



Talking Bridge

Summer 2022 Issue 5

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Wendy Wensum lives to fight another day

Although Talking Bridge has a new editor, **Douglas Bence**, I hope readers will not notice too many changes. That's essentially because Nigel Brock has passed the baton to me and with it the content for much of this issue including the diaries of the intrepid Wendy Wensum. My thanks to Nigel for that and hopefully these entertaining/informative pieces will continue.

I don't know how many county bridge associations have their own magazine, many don't. But I'm sure those that do will be hard pressed to meet the standards established by Nigel. All readers should thank him for what he's done for bridge and the county association.

Roots

As my maternal grandfather was born and raised in Norfolk, I have roots in the county and have three cousins living in the county from that side of my family. While this doesn't justify my relatively recent arrival, it has made my assimilation not only easier, but pleasurable.

Around the age of nine I learned the basics of rubber bridge on my father's knee when he was playing with his father and two brothers. When he was dealt a Yarborough or some other notoriously weak hand he allowed me to play the cards.

He was an excellent card player, but an appalling bidder who was forever manoeuvring his way round impossible contracts in usually vain attempts to minimise the damage. My family didn't, but might well have invented that homily about players forever over bidding minor suit contracts and under bidding their slams.

When I started to earn a living we used to play bridge at lunch times for a penny or two a hundred. We all dealt, bid and played at what now seem to be alarming speeds. I was so bad I could easily lose 1s 6d in 45

minutes which in a five-day week is noticeable when you're earning little more than £4 a week.

In the early 1980s I stumbled into the Acol Bridge Club which was at that time run by Chris Dixon who had at one time been on the edge of the England team.

Teaching was done by Gus Calderwood, a South African mathematician who had not long before won the Gold Cup. Gus had a remarkable memory and could tell three weeks after you had misplayed a hand and give you odds on a finesse working to two places of decimals.

The corners were quickly knocked off my game, but even now towards the end of an evening some long-forgotten bad habit will briefly escape from my subconscious and result in a bottom.

When I married and moved from London to Cornwall and raised a family, bridge was forced to the back burner, sometimes for years at a time.

Covid

I played at St Austell Bridge Club which is believed to be first in the county. When Covid reared its ugly head my regular partner and I were largely responsible for encouraging the technophobes to play on line. We got a lot of help and support from the Suffolk Contract Bridge Association.

Personal circumstances brought me to East Anglia in something of a rush, but I'm retired now and enjoying the game with some excellent partners. I've so far played at the two Lowestoft and Bungay clubs, the Noverre and Harleston. Wymondham and Fakenham are already on the list.

One of my regular partners seems determined to introduce me to as many of the local clubs as possible. So if any club, affiliated or not, wants to invite us then please make contact.

EBU changes rules on bid alerts

The EBU have updated both the Blue and White Books that regulate how the laws of bridge are interpreted and applied in England.

The Sky Blue Book, which applied to online bridge, has been scrapped, and its contents incorporated into the other two.

As the changes came into effect on September 1, we need to get our heads round the details. There are bound to be misunderstandings and the odd argument. Remember, ignorance of the law is no defence which is why we've slipped in the joker.

The main changes that affect players are in the Blue Book; the white book is mainly guidance and advice for tournament directors. Talking Bridge readers should thank **Rob Richardson** for reading the small print and producing this summary.

Most important is what now needs to be said after certain bids. For example, all transfer bids up to and including Two No Trumps must be announced.

This will mean a lot more talking for those players who use Precision or a prepared club system.

Acol and Strong and 5s players who use One No Trump - Two Spades as a transfer to Clubs now need to announce this at the table. If you play it as showing either minor, that also needs to be alerted.

After opening one of a suit and partner replies One No Trump, you must announce

'up to X points' if X could be higher than ten.

If you open one of any suit and your partner changes the suit at the two level, then this may be game forcing, and must be announced as such.

These last two changes are to cater for the increasing popularity of the American 2over1 system.

The definition of strong bids has also changed.

All references both to playing tricks and controls have been removed.

A strong hand must now either:

1. Contain sixteen or more high card points and/or
2. Have two suits with a combined ten cards and a combined thirteen or more high card points within those two suits.

This definition is clear and simple, and surely a welcome improvement on the previous gobbledygook.

Please note, this is not an extensive review of the new regulations, but merely covers the changes that will affect most club players.

More information is available on the EBU website. Follow this link:

<https://www.ebu.co.uk/documents/laws-and-ethics/blue-book/blue-book.pdf>



Mobile Interruption

Extract 46 from the Diaries of Wendy Wensum

I arrived at the Riverside for bridge rather earlier than usual and headed to the bar for a glass of wine. Wandering outside to the balcony overlooking the river, I had a conversation with Spouse on my mobile and was just about to turn it off when an unexpected text arrived from Millie:

‘Wendy, where are you? Don’t forget we’re playing bridge this evening.’

‘I’m here at the club.’

As I moved to the open door and peered through to the bridge room I could see Millie sitting with Jo and Kate at table thirteen.

The mobile made a pinging noise as another text arrived: ‘I can’t see you.’

‘I’m in the bar. I’ve reserved table two. Shall I go there or table 13?’

There was yet another ping: ‘How do you know I’m at 13?’

Enough was enough. I decided that table 13 was the easiest solution, but another ping stopped me in my tracks:

‘Come to 13 and bring a double brandy.’

I always lose in encounters with Millie so I went to the bar and returned with my wine and a brandy for Millie. Picking up my system card from table 2 on route, I joined the grinning threesome and wondered if thirteen would be my lucky number. As I had 13 cards on the first board things looked promising. It was a duplicate pairs event and half way through the session this board appeared:

Dealer East - NS Vulnerable

Millie

Q
9 3
A J 8 7 2
K 10 6 4 3

10 6 4 3 2
A K 8
9 6
A Q 10

K J 9 8
Q 10 2
Q
J 8 5 4 2

Wendy

A 7 5
J 7 6 5 4
K 10 5 4 3
Void

Two passes started the auction, West bid one spade and Millie’s two no trumps showed five-five in the minors. Holding four of his partner’s suit East ventured three spades. My five diamonds gave Millie and I a ten-card fit, so I raised to four diamonds seemed reasonable. West bid four spades, and having no obvious defence Millie bid five diamonds.

West led a spade and when dummy went down I could see two losing hearts. Once the club ace was gone the king was a winner, but the lack of entries to dummy made that difficult. Perhaps the hearts would break.

The first trick went three, queen, king, ace of spades. I tested trumps by playing the king and crossed to dummy with the ace. The nine of hearts brought out the ten, jack and king.

West was pushed for an obvious exit card and led the ace of hearts followed by the ace of clubs, which I trumped. I played another heart, ruffed it on the table and the eight and two appeared I was about to claim when a mobile phone sprung to life and disturbed my concentration.

‘That’s disgraceful’ Millie declared loudly. ‘Whoever owns that should be banned from the club.’

My phone was turned off, but the William Tell ring was increasing in volume and appeared to be coming from Millie’s cavernous handbag.

She was now tossing its contents in all directions in a vain attempt to subdue the miscreant piece of modern technology. Suddenly it was in her hand and fully subdued. She downed her brandy in one gulp and attempted to regain her composure.

She looked and saw the TD standing beside her as he said rather gleefully, and possibly gloatingly: ‘Club rules, half a top penalty, Millie.’ Turning to me he added, ‘Sorry about that Wendy’.

I gathered claimed the rest of the tricks while Millie repacked her bag. The traveller revealed that most pairs played in spades. Four spades can be defeated with a club lead, ruff; diamond to the ace; a second club ruff with the ace of spades still to come.

Later in the pub I asked Millie if she really believed players should be banned for leaving their mobile on. After a pause she mumbled: ‘Yes, but only after a first-offence warning.’

Duplicate wilts under the new normal

How the Noverre blends online with face-to-face

Covid has changed us all, the way we live with our family and friends, the way we work and play. It's changed not just our country and its economy, but the entire planet's.

It's also changed bridge and sadly not generally for the better. Some clubs are struggling to get more than three tables, which is a cut off point of sorts, but three and a half is worse because all or most pairs have to sit out for a round.

Obvious

The reasons for the decline are obvious. When the lockdown restrictions were in place players were forced online. Some preferred it, thinking that peering into a computer screen was preferable to driving to a draughty venue on a wet and windy night. Understandable.

Others remained terrified of catching Covid or passing it on to a vulnerable family member and/or lacked confidence in the efficacy of masks.

Playing cards is not the ritual it used to be. In the last century it was socially far more significant than it is now when it was a cheap and cheerful form of entertainment.

These days it is increasingly difficult to attract a younger generation to take the game seriously, and it's sadly been in slow decline for the last twenty years or more.

The Norfolk Contract Bridge Association is forever looking at new ways to promote the game, but see it as an uphill struggle.

But the Noverre club near Norwich may have pointed a way if not to stop the rot then at least slow it down.

It's only returned to playing face-to-face

for the last month or so, but it combines the results with those who prefer to play online. Each week there are three results: online, face-to-face and both of these combined.

And, crucially for some players, it's on the combined result that the master points are awarded.

There will be those who disagree with this policy as each side of the competition is playing with subtly different disciplines as online you cannot revoke or bid out of turn.

In addition the Noverre has in the recent past devoted time to encouraging new players, first teaching them the game and then partnering them with experienced duplicate players until they are sufficiently confident to branch out on their own.

As the Aviva offices are not so far away the Noverre is fortunate in having a sizeable population on which to draw. Even so, the club deserves huge credit for making the effort to bring more younger players into the game.

Humiliation

All over the country new, inexperienced pairs turn up at affiliated clubs populated with multi-starred masters and are so humiliated that they never return and go back to kitchen table rubber bridge.

I am reminded of a story told by Sue Maxwell who I met while doing the EBU teaching course.

She found that so many newer players had been destroyed at one particular club that she started her own. When we last spoke she was getting over twenty tables while the club down the road had gone out of business.

Norfolk shows face at EBU Summer Congress in Eastbourne



The EBU Summer meeting has been reformatted to a four-day event, a vast improvement in my opinion, writes **Rob Richardson**.

Before lockdown, the midweek events had been dying slowly, so to bring them back would have been optimistic to say the least.

With 50 tables playing in the Swiss Teams on Friday, I can only conclude that face-to-face bridge is back and thriving.

There were 58 tables in the Harold Poster Swiss Pairs on Saturday and Sunday, with a further nine in the Saturday Jack high event.

We decided to test ourselves against a very strong field in the Harold Poster. There were 48 boards each day and I recommend Brian Senior's write up of the final round on the EBU website. His view is from the top of the field.

Here's one from somewhat lower down. We were N/S and as our unfashionable bidding system came good we had one of our better boards.

Decisions Decisions

You're West and everybody is vulnerable. Partner deals and passes. South opens 1NT

announced as 12-14. This is what you were dealt:

S AT52
H A8
D T63
C AKJ4

Decision 1

Do I make a penalty double? I have 16HCP and South has 12-14. To make game likely I need partner to hold nine of the missing 10-12 points.

To take 1NT off about 5 HCP would likely be enough. In a strong field of 58 tables few will be playing a weak NT when vulnerable, so if this is a part score board 100 per undertrick may be good for us. Shall I pass? West doubled.

North bids two spades and East, makes a take out double.

Decision 2

North must have at least five spades and South at least two to open 1NT. Partner has anything from 0-11 points.

The double suggests towards the upper end of this, as they would surely pass with less rather than ask me to bid at the three level.

There are three options:

3 clubs
2 NT
Pass

There no longer appears to be a comfortable option.

Best bet for a good score now appears to be a Pass and hope for one-off doubled.

The wonderful +200 on a part score hand would be nice.

West passed.

	QJ974	
	QT42	
	Q95	
	8	
AT52		83
A8		9753
T63		K874
AKJ4		QT9

K6
KJ6
AJ2
76532

On 26 of the 58 tables N/S played in two spades. It went off three times. On 16

occasions West played in 1NT netting a 68% for one-off nearly all the time. Two spades doubled and just making was worth 92% to us.

Lessons from the hand

The pre-emptive power of the weak NT at match pointed pairs. Almost all the top scores for E/W were where West played in 1NT, a bit difficult when South has already opened it!

When a passed partner makes a take out double think long and hard before leaving it in for penalties.

And what about East's takeout double asking west to bid at the three level vulnerable? West has shown 15+ HCP. If he is not minimum he has another chance to bid.

Does East really have to speak? The same tricks in two spades not doubled nets about 45% for E/W, no game changer and they live to fight another day. Two spades is also the likely contract for N/S if West makes the difficult decision to stay quiet.

This was our first tournament since Covid struck and we were pleased to be back. Sitting in your own home, in front of a computer screen has little appeal to me. Although as I sit in my living room typing this, the irony does not escape me. Still, being a Luddite has always been something of a compromise in a modern World.

Getting the count of a hand

There are clues all the time, initially in the bidding, when an overcall shows five or a jump overcall six, for example. Some players have an instinct for getting the count while others struggle. It helps if you know the most common breakdowns of your thirteen cards. Nearly 22% of the time your cards will be distributed 4-4-3-2 over the four suits, over 15% of the time they will be 5-3-3-2, 13% 5-4-3-1, 10.6% 5-4-2-2 or 10.5% 4-3-3-3. Add these percentages together and it's clear that over 70% of all hands dealt fall into these five patterns.

The Genial Genie



Extract 47 from the Diaries of Wendy Wensum

I rubbed the magic lamp with a firm hand. In a flash a genie appeared hovering in the air.

‘I am the genie of all bridge players. Your wish is my command’ he announced in deep majestic tones.

‘Come on, genie, this is just a dream’ I replied. ‘No, no, this is for real’ he reassured me. ‘Name your wish, Wendy.’

‘Very well, I would like to be selected again for the Norfolk team’ I demanded.

‘Now, now, Wendy, you have only one wish and my power is great’ he said. ‘I suggest you choose something more general, more beneficial to the game worldwide.’

I considered this challenge carefully.

‘OK, I wish once and for all that married couples no longer bicker at the bridge table. That will be a wonderful legacy for all bridge players,’ I responded enthusiastically.

The genie considered for some time before he spoke.

‘Some things are impossible even for me. Your wish is granted; a place in the county team it is then.’

Daydreaming

‘Wendy, stop daydreaming. We’re all waiting’ ordered Millie rousing me from my reverie aware that three pairs of eyes were upon me.

‘Play the spade from dummy, please’ Millie continued wrapping up our three no trump contract with an overtrick and an average score.

Being dummy can be really boring at times. It was a trophy event at the Riverside and we were playing self-confessed pothunters, Jon and Jane, in a trophy event at the Riverside.

This next board was rather more interesting. See the next column.

Dealer South; Game all

Millie

5
J 10 8 3
K Q J 6 4
Q 8 3

Jon

Q 7 6 3
Void
10 7 8 3
K 9 7 4 2

Jane

J 10 9 2
A K 7 6 5
9 5 2
J

Wendy

A K 8 4
Q 9 4 2
A
A 10 6 5

Passed Throughout

I opened one club, Millie responded one diamond and I rebid one heart. Our opponents passed throughout,

Millie bid two hearts. I considered both three and four hearts, but decided on game as the diamond ace looked a useful card.

Jon led the three of spades. I surveyed dummy and noted the three obvious losers, two hearts and the club king. Setting up the diamond suit was a possible option, but sadly I lost the plot.

I won the first trick in hand with the spade ace and ruffed a low spade in dummy.

Returning to hand with the diamond ace I ruffed another low spade. Throwing two clubs on the king and queen of diamonds followed. Then I came to hand with the ace of clubs and hoping that the

spades were 4-4, I led the king, which held the trick.

I then played the ten of clubs, which Jon attempted to win with the king, but to my surprise Jane was forced to trump.

Until then I had no idea that hearts were breaking five-nil. She exited with another low trump, but the contract was made and gave us a useful score.

Mainly Hearts

The traveller showed mainly heart contracts with the odd three no trump also appearing. Whether my line of play was good or not, I don't know, but I certainly felt the friendly genie was on my side.

Making social conversation while we waited for the round to finish, I asked Jon if they were still doing jigsaw puzzles.

'Oh yes' he replied enthusiastically. 'At the moment we're tackling a 5,000-piece whopper called Ripples on the Lake. It's

very exciting. We'll continue with it when we get home.'

'Lovely, no wonder you don't have any ch....' Millie began but luckily the move was called and the rest of her observation was lost in the general hubbub.

In our local pub later, Kate and Joe instantly recalled the hand.

It had been played in four hearts by north. Kate had led the singleton jack of clubs, which was ducked in dummy allowing Jo to win with the king.

Club ruff

She returned a club which Kate ruffed and the contract was defeated.

Millie turned to me,: 'Why didn't you ask your genie to provide us with free drinks after bridge?' I declined to answer, but mused that if the genie ever needed a new home, one of Millie's many empty brandy bottles might serve the purpose.

Nigel's Bidding Challenge

This deal turned up in a simultaneous pairs' event at the Noverre. Dealer North; North/South Vulnerable

	J 10 9 5 3	
	10 9 4	
	2	
	J 8 7 4	
6 4		Q 8
Q 7 3 2		K 6 5
A 6 5		QJ 10 4
K Q 10 9		A 6 5 3
	A K 7 3	
	AJ 8	
	K 9 8 7 3	
	2	

North passes. East bid 1C (the partnership used a strong NT opener). South doubled and West redoubled.

In response to South's double, North bid

one Spade. Awaiting further action. East passed. South passed and West bid Two Clubs, which was passed out.

East passed South lead the ace and then the king of spades. The contract made exactly for 90 to E/W.

On another table, as above, North passed and East opened a weak 1NT. South, with 15 HCP, doubled. Happy to play in 1NT*, West passed. North made a weak take-out to 2S, which ended the auction.

East led the diamond queen; the king was played from dummy and West won with the ace. A diamond was returned which declarer ruffed in hand.

The fortunate two-two trump split enabled declarer to make ten tricks. North lost tricks to the club ace and heart queen for plus 170.

Should the spade game be bid? And if so how would you and your partner have bid it?



Last Word

If you read through to the end, well done; if you scrolled through without reading and decided to return and read it later, then make sure you do!

Talking Bridge is quarterly, but it doesn't make much sense to let publication be ruled by a calendar. Rob Richardson suggested to me, and I agree with him, that it should hit the inbox at a time when bridge players might like to read it. That is when the children and grandchildren are going back to school, just before Christmas, towards the end of February, when you're wondering if winter will ever end, and sometime in May.

So that's what we plan to do. Although I hope Nigel will dig further into the Diaries of Wendy Wensum, contributions are welcome as are letters, questions, observations and hopefully some analyses of that weird hand that came up the other day. Please send them to pussiekat@mac.com in either docx, rich text format or text. Many thanks.

The Norfolk Contract Bridge Association is constantly looking for ways to promote the game and Talking Bridge is just a part of what they do. If you have any ideas please send us those, too.

I'll end with a question. What do you do about that character who always manages to drop your singleton king?

Hold your cards closer to your chest.

Cheers,

Douglas Bence