

# *Table Talk*

*The Quarterly*

April 2020



**Editors**

**Mark Oettinger**

**Ingi Agnarsson**

## **Editor's Musings**

Bridge, like life, has seasons. Sectionals and Regionals tend to take place more in the warmer months, at least in the Northeast. One exception is the District 25 (New England) Presidential Regional. Of late, that tournament has been held in Cromwell, Connecticut. A couple of months in advance, I had booked a room at the hotel/playing site for three nights. Suddenly, I got an email informing the 72 people who had booked rooms by that time that the host hotel had been closed down by the Connecticut Department of Labor for failure to withhold (and/or submit) sales tax. The tournament would be moved to Sturbridge Massachusetts. For me, that is an hour closer, and the room rate at the host hotel was \$20 less per night! Good scramble, District 25!

I attended the second half of the tournament, arriving late afternoon on Thursday, and playing all available sessions...the Thursday night "side game," the 2-session Friday mid-flight pairs, the Thursday night side game, the 2-session Friday stratified open pairs, the Friday night Pro-

Am, and the 2-session Sunday bracketed Swiss teams. 9 sessions. 217 hands. Staying at the site afforded me the opportunity to play essentially non-stop undistracted bridge. And I loved every minute of it. I played with one of my regular partners, and we teamed up with a talented and gracious pair with whom I've played teams several times before. We didn't do as much winning as would have liked (it's rare that one does), but we had some success, and more importantly, had a great time seeing old friends, and making new ones.

For the second time since becoming Unit 175 (Vermont) Vice-President, I got to represent Unit 175 on the Executive Committee of District 25, of which another friend and occasional partner has now become President. This harkens me back to the 1980s, when I was Unit 175 President. At that time, I attended far fewer regionals, and therefore did not participate in bridge administration at the District level. It's an important task if regionals are to survive...and even grow. ACBL membership is far less than it was in previous decades, and even though baby boomers (many of whom played bridge at home growing up, or in college) seem to be returning to the game, active player recruitment is key to the future of the game. More needs done to encourage young people to play.

At the pro-am on Saturday night at the Sturbridge regional, there were two brothers competing. One, a third grader, was playing with his father. The other, a 5th grader, was playing with a local expert. When my partner and I played two boards at the table with the third grader, on the first hand, he challenged his father, "Aren't you supposed to have 5 Hearts for that bid?" On the second hand, which featured his father going down one as declarer, he offered an alternate line of play which he thought would have fared better.

**Coronavirus!**  
**Bridge Clubs Close**  
**Tournaments Cancelled**  
**BBO Booms**

**Covid-ge – bridge at a safe social distance (Ingi Agnarsson)**

All of us are experiencing highly unusual times with the coronavirus epidemic and the closing of practically all social interactions in that include more than a handful of people. The Burlington bridge club is not only a large gathering of people, but bridge seems designed specifically to spread viruses! Think about it. We all sit, less than 6 feet from one another and make certain that practically every player touches the same surfaces (shared cards) and as to make spread even more certain, we rotate people around so that everybody is assured exposure; bridge is literally a top-risk social game right now. Accordingly, we all got an email from Donna Griffith on March 13 that all operations were being suspended until further notice. This is a tough blow for us bridge players for not being able to play, nor socially mingle with the excellent folks at the club. However, this does not mean end of bridge – not at all. It simply means that, just like teaching at UVM, we have to move online. As mentioned in numerous articles in Table Talk, [bridgebase.com](http://bridgebase.com) (=bridge base online aka BBO) is the premier website to play and study bridge, with myriad of options from simply playing an endless stream of hands against robots for free, to playing ABCL ranked tournaments, to improving your play using the Bridge Master; a great tool! What is more, we can all meet each other and play together on BBO. I initiated a list of Burlingtonian BBO users on March 22 and as of April 12 it

contains 113 players had shared their BBO handles and we have seen a marked rise in play online!

I play a lot on BBO and after the disappointment from being sent home from our club on the morning of Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>(!) of March, I decided to initiate my Covid-ge plan (basically, playing more than a lot on BBO). Like bridge at any club, one's results vary with good tournaments and bad tournaments, and the full range in between. When I don't have a partner, I play the so-called 'daylong' tournaments, which you can play for \$0.39 (8 boards, scored only for BBO masterpoints), or \$1.39 (12 boards, scored for both BBO and ABCL masterpoints). I have my fair share of good results and certainly my (un)fair(? – doesn't it always feel like that) share of bad results. However, it just so happened that in one of the 5 competitive tournaments I played on day 1 of covid-ge, a 12 board ABCL tournament, I ended up in 1<sup>st</sup> place. This doesn't happen too often because you are competing against hundreds of other players – that each play their hands against 3 robots, not against the other people. Here, I decided to share that tournament, hopefully encouraging more players to play online, and in part to show you that robots can be really dumb! They are certainly not something to be afraid of (except, stupid can be scary), and you do not have to do anything spectacular to do well at BBO. I'll skim through the 12 hands, stopping at some of the more interesting ones. Note that I'm able to do so because BBO saves ALL the boards you play in tournaments, including the bidding and the playing of every card! How neat.

***Hand 1.*** The first hand well demonstrates how the robots, just like us humans, make some very basic defense mistakes. With North dealing, neither side vulnerable, I sat South and held:

♠ 62  
 ♥ AQ5  
 ♦ KQJ72  
 ♣ 952

After two passes I opened 1♦ (12 HCP, 7 losers), partner bid a 1♥ and rightly overcalled 1♠, which I doubled to show three hearts. After a 2♠ overcall by West, partner—Mr. robot the third—made an aggressive (and as it turns out, quite clever bid):

<p>           ♠ QJ            ♥ KJ932            ♦ 109            ♣ KJ43            ♠ K873      ♠ A10954            ♥ 876      ♥ 104            ♦ 8643      ♦ A5            ♣ A10      ♣ Q876            ♠ 62            ♥ AQ5            ♦ KQJ72            ♣ 952         </p>	<p>Board 1 : Dealer North : Love all</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>West</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>North</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>East</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>South</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td>Pass</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>1♦</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>1♥</td> <td>1♠</td> <td>Dbf</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2♠</td> <td>3♠</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>4♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4">All Pass</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Calling this an ‘aggressive’ game is an understatement, but partner presumably was, and rightly so “worried” (do robots worry much?) about the opponents making 3-4 spades. As the opponents indeed make 3♠, we are in a great contract.</p>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>		Pass	Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥	1♠	Dbf	2♠	3♠	Pass	4♥	All Pass			
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	Pass	Pass	1♦																		
Pass	1♥	1♠	Dbf																		
2♠	3♠	Pass	4♥																		
All Pass																					

However, robotic defense sweetened the deal. East lead the ♦A and switched to a club. Just about as friendly as a defense can be, but—in theory—securing four quick tricks. West took the ♣A and switched to the ♠8. East, however, committed to help declarer, put up the ♠A and underlead the ♣Q! I took one round of hearts and claimed. The contract is down 2 after SAC and switch to ♣A and another club, and declarer cannot avoid 2 club losers. **83.3%**. Lucky to make – yes, but the robots

will defend the same on every table if the bidding and play are the same, so it's not just pure luck... In either case, we were in a great contract even down one.

**Hand 2.** I made an overtrick in 1NT after another mis-defense. All it took was to duck twice with Axx against x to induce an unfortunate switch. **67.9%**.

**Hand 3.** I held:

♠ K732  
♥ Q53  
♦ AQ83  
♣ QJ

I was dealer and opened 1♦. We had a simple auction

1♦-P-1♥-P

1N-P-2♦ all pass (robots don't play the shotgun – but you should!).

I think I did OK to keep the contract only down one against a nasty 4-1 break where I underled ♦AQ83 toward 9742 and was able to keep control of the suit. Probably didn't matter much as opponents can make 3♣/♠. **83.3%**. Why? Didn't seem we did anything to deserve a good score. Perhaps going down only 1 was the difference. Or, I wonder if the robots found a way to enter the bidding against 1♦-P-1♥-P-1♠? I don't rebid spades there with a balanced hand, but rebid 1N. After the above bidding I guess West found an overcall of 2♣ on ♣AKxxx. In any case, good board.

**Hand 4.** Here my modest aggression (which is not completely randomly applied as some seem to think☺), paid off. With West dealing and all vulnerable the bidding went P-P-1♣ to me in South, and I held:

♠ A 7 6 2  
♥ -  
♦ K Q 10 7 2  
♣ A 4 3 2

I bid the natural 1♦, which West doubled and East bid 1N. I have 13HCP and partner is silent, but the hand is a 5 ‘loser count hand’ and can rock both offence and defense. So, I continued with 2♦. West jumped to 3NT and East discovered his heart fit and corrected to 4♥. I can smell a rat with 5 controls, likely 3 tricks—and having a heart void partner must have 5! Otherwise, the bidding would have been different. So, I doubled, and now the robots choose massacre over mere defeat as East chose to ‘correct’ to 4♠ which I happily doubled. This was the whole hand.

<p>♠ K 10 ♥ 9 8 5 4 3 ♦ 5 4 3 ♣ 9 8 5</p> <p>♠ J 9 8 5      ♠ Q 4 3 ♥ A Q 7 6 2    ♥ K J 10 ♦ A 8            ♦ J 9 6 ♣ 10 7          ♣ K Q J 6</p> <p>♠ A 7 6 2 ♥ - ♦ K Q 10 7 2 ♣ A 4 3 2</p>	<p>Board 4 : Dealer West : All vulnerable</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>West</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>North</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>East</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>South</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>1♣</td> <td>1♦</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Dbl</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>1NT</td> <td>2♦</td> </tr> <tr> <td>3NT</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>4♥</td> <td>Dbl</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>4♠</td> <td>Dbl</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>The defense was accurate. I lead ♦ K taken in dummy. The robot, hoping for a miracle, lead a trump to the queen and my ace. I continued a spade to partners ♠ K, who could now lead the diamond through. I took the ♦ 10 and played the ♦ Q to shorten dummies trumps. After a club that I took with the ace, I could play trump, and retain in my hand the last trump and two diamond tricks for -1100. <b>100%</b></p>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	Pass	Pass	1♣	1♦	Dbl	Pass	1NT	2♦	3NT	Pass	4♥	Dbl	Pass	Pass	4♠	Dbl
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**Hand 5.** I opened 1NT on a 14 count 2236 with ♣ AKQxxx in clubs. We got to 4♠ on a 5-2 fit (we have no heart stopper) and I got an overtrick in 4♠ after the robots failed to immediately cash their ♦ A. **85%**. It seems likely that the game was missed on many tables.

**Hand 6.** I made 2NT after ducking the first three tricks as the robots explored three different suits that I would not have wanted to deal with myself. Sometimes ducking, even if it is unnecessary (as long as it doesn't give away tricks), is a good way of inducing defensive mistakes. ***Don't force the action when you don't need to—give the opponents enough rope to hang themselves.*** **77.4%**

**Hand 7.** Unjustified hyper-aggressive bidding led to a paper-thin 3NT contract on 21 total HCPs. Due to the lay of the cards (revealed by the bidding) an accurate defense was needed, and—unsurprisingly— not

found by the robots. **96%**. Very lucky – but you need luck to win large events, and best to be lucky in thin games!

*Hand 8.*

♠ AK92  
♥ -  
♦ A95  
♣ 1096542

After three passes to me I opened 1♣ (11 HCP, 6 losers, 4th hand). Lefty overcalled 1♥, partner doubled, and East bid 2♣ as a good raise in hearts. Your turn? High on the last result I argued that this is a 30 point deck (no values wasted in the opponents best suit), partner has 4♠, enough to enter the bidding, and while my club suit ain't strong, it is long, and there is a decent chance it can be established, even against as little as xx. I can add 5 distribution points for my void. Partner could also easily hold QJxx xxxx xxx Ax as a very minimum hand, and that might do... So, I simply bid 4♠! Not everyone's choice, I realize, but consistent with my style. Also, what am I going to do over 4♥ if I limp in here with 2♠? Better take that decision now.

<p>♠ Q753 ♥ K876 ♦ J42 ♣ Q7</p> <p>♠ J86      ♠ 104 ♥ AQJ92    ♥ 10543 ♦ 1073      ♦ KQ86 ♣ K8        ♣ AJ3</p> <p>♠ AK92 ♥ - ♦ A95 ♣ 1096542</p>	<p>Board 8 : Dealer West : Love all</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>West</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>North</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>East</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>South</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>1♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1♥</td> <td>Dbl</td> <td>2♣</td> <td>4♠</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Partner didn't have all their points where I would have hoped, but the ♥K is actually strong as it prevents a 'heart attack' by the opponents. The game is half decent. West found probably the best lead, small ♦ to the ♦Q and my ♦A. I lead a small club and West took the ♣K. What now? If West plays a small diamond I'll finesse the ♦9 and free the ♦J. Heart does no good. Spade is hopeless. W led another club to the ♣A, followed by ♦K and ♦x. With balanced breaks, 3-2 trumps and 4-3 diamonds, this was enough. Contract made, 420. <b>98.7%</b></p>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	Pass	Pass	Pass	1♣	1♥	Dbl	2♣	4♠
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>										
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♣										
1♥	Dbl	2♣	4♠										

**Hand 9.** In 3N with 15 against 10 HCP I was careless and didn't take enough time to think at trick one. Always think at trick 1! I quickly found a simple line and just played it. In trick 6 I threw away a small club from ♣Ax, unnecessarily. It turned out that, in the end position, I needed this card for a simple endplay. My line was less than mediocre, unthoughtful, and unsuccessful, -2. **24.4%**

**Hand 10.** A routine 4♠ contract making 4. **52.1%**

**Hand 11.** Non-vul I pushed 3♦ over the opponents 2♥ following the law (both sides had 8 card fits, and I don't want to let the opponents play at their ideal law level). They went against the law and bid 3 over 3 (*the master suit stops at 2!!—leave the risk to the opponents*). Down 1. **71%**

**Hand 12.** I knew that I was on a good run with only one bad board, and some definite scorers. Time to seal the deal with a top! It's great to score 70% or so, but when you play all the time on BBO you want those rare wins. To do so takes a monster score. I got the perfect hand to bid aggressively:

♠ J982  
♥ AQ97  
♦ K  
♣ AKQ8

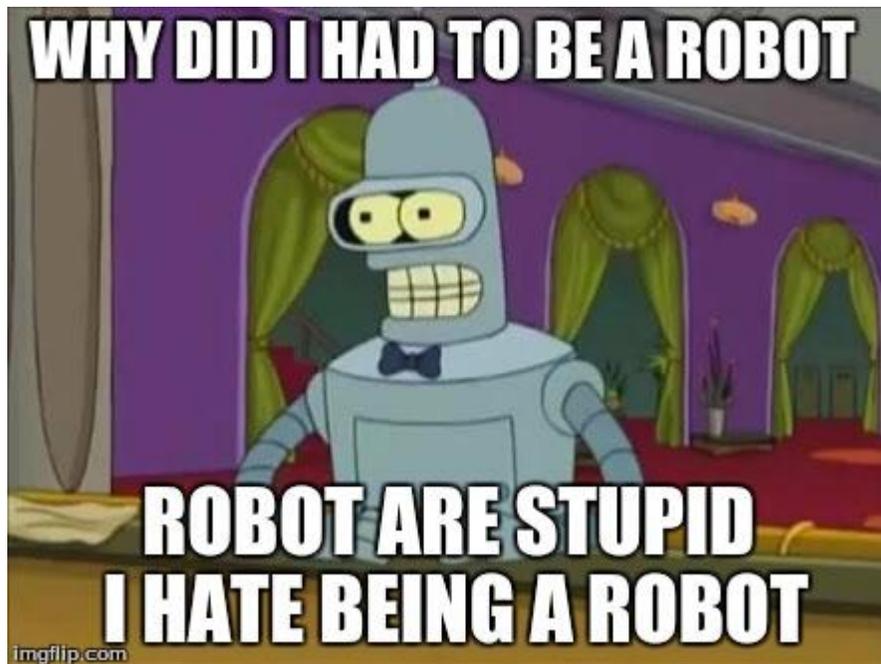
What to bid? 19HCP, 5 losers, nice shape, but value of ♦ K unknown. I chose to open 2N. I think that's the objectively correct bid! First, there are enough middle cards to pull the hand up to 20 points. Second, you want to, in some way, 'protect' the ♦ K. Three, and perhaps most importantly, if I open club partner is bound to respond with one of the majors. Great! No! This wrong-sides the contract which helps the defense no end, making a lead easy, revealing the ♦ K, and the heart fork. So, everything in my book recommends 2NT. This is the whole hand:

<p>♠ A Q 7 3 ♥ 10 4 3 ♦ J 6 5 2 ♣ 9 4</p> <p>♠ 10 5      ♠ K 6 4 ♥ K J 8 6 5    ♥ 2 ♦ 8 7 4 3      ♦ A Q 10 9 ♣ 10 6      ♣ J 7 5 3 2</p> <p>♠ J 9 8 2 ♥ A Q 9 7 ♦ K ♣ A K Q 8</p>	<p>Board 12 : Dealer West : NS vulnerable</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>West</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>North</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>East</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>South</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>2NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>3♣</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>3♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>3NT</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>4♠</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Partner bid stayman and 3N after my 3♥, which I converted to 4♠. It's a pretty good looking game, but the ♠K is off, as are the ♥KJ, and the ♦K is here absolutely worthless. In fact, as the cards lie, the game is hopeless. Of course, you can't see all this as declarer, but you can still see the game may be very fragile.</p>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	Pass	Pass	Pass	2NT	Pass	3♣	Pass	3♥	Pass	3NT	Pass	4♠
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West lead the ♣10 to my ♣A. I finessed spades, unsuccessfully. East switched to a small heart that I ducked to West's ♥J. Taking the ♥A and taking trumps is hopeless, you're left with heart and diamond losers. So, I had to hope that East had one of the Heart honors. But, alas. Yet again, however, the robot defenders came to the rescue! West knows that I have 4♥ after the bidding, and can now defeat the contract by simply leading another heart to be ruffed followed by the ♦A. But, no. West switched to clubs! This not only avoided the ruff, but elevated my ♣8. Now I could take the trick, take trumps in two rounds, cash two clubs discarding a heart and a diamond in dummy, take the ♥A dropping dummies ♥10 and trump finesse for West's king, and only give up the ♦A. **100%**. More luck? Yes and no. 4♠ is a standard contract which is probably played on most tables, and presumably the robots defend just as bad on every table. I think 2N is a key bid. It steers the contract to the

strong hand, and avoided North being declarer and getting an immediately crushing heart lead. I bet the contract was in North on most tables. Also, I know their defense is fragile and I bid and play accordingly. Avoiding forced sequences, rather let the robots do the work when possible. This brings up an important point. You are not only bidding and playing your cards. Successful players also bid and play their opposition. And, given that we all make defense mistakes, aggression tends to favor a decent declarer.

In any case, a fun Covid-age day 1 victory with a final score of **78.3%**. Happy trails on BBO. When alone, teach those robots some lessons!



## Are You Smarter Than A Robot? Using Loser Count in Deciding Whether to Invite, and Whether to Accept (Mark Oettinger)

<p style="margin: 0;">♠ 854 ♥ AK2 ♦ Q1098 ♣ J82</p> <p style="margin: 0;">♠ Q                      ♠ K1093 ♥ 94                      ♥ QJ1076 ♦ J753                    ♦ A42 ♣ A107543              ♣ 6</p> <p style="margin: 0;">♠ AJ762 ♥ 853 ♦ K6 ♣ KQ9</p>	<p style="margin: 0;"><b>Dealer South : All vulnerable</b></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;"><i>West</i></th> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;"><i>North</i></th> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;"><i>East</i></th> <th style="text-align: left; padding: 2px;"><i>South</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> <td style="padding: 2px;">1♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">1NT</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">2♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">3♠</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">All Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;"></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>				1♠	Pass	1NT	Pass	2♣	Pass	3♠	All Pass	
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My 1♠ opener is automatic. Robot/Partner responded with a forcing 1NT. I rebid 2♣...by the book when playing “Two Over One.”

Responder’s rebid of 3♠ strikes me as the product of overly-rigid point count “thinking.” Yes, North has 10 HCP, which is typically seen as an “invitational” hand. Note, however, that it’s a 9-loser hand. In other words, it rates to produce one trick less than the usual 10-HCP hand.

To Robot/Partner’s credit, he had his second bid in mind when he chose his first. When Partner opens 1♥ or 1♠, your bids of a forcing 1NT, followed by 3 of Opener’s Major, promise 3-card support and an invitational hand. If North is a human, who takes the time to count losers **as well as points**, the hand downgrades to a simple raise...just:

1♠-P-2♠-all P

Systems Note: Regular readers may recall that I like to play 3-card simple raises in the Majors as “constructive,” i.e., 8-10 total points. A weaker simple raise, i.e., 5-7 total points, with either 2-card or 3-card support, is shown as follows:

1♠-P-1N-P

2C-P-2♠-P

Notice how poorly the hand plays. I went down 2, for -200 and a 28.9% board. Had I been in 2♠ going down only 1, for -100, I would have gotten a 63.5% board. That one trick was the difference between a round of 65.43%, 89th out of 1169 players, for 4.09 BBO masterpoints, and a round of 69.78%, and 36th, for 8.55 BBO masterpoints.

I reiterate:

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Use loser count to decide Whether to invite Partner to game, And if invited, Whether to accept Partner’s invitation.</b></p>
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*\*Ingi’s editorial note:* as an observation that has nothing to do with Mark’s point, it seems to me that on an optimal line of play, the contract might only be down one.

## Rules of Bridge: Rule of 11 (Ingi Agnarsson)

The second rule I'll introduce in the 'rules of bridge' column is the rule of 11. This is a simple yet very effective tool both in offense and defense!

The Rule of 11 is employed when a lead is known to be '4<sup>th</sup> best', as is a direct mathematical corollary to such leads. It is very simple and easy to remember and 'calculate'. From the spot of a declarer, look at the opening lead. Let's say it's the ♥4. Subtract the opening lead spot card from 11.  $11-4=7$ . This is the number of cards higher than the ♥4 in the remaining three hands. You can then easily count how many of those are in dummy and on your hand; the remainder must be with your right hand opponent!

Here is an example (all in hearts, love to you all):

You, as declarer, hold ♥A762 against ♥J83 in dummy. The lead is the ♥5 – what to do?

♥J83

♥A762

Let's apply the rule of 11.  $11-5=6$  – so there are six cards higher than the ♥5 in the three remaining hands. You can see two of them ♥J8 in the dummy and you hold ♥A76. That's five of the six. Ergo, East has only one card higher than the five! Given that West would likely have lead ♥K from ♥KQ10 you can rule out that holding. So, East has either the ♥10 or one of the honors. You don't know, but there are two honors out and only one 10! So, you play small and are rewarded with East playing the ♥K, securing a trick on the ♥J. This is a very simple example to

demonstrate the concept; you would probably have played small anyway. But this tool can come in very handy when deciding what to play on a first lead.

Another example, to drive the principle home:

♥AQ104

♥863

Bidding goes 1N-3N and West leads the ♥7. What would you intuitively play? Very many players would here finesse for the ♥K, or the ♥J without too much thought. But, let's apply rule of 11.  $11-7=4$ . We see the ♥AQ10 in dummy and the ♥8 in our hand. Hence East has 0 cards higher than the seven...

♥AQ104

♥KJ972

♥5

♥863

You duck with absolute mathematical certainty (if the lead was 4<sup>th</sup> best) and take four tricks in the suit.

Note that this rule can just as well be used by the defender looking at the lead and the dummy. The defender can deduce exactly how many cards higher than the lead YOU have and plan the defense accordingly. Many early players claim they play 'standard' leads, but upon further interrogation are vague what that means. It's important to know what your partner is leading. 4<sup>th</sup> best is a good rule and can help you plan the defense (and can also be parasitized by the declarer). Overall, having clear rules for leads benefits the defense more than declarer as the defense has the extra tempo in getting to start!

What if the opponents instead lead ‘3<sup>rd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup>’? Is all this then useless? No! You just need to adjust accordingly. If the lead is 5<sup>th</sup> best, the rule becomes the rule of 12! Do the same calculations, but subtract the lead from twelve (there is one more card out than when 4<sup>th</sup> best is led). If the lead is the 3<sup>rd</sup> best, the rule becomes the rule of 10! Again, same exact logic, subtract the lead from 10. I use these three rules all the time in both offence and defense and they really help simplify the defense. We all should like that!

## **Hand Valuation in the Context of Slam Exploration (Mark Oettinger)**

Red v. White  
Dealer East

Sitting South, you pick up the following hand:

♠2  
♥AK10  
♦K1075  
♣KQJ95

In how many ways can we evaluate the hand?

We have 16 HCPs. The HCPs are “Prime,” i.e., Aces and Kings, and they are “Connected.”

The hand has only 5 Losers, i.e., it plays a trick better than the average 16 HCP hand. I call this phenomenon a “+1” (™) hand

It has excellent “Intermediates,” 2 10s and a 9, and all of the Intermediates are “Working.” Did you notice that this hand has only 4 cards below a 9?!

Also. no Honor or Intermediate is wasted in the short suit. A “stiff deuce” is, axiomatically, the perfect Singleton.

How would you plan to bid your hand? It is wisely said that you should always have your second bid (and arguably, your third, fourth and subsequent bids) in mind, before you decide upon your first bid. Looking at least to my second bid, I rate this hand to warrant a reverse. I will therefore start with 1♣, planning to reverse in Diamonds at my second opportunity. The 4=5 shape in the Minors is right. Some would argue that one should have 17 HCPs to reverse, but I’m OK with 16, especially with a +1 hand from a loser count perspective.

Some may recall my recommendation in the last issue, reiterated above, that when a hand’s loser count deviates from what its HCP count would presumptively suggest, use the loser count to “break the tie.” Stated differently, when loser count and expected HCP differ, trust the loser count more. When we have an established fit, this is particularly so. If we *don’t* have a proven fit, and are therefore likely to play in Notrump, my lower-than-expected loser count is likely the product of a long suit. If the quality of that suit is good (for example, KQ10987), the lack of fit matters less. On the other hand, if the long suit is Q109872, with the King in a *different* suit, the lower-than-expected loser count is “working” if we have a fit, but “non-working” if we do not. This is another take on the sometimes-heard claim that, “Loser count only



The more modern argument for bypassing Diamonds with North's hand is that if North *does* respond 1♦, East may well bid Spades at some level, making it very hard for North/South to find a Heart fit if they have one. It is especially critical at the matchpoint form of scoring to play in an 8-card Major suit fit if you have one, since playing in a Minor suit fit scores less well if you make the same number of tricks. Furthermore, when you do have an 8-card Major suit fit, having it as trump usually plays a trick better than Notrump, thanks either to the ability to get an extra trick through ruffing, or to prevent the run of your weak side suit.

Back to the auction as it occurred. After my reverse, responder rebid 2♠ (4th suit forcing to game). I bid 3♥ showing 3-card, delayed, "secondary" Heart support (in case North had 5 Hearts). Partner's 4♦ bid showed 4. We have something of a double fit. At least 8 Diamonds and 7 Hearts. I love my shape, concentration and intermediates. When I hear, "2 Key Cards without the Queen," I end the auction with 6♦, resigning myself to having to find the trump Queen.

Surprisingly, West led the ♥5. I won my Ace, led a small Diamond to the Ace, and a small Diamond back. The Queen showed up doubleton on my right. This allowed me to draw the last trump, unblock the Clubs, and use the Heart suit for transportation to access my tricks. Made 7.

Final note about loser count. A typical reverse is a 4-loser or 5-loser hand. I had the latter. North has a 7-loser hand. Loser count theory predicts:  $24 - (5 + 7) = 12$  tricks...small slam. North would have initiated slam exploration himself, had I not beat him to the punch.

## **Bridge Master and other ways of practicing your bridge on BBO (Ingi Agnarsson)**

In our current effort to bring the Burlington Bridge Club members online, it seems appropriate to discuss some of the functions of BBO other than actual playing. Hopefully you are finding other club members online by now and having fun games and discussions. Whenever you are out there all alone, there are also endless ways of still playing bridge for example with random strangers in the casual club, against robots in a solitary game, or playing competitive tournaments where your table can be accompanied by 3 robots, or 3 humanoids. Explore!

There is, however, yet another dimension to BBO allowing bridge training. I have found this to be very useful, both in teaching, advancing my declarer play, and in breaking in bidding systems with a new partner. As you log in, one of the main tabs is 'practice'. If you click on that, you get three options: Start a bidding table, start a teaching table, and Bridge Master. The teaching tables allow you to teach a students in a variety of ways. Let's focus on the other two options here.

**The bidding table is an excellent resource.** It allows you, for example, to sit with your partner against two robots and bid a stream of hands that you can then discuss. What's more. You can constrain hands to practice particular situations or conventions. You can, say, have a stream of hands where North always has a 1N opener and South has any range of hands, or a series of 8-9 point hands, or slam going hands with a minor, or whatever you want to practice. I recently used this tool to practice weak 2 openings where responder had enough for a 2N reply. Do this for 100 hands and you will never have a misunderstanding again! If you and

your partnership are willing to put in the work, this tool can really help you refine your bidding.

**Last, but not least, there is the Bridge Master.** I have used this tool in recent years to improve my declarer play. And not only do I still use it to refresh various techniques, there are also more classes available that I have yet to tackle, on very advanced (world class) declarer play that I simply do not yet understand. Always something to look forward to. The interface looks like this:



As you can see there are 5 ‘levels’ going from beginner to world class. You click on a level, and start being dealt hands, given the bidding, and become the declarer with a lead on the table. Now, do your best! I’ve played so much on BBO that I get this service for free, but I think for most players this will cost \$0.39 per half hour. So, you can get 3 hours of training for a buck and pennies. The real beauty of this service is that *the deals are created by experts and come with expert commentary*. You try your line of play and may succeed or fail. If you fail, you get to try again and again as much as you want. If you give up, you can see the ‘solution’. Regardless, once you’re done playing a hand, you can go through the play, with expert commentary on the logic of the correct line

of play. Just awesome. My approach was simply to start at the beginner level (I'm not a beginner, but all the more reason to make sure that basic declarer play is routine). I had to think hard at the advance level, and started really struggling at the expert level. That's where I, personally, got the most out of this; I eventually get most of the right, with a few tries—and I totally understand the logic once I look at the solutions. The world class level was over my head. I'm waiting for a calm day or two to try to really understand the intricacies of compound squeezes and other sophisticated plays, very rarely seen. But I am looking forward to hopefully understanding this at some point. In sum, any player, at any level, will improve their declarer play by carefully going through these lessons and really taking time to appreciate the logic behind the correct play. *And by all means start at the beginning!* Up your declarer strength a whole level before the Burlington Bridge Club meets again!

### Preempts Are Annoying (Mark Oettinger)

This one comes from Ron Weiss. He played the hand with one of his regular partners in NYC. I won't tell you whether he was North or South. The North/South hands were as follows:

<p>♠ J4 ♥ AK104 ♦ J973 ♣ A74</p> <p>♠ KQ10987 ♥ 65 ♦ A ♣ KJ53</p>	<p><b>Dealer West : NS vulnerable</b></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>West</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>North</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>East</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>South</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td>2♥</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>2♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>2NT</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>3♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4">All Pass</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>		2♥	Pass	2♠	Pass	2NT	Pass	3♠	All Pass			
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Apportion the blame.

On a really bad day, it makes 4. It might make 6...a 17% chance, by my rough estimate. They should certainly have been in game. Whose fault was it, and what could he (or they) have done to “get there?”

North hears RHO open 2♥. If they play in Hearts, North has 3 trump tricks, but for now he has to Pass. South balances with 2♠, which could be a pretty broad range, but my expectation would be 13-15. North has a full opening hand, including a likely three Heart tricks. I think that 2NT is too pessimistic. I would have bid 3NT directly. After all, if you just invite (crediting South with an absolute minimum 2-level balance), South has no way to imagine your perfect Heart position. He who knows...goes...right?

But that’s not the end of the blame casting. After North’s 2NT bid, South should reassess. He has a 5-loser hand. North’s invitational hand can be expected to have 8 losers...as it does in this case. Loser count therefore predicts that we will make 5. Is loser count even *on* in this situation? Maybe. Does North’s 2NT *guarantee* 2 Spades? Probably not, but it does imply them. And even if it doesn’t, South’s Spade suit is almost self-sufficient. And finally, South has a mere 5 losers. He should bid game with even 6 losers, so with 5 losers there’s no question.

Either party should have gotten this right. I apportion the blame 100% to each.

**Footnote:** Shortly before publication, Ingi and I had an internal editorial discussion about this article, as we invariably do. He made a

couple of very good points, which I will mention here, rather than simply going back and incorporating them. My secondary purpose is to illustrate how a partnership intent upon advancing needs to have these types of discussions as a part of their process of getting better. Ingi points out that South may well balance with less than 13-15 (which I acknowledge), since “just going quietly” in a situation like this rarely produces a good result. For this reason, North’s 2NT, in his opinion, is not blame-worthy, and South should clearly carry on to game with only 5 losers. More importantly (in my opinion) is that South might choose to Double first, planning to either raise 2NT to 3NT, or to follow up any other bid by North with some type of game-force in Spades. The beauty of the Double is that it gives North the option of passing for penalty if, as was certainly the case here, he had a Heart stack.

***\*Ingi’s editorial note:*** I can see a lot of hands were I would balance on two spades with less than the ideal 13-15, like almost any decent hand with 6 Spades (and many with 5). For that reason, I think a 3NT bid would be bordering on the criminally optimistic—let alone the clear defect that it totally buries the Spade suit. 2NT after all describes a good hand that couldn’t double 2♥. South’s refusal to go to game after 2NT *is* criminal. And, I think in these situations one should always carefully consider if a double is a viable option to protect a partner ‘trap passing’.

## Why Has This Never Come Up For Me In 50 Years Of Bridge? (Mark Oettinger)

<p>♠ 108 ♥ KQ1065 ♦ AQ7632 ♣ -</p> <p>♠ KQ                      ♠ 9743 ♥ A74                      ♥ J93 ♦ KJ109854              ♦ - ♣ 6                          ♣ AQJ1075</p> <p>♠ AJ652 ♥ 82 ♦ - ♣ K98432</p>	<p><b>Dealer South : NS vulnerable</b></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>West</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>North</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>East</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>South</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td>2♥</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>2♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>2NT</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>3♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4">All Pass</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>		2♥	Pass	2♠	Pass	2NT	Pass	3♠	All Pass			
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All Pass																	

You're South in 1<sup>st</sup> seat. Vulnerable against not. Do you open? If so, with what? Only 8 HCP, but only 6 losers. A +3 (™) hand!

There are at least 4 ways to proceed:

Pass and await developments

Open 1♠

Open 1♣

Open 2♠

I chose to open 2♠, and LHO overcalled 3♦. Partner doubled. Is that negative or penalties? Our card says, "Negative Doubles through 3♥," but partner and I had never discussed this sequence. Looking at my hand, with a void in Diamonds, it crosses my mind that partner may have a Diamond stack. On the other hand, my shortage in Hearts

implies that he has 4+ Hearts, which is expected (if not required) if the Double is meant to be negative. Of course, negative doubles should also show a tolerance for the fourth suit...in this case, Clubs. That seems a little unlikely, given the fact that I hold 6 Clubs. So, two out of three of the “indicators” suggest that the Double is intended as penalty.

Just a quick aside on my decision to open 2♠. I know that this is not everyone’s cup of tea, but preempting is incredibly effective in disrupting the opponents. This is especially true when you have the Spade suit. My thinking on opening a Weak 2 in the Majors with only a 5-card suit has gone through a bit of an evolution in the past couple of years. I started doing it with Ingi, who was taught that the odds only favor this tactic because there are 7 missing cards and if distributed in a balanced way partner more often than not has a 3 card suit (2/3). Now he prefers to do this only with 4+-card Minor side suit. Another of my partners does it when non-vulnerable, regardless of the shape of the rest of his hand, and never does it when vulnerable. I am happy to play the system which is preferred by each of them when we play, but Ingi has just acquired software that allows the user to painlessly generate thousands of such hands in order to project which approach is superior in the long run. I can’t wait to test it in this context.

I hate undiscussed sequences. Admittedly, unless you and your partner play together a LOT, it is essentially impossible to discuss all sequences. Phil Sharpsteen explains it this way when he avoids making an ambiguous bid: “I was trying to avoid an accident.” I have a less pithy version of this excellent rule: “If you think I might misunderstand a bid that you are considering making, assume that I will, and bid something else.” I have been known to describe this as my “Bidding Rule #1.”

Spoiler alert: I made the wrong decision at the table...yet again. I didn't take the time to weigh the fact that I had 6 Clubs, making it far less likely that my partner had "negative double shape." Why do so many of my articles feature me making mistakes? Yes, I do make a lot of them. But I also believe that we learn much more from our mistakes than we do from our successes.

How else could I have figured out what partner was intending? I could probably have paid more attention to my RHO's demeanor following partner's Double. Since I didn't, I don't have much to relate, but I believe that RHO tanked for a while. In other words, she sat and thought for a while before passing. The technical term is a "break in tempo," which brings up an interesting point of "bridge law."

You may draw any inference that you wish from the behavior of an opponent. You do so, however, at your own risk. Also, it is not ethical to try to deceive an opponent by displaying disingenuous behavior...such as by hesitating when you don't have a problem. Some call that coffeehousing; others call it cheating. The more subtle rules-related problem is created for the partner of a bidder who breaks tempo. He is forbidden from drawing inference from his partner's break in tempo, and therefore, from among reasonable alternatives, will usually be deemed to have made the wrong choice. In other words, on the following auction:

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	2♥	2♠
3♥	3♠	...P	P
?			

If East hesitates before passing, West faces a lose-lose-lose proposition. He could bid 4♥, or he could Pass, or he could Double. Let's assume that West's hand was somewhat equivocal, and that any of the three bids are (the Director may survey one or more players of similar skill level) roughly equivalent in efficacy. By breaking tempo, a player "prohibits partner from choosing from among logical alternatives one that could demonstrably have been suggested over another." See *Laws of Duplicate Bridge*, Rule 16B(1)(a). Essentially, whatever the "hesitater's partner" decides to do, the resulting score can (and should) be adjusted to the least favorable for the offenders of the logical alternatives."

So, for me at least, in the future, when we open a Weak 2, and opener's LHO overcalls, Double is for penalty, not Negative.

***Ingi's editorial note:*** I actually think Mark did the only right thing for the very simple reason that you are bound by what is on the convention card. Bids can't sometimes mean something completely different and partner is just supposed to figure out those special cases. No good partnerships work like that. Unfortunately, his partner may not have noticed what it said! Of course, if you want doubles in this particular situation to be penalty, it's just a matter of noting that on the convention card. Personally, I would prefer the double to be negative as I suspect they come up more frequently.

## Isn't A New Suit By An Unpassed Responder Always Forcing? (Mark Oettinger)

<p>♠ AK ♥ K42 ♦ QJ9532 ♣ 93</p> <p>♠ 10 ♥ J1076 ♦ K87 ♣ K10654</p> <p>♠ QJ8532 ♥ 9853 ♦ A ♣ AJ</p>	<p><b>Dealer West ; WE vulnerable</b></p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>West</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>North</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>East</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>South</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td>Pass</td> <td>1♦</td> <td>Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td>1♠</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>2♦</td> <td>Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td>?</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>		Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass	?			
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	Pass	1♦	Pass														
1♠	Pass	2♦	Pass														
?																	

I was South. Ingi was North. I had to suppress a smile. We've discussed many times whether it's better, in this situation, to rebid one's 6-card suit, or to show one's 4-card second suit. The first time it came up for us, Ingi unhesitatingly said, "Show your second suit. That way, I know at least 9 of your cards, rather than only 6." I had never looked at it that way, but since then, I have become a faithful adherent to this approach. Showing the second suit gives partner the ability to compete more intelligently, which in turn improves results. Feeling like a very good partner, I therefore rebid 2♥. I was planning to rebid my Spades if we didn't find a Heart fit. We would find the best game. Imagine my surprise when it went Pass, Pass, Pass! Here was the final auction:

West	North	East	South
P	1♦	P	1♠
P	2♦	P	2♥ all Pass!

I distinctly remember thinking, “2♥ is a new suit by an unpassed responder,” and is therefore forcing. Ingi obviously thought otherwise. I’m not sure whether the basic principle is sound across the board. Perhaps, in certain auctions, opener should be able to pass a new suit by an unpassed responder. If so, however, I recommend that you and your regular partners take the time to discuss the relevant sequences. On the other hand, if you’re like me, and play with a lot of different partners, rules of thumb may be valuable for the clarity that they afford...even if a technically superior approach can be achieved through thorough in-depth discussion.

*Ingi’s editorial note:* I don’t know if it is funny or tragic that on this particular day, I was absolutely certain that this sequence was not forcing. We all make mistakes but this was a real brain fart. A note on the principle of bidding the second suit, I think it makes perfect sense. But, one might certainly deviate from that with highly asymmetric suit qualities. Nevertheless, length is length.

### **Limericks corner (Ingi Agnarsson)**

Frank Hacker has started making limericks in his ‘spare time’ amidst the coronavirus crisis. His goal is to cover various first names (but not actual players, though you may play with the idea) in an ongoing limericks factory and has allowed me to share them here. I guess you can chose if these apply to you Here’s one of my choice:

There was a new player named Bill  
Whose bidding was always a thrill  
His partner would frown  
As 2 she went down

We're thankful her looks couldn't kill

Apparently inspired by Frank's enterprise, Ellie Hanlon decided to try her skills at it, you be the judge:

There was a bridge pro named Ingi  
Who liked to go out in his dingy  
His spiders he studied  
And his bridge he got muddied  
And it all made him slightly unhinged

During these strange time we are in need of comic relief. I invite other people to join in and send a limerick for the next issue of TT!

### **After You Alphonse - Apportion the Blame (Mark Oettinger)**

This hand was submitted to me by Ron Weiss. He and his partner were East/West.

<p>♠ 1082 ♥ 654 ♦ A83 ♣ KQ86</p> <p>♠ KQJ9653    ♠ A7 ♥ K3            ♥ Q987 ♦ 62             ♦ K7 ♣ A9             ♣ 105432</p> <p>♠ 4 ♥ AJ102 ♦ QJ10954 ♣ J7</p>	<p>Board 1 : Dealer North : Love all</p> <table><thead><tr><th><i>West</i></th><th><i>North</i></th><th><i>East</i></th><th><i>South</i></th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>1♠</td><td>Pass</td><td>1NT</td><td>2♦</td></tr><tr><td>2♠</td><td>All Pass</td><td></td><td></td></tr></tbody></table>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>	1♠	Pass	1NT	2♦	2♠	All Pass		
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1♠	Pass	1NT	2♦										
2♠	All Pass												

With the King of Diamonds sitting well, Declarer made 4. Should they have been there? Should they have at least explored? And if so, how?

West opening bid of 1♠ is clear. East's forcing 1NT response is equally clear if you're playing "2 over 1." South's bid of 2♦ is less clear. He could just as soon Double, or use a "Sandwich 1NT," to show the two unbid suits. He presumably chose the 2♦ bid because of the disparity in suit length. Regular readers of *Talk Talk* know that I love 2-suit bids. I would be sorely tempted, suit length disparity notwithstanding. Whether or not you agree with my taste, humor me for a moment. When you *do* play Sandwich 1NT, the next question is, "What's the difference between a Double and a Sandwich 1NT?" I have an easy rule...the principle of "fast arrival." Because 1NT is faster arrival, it is weaker. A secondary characteristic of Sandwich 1NT is that it usurps the opponents' ability to play in 1NT. First one to 1NT (sometimes) wins!

We digress. South bid 2♦. So...what should West rebid? He has 13 HCP, but only 5 losers (a +2 hand). No fit had been "found," but in my view, West has a self-sufficient spade suit. I think that West has enough to jump to 3♠ on his second turn. It describes the suit length and overall strength of the hand extremely well. If West jumps to 3♠, East has little trouble raising to game with 9 HCP and only 7 losers. And even if West simply rebids 2♠, I think that East clearly has enough to show interest in game. After all, opener's 2♠ bid should show 6 Spades, so we have an 8-card fit. Also, East is at the top of his 1NT range, and has only 7 losers. He might try a raise to 3♠, and if he does, West will gladly accept.

Some will argue that this 22 HCP game was a bit lucky, but it's a straight 50% proposition, turning only on the location of the Ace of Diamonds. In addition, there's a small chance that the defense could go wrong, and give you a contract that goes down with accurate defense.

Some people say, "It's a bidder's game." Others advise that one partner should be cast in the role of optimist, and the other in the role of pessimist.

The title of this article invokes the memory of *Alphonse and Gaston*, popular cartoon characters from 1901-1910. The two friends suffered from excessive and paralyzing politeness. "After you Alphonse." "No, you first, my dear Gaston!" And so, they never left. And presumably, they never got to game. Exploring games is both fun and challenging. It improves your hand evaluation...which in turn improves your bidding judgment. Getting more than 50% of your "game decisions" right is both gratifying and rewarding.

### **Ginger versus Mary Ann (Mark Oettinger)**

You are South. None vulnerable. West has dealt. You hold the following hand:

♠K62

♥AJ1087

♦AJ10

♣102

Pass to you. You open 1♥. The opponents pass throughout. Partner responds 1♠. What's your rebid? This has been the brief auction thus far:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	?

It's a classic question. Do you raise with 3-card Spade support (you imply 4 Spades), or do you bid 1NT without a Club stopper? My experience is that stronger players tend to bid 2♠. I don't have a particular feeling as to why, but

*if you play a convention called Spiral, you can feel more comfortable raising with just 3, since you have a way of clarifying Responder's hand.*

After 2 of a Major, "next step" asks Responder to clarify his hand with his third bid. Here's a typical auction:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♠
Pass	2NT	Pass	?

2NT starts Spiral. Responder shows the following hands with the following bids. You will note a significant similarity to the response structure in an "Ogust auction.":

3♣: 3 Spades and a poor hand;

- 3♦: 3 Spades and a good hand;
- 3♥: 4 Spades and a poor hand;
- 3♠: 4 Spades and a good hand;

In a Heart auction, 2♠ starts Spiral. Responder shows the following hands with the following bids:

- 2NT: 3 Hearts and a poor hand;
- 3♣: 3 Hearts and a good hand;
- 3♦: 4 Hearts and a poor hand;
- 3♥: 4 Hearts and a good hand;

Here's the whole hand:

<p>♠ QJ1084 ♥ 5 ♦ 654 ♣ KQ76</p> <p>♠ 97                      ♠ A53 ♥ Q93                     ♥ K642 ♦ KQ8                     ♦ 9732 ♣ J9854                  ♣ A3</p> <p>♠ K62 ♥ AJ1087 ♦ AJ10 ♣ 102</p>	<p>Board 1 : Dealer North : Love all</p> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>West</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>North</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>East</i></th> <th style="text-align: left;"><i>South</i></th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td>Pass</td> <td>1♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>1♠</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>2♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>2NT</td> <td>Pass</td> <td>3♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Pass</td> <td>3♠</td> <td>All Pass</td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>			Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠	Pass	2♠	Pass	2NT	Pass	3♣	Pass	3♠	All Pass	
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>																		
		Pass	1♥																		
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♠																		
Pass	2NT	Pass	3♣																		
Pass	3♠	All Pass																			

Does North's hand warrant a game invitation? Point-wise, it's a bit shy. On the other hand, it's a 7-loser hand. North believes that we have an 8-card fit, but since you're playing Spiral, it can't hurt to ask. South's

third bid is obviously either 3♣ or 3♦ (since he has only 3 Spades), but does he have a minimum or a maximum. 13 HCP, but 8 losers.

Remember: when a hand's HCP and loser count don't match up, assume that the loser count is the better assessment of the hand. If we assume that South assesses his hand as "minimum," he bids 3♣ (just like Ogust) then the complete auction has gone like this:

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♠
Pass	2NT	Pass	3♣
Pass	3♠	Pass	

A tremendous percentage of the matchpoints go to those who get the part score battles right. Consider adding Spiral to your tool box. It can sometimes allow Opener to raise with 3, while affording Responder the ability to determine that opener has done so.

***\*Ingi's editorial comment:*** South's hand has redeeming factors, that I keep talking about, excellent connected intermediate cards. Considering those he may have bid 3♦ in the spiral sequence (I certainly would have). From South's hand this is a very good hand if partner has an honor in hearts and/or diamonds. Alas they are both in clubs, but on other similar deals they will be placed more favorably (also odds are against two honors being both in one out of three suits!). I think in the long run representing this hand as a maximum would work better – wouldn't it be fun to use a simulation program to answer this question definitively? **Look for simulations in future *Table Talk* issues!** Maybe we will try this hand first 😊

## **Upcoming Vermont Tournaments (All Subject to COVID-Related Developments)**

Vermont Sectional  
Burlington Bridge Club  
600 Blair Park Road  
Williston, Vermont  
May 15, 16 & 17, 2020 – **already postponed**

Vermont Sectional  
Battenkill Eagles  
2282 Depot Street  
Manchester, Vermont  
July 10, 11 & 12, 2020

President's Cup  
Location TBD  
August 16, 2020 (tentative)

Vermont Sectional  
Burlington Bridge Club  
600 Blair Park Road  
Williston, Vermont  
September 11, 12 & 13, 2020

Vermont Sectional  
Quechee Base Lodge  
3277 Quechee Main Street  
Quechee, Vermont  
October 30, 31 & November 1, 2020

### **Vermont and Nearby Clubs**

**Manchester Equinox Village Open**

**49 Maple Street**  
**Manchester, Vermont 05254**  
**Elizabeth VonRiesenfelder; (802) 362-5304**  
**Tuesday; 1:00 p.m.; 0-200 MPs**  
**Tuesday; 1:00 p.m.; open, stratified**  
**Sunday; 2:00 p.m.; February, March; open; stratified**  
*Multiple sites; call first; reservations requested*

### **Taconic Card Club**

**6025 Main Street**  
**Manchester, Vermont 05255**  
**Kim Likakis; (802) 379-1867**  
**Thursday; 12:30 p.m.; open; reservations requested**

### **Apollo Bridge Club**

**115 Main Street**  
**Montpelier, Vermont 05602**  
**Wayne Hersey; (802) 223-3922**  
**Friday; 6:30 p.m.; open**

### **Newport Club**

**84 Fyfe Street**  
**Newport Center, Vermont 05855**  
**Eric McCann; (802) 988-4773**  
**Wednesday; 1:00 p.m.; exc. Jan, May, Oct, Nov, Dec; open; stratified**

### **Barton Bridge Club**

**34 School Street**  
**Orleans, Vermont 05860**  
**Linda Aiken; (802) 525-4617**  
**Monday; 12:30 p.m.; open; stratified**

### **Rutland Duplicate Bridge Club**

**66 South Main Street**

**Christ the King Church**

**Rutland, Vermont 05701**

**Raymond Lopes; (802) 779-2538**

**Monday, 12:00 Noon; open; stratified**

**Tuesday; 6:00 p.m.; open; stratified**

**Thursday; 6:00 or 6:30 p.m. (time *changes seasonally...call first*); open; stratified**

***Multiple sites - call first for locations***

**St. Albans DBC**

**75 Messenger Street**

**St. Albans, Vermont 05478**

**Marsha Anstey; (802) 524-3653**

**Monday; 7:00 p.m.; open**

**Burlington Bridge Club**

**600 Blair Park Road**

**Williston, Vermont 05495**

**Phil Sharpsteen; (802) 999-7767**

**Monday; 6:30 p.m.; Non-LM 0-500 MPs; stratified**

**Tuesday; 6:30 p.m.; open; stratified (May-October only; call first)**

**Wednesday; 9:15 a.m.; open; stratified**

**Thursday; 12:30 p.m. 0-300 MPs; stratified**

**Friday; 9:15 a.m.; open; stratified**

**Sunday; 1:00 p.m.; open; stratified**

**Website: [www.bridgewebs.com/burlingtonacademy/](http://www.bridgewebs.com/burlingtonacademy/)**

**Norwich DBC**

**43 Lebanon Street**

**Hanover, New Hampshire 03755**

**Paul Hoisington; (802) 249-0839**

**hoise430@gmail.com**

**Tuesday; 6:30 p.m.; open; stratified**

**Quechee Duplicate Bridge Club**

**Quechee Club**

**3268 Quechee Main Street**

**Quechee, Vermont 05059**

**Dick Tracy; (802) 384-0461; [gmbuy51@gmail.com](mailto:gmbuy51@gmail.com)**

**Monday; 1:00 p.m.; open; stratified; weekly; year-round**

**1st Thursday of each month; 6:30 p.m.; *monthly*; year-round**

## **Eastman Bridge Club**

**48 Lebanon Street Street, Hanover, NH (Wednesday at 1:00 + Friday at 1:00)**

**6 Club House Lane, Grantham, NH (Tuesday at 12:30)**

**Jane Verdrager; (603) 865-5508**

**Website: [www.eastmanbridgeclub.com](http://www.eastmanbridgeclub.com)**

## **Keene DBC**

**Elks Lodge**

**81 Roxbury Street**

**Keene, New Hampshire 03431**

**Anne McCune; (603) 352-2751**

**Monday; 12:00 Noon; open; stratified (partner available)**

**Thursday; 12:00 Noon; open; stratified (no partner guaranteed)**

## **Ticonderoga (New York) DBC**

**109 Champlain Avenue**

**Ticonderoga, New York 12883**

**Michael Rogers; (518) 585-3322**

**Monday; 12:30 p.m.; open; stratified; reservations requested**

**Thursday; 12:30 p.m.; open; stratified; reservations requested**

## **Plattsburgh (New York) DBC**

**5139 North Catherine Street**

**Plattsburgh, New York 12901**

**George Cantin; (518) 563-6639**

**Tuesday; 6:45 p.m.; open; handicap**

**Thursday; 6:45 p.m.; open**

**Friday; 12:30 p.m.; open**

## **Useful & Fun Links**

<b>ACBL</b>	<a href="http://www.acbl.org"><u>www.acbl.org</u></a>
<b>District 25</b>	<a href="http://www.nebridge.org"><u>www.nebridge.org</u></a>
<b>Unit 175</b>	<a href="http://www.vermontbridge.org"><u>www.vermontbridge.org</u></a>
<b>Bridge Base Online</b>	<a href="http://www.bridgebase.com"><u>www.bridgebase.com</u></a>
<b>OKBridge</b>	<a href="http://www.okbridge.com"><u>www.okbridge.com</u></a>
<b>Bridge Guys</b>	<a href="http://www.bridgeguys.com"><u>www.bridgeguys.com</u></a>
<b>Pattaya Bridge Club</b>	<a href="http://www.pattayabridge.com"><u>www.pattayabridge.com</u></a>
<b>Larry Cohen</b>	<a href="http://www.larryco.com"><u>www.larryco.com</u></a>
<b>Mike Lawrence</b>	<a href="https://michaelslawrence.com/"><u>https://michaelslawrence.com/</u></a>
<b>Marty Bergen</b>	<a href="http://www.martybergen.com"><u>www.martybergen.com</u></a>
<b>Baron Barclay Bridge Supply</b>	<a href="http://www.baronbarclay.com"><u>www.baronbarclay.com</u></a>
<b>Michael's Bridge Sanctuary</b>	<a href="http://www.mapiano.com/bridge.htm"><u>www.mapiano.com/bridge.htm</u></a>
<b>Power Rankings</b>	<a href="http://www.coloradospringsbridge.com/PR_FILES/PR.HTM"><u>www.coloradospringsbridge.com/PR_FILES/PR.HTM</u></a>