

# *Table Talk*

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**Editors**

**Mark Oettinger**

**Ingi Agnarsson**

## **Editor's Musings**

Dateline Mid-April...

As we begin the 3-month process of writing this issue, live bridge has been under suspension for a month. The Columbus Nationals were the most high-profile casualty, and there is doubt that the Montreal Nationals in July will be able to be held. All near-term Sectionals and Regionals have been cancelled, and Bridge Base Online (BBO) is seeing several times its pre-virus number of players. Earlier today, I logged on to find 45,000 players online. Before the virus, I do not recall seeing numbers greater than 10,000. To BBO's credit, it has managed to accommodate the upsurge with minimal impacts to user performance. Aside from occasionally getting ousted from a game (one is always able to log back in immediately, without loss of continuity), the infrastructure has proven to be remarkably resilient. These types of "software as a service" (SAAS) platforms are highly "scalable," and my assumption is

that BBO essentially “ordered up a bunch more server space” from Amazon (or whatever server farm de jour), and voila!

Even before the virus, one had to imagine that increasing cooperation between BBO and the ACBL was inevitable. In fact, it has been a reality for some time already. With bricks & mortar clubs closed, however, pressures for deeper online bridge collaboration are growing like wildfire. It turns out that it’s not as easy as one might think. I got invited to play in the first-ever Ithaca, NY bridge club virtual game. I eagerly accept, but was then told that it wouldn’t be technologically possible...I wasn’t in their database from before, and although they suspected that exceptions could be made, their tech people couldn’t immediately figure out how to do so. I suspect that this type of functionality will be freely available soon.

Once the virus is over, will bridge have changed? And how long will it take us to get back to face-to-face club games and sectional, regional and national tournaments? We start with the stark reality that live bridge is about the best conceivable environment for passing germs. To make matters worse, ACBL members have an average age of close to 70, and some of our members are not in the greatest of health.

Dateline July 3...

All face-to-face bridge has been cancelled through 2020. Virtual clubs have become fairly common. The Burlington club started with two open games per week, on Wednesday and Friday mornings. Play was initially limited to individuals who had won masterpoints at the Burlington club during the previous year. It then became permissible to add additional players...within limits...and the Burlington games essentially opened up

to the entire Unit 175 membership (i.e., all of Vermont). Sunday afternoons were added, and then Monday evenings, which is where we stand as this issue goes to press.

The line between the ABCL and BBO becomes increasingly blurred. A 4-day online “regional” was just held by the ACBL, and there have been two online silver point events, but we are cautioned not to think of them as sectionals or as STAC games. There is tension around the issue of “who controls bridge” in the new environment. The stakeholders are Members, Clubs, Units, Districts, the ACBL, and online bridge (functionally, at least for the moment, BBO). The recent regional netted the ACBL \$565,000! I don’t know how much BBO got, but to my knowledge, Units and Districts got nothing. There are concerns in some circles that a coalition of the ACBL and big clubs will prefer fewer sectionals and regionals. Stay tuned.

### **Fourth Hand Weak 2s (Ingi Agnarsson)**

Weak 2 openings, which most of us play at least for 2♥ and 2♠, are effective pre-empts because the opponents must now bid with the 1<sup>st</sup> level, and most of the 2<sup>nd</sup> level, gone. Preempts are so powerful that some of us, and all of me, sometimes second-level preempt with only 5 cards. There is actually a theory behind that. If you have, say, 5 Spades, there are 8 cards out. They will tend to be distributed 3-3-2. Thus, on average, your partner 66% of the time has 3 – and you are on a ‘safe’ (according to the Law of Total Tricks) fit at the 2 level. Weak 2s also rarely get doubled for penalty because modern bidding emphasizes takeouts. With Mark we do like to have a 4+ card minor on the side on those occasion. We are pretty happy with the success of this approach.

We can all see the value of preempts when preceding opponents' bidding. Thus, some claim, fourth hand weak 2s don't exist! How can you—and why would you—preempt opponents who have already passed? The answer to that is competitive bidding. It is generally agreed upon that 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> hand openings can be weaker, because you take a risk to enter the bidding and get a positive score. So, a fourth hand 1♠ opening could very well be 10 or 11 points with 5 Spades. This is why we have “Drury,” effectively allowing your passed partner to ask “Do you have a real 1<sup>st</sup> hand opening hand, or did you enter lightly?” What if you have 6 Spades? I would argue, and I'm certainly not alone but rather following bridge theory, that you can profitably open a Weak 2 in fourth hand so as to 1) enter the bidding, and 2) establish the contract, 3) more effectively eliminate an entry into the bidding by opponents. After pass, pass, pass, and 1♠ on a minimum opening hand, the pesky opponents will almost inevitably enter the bidding. They'll tend to have close to 10 points each. Now you have to compete. Opening a Weak 2 is much more likely to eliminate competition, and to set a reasonable contract for a likely positive score.

This hand came up on Sunday June 21 in the VT BBC local tournament. It is not a very exciting hand, everybody played in 2♠, but it demonstrates the concept. I held:

AK8754

95

J54

A5

The bidding went pass, pass, pass to me. Most people would (and did) open 1♠ here. There is nothing wrong with this bid, but it does basically invite the opposition to compete. The opponents are both passed, again,

will tend to have close to 10 points each, and now can aggressively enter with any 5 card suit. But you don't want them to find a fit. Nor do you want them to exchange information for a more effective defense. You have 6 Spades, partner rates to have 2-3 the vast majority of times (someone would have pre-empted if the distribution is wild). You want to play in 2♠ for a likely good score. So, I opened 2♠. One other player in our club, Karen Hewitt, also opened 2♠. We got 100% and 72.7%, respectively. Maybe by chance, but the less information the opponents have, the harder is the defense. To emphasize the point, I recall a recent hand against robots that is very similar:

75  
AK10953  
A10  
83

Again the bidding went pass, pass, pass to me. I opened 2♥ and played there for about 90% score. Lefty held

KJ543  
QJ4  
KJ4  
74

and didn't enter the bidding at the 2-level. Their partner had:

Qxxx  
xx  
Q987  
AQx

While they easily make 2♠, we made 2♥ (giving one spade, one heart (lacking entries to do the deep finesse), one diamond, and two clubs. On

almost all other tables the bidding went pass, pass, pass, 1♥-1♠-P-2♠, all pass. When points are distributed equally among the four players (nobody has a 12 point opening hand), you can certainly expect competition if you enter the bidding. Rule it out when you can with 4<sup>th</sup> hand Weak 2s!!

### **Last Clear Chance (Ron Weiss)**

There is a doctrine in tort law called “last clear chance.” It provides that the negligence of a party suing for damages for an accident is irrelevant if that party is able to show that the other party had the last opportunity—the last clear chance—to avoid the accident. In the hand described below, North and South had a bang-up of an accident. North contends that South was negligent, and South contends that even if negligent, North had the last clear chance to avoid the bad result on the hand. In the subsequent lawsuit of South vs. North, who should prevail?

Playing IMPS, non-vul vs. non-vul, South dealt and opened 1♦ holding:

632  
A9  
QJ98  
AK92

LHO passed (the opponents passed throughout) and North responded 1♠.

It would seem that South now had two “reasonable” bids: 1NT and 2♣. Not enthralled with his Heart holding, South bid 2♣. (Had South bid 1NT, I would, for reasons that will become clear, not be writing this piece.) North then jumped to 3♦, which in the N/S system is invitational. What should South have done now?

With the jump in Diamonds, South “knew” that game was in hand. But, which game? If North had 5 Spades, then 4♠ would be the right place (based on the doubleton Heart, South’s 14-count gets upgraded to 15+). Otherwise, the right game could be 3NT, or even 5♦ (remember, we were playing IMPS). But, how to find the right strain?

After a bit of a pause, South bid 3♠, which in the N/S system should show 3 Spades with either 4-4 or 5-4 in the Minors, and a hand not strong enough to reverse. South thought that the bid of 3♠ showed game values. North, however, took South’s bid as invitational and passed. The result was a loss of 4 IMPS, not pretty.

So going back to our lawsuit, was South negligent? And if South was negligent, did North have the last clear chance to avoid the loss of the 4 IMPS? As author (and judge and jury here), I find that South was negligent not once, but twice. While 2♣ was not an unreasonable bid, 1NT would have been much superior. With Ax of Hearts, South knew that the opponents were not going to run off the first 7 tricks. But the real benefit of bidding 1NT is that it would have given North an easy response of 2♣ (New Minor Forcing) if North had an invitational hand and 5 Spades. But to escape liability, North must not have had the last clear chance to bid the game in Spades. So how should North have taken South’s 3♠ bid?

North argues that South’s bid described a minimum hand. Did it? Again, you are playing IMPS, and you are non-vul. With a minimum hand, wouldn’t South just have passed North’s 3♦ bid? I find that North should have taken South’s bid as showing more than a minimum, and now knowing that there is a double-fit – Spades and Diamonds – should have bid the Spade game. My decision, therefore, is that while South was negligent in not responding 1NT to North’s 1♠ response (and again for not bidding 3NT after North’s jump in Diamonds), North had the last clear chance to bid the Spade game. Verdict for South!

Here's the full deal:

|       |       |       |
|-------|-------|-------|
|       | AKJ75 |       |
|       | Q3    |       |
|       | 10732 |       |
|       | J5    |       |
| Q108  |       | 94    |
| J1064 |       | K8752 |
| K6    |       | A54   |
| Q1076 |       | 843   |
|       | 632   |       |
|       | A9    |       |
|       | QJ98  |       |
|       | AK92  |       |

***Ingi's editorial comment:*** I do not think 2♣ is a reasonable bid on South's hand. 1NT describes a 12-14 point balanced hand (and does NOT promise stoppers in all suits). That is a perfectly accurate description of South's hand. Meanwhile, 2♣ indicates a distributional hand and should show at least 5 Diamonds. So, on this hand, 2♣ is misleading...and it creates unnecessary bidding challenges. This should be a straight forward auction: 1♣ (Better Minor), 1♠, 1NT, 2♦ (NMF), 2♠, 3♠...and South should accept the invitation. [The auction is easier using Shotgun, see the April 2018 issue of *Table Talk*]. It is possible to defeat 4♠, but that takes an unlikely defense: underlead the Ace of Diamonds to the King, Diamond back, Diamond ruff, and then the Jack of Hearts (trapping the Queen). In the actual auction, after 3♠ by South, North might hope for South to be 3=1=5=4, and therefore consider

raising, but why didn't South just bid the game with that hand? So despite very suboptimal bidding by South, North did have the "last clear chance." Maybe I'd lose a 5 billion tort suit, but I'd be comfortable sitting North. South, in my opinion, mis-bid the hand and simply created a problem where none existed.

**Mark's editorial comment:** Ingi raises the issue of "Better Minor" in the context of a hand with 4-4 in the Minors. For a discussion of that somewhat controversial area, avid readers may enjoy reviewing another article that appeared in the April 2018 issue of *Table Talk*.

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### **Undiscussed Sequences - How to Land On Your Feet Most of the Time. (Mark Oettinger)**

This is another hand inspired by Ron Weiss. Vulnerable vs. non-vulnerable, you hold the following hand in first seat:

AQ32

43

KQ62

AQ10

You open a 15-17 1NT. Leftie passes, and partner jumps to 3♣. Per your partnership agreement, this is Puppet Stayman, but before we review that convention, let's review some of the common meanings that players attribute to a "jump shift over partner's opening 1NT."

There is a notable lack of consensus about how best to play jumpshifts over 1NT openers. You know the section of the convention card. It is located just to the right of the blanks for your 1NT range. It seems like these sequences almost never come up, but you need to have an agreement. Some people play them as showing a 6-card suit and being invitational to 3NT. I was squarely in this camp for quite a while, advocating that the bid should show 2 of the top 3 honors, so that partner can be reasonably confident of 6 tricks in the suit if he holds one of the top 3 honors himself and at least two cards in the suit. This approach has brought me some success, although again, the sequence very rarely comes up.

Others play these jump shifts as Splinters. In this style, 1NT - 3♥... shows a game forcing hand and a singleton or void in Hearts. It should, in my opinion, also show precisely 4 Spades. After all, with 5 Spades, responder would transfer first. There are a number of details that merit discussion in this style, including whether 1NT - 3♣ (Club shortness) and 1NT - 3♦ (Diamond shortness) require that responder have 4 cards in *each* Major. I have played this way (Splinters) as well, more so recently. This system also has its merits...when the bids come up.

Another contender in this area is using 3♣ as Puppet Stayman, as was being played by Ron Weiss and partner when bidding the subject hand. It forces to game, and asks opener to redescribe his hand:

|   |    |   |     |
|---|----|---|-----|
| W | N  | E | S   |
|   |    |   | 1NT |
| P | 3♣ | P | ?   |

3♦ = one or both 4-card Majors

3♥ = 5 Hearts

3♠ = 5 Spades

3NT = no 4-card *or* 5-card Major

Puppet allows for a very information-rich auction, and encourages opener to open 1NT with a 5-card Major (if you need encouragement)... since the 5-card Major may end up getting disclosed through Responder's use of Puppet. Of course, information-rich auctions educate both sides, and there are some who argue that Puppet is a bad idea precisely because it gives the defense too much information. Adherents to this point of view are quick to sing the praises of this elegant auction: 1NT - P - 3NT - P - P - P. And elegance aside, this spare auction gives the defense no extraneous information whatsoever. That puts the opening leader at a particular disadvantage, and it can undermine the defense later in the hand as well.

Side issue: **Should you open 1NT with a 5-card Major?** If so, should you do so always? Never? Sometimes? If sometimes, under what circumstances? I fall into the "sometimes" camp. Actually, it's a "most of the time" camp. As I have recommended in the past, when you inevitably have to lie about your hand (because no bid fits perfectly), be most reluctant to lie about your strength. I do not like to look at life through a negative lens, so I will rephrase this principle in the affirmative:

**DESCRIBE YOUR STRENGTH  
AS ACCURATELY AS POSSIBLE.**

This principle argues in favor of opening 1NT with a 5-card Major *if there are no contra-indications*. My biggest contra-indication is when I have only 2 cards in the other Major. All too often, opening 1NT with such a hand garners a transfer from partner into your 2-card Major. More often than not, that's a 7-card (2-5) fit (bad enough), and sometimes, to add insult to injury, you have a 5-3 fit in the *other* Major! Arghhh! In the interest of accurately showing my strength, I'm even getting accustomed to opening 1NT with a singleton Ace, King or Queen (which only fairly recently became permissible)...as long as the shortness is in one of the Minors.

But back to the postulated hand. Here are all 52 cards:

Dealer South

Vul vs. Non-vul

|       |      |         |
|-------|------|---------|
|       | KJ86 |         |
|       | AJ85 |         |
|       | 3    |         |
|       | J872 |         |
| 9754  |      | 10      |
| KQ972 |      | 106     |
| 10    |      | AJ98754 |
| 953   |      | K64     |
|       | AQ32 |         |
|       | 43   |         |
|       | KQ62 |         |
|       | AQ10 |         |

The auction began like this:

|   |    |    |     |
|---|----|----|-----|
| W | N  | E  | S   |
|   |    |    | 1NT |
| P | 3♣ | 3♦ | ?   |

Ron and his partner were playing Puppet Stayman, but had never discussed what to do over interference. Had East passed, South would have bid 3♦ to show “one or both 4-card Major(s).” With the interference, would a Double now be “Stolen Bid?” That sure would be convenient, but again, it’s “undiscussed.” How do we avoid what Phil Sharpsteen would call “an accident?” Ron and his partner do open 1NT with a 5-card Major (most people these days do), so responder may or may not have a 4-card Major, as he may be “Puppeting” merely to ascertain whether opener has a 5-card Major...with the intent of bidding 3NT if he does not.

Long story short, having an agreement, in this sequence, that Double is Stolen Bid, and that direct bids of 3♥ and 3♠ show 5, and that 3NT shows no 4 or 5-card Major, seems like a pretty good strategy, but that agreement has to come after the current auction has been concluded (for better or worse). And if you’re inclined to think, “That seems incredibly obvious,” I would simply ask, “What if the interference had been 3♥ or 3♠ (consider them separately) instead of 3♦?” Undiscussed situations like this tend to seem simple to the perpetrator (“I was showing first or second round control”), but the victim replies, “I thought you were showing a second suit.”

Here are a few suggestions for minimizing the frequency of your partnership misunderstandings:

1. Have a completely filled-out convention card;
2. Know your agreements;
3. Discuss your agreements with partner regularly;
4. Follow those agreements;
5. Update those agreements after each misunderstanding;
6. Beyond a convention card, consider having more extensive system notes;
7. Have agreed “default understandings” for when undiscussed situations inevitably come up. Here are a few examples:
  - a. If it’s undiscussed (i.e., not on the card), it’s natural;
  - b. Opponents’ Doubles are transparent, i.e., we bid just as we would if the doubling opponent had passed;
  - c. An undiscussed Double of opponents’ interference is (pick one):
    - i. Stolen Bid; or
    - ii. Penalty-Oriented;
  - d. Over interference, play “Systems On” whenever available;
  - e. All strange bids are forcing (ASBAF...thanks Mike Farrell); and my favorite
  - f. If you are considering making a bid that you think I might misunderstand, assume that I will...and bid something else.

So, finally...back to the problem at hand. What to bid?

Partner initiated Puppet, so we know that we are going to game. In addition, partner has asked: “Do you have a 4-card or 5-card Major suit?” In the absence of pre-agreed default understandings 7(b), (c) and

(d), above, I look for the most suitable natural method available with which to answer partner's question. Should I bid 3♠? This could lead partner to think that I have 5 Spades. I could Pass, but I have 17 HCP (the top of my range), so taking an unforced/free bid describes my strength nicely. If I choose to Pass, partner can show a 4-card Major if he has one. Hmm...quite a few choices.

Although I have said several times that showing one's strength is often paramount, I have already shown my strength within narrow parameters through my opening bid. Beyond that, we are in a game-forcing auction, so I do not have to be worried about partner stopping short of game. Had I been in South's position, I would therefore have passed to let North clarify. Given the actual hands, either 3♠ or Pass ends up getting us to 4♠. The most dangerous option is the most ambiguous, and the least natural...Double. In undiscussed situations, resist making the systemic bid that you *wish* you had on your card. Then circle the hand, discuss it after the round, and update your understandings.

**Ingi's editorial comments:** I relish reading this entry. Not only because I think it is wise—it certainly is—but it also speaks to our bridge game. Mark and I have been playing for a while. Once in a while during the bidding I make an 'inspired' bid. Mark likes to call these bids 'what else could this possibly mean?' (an unfortunate acronym wectpm does not seem useful). I feel inspired and I hope my partner is equally inspired. It seems attractive. Maybe if we got it right it would get a mention in the bulletin. But, I'm afraid Mark is on spot. Put your fantasies aside. Do not make a bid that partner will likely misunderstand. A marriage is a contract that can be legally undone. I do not know any legal way of undoing a terrible bridge contract.

## Slamming in Ithaca (Mark Wheeler)

*Mark O's Preface: Mark Wheeler and I played together in law school. He, like I, stopped playing bridge for many years while he raised a family, but he picked it up again after he retired in mid-2019. He and I played, for the first time in 40 years, in the Latham NY Sectional (roughly the mid-point between our respective homes) last November, and we had plans to play again. Covid has put a stop to that for the moment. The big difference between playing bridge in the late 1970s and today is bidding. As a result, much of our recent bridge-related communications have centered around his getting used to "two over one" and other developments in modern-day bidding. Here's a quick example. The question that arose from this hand was, "What should responder's 2nd bid be?" The actual auction is shown. I posited that 3 ♦ (New Minor Forcing) might have been better. Mark was South. Judge for yourself:*

Dealer: South

Non-Vul vs. Non-Vul

K73

KJ

AQ4

KQ74

AQ98642

10973

KJ

-

| North | East | South | West |
|-------|------|-------|------|
| 1♣    | P    | 1♠    | P    |
| 2NT   | P    | 3♥(?) | P    |
| 3♠    | P    | 4♣    | P    |
| 4♦    | P    | 4NT   | P    |
| 5♥    | P    | 6♠    |      |

Opening lead: Ace of Clubs

Making 6 on a claim. On reflection, for a number of reasons, I think your suggestion of 3♦ is better. Both bids court a response of 3♠, but a 3♦ bid allows opener to bid Spades with 3, Hearts with 4, and 3NT with neither. Plus, since 3♦ does not deny 4 Hearts, it allows for the potential 4-4 Heart fit to be played by the strong hand. 4♦ was music to my ears, since slam looked likely with first round control in both Minor suits, and a 10-card trump fit. 5♥ showed two key cards without the trump Queen. At that point, I am embarrassed to admit that I reverted to my old ways (“Cowboy,” as your UVM bridge-playing professor called me). The optimist in me reasoned: (i) dummy could have the Ace of Hearts; (2) if not, it could have the King and Queen of Hearts; (3) if not, it could have the right-sided King of Hearts alone; or (4) perhaps they won’t lead Hearts. I am not recommending the slam, but simply reporting on what took place. You will note that even without the fortuitous lead, the contract would have respectable chances. Unless both the Ace and Queen of Hearts are in the East hand, a correct guess in the Heart suit will yield 12 tricks, barring unlikely splits in Hearts and Spades (making 7 Spade tricks in hand, 1 Heart trick, 1 Heart ruff and 3 Diamond tricks).

**Mark O's Epilogue:** *I was intrigued by the fact that Mark and his partner use the 4♣ and 4♦ bids to show “first round control.” In one case it was a void, and in the other, an Ace. This has elements of what I call Italian Cue Bidding, although that system shows first or second round control. Larry Cohen advocates the same, describing the system as “control showing bids.” The common theme, as we explore for slam, is that we rule out that we have a suit with two quick losers, and then we use Key Card Blackwood for further clarification. In case it is unclear from the context, the person to whom Mark attributes the “cowboy” comment is Professor Tierney. I have never heard Professor Agnarsson call anyone a cowboy.*

**Ingi's epi-Epilogue:** *it is interesting that there seems to be a continental divide in cue bids. As 'kids' in Iceland we learnt that cue bids were first or second stoppers (Italian Cue Bids). Ace, king, singleton, or void. I think that's common to the rest of Europe pretty much. This seems to be a more effective way of slam bidding than cue bids promising an ace or void. In any case, no, Mark is right, I didn't call nobody cowboy!*

### **Bridge is a Bidder's Game (Ingi Agnarsson)**

No matter what, a bridge hand starts with bidding (even if pass, pass, pass, pass). The bidding establishes the contract, and often the lead and defense. In an expert game, it sometimes seems that the deck has 50+ points, everybody is bidding. Besting your opponents in a competitive auction is absolute key to success and one of the many reasons that effective crutches such as the “Law of Total Tricks” and “Loser Count” have become invaluable bridge tools. Indeed, some say bidding is 80% of bridge. As bridge theory advances, and especially with the

development of simulation software, it is increasingly clear that aggression is a long-term winning strategy. Everybody likes playing opponents who don't interfere. Like one world champion, the exceptional Icelandic player Jón Baldursson, exclaimed: "Don't be a pleasant opponent—bid." The more tongue-in-cheek quote by Edgar Kaplan also suggests you should get into the bidding whenever you can: "It is well-known that in third seat, you must have 13 cards to open the bidding."

Consider your hand, consider the vulnerabilities, but most of all, consider bidding! You may claim that you don't have the perfect hand for a bid. Duh! You rarely do. Waiting for the perfect hand to bid is like a birdwatcher pointing their binoculars at a single spot and waiting for the right bird to arrive. You are dealt hands and your objective is to figure out if you can reasonably enter the bidding, as frequently as possible, despite flaws in your hand.

My partners sometimes claim I'm a hand-hogger—I tend to play more than 25% of hands one would expect to play by random. The reason for that is very simple; I bid. Every chance I get, I bid. Of course, I get into trouble every now and then, but in the long run, this strategy has served me very very well.

This morning I woke up at 3 am. Insomnia has long been a part of my life. So, what do you do, wide awake at 3 am? Luckily, Bridge Base Online never sleeps.

In a MP 'individual' tournament (playing against robots, but with comparison to other humanoids doing same), vulnerable against non-vulnerable, I was dealt this hand:

AKJ5  
Q74  
J53  
J53

Simple, flat, 12 count. My left hand opponent opened 1♥. You, naturally, pass, and are faced with 2♥ by lefty and pass to you. Now what? You probably pass. You have decent defense and at unfavorable vulnerabilities, entering here with something like 2♠ is very risky. Pass? You just had a poor hand.

It never got to this point because after lefty opened 1♥, I bid 1♠. Sure, you ‘promise’ 5 cards, but more to the point, this is our opportunity to enter the bidding, secure a great lead if partner is on the lead, and, if partner has a fit, an entry to competitive auction. You are very unlikely to be punished at the first level, so this bid tends to be pretty safe—unlike entering at 2♠ later. As it happened, the bidding went 1♥-1♠-P-4♠, all pass! Do you now worry that you overbid? This was partner’s hand:

Q1062  
3  
Jx  
AK108642

With the club Q on-side (Qxx against x, I played the J and lefty, a robot not endowed with the best of our bridge knowledge, erroneously covered with the Q) the contract made despite 4-1 spade break. Another 20 point game! This also meant that the opponents make 4-5♥, depending on finding the ♥Q. So. Not entering the bidding -170 or -200, entering the

bidding +620 (or, failing to find the ♣Q, a great score down 1 for -100). As it was, my robot friend and I got 100% for this effort.

Of course, when you start entering ‘lightly’ you have got to be aware that there is risk involved and you must, somewhere, set the limit. I played this hand with Mary Tierney and in an instance of ‘inspiration’ figured I’d apply the above principle to this hand:

J9  
AK63  
AK43  
984

The bidding went 1♥-P-1♠ to me. I figured I have 4 defensive tricks, partner will never lead a Heart on this auction and bidding my better minor might help the defense, and possibly we could have a part-score better than defending. So I bid 2♦. This, I believe, was the first time in my bridge career I entered the bidding at the second level with a 4 card minor. I also believe there was a good reason I never did this before!

The auction might have been successful, and indeed, the opponents can make 3NT, but they only have 23 points and nobody is bidding that high. In the end, my 2♦ was simply passed out, the results was -5, and a 22.2% score. Be aggressive, but also be sensible. This bid was probably unhinged, not sensible, and it incurred a cost.

### **Small Slam in Clubs...3 Variations (Mark Oettinger)**

Slam bidding can be highly enjoyable, *especially when the opponents do not interfere*. [note Baldursson’s comment above]. One has a lot of room to explore, and one often gets to use several different conventions, and

sub-conventions, all in the course of a single auction. One finds a fit, shows first and second round controls, uses Key Card Blackwood, asks about the trump Queen, asks about outside Kings, and invites Grand Slam if partner has undisclosed extras. In a regular partnership, you should be able to make the right slam decisions significantly more often than not. And doing so is very satisfying.

**NOTE TO DEFENDERS:**  
**INTERFERE WITH YOUR OPPONENTS' SLAM BIDDING EFFORTS,**  
**WHENEVER YOU CREDIBLY CAN.**

A particularly effective form of interference is preemption, and in my opinion, the most effective preempts come at one's first opportunity. Opening preempts and jump overcalls make it far harder for the preempter's opponents (usually, the pair with the greater strength) to have an efficient and effective auction. This principle applies both when the opponents of the preemptor(s) are making *game*-level, or *slam*-level, decisions. So...disrupt when you *credibly* can.

What do I mean by "credibly?" If it goes Pass - Pass to you, and you hold xx xxx KQJxxx xx, what are you going to do? To me, there's a legitimate stylistic choice: 3♦ or Pass. My lack of a 7th Diamond is certainly a defect, but some of you know that I espouse a "two defect rule." My HCP holding and loser count are both within normal limits for an opening 3-level preempt, and therefore, I would open 3♦ if non-vulnerable, but I would Pass if vulnerable (a second defect). *ACBL Bulletin* columnist Adam Parish recently advised that if you have a hand that simply does not lend itself to accurate description in your

partnership methods, you should be the most reluctant to lie about your *strength*. Viewed through this lens, the lack of a 7th Diamond seems to me like a rather minor flaw.

Another *Bulletin* columnist, Robert Todd, recently asked, “When your hand qualifies for either a simple or jump overcall, how should you decide?” In that situation, he argues for *jump* overcalling because the HCP range (5-11) is narrower (he uses the phrase “less blurry”) than the point range for a simple overcall (8-18). The embedded common wisdom, as I see it, is that you should try to be as honest and clear as possible when conveying the *strength* of your hand to your partner. That’s not to say that you should grossly misrepresent your shape, but...

**WHEN FACED WITH A CHOICE OF IMPERFECT BIDS,  
STRIVE FIRST TO BE AS HONEST AS POSSIBLE  
ABOUT YOUR STRENGTH.**

But we digress.

In my last regional before the Covid-related shutdown, in Sturbridge, playing with different partners, we bid and played two interesting 6♣ contracts on consecutive days. Two months later, playing online with a robot partner, “we” reached another 6♣ contract. Let’s review them “over my shoulder,” digressing here and there, with the goal of distilling a few useful principles.

My partner on the first hand was Ron Weiss. Our opponents included Jack Mahoney, District 25 President, with whom I have played in the past.

Dealer: West

EW Vul

|       |       |         |
|-------|-------|---------|
|       | AQJ87 |         |
|       | Q106  |         |
|       | -     |         |
|       | A8765 |         |
| K1094 |       | 63      |
| K974  |       | 532     |
| 9865  |       | KQJ1074 |
| 4     |       | J10     |
|       | 52    |         |
|       | AJ8   |         |
|       | A32   |         |
|       | KQ932 |         |

The auction went like this:

| W | N  | E | S   |
|---|----|---|-----|
| P | 1♠ | P | 2♣  |
| P | 3♦ | P | 3♥  |
| P | 3♠ | P | 4NT |
| P | 5♠ | P | 6♣  |
| P | P  | P |     |

3♦ was a Splinter. 3♥ and 3♠ showed first or second round controls. These are sometimes referred to as Italian Cue Bids. Larry Cohen calls

them Control Bids. Regardless of what you call them, we now know that we do not have 2 quick losers in any suit. That sets the stage for Key Card Blackwood, and when partner shows 2 key cards *with the Queen*, I examine my Queen of Clubs closely to make sure it's not a Spade. Why is he lying? It's clear. Partner assumes that I have 5 Clubs for my 2♣ bid, so he must have 5 Clubs himself, since with a combined total of 10 trumps, you respond to KCB *as if* you had the Queen of trumps (since it's a heavy favorite to drop).

That's all the encouragement I needed. The play was simple, with the King of Spades onside. Declarer's two "small" Hearts went away on the two Spade pitches, and voila, 13 tricks! +940!

\* \* \*

The second hand was played in the Saturday Night Pro-Am in Sturbridge. I got paired with a young lawyer who has been playing for a couple of years, has roughly 200 masterpoints, and cannot get enough of the game. We all remember the overwhelming joy of that steep learning curve...and its inevitable plateaus. There turned out to be more pros than ams, and Ron did not have a partner, so he chose to kibitz my partner, which afforded her even more useful feedback. In the few minutes we had after meeting, and before the start of the game, I counseled her about Hamman's Rule: "If you have a logical choice from among a number of possible bids, and 3NT is one of them, bid it." I think that we bid and made 3NT on 8 of the 12 first hands. Then came this hand:

East Deals

EW Vul

|        |          |       |
|--------|----------|-------|
|        | AQ75     |       |
|        | 2        |       |
|        | Q986     |       |
|        | Q865     |       |
| 10986  |          | KJ432 |
| Q103   |          | AK985 |
| J10753 |          | K4    |
| 4      |          | J     |
|        | -        |       |
|        | J764     |       |
|        | A2       |       |
|        | AK109732 |       |

The auction went like this:

| W  | N  | E  | S     |
|----|----|----|-------|
|    |    | 1♠ | 2♣    |
| 3♠ | 4♣ | P  | 6♣(!) |
| P  | P  | P  |       |

How did I justify 6♣? First, the vulnerability was right. Second, because the opponents had settled below game, I suspected that they only had 9 Spades between them. If they had 10 Spades, they would probably have bid game. That gave partner 4 Spades, and probably 5 Clubs, leaving only 4 cards in the red suits, of which I had one “covered.” Third, to raise me to the 4-level, I surmised that partner has something beyond just a bunch of Clubs and values in the opponents’ suit. That something could be one or more “cover cards,” or it could be shape. Fourth, if partner’s hidden superpower is shape, partner’s shortness is more likely to be in Hearts than in Diamonds, so the hand

could be the cross-ruff of the century. Fifth, we probably have a 12-card Club fit, and if so, the opponents will not lose any Clubs. Sixth, we may prompt them into making “the last mistake.” Seventh, oddly enough, 6♣ may be less likely to get doubled than 5♣. Eighth, having the second 6♣ contract of the tournament would be cool. Ninth, this was a Pro-Am, where a bit of swashbuckling is in order. Tenth, the District 25 Secretary was kibitzing our opponents. Eleventh, we were having a great round. As Zia would say, we were in Heat 1. And twelfth, it was deep into my third session of the day, and closing in on 10 p.m.

The Jack of Diamonds lead would have beaten it, but West understandably led a Spade. I hooked the Queen and had to ruff the King. I then led a Heart to set up the cross-ruff. Back came a Club, but when trumps split 1-1, I had 12 tricks via cross-ruff, dallying briefly on the board to throw my small Diamond on the Ace of Spades.

No overtrick this time. Just +920.

\* \* \*

The third hand was played online:

Dealer: West  
 EW Vul

|      |         |  |       |
|------|---------|--|-------|
|      | 54      |  |       |
|      | K2      |  |       |
|      | 97      |  |       |
|      | AKJ9652 |  |       |
| A106 |         |  | Q9    |
| 873  |         |  | 10965 |
| J642 |         |  | Q1053 |
| Q103 |         |  | 874   |
|      | KJ8732  |  |       |
|      | AQJ4    |  |       |
|      | AK8     |  |       |
|      | -       |  |       |

The auction went like this:

|   |    |   |    |
|---|----|---|----|
| W | N  | E | S  |
| P | 1♣ | P | 2♠ |
| P | 3♣ | P | 3N |
| P | 6♣ | P | P  |
| P |    |   |    |

My 2S bid is a “Soloway Jump Shift,” showing 17 total points and a rebiddable (likely 6-card) Spade suit. I play enough on BBO to understand its bidding system (which is known as Ginsberg’s Intelligent Bridgeplayer or GIB) pretty well, and I like Soloway Jump Shifts. That said, remember “cursor float” the bids...both your proposed ones and

theirs...as the meanings can sometimes surprise you. There is little need for Weak Jump Shifts in “BBO daylongs” because, by definition, you hold the “best” (or tied for best) hand at the table. For the same reason, robo-partner will rarely have a Soloway Jump Shift over your opener. Understand that a Soloway Jump Shift by you over an opening bid by robo-partner will be treated as highly slam-going. My 3NT seemed straight-forward, and I was not about to “mastermind” my partner’s 6♣ bid. I have found that when robo-partner bids a suit like that, it is usually self-sufficient.

Robo-Leftie could have made this a non-story by starting with the Ace of Spades, but he did not. He led the Three of Hearts instead. Through the wonders of limitless computing power, robots test each possible lead and choose the statistically most promising. In doing so, they even differentiate between matchpoint and IMP forms of scoring.

Serious students of the game will enjoy two companion volumes entitled *Winning Notrump Leads* and *Winning Suit Contract Leads*, by David Bird and Taf Anthias. Their research methodology mimics that of GIB. They take a hand, run 5,000 iterations of the other 3 hands, and test each of the 13 possible leads against each of the 5,000 simulations, to analyze how many tricks each lead produces (matchpoints) and how often they will beat the contract (IMPs). The authors then distill general leading principles from the results. It is fascinating (if dense) reading, with occasionally surprising results. For example, doubletons are actually pretty good leads against suit contracts, and it is often right to lead an Ace, since that gives you a chance to “have a look,” and to judge the lead to trick 2 based on much more complete information.

Back to the play of the hand. The contract certainly is not “usual,” and I judged that going down was not going to garner any matchpoints. Was there a way to make it? Yes! I had to hope that the trumps were 3-3, and that the Hearts were 4-3, and that the opponent with the Queen of Clubs only had 3 Hearts.

I won the opening lead with the King of Hearts on the board, cashed the Ace and King of Clubs, and then played off three more Hearts, pitching both of the board’s Spades on the third and fourth Hearts. Robo-Leftie ruffed the last Heart with the Queen of Clubs, but could not prevent me from getting to the board to draw West’s last trump and claim the balance. About an 8% slam, as I calculate it!

**Ingi’s editorial comment:** I’m not sure how BBO programs their Ginsberg’s ‘intelligent’ bridgeplayer robots. I find that their play and defense is often remarkably unintelligent. Is this on purpose? Robots easily outcompete humans nowadays in other complex games like chess, Go, backgammon and others. The competition is not even remotely close. It seems that robots are still a long way away from doing that in bridge. Decades ago Zia Mahmood offered a million dollar reward for any robot able to beat him in bridge. The offer has since been retracted, but I do not think the great Zia would have any problems beating BBO robots 90% of the time.

### **Rules of Bridge: Second Hand Low (Ingi Agnarsson)**

There is little doubt that defense is the most challenging aspect of bridge to master. Bidding you can take to sophisticated levels studying at your leisure at home, and if you studied with partner, your communication can be very effective. Declarer play can be complicated, but you already

did your partnership communication during the bidding and you have the luxury of seeing partner's hand while playing! In defense, your picture of partner's hand may be a bit fuzzy, to right out deeply obscure. Did partner like your lead, or not, is he giving you an attitude or count, what is he indicating with a positive attitude, how many diamonds does he have, where the heck is the ♥K? You need to try to picture partner's hand, and you need to communicate effectively with partner during defense, in much greater darkness than you do during the bidding. Hence, players tend to make the most mistakes in defense, even world class players.

I find that in non-expert game, simply having the higher point count and tending to play the hand is a clear path to a good game. In an expert-world class game, this is not necessarily the case, because defensive 'gifts' are rarer and certain mistakes are more likely to be repeated on multiple tables. In a non-expert game, 'gifts' are pretty frequent and fairly random (different types of mistakes on a given hand). In such a game if you declare the majority of hands, you are almost guaranteed a good score.

One of the most frequent gifts I receive whether on BBO or at the BBC stems from defenders eagerness to secure a trick as soon as possible. This is a typical example:

Dummy holds

K82

against your Q73

You play the 3 from your hand and LHO jumps up with the Ace. You now got two tricks in the suit which is practically impossible with

‘good’ defense. If LHO ducks, you score the King, but your Queen must now lose to the ace, and the third round trick is also the opponents.

This is a part of a very general bridge principle, or rule, that can be expressed in only 9 words:

Second hand low... Second hand low! **Second hand low!!**

In other words, when declarer/dummy plays a low card and you hold the top honor sitting on the second hand to play, duck. If you are not clear on this principle, studying and applying it is one of the quickest and most effective ways to improve your defense. Whenever in doubt, play second hand low. Prepare before being put on the spot so you can play second hand low smoothly without hesitation. Consider this suit in dummy:

KJ3

You have A842 and declarer is on lead and plays a small one. DO NOT go up with the ace. And you could see this will happen at some time, so when this play comes along, duck smoothly. If you start thinking in this situation, you will imply the Ace to declarer (and worse, to partner).

Let’s say declarer held 95. If you go up with the Ace, it’s an easy trick for declarer, smooth ducking puts declarer on a guess at no cost.

*To make it clear, this rule holds when declarer plays a small, or a finesse-able card.* In other words, when your Ace is not taking a high card. If declarer plays the King and you have the Ace, it will often be correct to play it, second hand. The most obvious exceptions to the second hand low rule are: 1) when there is an urgent need to get on lead and make a critical switch, and 2) *often, but certainly not always*, when declarer is playing from a singleton.

I played this hand on BBO with Mary Tierney, being a frequent partner we have, of course, discussed the second hand low principle in detail:

|       |       |       |
|-------|-------|-------|
|       | KQ63  |       |
|       | KQ65  |       |
|       | Q8    |       |
|       | J53   |       |
| J9    |       | A8542 |
| AJ    |       | 932   |
| KJ432 |       | 9765  |
| AK109 |       | Q     |
|       | 107   |       |
|       | 10874 |       |
|       | A10   |       |
|       | 87642 |       |

I sat North and opened 1NT 12-14, and the bidding continued: 1NT-P-P-2NT (minors), I passed, East bid 3♦ where we played. Mary led the ♠10 hoping for a ruff, however, East took the Ace and with only two spades in dummy, any hopes of a ruff disappeared. East immediately played a low diamond. An inordinate number of ‘early career’ players would intuitively go up with the trump Ace, and perhaps play another trump. Or, return another spade. Incorrect! Instead, Mary smoothly ducked, declarer—being put on a guess—finessed the Jack and I took the Queen. I now had a chance to switch to ♥K, securing a trick there before the trumps could be cleared. If Mary had gone up with the ace, the declarer

first of all only gives one trump trick, and secondly can throw Heart losers in clubs. Smooth 'second hand low' gained two tricks. We got a very good score defending 3♦ making three for -110.

An objection I often hear is 'I thought declarer was playing from a singleton'. First, your thinking must be very clear here, not merely a hunch. You have to have very good evidence for a singleton to violate the second hand low rule. Second, it can be the correct to play second hand low, even if declarer (or dummy) is playing from a singleton! Consider this hand:

|       |        |
|-------|--------|
| Ax    | KQJxxx |
| KQxxx | x      |
| xxx   | Axx    |
| xxx   | Axx    |
|       | xxx    |
|       | Axx    |
|       | xxx    |
|       | xxxx   |

The contract is 4♠ and you led a spade. Declarer ducked to the spade King and now plays a small Heart. You suspect this is from a singleton, or let's say you KNOW it's from a singleton. You rush up with the Ace and declarer makes his contract (6 spades, 2 hearts, and the two minor aces). What if you, instead, play second hand low? Declarer wins the King and avoids a Heart loser, however, he must now lose two tricks in each of the minors for down one! Let's, say instead the dummy had only Kxxxx in Heart. Even in this situation, you don't lose by ducking as in both cases declarer simply gets one Heart trick, and loses 4 tricks (either

one Heart and 3 minor tricks, or 4 minor tricks). Don't get me wrong, it can be risky to play second hand low when declarer/dummy plays a singleton, but in certain situations it is cost free, and in some other's it can be a critical play!

In sum, unless I am declarer at your table (I *love* gifts...), **play second hand low!**

## **Upcoming Vermont Tournaments**

Face-to-face tournaments are cancelled for the balance of 2020  
Play in online national, regional and silver point tournaments  
Go to Bridge Base Online (BBO)

## **Vermont and Nearby Clubs**

Many, if not all, bricks and mortar clubs are closed due to Covid  
Check websites and call or email first!

### **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**

## **Mad River Valley Bridge Club**

**The Waitsfield Inn**

**5267 Main St**

**Waitsfield, VT 05673**

**Vickie Walluck; 802-590-3068**

**[VickieWalluck@gmail.com](mailto:VickieWalluck@gmail.com)**

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

**Call or email Vickie in advance if you need a partner**

## **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**

**Table Talk Online**

**[www.bridgequarterly.org](http://www.bridgequarterly.org)**

**ACBL**

**[www.acbl.org](http://www.acbl.org)**

**District 25**

**[www.nebridge.org](http://www.nebridge.org)**

**Unit 175**

**[www.vermontbridge.org](http://www.vermontbridge.org)**

|                                    |                                                                                                                         |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <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> |