up short of trumps. It is also least likely of all the suits to give a trick away, which is paramount against partscores, particularly at pairs.
(b) a heart: 1 mark. This is my last choice of lead. It will carve up any holding partner has, and partner could well have four trumps and might make a couple of
tricks in the suit if you do not lead them. The usual reason to lead trumps is because you are worried about the short trump hand taking ruffs. On auctions like these it is very rare that dummy has any ruffing potential.
(c) a diamond: 3 marks ( $\mathrm{A}: 5$ marks). Often people feel the default lead is the 'unbid suit' but again this needs to be taken in context. There is no need to lead the unbid suit from a dangerous holding and they do not come much more dangerous than this one. I just prefer the ace to a low one as sometimes declarer has a holding like singleton king, but really I would look elsewhere.
(d) 3: 2 marks; ( 1 mark). Just as it is often right to lead through dummy's suit, it is rarely right to lead round into declarer's suit. It could be OK, but it is heavily against the odds.


|  | South | West | North | East |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | 1NT | Pass | $2{ }^{1}$ | Pass |
|  | 24 | Pass | $3{ }^{2}$ | Pass |
|  | 49 | All Pas |  |  |
| 1 | Stayman; | 2 Invita |  |  |

## ANSWER

Here we know more about the hand. Declarer is balanced with four to five spades and fewer than four hearts (assuming standard Stayman responses). Responder has an invitational hand, so they do not have many values to spare.
(a) a spade: 10 marks. I have just spent a page telling you not to lead trumps, and now I give top marks to a trump lead. Is it then safe? No, far from it. It is possible partner has Qx for example and you have just given up your trick in the suit. Why do I suggest it then? Because everything else is worse! Consider the bidding. The oppo have bid to $4 \boldsymbol{\Phi}$ and therefore probably have $24+$ HCP between them. You have 12. That leaves precious little for partner, and what tricks you make on this hand are likely to be from your hand. So you need to protect your high cards at all costs. Your aim is to give as little away as possible, and the trump is least likely to do harm.
(b) a heart: 1 mark ( $\vee$ A: 3 marks). A low heart might confuse everyone, but it is the
most dangerous of these suits to lead from. The ace is not much better, but I suppose you might just catch partner with a singleton or something. Not my choice though.
(c) a diamond: 3 marks. This is essentially playing partner to hold the queen or the ace. Otherwise it certainly gives a happy declarer a trick..
(d) 6: 7 marks; (eQ/10: 1 mark). If I was not going to lead a trump, this would be my choice. The jack is good enough in partner's hand not to give away a trick, and if partner has nothing in the suit it may not cost ( $\mathrm{A} / \mathrm{KJx}$ in the dummy for example). On these kind of hands it is always something of a guess as to what partner has, but you should try and play as safe as possible.

Y ou are sitting West. Choose your lead:

```
Hand 4
- Q7
` K9763
- Q103
& K64
```

|  | South | West | North | East |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
|  | 14 | Pass | $3 \mathbf{1}^{1}$ | Pass |
|  | 4. | All Pass |  |  |
| 1 | Invitation |  |  |  |

## ANSWER

Again, other than knowing responder has an invitational hand with spades, we know little about the hand.
(a) a spade: 1 mark. This is not a good lead. You have quite a good chance of making your queen - but not if you lead the suit.
(b) a heart: 3 marks ( $\vee \mathrm{K}: 1$ mark). There is no reason to suppose you need to be aggressive on this hand. Try and find the safest lead, and leading from your kings is not it.
(c) a diamond: $\mathbf{1 0}$ marks. This is the safest lead on this hand (none are safe but at least it is the best you can do).
(d) a club: 7 marks; (eK: 1 mark). For the reasons given above this is not a great lead. I slightly prefer it to a heart in that you have less length in the suit, so it may not cost. For example, if the holdings are Axx opposite Qxx in dummy you still have a trick eventually whereas, if they are Axx opposite Qx in dummy you do not. This is a little more likely in hearts as you have more hearts than clubs.

Continued overleaf

## LEADS SUMMARY ~ KEY POINTS

1 Always, but always, notice the bidding and think about what that tells you about the hand. Your lead will be influenced by all of these considerations.
$\because$ Does the auction suggest that they are stretching or only have just about the right number of points?
$\because$ Does the auction suggest partner might have significant values?
$\because$ Does the auction suggest balanced hands?
$\because$ Does the auction suggest they have lots of values and/or lots of tricks?
$\because$ Does the auction suggest they might have a suit to set up and run for discards?

2 It is not usually right to lead trumps - far less often than is generally thought.
3 Unless you have a good lead, look for the suit that is least likely to give a trick away, unless the auction indicates otherwise.
4 It is often right to lead dummy's suit (particularly in partscores) far more often than is thought.
$s$ it wrong to fiddle with the bidding box, before deciding what to bid?

It is bad practice to fiddle with the bidding box before you have decided what to bid - it is a source of information to everyone else at the table, information which may be useful to the opponents and information which partner will have to avoid taking advantage of. When you start fiddling with the bidding cards, it will be obvious what bids you are considering, whether you are considering passing, or that you are considering doubling. All this information is 'unauthorised information' to partner, who must carefully avoid taking any advantage from that information.
When choosing your call, keep your hands still, think if you need to, and only once you have decided what to bid, select the appropriate card from the bidding box and put the call neatly on the table.

Why does the leader choose the lead before questions - who can ask questions before the opening lead is made (face down)?

After the last pass of the auction, the bidding cards should be left on the table. At this point the person who makes the opening lead can ask questions about the opponents' auction in order to inform their choice of opening lead - and only that person can ask questions. When the person making the opening lead has made their choice, they should put their opening lead face down on the table and now the other defender and the declarer can ask questions. This is done now to avoid questions, or answers from the other defender, influencing the choice of opening lead. Once the questions have dried up, the person who made the opening lead asks 'No more questions?' (or 'No questions?'), the bidding cards are picked up and the opening lead is faced before dummy is spread.

Am I entitled to ask questions during the auction - are there dangers of doing so?

During the auction you can ask questions about the opponents' bidding, but only when it's your turn to call. You can ask about bids from earlier in the auction, not just the opponents' bids after you last called - whether there has been an alert or announcement or not. A player can ask about the opponents' bidding even if they are likely to pass. If you don't need to know you can wait and ask questions when the auction is over.
The main danger from asking questions is that it shows interest in particular calls made by opponents which can give information to partner about your hand. This information is 'unauthorised information' to partner, who must carefully avoid taking any advantage from it. But if you need to ask, you should ask - and partner will have to cope with not taking advantage.

Why are artificial bids above 3 NT not alerted unless they are made on the first round?

Artificial bids are alerted except when they are both above 3NT and after the first round of bidding. So ...

| West | East |
| :--- | :--- |
| $1 \downarrow$ | $4 \star^{\mathrm{A}}$ |
| ${ }^{\mathrm{A}}$ splinter |  |

the 4 (splinter) is alerted on this auction as it's the made in the first round, but ...

the 4 (splinter) on this auction is not alerted. The reason for the apparent anomaly is that, after the first round N/S will probably not need to know what the
bids mean until the end of the auction. If both sides are bidding it will be obvious that the bids could be artificial (in which case the opponent should ask if necessary). The alerts of potentially artificial bids in a slam auction may serve to help the side which is bidding to keep on the same wavelength even though they should not use information from partner's alerts and explanations.

At the end of the auction, before making the opening lead, the defender on lead should ask for an explanation of the auction if there are bids above 3 NT , and once they have chosen their lead their partner can also ask questions.
f I completely mess up in defence and declarer makes their contract and dummy says 'Very well played partner' is this gloating - against 'Best Behaviour at Bridge' guidance (see page 66)?

Some players, when dummy, as a matter of courtesy, wish partner luck when they put dummy down; and then at the end of the hand, compliment partner on their play -'well played partner' or perhaps 'good try partner', if declarer has gone down. This also happens online, and there are abbreviations glp for 'good luck partner', wpp, and gtp. Both online and face-to-face, declarer may not have done anything special, and indeed dummy may not have been following the play at all. This is all well-intentioned and is regarded as good etiquette.

The EBU White Book says that a genuine compliment to partner for a well-played hand is not considered gloating and is not a breach of 'Best Behaviour at Bridge'.

But if dummy says 'Very well played partner' in a knowing way, and declarer has done nothing special, but has just benefited from some obvious misdefence, then this is gloating and is not acceptable.

## Journey of a Bridge Player

How long have you been playing bridge? Some people play regularly, enjoying the social element and finding their level. Others go to classes for years, enjoying the lessons but hardly putting the concepts into practice. Others are ambitious. Bridge takes a hold in their imagination and they see an English Cap beckoning.

If you want to really improve at bridge you have to play against good players, and you have to ask for advice. It's rude to tell people where they went wrong at the table, so if you would like to know if you could have bid or played better, you may need to ask.

Here's a suggestion of the competitions you might join as you climb the master point ranks. These tournaments give you the chance to meet better players and learn from them.

Did they deceive you could you copy that? Did they catch your singleton king how did they know? Did they put you on lead at the end, so you had to give a trick away . . . mmm . . . something to think about?

There are other things to do as you get your feet under the table at a club. Please volunteer to join the committee - it's not just for the best players and should consist of all levels. The views of the newest members are often under-represented on the club committees. You might want to introduce mentoring evenings, or a social event or a 'date night' to find potential new partners.

There's lots you can do for the club and for your own bridge satisfaction. Here's what you might feel ready for.

|  | MASTER POINT RANKS |
| :---: | :--- |
| Local | Why not try out a café bridge. You will enjoy these wonderful <br> relaxed occasions where you stroll between watering holes <br> playing a couple of hands at each and meeting lots of people. <br> It's sociable and it's not a bit scary. You'd also be very welcome <br> at charity bridge events and might consider a bridge holiday. |
| Club | You've had a few good results to get this far - congratulations! <br> You can stop feeling nervous. Enjoy yourself and familiarise <br> yourself with the county website to see what's happening <br> locally, and check out My EBU to see your sessions and how <br> you are doing on the National Grading Scheme (NGS). There's <br> lots to see. |
| Area | OK - You are certainly ready for some county events. Check <br> out the website to see what's going on - counties typically run <br> various pairs and teams events, some of which are 'Swiss'. This <br> means that after the first round you will play people with a <br> similar score to yours. Start looking for a partner who might <br> want to accompany you, and perhaps some team mates. Most <br> counties run a County League with several divisions - form a <br> team - it's great fun. There are also handicapped events where <br> your NGS grade is taken into account. |
| District | You could now look at joining a Green-Pointed event. These <br> are run F2F by counties or there are OODGP (Online One-Day <br> Green Point) events run by the EBU. Green points are usually <br> awarded at a higher rate than the points you earn in a club <br> session, as the competition is generally more serious, and they <br> will be needed for some of the ranks you might be aiming for <br> in the future. You will be a regular club player by now, and <br> might consider joining the club committee. |
| County |  |\(\left|\begin{array}{l}Congratulations - this is known as a Landmark Promotion. It's <br>

a big one. You are ready to join anything. Make the most of <br>
what's on offer. As an added incentive your EBU account is <br>
credited with a £25 voucher to use against entry for any EBU- <br>
organised event. You'll find it on My EBU.\end{array}\right|\)

In another life, I was asked what the best part of my job was. The people, I instantly replied. And the worst part? The people! Same with bridge, you'll love some, not others. But the challenge of overcoming opposition, making that play you read about last week, finally understanding and carrying out an end play. It's as good as ${ }^{* * *}$ and if you are as old as me, it's better!

You now play regularly in your club and have seen a county event advertised on the noticeboard. Should I, shouldn't I? Don't vacillate, enter it! And remember to look on your county website (and the EBU website if you want to try something more adventurous). Competitions bring a wealth of new challenges. At county level and above you'll play against some experienced and better players. If your expert oppos look friendly, and more than a few are, grab the opportunity with
both hands - ask them if you could or should have done something better or differently. Yes, you might have to be a bit bold to ask but honestly it is well worth it. As the saying goes ... think of them in fewer clothes than they are wearing, and you will realise that they, too, are part of the same human race.

The more people that you play against, the more the experience will bring your game on - the more this happens the more enjoyment you will have and, as a side issue, the more friendships you will make. You will have your successes and your failures, but the thing with failure in bridge is that it is there to help you to learn from the pitfalls into which you may have fallen. It's all a learning curve, a massive challenge, and don't let anyone tell you bridge is only a game. It's a wonderful way of life.


Hats off to a national event where any pair can win, or do well. It's certainly a competition to consider entering.
The principle of handicapping is well established in many sports such as golf and horse racing and in games such as chess. The stronger contender has to accept a disadvantage such as more weight to carry or less time, or fewer shots. The desired outcome of the handicapping process is to make a competition meaningful. The perfect outcome would result in everybody finishing equal first ... or last. Of course, it doesn't work out like that as both horses and bridge players can play better or less well than expected on the day but handicaps give everybody an equal chance of their day in the spotlight.
The National Grading System in bridge is perfectly suited for handicap competitions. A lower-rated pair can compete on equal terms with a couple of stars. It has been used in many clubs either regularly or as an annual event.

In the National Handicapped Pairs Championship your rating (handicap) will be based on the average NGS of you and
your partner. To do well you simply have to play better than expected based on your NGS - anyone can win this event just by having a sufficiently good day!

The event will be played both F2F at clubs around the country, and online, with the results from heats combined and match-pointed across the field, like a
simultaneous pairs event. There will be blue points at national level to the top third of the field and prizes too based on the overall handicapped ranking list. Perhaps more important than points and prizes is the joy and delight for lowerranked players who finish near the top, and that could be you!


## Relaxed 6-high games on BBO

Join the EBED 6-high Relaxed Games on Bridge Base Online

$$
\begin{gathered}
\text { Every Wednesday at 2pm } \\
\text { - only \$3.50 - }
\end{gathered}
$$

Specifically for players with an NGS no higher than a 6, these games are run with experienced teachers to hand, with a Zoom discussion afterwards. If you are in need of a partner, please let us know and we will help.

For more information: mark@ebedcio.org.uk

## Relaxed 9-high games on BBO

Join the EBU daily 9-high Relaxed Games on Bridge Base Online, at 11am or 7.30pm

Daily12-board games only \$2.30
These games are for players without too much experience, with an NGS no higher than 9, and run at a slower pace than our other regular daily games.

For more information: www.ebu.co.uk/competitions/events-less-experienced-players or Tel: 01296317203

Both the English Bridge Union and English Bridge Education and Development are offering games for progressing players (Up to 6 and 9 on the NGS*) - see left - and look out for other games organised by teachers, clubs and your county. It's a great way to take a step into duplicate bridge - nothing improves play as much as playing! Members who need to buy BB\$ to play in paid games should buy them through the BBO website and not through the app, which often adds on a significant surcharge. Here are testimonials from people who have taken part in games specifically for less-experienced players:
Many thanks for your input regarding Saturday's tournament - really enjoyed it looking forward to the next.
I really enjoyed the event and thank you for sorting us out with another pair.
I was very nervous at the start but thoroughly enjoyed it. Thank you.
Hadn't played more than 16 boards before, didn't realise you could play as many as 24!

Thank you for organising the event, really enjoyed the afternoon even if we didn't do very well. Let me know when the next one is.
Excellent experience, thank you for inviting us to play.
Although daunting, the Midlands teams tournaments 9-high and 6-high this year have been excellent experience, getting us newbies ready to get back to club play asap and face the experienced players with more confidence.

The ability to look back at the hands played in the EBU daily U9s tournaments has really helped my play. I can talk though our games with partner and apply the lessons learned to our conventions and play. So much more helpful than playing in friendlies on BBO or club games against really experienced players where we can't easily understand their bidding.
Ref 9-high and 6-high events: These events are great fun; you could describe it as speed dating meets online bridge (not that I've tried the former!). Seriously though, in the two events in which I participated, I've met players, in their homes, from as far afield as Cornwall to Derbyshire, and Northampton to the Welsh borders. It's terrific to discover there are so many people around the country enjoying the game as much as me!
${ }^{*}$ for details of the NGS see page 65

## Master Points

The Master Point Scheme is run by the EBU. Master Points are awarded for finishing in the top third in competitions run by the EBU, counties and affiliated clubs, or external competitions licensed by the EBU. The points are awarded on a scale according to the size and status of the competition.

Master Points are credited to your account automatically - you do not need to do anything.

## Local, Blue, Green \& Gold points

Local points (black points) are typically awarded in club competitions. Blue points are awarded in some club and County competitions, some minor national competitions, and in the EBU's Simultaneous Pairs. Green points are awarded in most national events, and select county competitions. Gold Points are not part of the main Master Point scheme. They are a separate scheme, used to recognise the current 'form' of elite players.

## RaNKINGS

There are over a dozen different rankings which you can achieve. The early ranks are reached by most players. The top
ranks are only achieved by a small percentage of members in their lifetime. A list of rankings can be seen here.

To reach some rankings you must earn green points, rewarding those who take part in higher level competitions. Your ranking is calculated automatically, and can be seen on My EBU.

## Promotions

All promotions (other than for those members who have chosen not to be listed) are on our website, with a new list posted every month. Click here for a link to Promotions.

Promotion to one of four landmark ranks is recognised by a listing in English Bridge magazine, and the receipt of a certificate. Those achieving the rank of Master receive free entry to the annual Masters Pairs event. Click for a link to the Masters Pairs.

## ANNUAL COMPETITION

There is an annual Master Point competition, with prizes for winners in various categories and covering all ranks. For details see www.ebu.co.uk/masterpoint-reports.

If you do not wish to appear on any promotions list, you can change the setting on your preferences in My EBU.

TThe National Grading Scheme (NGS) measures an individual's current level of performance when playing duplicate bridge.

Unlike the Master Point Scheme (see p64), which reflects lifetime achievement, the NGS reflects an individual's current standard of play. It can go down as well as up.

Your grade is calculated automatically based on the results submitted to the EBU, and is updated each time you play. In simple terms, it looks at how well you performed compared to what would be expected against the opposition you are facing, and given the standard of your partner.

Grades are divided into 13 bands, ranging from a 'Two' through to an 'Ace'. The Ace category is then subdivided, with very few players reaching an Ace of Spades.

When you first start playing in duplicate tournaments you won't have a grade as you have not played enough hands for one to be calculated. Your grade is not published, and your partner's NGS will not be affected, until you have played 150 boards. Once you have played 150 boards, but less than 1,000, your grade is considered to be 'evolving'. Once you have played 1,000 boards
you have a 'mature' grade. Your grade (between 0 \& 100) represents the percentage score it is estimated you could expect on average if you hypothetically played with a player of the same grade, against a field of average (50) strength.
You can see your grade, how recent results have affected it, and the grade of your different partners and partnerships, on My EBU. Grades are available publicly at www.ebu.co.uk/ngs. If you wish to hide your grade so it is not made public, you can change the setting on your preferences in My EBU - your grade will still be calculated, and you will still be able to see it in My EBU.

## What affects your grade?

Your grade is affected only by how well you and your partner perform relative to expectations. It doesn't matter if you play with an international or a beginner, and in a club game or a national competition. All that matters is whether you got a better score than the scheme thinks you should have done, given who you were playing with and who you were playing against.

There are some myths that the NGS doesn't work in certain scenarios. Many were dispelled in a historical article at: www.ebu.co.uk/documents/miscellaneous/ngs/clark-article.pdf and we have recent research that confirms this.

## Best Behaviour at Bridge

##  0

$\checkmark$ Greet others in a friendly manner prior to the start of play on each round.
$\downarrow$ Be a good 'host' or 'guest' at the table.
$\checkmark$ Make your system card readily available to your opponents and fill it out completely (required).
$\checkmark$ Make bridge enjoyable for yourself, partner and opponents.
$\checkmark$ Give credit when opponents make a good bid or play.
$\checkmark$ Be friendly to novices \& help them to enjoy the game.
$\checkmark$ Take care of your personal grooming.
$\checkmark$ Ensure that your mobile phone is turned off.
$\checkmark$ Enjoy the company as well as the game.
Remember that it is rude to criticise your partner or opponents in public, to be less than polite at the table, to gloat over good results or object to a call for the tournament director or to impolitely argue about a director's ruling, or generally to make any personal and disparaging remark.

The small print:
As in all games that are governed by rules and regulations, bad behaviour will be penalised ....

If a player at the table behaves in an unacceptable manner, the director should be called immediately. Annoying behaviour, embarrassing remarks, or any other conduct which might interfere with the enjoyment of the game is specifically prohibited by Law 74A. Law 91A gives the director the authority to assess disciplinary penalties. This can include immediate disciplinary board penalties and may lead to disqualification from the current event. In addition any violation may result in a disciplinary hearing where a player's future participation in tournaments will be considered.

## Please call the Director if you think you

 may have been affected by bad behaviour.You will be helping others as well as yourselves.


Every member of an EBU club is automatically a member of the EBU _ which includes access to a personal web portal called My EBU. This has been developed and improved over many years, and enables members to view and analyse their results, see their master point progress, and book events of every kind, from social bridge to top congresses.

## LogGing on

The first step with My EBU is to log on. To do that, head for the EBU home page and click or tap the red link called My EBU. On a smartphone, there is no red link but there is a Menu you can tap, with My EBU the top link.

That will get you to the $\log$ in screen. Here, you need to know your EBU number and your password. Your club secretary or scorer can tell you your number, if you are not sure. If you have forgotten your password, or never had one, follow the link for that and enter your

number in our password reset page. This depends on the EBU knowing your email address. If nothing seems to work, call us on 01296317200 and we will sort it out!

## Your Sessions

The first page you will see in My EBU is a list of all the sessions you have played this year. There is a lot of information here and it can be confusing. It starts with the date, which is easy enough, and then the

SID (Session ID) which you can safely ignore! Then comes the club where the session was played, your partner, and the score, normally a percentage but sometimes a plus or minus figure showing the IMPs (International Match Points) for a teams match. Next it shows the master point award, and after that three figures relating to the NGS (National Grading Scheme).

What is the NGS? This is a grade which is an approximation of your current bridge performance relative to everyone else! If it is $50 \%$ you are exactly in the middle, though a low NGS is nothing to worry about; what really counts is enjoying the game. It is always nice to improve though, and the three figures shown for every NGS-graded session tell you how you did. The first is the SOpp - Standard of Opposition - which tells you how strong or weak the session was. Again it is a percentage; above $50 \%$ means the players were above average overall. Any player will expect to score less well in a strong field.

Then comes the Par. This is how you did considering your own grade before the session alongside the SOpp. If it is positive and green, you did well; if it is red and negative, better luck next time! Finally, the NGS column shows your grade following the session.

You can also sneak a look at how everyone else in the session did. Click the link in the Club column to see all the scores and NGS results. It is quite fun to sort by the NGS column; then you see who really did well, considering their normal result, as opposed
to simply seeing the usual suspects towards the top.

The NGS tab gives you another view of your grade performance, with a pretty chart and a list of your partnerships. The NGS gurus tell us that the partnership grades are more accurate than individual grades, a point to ponder!

## MASTER POINTS

Unlike the NGS grade, your master points can only go up with the exception of Gold points! Click or tap the Masterpoints tab at the top of the My EBU screen to see your current totals and rank. You can also click to view your Personal Masterpoint Report which shows how you ranked in the last year compared to others in your club, county and nationally.

Utilities menu: here you can find entries for booking events and courses as well as other features. Using Book Events, you can secure your place in any current EBU event - though be careful, as some events have specific entry requirements. You can find out more about the competitive events here www.ebu.co.uk/competitions/eventssummary

Magazine menu: here you can find recent issues of the English Bridge and Discovery magazines, as well as a link to the web library of older issues.

Account: This menu has several options including My Details, a page where you can set your preferences and information for various things. Some to note:
Date of birth: Please fill this in if not already done! It helps us in planning and we will not divulge your birthday to anyone!
Magazine/Diary preferences: We only send the diary to those who want one, to save cost and postage. Tell us here if you want it. You will receive the magazine unless you opt out - in which case you can still read it online. Two players in one household receive one copy of the paper magazine unless they request for more copies to a single household.
Anonymous, Public Masterpoints and NGS Preference: These settings control whether other people can see your grade and points record. Some feel they enjoy bridge more without thinking about their grades, so if that is you, you might want to hide them out of the way!

DID YOU KNOW you can use your club's website to analyse hands you have played?

Many clubs use BridgeWebs to host their website. The results are uploaded to the site and hand records and analysis are usually available. If it was an online game you may even be able to see the bidding and play on each board.

Bridge can throw up some intriguing results! A hand I placed recently had N/S playing in 3 NT and making 10 tricks at one table, while at another E/W played in 2 NT and made 6 tricks - getting an outright top! How was it that the two sides made such a divergent number of tricks, both in no trumps?

If the game was played online, BridgeWebs, or strictly the Bridge Solver Online (BSOL), can tell you. Head to your club's BridgeWebs site and find the session. Click on a pair or player in the ranking. You will see on the right that you can select any board by clicking on its number, and below the board, the results for all the pairs that played the board.
Now, how was it played? The method depends on whether you use the Classic or 2022 version of the results page - this is an
option towards the top of the page. Here is how to replay it: In the Classic edition, click the Play button by the result you want to replay.

|  |  |  | View | Larg |  | Play it | again |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Board No 11 None Vul Dealer South |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| NS | EW | Bid | By | Ld | Tks | +Sc | -sc + - | Play |
| 4 | 1 | 2NT | S | * | 8 | 120 | 24 | Play |
| 5 | 3 | 2NT | S | * | 10 | 180 | 42 | Play |
| 6 | 8 | 3NT | S | * | 10 | 430 |  | Play |
|  | 2 | 2NT | W |  | 6 | 100 | 06 | Play |

This will open the hand viewer. You may be prompted to choose which hand viewer to use. If so, I suggest you select BSOL (Bridge Solver Online), created by John and Miriam Goacher for the bridge community. The board will open showing the bidding at that table. What is a bit less obvious is that you now need to click the highlighted box in the 'Possible contracts' grid for the suit and player for that board. If you click on the matching box, you will get arrow buttons that let you step through the board card by card as it was played, complete with an analysis showing how many tricks can be made by the pair about to play, according to which card is chosen and assuming perfect play from both sides.

In the example below, West will only make three tricks against best defence, in the hopeless contract of 2 NT , indicated by the small number 3 in the two possible cards that can be played to the opening trick.

| -KQ108 <br> -K7653 <br> - $\mathrm{A}_{3}{ }^{1} 7_{3}$ |  | 11 |  |  | $\begin{aligned} & \text { ¢ } \because 100 \\ & \text { - } 963 \\ & 102 \\ & +984 \end{aligned}$ |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| $13 \begin{aligned} & 11 \\ & 13 \end{aligned}$ |  | -Q 98 <br> - AJ 75 <br> +Q 4 <br> -KJ62 |  |  |  |
|  | $<$ | Stop | > | Options | Help | hands enable you to step through every card played.

If you are using the 2022 view, it is similar but slightly different. It is all the same up to the point when you select the board number. Then, click 'Replay' by the result you want to play through. The Bridge Solver Online now appears below the results, not in a popup window, so you might need to scroll down to see it. After that it is the same: click the highlighted box in the grid of possible declarers and suits, and you will be able to step through the hand card by card.
If you cannot see the bidding and play at all, it might be because the session was not online, or the scorer did not upload the
results with all the information. If you cannot see the cards, it might be that the session was dealt manually, or that the scorer did not upload the deal file to BridgeWebs.
There is a lot more to see on BridgeWebs, including competitions that the club may have set up, and sometimes features like 'find a partner'. The play analysis though is particularly fascinating and a great way to explore how the best (or luckiest) players got their good results.
Pianola is another popular platform for hosting clubs' websites, and has many similar features. RealBridge games too are often replayable on the RealBridge site, with the options to change the play half-way through the game to see how it might affect the result. It's really worth giving some time to exploring all the available options. Most of it is pretty intuitive, so get going and discover whether the slam you bid and made was brilliant or lucky, and the contract you failed to make was bad luck, bad play or bad bidding! Check what the better players did - how they bid and played it. There's always so much to learn, but beware - 'double dummy analysis' is a 'could have' position, not a 'should have' position. See article on next page.


Clubs using Pianola also benefit from a wealth of information and replay options (images above). There's a Pianola guide at https://tinyurl.com/2307Pianolaguide

## Double Dummy Analysis - and a Pinch of Salt

Bridge results software has become very good at showing what is called double dummy analysis of any board and often, any position. It is frequently fascinating and may tell you, for example, that declarer can make the contract by leading the 8 at trick three, but can go down if the $\$ 3$ is led. Sometimes working out why is quite a puzzle!
In a nutshell, double dummy analysis is a mathematical solution to the maximum number of tricks that can be made given optimum play by both pairs, and full knowledge of all the hands. It is called double dummy because if a player could see their own hand and two dummy hands, then the cards in the fourth hand would also be known by elimination.
Double dummy analysis has been around for many years, and is now available through free and open source software.

However, US bridge player Matthew Kidd, who wrote an early double dummy analysis program for the American Contract Bridge League (ACBL), warned that 'double dummy results must be taken with a healthy dose of skepticism,' as they may depend on play that is against the odds, such as dropping a singleton king with the ace. 'Many new players look at the double dummy results and feel they have done something wrong if they do not match the computer generated result. This is a serious misconception', the article observed. See https://lajollabridge.com/Software/ACBLm erge/ACBLmergeReport.htm
The conclusion? Double dummy analysis is super-useful and studying it can improve our play - but it is incapable of telling us the best single dummy play and not at all suitable for berating either yourself or your partner for not bidding game or choosing a different line of play!


## Open to everyone with an NGS grade of Jack and below

More information:
ebu.co.uk/competitions/jack-high-events

