

# *Table Talk*

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**Editors**

**Mark Oettinger**

**Ingi Agnarsson**

## **Editor's Musings**

### **Mission Accomplished**

Ingi and I have decided, after 16 issues over 4 years, to conclude our tour of duty as your *Table Talk* editors. As you will read below, Ingi has accepted a tenured professorship in Iceland beginning January 2022, and will therefore be spending most of his time there. He did negotiate terms which will allow him to be in Vermont for several weeks or months each year, in order to be able to spend time with family. Don't be surprised, therefore, when you see him playing at a local club or tournament. We have had as lot of fun writing *Table Talk*, although it has also been a tremendous amount of work. With roughly 500 pages of substantive material, we toy with the idea of publishing a book, and without the need to produce new material every quarter, perhaps we will repurpose some of the captured time in furtherance of that task.

There were times when we wondered whether anyone was reading what we were writing. Then would come an email posing a question, or a kind word at the table. For anyone who might be considering stepping up to become the next *Table Talk* editor, you have to do it because you find value in the act itself. Those of us who love bridge know how endless of a learning process it is. And it's often said that the best way to learn is to teach. Over the past 4 years, I have learned a LOT about many bridge-related topics.

It's interesting to write about a fast-changing period of time, knowing that by the time one's writings are read, the news will be stale. It's a bit frustrating. Will my prognostications have been proven right or wrong? Will anyone care? Perhaps some day...someone...much as I did...will read through old issues of *Table Talk* as a window to the past. They will relive Vermont sectionals of the 1990s with 250 tables over 5 sessions. And the commentators of the day bemoaned the decline of bridge even then. If anyone is interested in becoming the next *Table Talk* editor, please reach out to either Ingi or me...or to both of us...it's a great experience for the right person.

### **Return to Live Play at Clubs**

Burlington Bridge Club (BBC) restarted live play on Sunday, July 11. 13 tables that day; 15 last Sunday. It also restarted the in-person "under 300" game that week. Proof of vaccination is required (a database is maintained, so you won't be asked twice), and masks are not required. Other precautions remain in place, at least for now. For the time being, BBC's other games (Monday at 6:30 p.m., Wednesday at 10:15 a.m., and Friday at 10:15 a.m.), will persist online. Check the BBC website for details.

By highlighting the BBC schedule, I do not mean to slight other clubs. I am simply less aware of their doings. As always, contact information for all of Vermont's ACBL-sanctioned games is included at the end of each issue of *Table Talk*. I have heard that many Vermont clubs have been back to playing live since early or mid June, with roughly pre-pandemic attendance. As always, the club contact information is at the end of the issue. Reach out to the point of contact and PLAY BRIDGE!

### **The Return of Sectionals and Regionals**

The ACBL has resumed "sanctioning" Sectionals and Regionals, but as of this writing, the traditional Unit 175 September 10-12 and October 29-31 Sectionals may not occur in 2021. Efforts are afoot to make these tournaments happen, but nothing is firm yet. Keep posted for Unit 175 announcements, and if you can, hold the dates.

District 25 returns to hosting Regionals with Warwick from August 31 to September 5, and Mansfield November 3-7. Vaccination required; mask not.

### **The Future of Bridge?**

Face to face is back. Online will continue, though perhaps diminished. Will hybrid games emerge? In my fantasy, some players would play live, while other players would join via BBO, much as was the case before Covid when directors would use robots to fill half tables. I've been given the name of the guru of such matters at the ACBL, and I plan to broach the issue with him when time permits. Hybrid games would

increase access to duplicate bridge. The technology should be doable, but cheating is a thorny problem for online bridge.

The roll-out of the smaller (13-member) ACBL Board is underway, and we (District 25/New England) are being merged with District 24 (NYC and Long Island). Unit board members are the electors, so if you are one, get to know the candidates, watch for the ballots, and be sure to cast your vote.

## Featured Vermont Bridge Personality Ingi Agnarsson

### Bridge, Blood, Buddies and Bugs



*Ingi and family – Francis, Laura, and Lee in Shelburne Bay Park, July 2021. Laura is a biologist like me, in fact she is the latest faculty member at the Department of Biology at UVM - hip hip hurray! But while our kids are plenty smart, they are certainly NOT biologists! Francis likes building things and dreams of a career in*

*engineering or astrophysics, while Lee loves music, literature, and animation, and may seek a career in one or more of those areas*

**Preamble** – Mark asked me write this (I already sound like a bad partner). As it turns out it is our last issue and for me a farewell to USA. Sure, I'll spend time

here and you are stuck with me at the club for a while, but USA will no longer be my primary home. I'd hesitate to say this adds significance to this issue because that is a big word for a small publication. But it means something to me. I enjoy our club. I love walking through the doors of club seeing Phil browsing some news about hickory in Vermont and looking forward to KC's excellent treats. Nothing is for granted. But time at BBC usually is quality time. I am very happy to have walked among such excellent people as yourself. Burlington bridge club is a home. It will remain a home as long as you'll have me.

Mark and I tried to make this publication matter. We put in time and work beyond our pay grade (I never saw how much Mark was making, but judging by my income he'll need retirement plan-or owes me a check). We cannot guarantee that you were always entertained, but we certainly wanted to entertain you. We walk away four years later hoping very much that someone will pick up. It's a gem of a publication and it would be sad to see it go.

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The first thing I learnt about bridge, at the age of 10, was that face-cards and aces are worth points, and if I have 12 or more of them suckers, I should open the bidding with 1 club. I was also allowed to consider opening 1NT with a lot of face-cards, but mostly, the lesson was, bid 1 club. What simple times!

I don't know if you can surmise from that who my first bridge teacher was. I imagine it was the way a lot of us learned. No, it wasn't my grandma, or grandpa, but close. We had recently moved from a 'project' like apartment building to a house in a new neighborhood. My parents' finances were tight. But recently, the salary of my father, who was a scientist and a university professor, had dramatically increased. Finally the University of Iceland was appreciating expertise. Of course, changing schools at the age of 10 was difficult. I left all my friends behind and now lived in a place where I knew nobody, and was the 'new kid in class;' a challenging experience for a uniquely shy child.

Luckily, in the neighborhood - a cluster of about 45 single family homes - seven of the kids in my class lived right there. So I soon made some friends. One of them lived only three houses down. His name was Björgvin (we remain close friends to this day, though we rarely see each other living continents apart), and he had a grandmother who played bridge. I was already addicted to games. I played every card game, chess, and all board games anyone was willing to play with me since the age of 4 or so. I was privileged in having a close and loving relationship with my grandparents and they had inordinate patience to entertain me through playing games. Every day, for years and years and years. My dad also taught me chess. I loved it, was soon better than my dad at it, and learned about strategy and planning playing chess.

Just as we moved to the new neighborhood, I started joining my grandparents on my mother's side in a recreational 'club' for the elderly, which happened to be a 3-minute walk from our new home. They would go there twice a week to play cards, mostly whist. I got to go and hang out with lovely senior citizens and play cards for hours. In between, there was coffee and cakes. This was heaven for me! I always got along easier with adults, especially older adults, than with kids. I found no reason to be shy amongst my grandparent's friends. So I found a smile and started picking up some basics of strategic card playing.

Björgvin's grandmother insisted on calling me Julius, for some incomprehensible reason. It became a teasing nick-name at school: "Ingi-Julius" for a while, not something I needed as the new kid in class. So, I have to admit, I resented the old woman for this. However, I quickly forgave her for the gift she had given me in discovering the game of bridge! Soon after learning the basics of the "Vienna system" (1 club openers on most 12+ hands, and 1NT responses on all game-going hands), I abandoned the purely-fun whist tables at my grandparents' club

and asked if I could join the bridge tables. The people kindly let me play, but I soon learned that bridge players took their game far more seriously than did whist players. I got to hear how poor my bidding and play were all the time. Sometimes it brought me to tears. But the game was so thrilling that I persisted. In a couple of years or so, I was more or less holding my own.

My father was an ecologist, and my grandfather a botanist. My great granddad was an excellent naturalist, and a farmer. There's something in our genetic makeup. I never had any doubt, or really, any choice. I set my own career at the age of 5. I was to study biology, a topic I just naturally loved, and become either a museum curator or a professor. I never ever looked back. No other line of work was ever a career option. Interestingly, my brother apparently inherited a different set of genes from dad, and for a long time it seemed to me that he might be interested in almost any line of work as long as it had nothing to do with biology! He became a professional photographer, and is excellent at it.

Even though my career path was set as a small child, it didn't mean that I didn't have other jobs. I did all kind of work. In Iceland it is common to start on the job market at the age of 12 or so. You do school and then you work for 3 months over summer. I started earlier, around the age of 9, working in the lab of my dad. There I would do basic lab maintenance and cleaning, and sorting of biological materials. Soon I was assisting my dad in the field, and sorting through intertidal invertebrates. I became quite good at identifying bugs, especially amphipods. That was the start of my 'bug life' and I started collecting moths and other bugs at the same time, not realizing at the time that that would become my profession (I was interested in all of life). I then did work as a part of junior work teams, usually involving gardening of some sorts, and other community projects.

At 17 I was working in the dairy section of a large supermarket and bought my first car. I then did various types of work during summers including more lab work, various supermarket jobs, gardening and landscaping. Landscaping paid best. I worked on a small excavator, laid brick and stone sidewalks, and did some minor carpentry. During those years I occasionally played bridge with Björgvin and grandma, but no longer went to the club with my grandparents – career was already interrupting bridge! As I graduated high-school I decided to take two years off before acquiring a college biology degree. I worked for the first year in landscaping, saved money (my parents never threw me out, so I lived for free and saved all my salary), and planned my first major expedition to get to know this planet.

At the age of 20 I flew off to Brazil and then spent 4 months travelling throughout South America, mostly as a passenger on an old Bedford truck driving from Rio de Janeiro to Quito in Ecuador—a large section of the trip through the Amazon rainforest. It wasn't boring. This was a company-run expedition where you paid for your seat on the truck, and were provided with the ride, tent, and food (that we cooked ourselves), throughout the journey. This was both mind-blowing and life-altering experience. I had never before experienced this kind of freedom and excitement, and the joy of being out in nature all day every day for months on end. My plan to become a biologist was yet again reinforced, and in the process, I decided that I would continue to travel with the ultimate goal of seeing all countries on earth! It's still a goal, but I'm only up to about 55 so far...

When I got back home to Iceland, I started college and I experienced depression for the first time in my life. The first semester's assignments were mostly reading about chemistry and biometrics, but no real biology. This was during the cold and very dark winter time in Iceland,



which contrasted very unfavorably to the thrill of roaming tropical South America. It was a struggle for the first semester, but I was to find happiness again with my first girlfriend and (I am somewhat embarrassed to say), even more so with rediscovering bridge! I decided to learn bridge properly during that dark winter, and took a bridge course taught by recent world-champion Guðmundur Arnarsson (Bermuda Bowl, 1991, winner Iceland). The course focused on modern 2/1 bidding system and basics of card play and defense. It was simply amazing. The counterintuitive Vienna system was quickly forgotten. In the course I made a friend “Halli” a few years older than me, setting us apart from the generally much older crowd. After the course we started playing in our local club and soon started winning regularly. Halli remains a close friend and occasional partner—again, seen rarely due to continental separation.

During the next several years while in college, and after college working at the Icelandic Museum of Natural History (saving money for my next world trip), I played a LOT of bridge. “Junior” bridge in Europe involved anyone 25 or younger. We played a lot of tournaments (with Halli, and other partners – all of whom remain close friends) and annual junior championships, etc. We also went abroad to join junior ‘bridge camps’ including the 1<sup>st</sup> World Junior Bridge Camp in Ghent, Belgium in 1995. I was only later to appreciate that I spent a week in that camp with many players that were later to achieve fame, among others, Boye Brogeland and Geir Helgemo, Norwegian juniors that were to become one of the best pair the game has ever seen.

The peak of my bridge ‘career’ was winning the Icelandic junior pair championships and being selected to represent my nation in international junior tournaments. With my partner at the time, we won the first pair tournament we played internationally, and did quite ok in the team

game. The best of it all was having a world-famous master bridge player and very recent world champion Barry Westra (representing the 1993 Netherlands team winning the Bermuda Bowl) sitting behind me and my Belgian opponent in one of the team games, a match that Mr. Westra would write about in the tournament bulletin. We played well and probably for the first and only time in my life, my partner and I scored in all 16 hands, our opponents did not get a single positive score—not a single number in their column! Needless to say we won the match.

Westra wrote a piece on the bad run of the Belgians (he had been ‘hired’ to follow the Belgian team), and offered me praise for one of the boards. There, on a distributional hand with a Diamond void, I made a very aggressive 5C overcall before opponents had time to find their suit (they had the majority of the points) – they landed in 5D which I then doubled, with limited defense but sensing they were not surefooted. Misjudging the trump suit, declarer went two down vulnerable for -500, providing us with one of our best boards. Westra wrote something like, “South really did it to East in this hand for a great score.” Since, my bridge career has been downhill.

Soon, my days with the junior national team were numbered as my partner and I tended to argue too much and eventually stopped playing. Mood control at the bridge table has always challenged me, as all my partners well know... As I turned 26 and was no longer an eligible ‘junior’ I had graduated college a year earlier (1995) and was razor focused on furthering my career as a biologist and exploring the world more. As I had done after high-school, I took two years off after college and worked to save money in the first year, and then traveled during the second year. This time I went to Africa and ended up traveling there for nearly 8 months. I saw a big part of the continent and I absolutely loved it. Near the end of the trip, I took a month-long course in Tropical

Ecology in a tropical montane rainforest filled with life, including healthy populations of our next of kin, chimpanzees. You'd walk around the forest and admire all kinds of life, and then you might meet a chimpanzee or two sharing your trail. Magical times.

I returned home psyched about my prospective career and soon (1998) started grad school at the George Washington University and the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC. I 'permanently' moved away from Iceland, left all my bridge friends behind, and wouldn't play serious bridge—apart from very occasional tournaments when visiting Iceland—for the next two decades. I loved my studies and I love my job – the job I had planned for myself at the age of 5. And the job, and then marriage and kids, made for a busy life. There is no greater love in this world than the one you feel for your kids. No time for bridge.

Further, I was a total workaholic since entering grad school and until rather recently. My near 800 page long PhD dissertation was to set the 'pace' of profuse scientific writing and at least moderate success as a scientist. To date I have published close to 150 scientific papers, which is considered quite a lot for my career stage. They are mostly about evolution and spiders—I wouldn't recommend any club members to read any of them—but they, like all scientific papers, continue to build brick by brick the strongest form of knowledge we have as humans. The scientific method is a powerful information-seeking approach as we spend most of our time trying to *disprove* this very knowledge. And while my papers must seem esoteric to the public, several have been covered by mass media and such reports are generally accessible and understandable, and what is more important to me, my work has had impact. It is hard to measure impact but in science we use information such as number of citations to our papers, and a thing called H-Index and some others that are a play on quantity of published work plus its

citation record. My work has been cited >7000 times (H-index 44) meaning that other scientists find it interesting and worthwhile and it has been accepted as useful building blocks. I am about to take a new step in my career taking a job at the University of Iceland. I hope to prosper there and continue to make some kind of a difference.



*Photos from the field in Seychelles about 8 years back. We are hunting for large web spiders and little spiders that use such giant webs as homes and steal prey from the owner. This 'system' is incredibly interesting as these 'host webs' are like islands for the little thieving spiders. On tropical islands we are therefore studying 'islands within islands' trying to understand how organisms come to live where they are found, and diversify. On the right, I am 'puffing' a web, using a homemade device to administer clouds of corn starch onto a large web so that its threads become far better visible and photographable. On the left I am shamelessly admiring my 'puffing' work.*

Still, thinking back, I'm surprised I didn't make an earlier effort to play bridge in the US. I guess it was simply not on the radar given my priorities. It wasn't until a few years into my second job as a university professor at UVM that something made me wonder about local bridge. I think it was during my annual visits to Iceland when I'd meet and play with my old bridge buddies that I thought – damn this is fun! Why don't I do this at home? I went online and soon found my way to the

Burlington Bridge Club. What year was it? 2014? I don't remember. But once I stepped into the club, there was no looking back. Bridge was back on the menu! My first time I had an interesting game with Layton Davis. And then the second time I came to the club my partner was a lovely and entertaining grand fellow, and an amazing bridge player: Phil Sharpsteen. We went on to have a successful partnership with numerous wins over several years.

During those years, I often struggled with alcohol and depression that came on after my father died, and was intensified as I went through divorce. I became less predictable, sometimes irrational, and would end up playing under the influence. Needless to say, this behavior tore at everything in life: relationships, family, friends, partners, and through it I eventually lost my greatest bridge partner. Alcoholism, once it pops up its ugly head, becomes a lifetime struggle, and one that I still struggles in having under decent control. Alas for feelings hurt and relationships damaged – for the alcoholic, recovery eventually leads to making amends and seeking forgiveness. The wonderful BBC has always as a whole and through individual members (I have to mention especially Mark Oettinger who is a rock), been most supportive and for that I am ever so thankful.

A recent, but short, period in my bridge 'career' I'm particularly fond of. Through an Icelandic friend who plays professionally in the US, I got a bit of a taste of professional bridge. I ended up playing as a 'hired gun' at three events, culminating with participation in the Nationals in Las Vegas in 2019. Being paid to play bridge is something else. I found it absolutely thrilling, and after considerable success in Vegas (runner ups in the <6000 mini-Spingold), I fantasized about parallel professional careers in science and bridge. However, covid19 scrambled such dreams as live bridge came to a screeching halt. It is hard to get into and

establish yourself in professional bridge. Being again removed from it and now moving to Iceland will likely mean that my professional dreams are over. But, one never knows. If the opportunity knocks, I'll certainly jump on it.

Recently I have partnered rather haphazardly with a number of players, often Mark Oettinger, Nick Ecker-Racz, Mary Tierney, Gene Kaslow, Stanley Rosenthal, sometimes Phil Sharpsteen, and several others, including a couple of Icelandic players who were able to play at BBC through the covid-forced online play. All of these partnerships go beyond the bridge table; friendships are formed. Apart from partnerships, I also have kindled friendship with my opponents, including my favorite opponents, the menacing pair Mary and Ellie! In fact 'the ladies' as my kids call them, have made formidable teammates with Phil and me, but oddly, I have never partnered with either of them. We relish doing battle with each other.

What all these people have in common is that we have connections beyond the bridge table. This has been the story of my bridge life: friendships. The majority of my friends in life I discovered through bridge. Nearly all the remainder, including Laura, have come through biology; a couple through sports. Some of the best times I've ever had and some of the best memories—apart from time with family, especially my kids, to which nothing really compares—come from playing bridge, not the least during my time as a junior in a group of amazing friends. Amazingly, all of my partners and members of that group of junior players are still friends, some of my closest friends, even though I left Iceland and have been abroad for over 2 decades. Bridge has given me great times and many of the friendships that I value the most. For this I am eternally thankful to this queen of all games. As I move to Iceland this coming January, I know that bridge will be the "bridge" to both my

old friends in Iceland, and to the friends I've made at the Burlington Bridge Club. What a life altering game.

**Winning 23.5 out of 24 Matchpoints**  
**from my Idol, Oswald Jacoby**  
zayard Lee “Tink” Tysor

From 1970 to 1975, I lived in New Jersey and frequented the Essex Bridge Center, and I regularly traveled to New York City for tournaments. The facilities of the Essex Bridge Center were large enough (lower level of a shopping center) to accommodate sectional tournaments, and Oswald Jacoby would usually be in attendance. Of course, I had heard of him and his 2NT major response and transfers, and I got to play against him and also kibitz him (yes, I enjoy kibitzing good players) quite a few times a year. He was always pleasant to his partner, opponents, and kibitzers alike. He also played the hands so fast that there was almost always lots of time remaining at the end of the round.

Besides admiring his contributions to the war effort, and to the field of mathematics, I learned a lot by reading his books on Bridge, Poker, Backgammon, etc. I thought that I had bought and read all of his books, and his “Backgammon Book” was prominently displayed on my coffee table. But years later, I learned that I had read fewer than half of them. Maybe he wrote those after I gave up bridge for twenty years while raising my family.

One weekend, there was a two-day open event in New York City. It had a two-session qualifying event the first day, and two-session final/consolation event the next day. My partner, also local to the Essex Bridge Center, was a promising young high school student, and we commuted into the city for the event. During the first session, I saw that we were going to be playing against Jacoby. So, just before we arrived at his table, I got my partner off to the side and told him “Do not be intimidated, but our next opponent is the famous Oswald Jacoby, and the only advantage we might have is I know something about him, and he



knows nothing about us. What I know about him is that he bids like a maniac and because of his reputation, everyone is afraid to double him, so he gets away with murder. So do not be afraid to double.”

Well, this up-and-coming bridge playing high school student took me way too seriously. On the first board, he doubled Jacoby’s overcall of 3 Hearts and we set it 2 for 300 against our partscore, tied for top. On the second board, Jacoby overcalled with a vulnerable 2 Spade bid, which my partner also doubled. On this one, a very high percentage contract, every card that counted happened to be sitting wrong for Jacoby. Even he had to stop and think several times during the play. He gave us multiple opportunities to discard incorrectly, but my partner was up to it, and with half a dozen tricks to go, Jacoby tabled his hand and conceded, “Down 1.” That was +200 for us against, at most, our partscore, an absolute top. For the round, we took 23.5 out of 24 matchpoints from my idol. I was ready to get drunk for a month, but my partner was too young to drink, or to drive me home, and we had another session to play.

For that first session, my partner and I had a 52% game, and Jacoby was way below 50%, again time to celebrate. Me, a non-life master, finishing in the upper half of a NYC tournament while playing with a high school kid, and finishing ahead of my idol. It cannot get better than that! Then, in the second session, we again finished with around 53% and were thrilled. We then double-checked Jacoby’s score, and he had an unbelievable monster in the second session. Bottom line was, he qualified for the finals, and we just missed the cut and had to play in the consolation round. Jacoby still was, and still is, my idol.

One more Jacoby anecdote:

I was kibitzing Jacoby in a team game and after his table finished their 4 boards, the caddy returned with only one board. When they finished that

board, they called the caddy who only brought them one more board. After that one, they had to wait for the 3<sup>rd</sup> board. One of the players said that the other table must be having a problem playing the hands. Jacoby said, “That’s funny, sometimes I have trouble bidding a hand, but I never have a problem playing a hand.” There was a long awkward moment of silence while we thought that maybe that was a little arrogant which is not like him. Finally, Jacoby said “I used to have problems playing the hands, but I guess I have just gotten too old to envision any problems.”

Yup, he is still my idol.

## **Scrambling 2NT**

**Ron Weiss**

Playing matchpoints, RHO opens 1♠. You Pass. LHO bids 2♠, and it goes Pass Pass back to you. What do you know about the hand? RHO has 5 Spades, and probably 12-14 HCP; LHO has 3 (or 4) Spades and probably 5-9 HCP. So that gives the opponents a combined 17-23 HCP, more likely closer to 20-21 HCP since partner did not take any action over North’s 2♠. So do you let them play in their “comfy” 2♠ contract? Like most good questions the answer is “it depends.” Are you vulnerable or not? Is it likely that they have missed a game, and that a bid by you will bail them out of their mistake?

While no answer will be perfect all of the time, odds are that even if you are vulnerable, letting North/South play 2♠ is not winning bridge. So what is your bid?

If you have a decent 5-card suit (especially one with concentrated honors), you can bid it. But the bridge gods do not always give you a

nice 5-card suit. What if you have three 4-card suits? Then the right bid would be to Double, asking partner to bid his longest suit or, with suits of equal length, to bid them up the line. If you have two 4-card suits and one of those suits is Hearts, Double is also probably the right bid. But what if you have only 2 or 3 Hearts and are 4/4 or 4/3 in the Minors? If you Double and partner bids Hearts, you may well end up in a 4/3 fit. But with that distribution, a better place to land would be to find a 4/4 fit in the Minors. But how do you get there?

You bid a Scrambling 2NT! Is that natural? How could it be, given that you passed the first time? Our opponents have announced at least an 8-card Spade fit. The bid is “scrambling” because it asks partner to bid his 4-card Minor suit holdings up the line. Also, by bidding 2NT rather than doubling, you are denying 4 Hearts. So, with 4/4 in the Minors, after your 2NT bid, you would Pass if partner bids 3♣; with 4/3 distribution in the Minors, if partner bids 3♣, you would correct to 3♦, and partner would presumably Pass.

Partner Can Also Use Scrambling 2NT. When you have doubled instead of bidding 2NT, your partner can also use the scrambling NT bid to find the best spot to land.

So going back to our original auction (1♠-P-2♠-P-P-?), if you now Double, your partner can use 2NT to ask you to bid your 4-card Minors up the line. So with a holding such as 2=3=4=4, over your Double, East would bid 2NT and would pass whichever Minor you bid. If, instead, East held 3=3=4=3, if you bid 3 Clubs, East would correct to 3 Diamonds.

But how do you know that 2NT is not to play? Again, your partner has already passed and the opponents have announced at least an 8-card spade fit. So does 2NT have a reasonable chance of making? Not likely. And if your partner has a Spade stack, then why didn't he Pass your Double?

By the way, both 2NT bids should be alerted.

## **Major Suit Simple Raises and a Few Follow-Ons**

**Mark Oettinger**

### **Constructive Major Raises**

These days, with the exception of the few people who play Precision (i.e., Big Club), it is hard to find anyone who does not play “two over one forcing to game.” One of the central characteristics of “2/1,” is that a 1NT response to an opening bid of “1 of a Major,” is forcing for one round. Many who use this structure also have the agreement that 1NT is *not* forcing by a *passed* hand.

An advantage of “1NT forcing” is that it gives responder a lot of ways to describe his hand at his second bid. The *disadvantage* of “1NT Forcing” is that one loses the natural meaning of that bid. So, if responder is an unpassed hand, we cannot play in 1NT after a “1 of a Major” opening bid. The near-universal adoption of 1NT Forcing reflects a *de facto* consensus that its benefits outweigh its detriments. This “cost/benefit” analysis has to be undertaken whenever we adopt a convention. Do its gains outweigh the loss of the natural meaning of the sequence?

So let's assume that we play 2/1 with 1NT forcing. If partner opens 1 of a Major, we have two ways to make a "simple raise." I call the first a *direct* simple raise:

1♠	P	2♠...
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The second is an *indirect* simple raise:

1♠	P	1NT	P
2♣	P	2♠...	

What is the difference between these two auctions? Some play that the direct simple raise shows 5-10 total points and 3-card Spade support, and that the indirect simple raise shows the same strength but with only 2-card Spade support. I have never been fond of "backing into" a 7-card fit. A very simplistic encapsulation of the Law of Total Tricks says that you should be safe contracting to make the number of tricks that you have combined trumps between your hand and dummy. In other words, if you have 7 trumps, you should be safe at the 1-level. The problem is that you are at the 2-level, but probably have only 7 trumps...a violation of the Law of Total tricks. Hence (in part) my discomfort.

I like to play "**constructive**" direct simple raises, i.e., "top half of the range." Since the full range is 5-10 total points, the top half is 8-10 total points. To count *total* points, we add our HCPs to our shortness points. We only count shortness points *after* a fit has been established. The *indirect* simple raise therefore shows 5-7 total points, the "bottom of the range." It can be done with either 2-card (as a last resort) or 3-card trump support. Responder's ability to make this distinction can prevent opener from inviting...only to be rebuffed...and turning "2♠

making” (+110) into “3♠ down 1” (-50 or -100).

## Responsive Doubles

Let’s posit the following definition:

A Responsive Double is a (takeout) double by advancer, after the opponents have bid and immediately raised a suit, and partner has either overcalled or doubled.

Here’s the simplest example of a Responsive Double auction:

1♦            X            2♦            X...

I like to play Responsive Doubles over opponents’ *double* raise as well:

1♦            X            3♦            X...

Whether you and your partner play the second of these auctions as “responsive” depends on your partnership agreement. There is a box to check in the upper left part of your convention card that asks you to specify, “Responsive Doubles through \_\_\_\_.” I like to play, “through 3♥,” reserving penalty doubles above that. There are advocates for other ranges. I don’t feel strongly about it, however, and will play whatever partner wants. I just urge that you and your partner have a clear agreement.

*Partner’s* first Double shows at least tolerance (a minimum of 3-card support) for each of the three unbid suits. It also shows at least an

opening hand...ish. I'll do it with as few as 10 HCP if non-vulnerable and well-shaped. On the other hand, partner could have a very big hand. Doubling in the overcaller's position and then subsequently bidding a new suit shows a strong hand...I like to play 17+ total points...typically 6 losers...and a near self-sufficient suit.

From advancer's perspective (the one who is considering making a Responsive Double), he should base his bid on the assumption that partner has 4=4=1=4 and a basic opening hand. 3-suited hands are special. For one thing, after LHO opens and RHO raises, the chances that you and your partner have an 8-card fit *somewhere* are very high. Therefore, I count my singleton for 2 distribution points even before I know that we have a fit. After all, bridge (like life) is mostly a game of probabilities, not certainties.

What does a Responsive Double show?

The Responsive Double shows the absence of a strong preference for a particular one of the three as-yet unbid suits. You are asking partner (the initial doubler) to choose. Since you have no clear preference, partner's choice will allow him to pick a suit which is at least 4 cards long, meaning that you will be in at least a 7-card fit. That's not ideal from the standpoint of the Law of Total Tricks, but again, it's an imperfect game. On the question of how strong your Responsive Double needs to be, consider the number of tricks for which partner will have to contract. If the chances are that partner will be able to choose a suit at the 2-level, I recommend at least 8 total points. If the chances are that partner will have to bid at the 3-level, I recommend around 11 total points.

Here is a slightly different sequence that most agree is also a Responsive Double. It differs in that partner has *overcalled* instead of *doubling*. Here's an example:

1♦            1♠            3♦            X...

What does *this* Responsive Double show? Clearly, it's "the other suits." In this case, it shows Clubs and Hearts. It also shows enough to be willing to have partner (overcaller) bid 4♣ if his Clubs are better than his Hearts. Keeping in mind that partner may have as few as 8 HCP for his simple 1-level overcall, Responsive Doubler better have around an opening hand. Vulnerability plays a role as well, since you don't want to go -200 (or worse) for down 2 (or more). The perceived strength of the opponents is also a consideration. Stronger opponents will Double more frequently, and even going down 1 will be a very poor score if we are vulnerable. It is true that RHO's jump raise is often played as preemptive in contemporary bidding...so we may have the predominance of the strength, and even 4♣ may make, or go down 1. And 4♣ may be hard to Double. But clearly, you should use the Responsive Double in this situation far more readily when *non-vulnerable*.

### **Help Suit Game Try versus Re-Raise (Advanced)**

With silent opponents, our auction starts in one of the following ways:

1♠                    2♠ (constructive; 8-10 total points)...

Or



1♠	1N (forcing)
2♣ (3+ Cs)	2♠ (2-3 Ss; 5-7 total points)...

Let's say that opener has enough to invite. Opposite the constructive direct simple raise, that's 16 total points. Opposite the minimum indirect simple raise, it's 19 total points. Opener can either bid a new suit or re-raise. Examples:

1♥	2♥
3♦...	

or

1♥	2♥
3♥...	

The second auction above is purely "competitive." In other words, it's *not* invitational. Instead, it's intended to block the opponents from balancing in Spades profitably (and conveniently) at the 2-level. The first auction above shows a "fragment," something like KJx of Diamonds, and invites game based on partner's Diamond holding. With Qxxx of Diamonds, partner accepts the invitation. With xx of Diamonds, partner declines the invitation.

Under this structure, the following auction:

1♥	2♥
2N...	

Is natural and invitational. [Ingi's editorial comment: or can be used to show or request a shortsuid]

Regular readers of my bidding articles know that I favor “rules of general construction.” One of those is, “If it’s undiscussed, it’s as natural as the context allows.” Having such “default understandings” can be very helpful in “avoiding accidents.” Credit for that last phrase goes to Phil Sharpsteen.

### **Spiral (Advanced)**

How often have you held this hand?

♠Jxx  
♥AKxx  
♦xx  
♣KQxx

You open 1♣ and partner responds 1♠. What’s your rebid? 1NT lacks a Diamond stopper. 2♠ lacks a trump, but your hand looks like Spades could easily play a trick better than Notrump, even if partner only has 4 Spades. And, in that case, you can “take the Diamond tap” in the short trump hand, gaining a trump trick, and not shortening declarer (thereby decreasing the risk of losing control). Spiral offers a way, *with the appropriate hand*, for opener to bid 2♠ with only 3-card support, and to be able to clarify his trump holding on his next bid when partner has enough to explore game.

If Responder wants to explore game, he asks about opener’s Spade length, and his overall strength, as follows. Responder bids “next step”

(2NT over opener's 2S bid, or 2S over opener's 2H bid) asking opener to clarify via the following "Ogust-like" structure:

S	W	N	E
1♣	P	1♠	P
2♠	P	2N	P
?			

South's second rebid would be chosen from among the following options:

- 3♣ = 3-card support; minimum opener;
- 3♦ = 4-card support; minimum opener;
- 3♥ = 3-card support with extras; and
- 3♠ = 4-card support with extras.

If Hearts (as opposed to Spades) is our suit, opener's third bid is simply "one level lower." Also note that Spiral can be played "3344" rather than "3434," as illustrated above.

I am a bit equivocal about Spiral, since I favor a system for being able to explore game after South's 2 bid which allows responder to invite game needing help in one of the three non-trump suits (a traditional Help Suit Game Try) or two of the three non-trump suits. Spiral usurps the latter treatment, but it is occasionally nice to be able to raise partner's likely 4-card Major with only 3-card support, and for when you do, to have a way to accurately place both the level and the denomination of the final contract.

Try Spiral, and/or any of the above Major suit sequences, with your favorite partner. If you enjoy a little bit of bidding theory, you'll find that your "Major suit sequences" will be far more accurate. See you at the table!

### **A Reader Writes...**

Hi Mark and Ingi:

How would you, in 1st seat, bid this extraordinary hand? The opponents were silent throughout the auction:

♠AKQJ5  
♥AQJ10972  
♦2  
♣-

Partner, by the way, has both the King of Hearts and the Ace of Diamonds. How might we pinpoint those crucial resources?

Thanks,

Missed the Grand

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Ingi Responds:

Dear Reader:

It's never easy to bid on monsters and then try to get the relevant info from partner.

You have 2 losers (♥K and ♦2), essentially close to a decent half slam on your own hand—and too strong a hand not to open 2♣). I'd open 2♣ and then bid hearts. Mark and I respond to 2♣ with controls so we would right away have an idea of what As and or Ks partner may have.

If partner responds 2♦ waiting, then 2♥, what does partner bid? If they show any sign of H support, I'd then bid 5♣ 'voidwood/exclusion blackwood' to ask for keycards outside the Club suit. This would be a quick way to get it right

If partner bids something like 3♣ after your 2♥ I'd bid 3♠ - clearly distributional hand with ambition. What does partner bid now?

If you manage to get partner supporting either suit, then cue bids (rather than asking for aces) would be useful - let's say they raise 3♠ to 4♠. Then you cuebid 5♣ showing the Club Ace, or King, or singleton, or void, If partner skips 5♦ (denying 1st or 2nd round control in Diamonds), you settle for 6♠. If they bid 5♦, you can cuebid Hearts and see if partner is willing to show anything they have not already displayed (such as the ♥K).

The key thing is that 2♣ is gameforcing and then you try to bid as slowly as possible to try to get partner to show you support. When you get it you have 'voidwood' or cue bids. Without any help for partner, I'd take a shot at 6♥).

Ingi

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Mark adds:

Dear Grand Misser:

As you can see from Ingi's email, he and I have some fairly sophisticated bidding systems to deal with hands like this. I would add the following:

My first reaction is also that it's a 2-loser hand. That's a rare thing. I place a lot of weight on loser count. You basically "have 5 (i.e., 11 playing tricks) in your own hand." Beyond that, there's a "rule" that suggests that even when partner has passed throughout the auction, it's not unreasonable for you to count on him for 1 trick. Clearly, this is not "science," but you'd be amazed how often it works. Hence Ingi saying that he would bid 6♥ even if partner is silent. Also remember (and Ingi touches on this) that it is ill-advised to *initiate* Blackwood (whatever form you play) if you have a void...unless you play Voidwood (aka Exclusion Blackwood)...since you won't always know, from partner's response, whether he has the *right* aces (or key cards). Also, if *partner* initiates Blackwood, you (as *responder* to Blackwood) need to know (and need to have discussed) your responses. Here's a link to a brief related article in the October 2020 issue of *Table Talk*, starting at the bottom of page 16:

[http://www.bridgequarterly.org/uploads/6/6/8/0/6680387/october\\_2020\\_table\\_talk\\_fixed.pdf](http://www.bridgequarterly.org/uploads/6/6/8/0/6680387/october_2020_table_talk_fixed.pdf)

Best,

Mark

## **Vermont's Virtual Games**

### **Burlington**

Monday, 6:30 p.m.

Wednesday, 10:15 a.m.

Friday, 10:15 a.m.

Sunday, 1:15 p.m.

### **Barton/Dorey/Harfang**

Monday, 1:30 p.m. (Dorey)

Wednesday, 1:30 p.m. (Dorey)

Friday, 1:30 p.m. (Barton)

Sunday 4:00 p.m. (Harfang)

Call Denny Lyster at (802) 744-6839

Or call Eric McCann; (802) 988-4773

Or call R. James Macdougall (450) 292-3762

## **Vermont and Nearby Clubs**

Some bricks & mortar clubs are still 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 (change pending - call first)**

**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**

**Arthur Aiken Bridge Club**

**34 School Street**

**Orleans, Vermont 05860**

**Monday; 12:30 p.m.; open; stratified (face-to-face returning in July?)**

**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**

**Club Phone; (802) 872-5722**

**Don Sharp; (802) 985-9199**

**Phil Sharpsteen; (802) 899-2080**

**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; [gmboy51@gmail.com](mailto:gmboy51@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*  
**ACBL**

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

<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>Bridge Winners</b>	<a href="http://www.bridgewinners.com"><u>www.bridgewinners.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>