



# Talking Bridge

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## Contents

A look inside Norfolk's biggest club	Page 2
Dealing with a pre-empt	Page 3
Oscar's errors floor Wendy & Millie	Page 4
Robots: if you can't beat them, join them	Page 5
Go for it or play for one off?	Page 6
Augusta done by diamonds	Page 7
Graham Hardman loves unpredictability	Page 8
'Weak twos are utterly useless'	Page 9
Last Word	Page 10

# How Bawburgh brings beginners to the boil

THERE IS evidence that bridge enthusiasts are beginning to desert playing online and returning to playing face-to-face. Hopefully, long-awaited spring weather will accelerate the trend, writes **Douglas Bence**.

If it were in a legal context, the evidence might not yet be enough to convince a jury, but it is happening, if slowly and not yet at every club.

In its first Monday morning session after last Christmas, for example, Bawburgh Bridge Club filled twenty two tables.

Formed in 2005, Bawburgh is now Norfolk's biggest club. It is obviously helped by being just off the A47 and easily accessible for Norwich's booming population.

## Formula for Success

While location is a major advantage, there are other reasons for Bawburgh's success. It works hard not just at teaching new players, but also nursing them over the hurdles that arise in the error-laden passage to becoming a committed, even addicted duplicate player.

Bawburgh Village Hall is large enough for the Wednesday morning beginners to be at one end of the room. Their next step is the supervised practice at the other end. It had four tables when I visited in March.

The next course, run by accredited EBU teacher Matt Jackson, starts on April 19 and comprises thirty-three two-hour £5 lessons divided into three terms.

When I was at this stage, too many years ago to admit, we shuffled, cut and dealt and effectively played rubber bridge, without scoring. We put up our hands or shouted for help when we needed it, either in bidding or play.

At Bawburgh's supervised sessions, bidding boxes are used and the cards arrive in boards as they would at any club session. The only thing they don't practice is changing tables, and I'm sure we all know experienced players who cannot figure out

who they're following until the penultimate round.

Supervised practice is a difficult time for new players when any contract over two spades might be enough to precipitate a panic attack. Husband and wife or partner-partner partnerships can get themselves into messy contracts when one player is overly protective of the person the other side of the table.

It is also the time when defenders may not treat the card play as serious as that of declarer who after the opening lead has the advantage of seeing all twenty-six cards.

Those taking the next learning step are urged to try one of Bawburgh's Monday morning sessions. These are not exclusively for those new to duplicate, but also attract players of widely different standards, some of them highly experienced, but they may not be as good or as mobile as they used to be.

While too many local clubs are struggling to muster four tables, Bawburgh, with its 'relaxed' morning sessions on Mondays and afternoon games on Wednesdays and Thursdays, is by contrast a business.

## Custom Packages

It has its own financial software package and instead of posting results on the ugly and ever-clunky Bridge Webs, uses some specialist software developed in Leeds called Pianola which club members get free. Pianola has a monthly paid option which offers additional analysis for those keen enough to try fast tracking their progress.

Tea, coffee and biscuits come with the table money (£2 for members), but for those who fancy an extended afternoon, the highly-recommended King's Head pub is a ten-minute walk away.

Rob Richardson was my partner for a Wednesday twelve-table session. You'll find his comments on one of the boards in following page.

# One way of dealing with a pre-empt

ON BOARD SEVEN I was sitting West with six clubs and eight points. When South opened three diamonds, I decided that the hand belonged to the opposition, writes **Rob Richardson**.

If South had passed would you have opened three clubs on my hand? Remember that only a few pairs can open a weak two in clubs because the bid means something else. Had my partner passed I might have done, but as we were vulnerable against my better instincts .

I have an agreement with most of my partners that if I am next to bid after a pre-emptive opening, and my partner, as in this case, has not had a chance to bid I will say something with an opening hand and pass without one. I passed.

North raised to four diamonds and my partner, sitting East, doubled. South passed.

What to do? We know that a vulnerable North has raised, so they must have some points, but as East is able to double, he must like me be short in diamonds.

## Custom Packages

He surely can't be doubling on high card points? As we're all vulnerable if that were the case there are not enough points in the pack for everybody's bids.

Partner hasn't overcalled a major, so can't have a six-card major, but probably has 4-4 or 5-4. We have a probable 4-4 spade fit, and 6-3 or 6-4 fit in clubs.

East must have clubs, as he is short in

diamonds and does not have a super long major. Normally it's right to play in the major suit fit, however, if partner does have four clubs, there is a strong probability that South, whose bid shows only six cards that are not diamonds, will be roughing clubs early.

The only way to be sure that this cannot

happen is to make clubs trumps. I bid five clubs and played there.

In spades North can cash the ace of clubs and give South a rough. South should now play a small heart, which gives West a difficult choice of playing or not

playing the King. As North probably had more hearts and more points than South, he may well get this wrong.

In clubs, I thought, South will never get on lead to cause a problem in hearts. We were the only pair to bid the club game and got ourselves a top.

What about the others? Nine pairs were either in three or five diamonds, the latter going one off. Two Easts found the spade fit, one playing in five spades and another in three spades, both making ten tricks.. One North was one light in three no-trumps.

## TOP TIP

The purpose of a pre-empt is to make life difficult for the opponents by using up their bidding space. In other words preventing them from fully disclosing their hands to each other. You can mitigate this by listening to your opponents bidding and drawing sensible inferences.

	♠ J 4	
	♥ Q 7 4 2	
	♦ A J 8 5 3	
	♣ A 5	
♠ K 10 9 5		♠ A Q 8 6 2
♥ K 6		♥ J 10 9 3
♦ 7		♦
♣ Q 10 8 7 4 3		♣ K J 9 2
	♠ 7 3	
	♥ A 8 5	
	♦ K Q 10 9 6 4 2	
	♣ 6	

# Cue for Burlesque

## From the Diaries of Wendy Wensum

THANKS TO earlier performances, Millie & I had no chance of winning the Riverside Bridge Club's monthly series of pairs events for the club championship. A relatively large field settled down for the final session which would determine the overall winners and this distributional deal did nothing to improve our position.

### Dealer South Game all

Kate

♠  
♥ A Q J 10 7 6 2  
♦ 10 9  
♣ A 10 7 4

♠ 8 6 5  
♥  
♦ Q J 7 6 5 3 2  
♣ J 9 3

Jo

♠ K Q J 2  
♥ K 3  
♦ A K 8 4  
♣ K Q 6

When Kate and Jo played the board, the auction was fairly routine. With twenty one points, Jo opened two no trumps which was followed by three diamonds from Kate sitting North and asking for a transfer to hearts.

### Kate goes slamming

East doubled for a diamond lead and with only two hearts Jo passed. Undeterred, Kate went slamming with Roman Key Card Blackwood. Five hearts from Jo confirmed two key cards missing the heart queen. This was good news for Kate who bid six hearts.

West led the queen of diamonds as requested by the double and East ruffed. Jo took the remainder of the tricks and made her contract. But with only the missing ace

to lose, six no trumps would have produced a better score.

Seven hearts played by north appeared to be the winning score, or was it? When Millie and I played the board, the auction began in the same way, but then took a different route.

All went well up to the three heart transfer bid. Oscar, sitting North, bid first clubs at the four level and then spades showing first round controls and agreeing hearts as trumps.

Sadly Ian, sitting South, unfortunately wrongly interpreted both these bids as natural. His four diamonds was intended to be natural, although systemically it was a cue bid.

### Oscar screws up

Now he wrongly assumed that Oscar held five hearts, four clubs and four spades. Erroneously presuming a four-four fit in spades, Ian bid six spades.

Oscar panicked and bid six no trumps. Ian assumed Oscar had the ace of spades and bid the no-trump grand slam.

I was confused by the bidding, but as Millie had suggested a diamond lead, I led the queen.

When dummy appeared, Ian remained calm and brought home the contract by running seven hearts, two diamonds and four clubs.

'Did you forget the system?' Oscar asked his partner.

'We got a good result,' Ian prevaricated.

'You forgot the system again, didn't you? Admit it.'

'Possibly, but I got us a top' he replied.

'You didn't recognise my cue bid,' said Oscar with disappointment in his voice as they trailed off to the next table without so much as an apology for their fortuitous result.

'I wish we could make mistakes like that and get a top,' Millie observed ruefully. 'Anyway, Wendy, you should have led a spade.'

# Robot gadgets: if you can't beat them, join them

THE GOVERNMENT'S pledge in the March budget to pump more money into Artificial Intelligence might of stirred the emotions of those who came up against robots while playing online during Covid.

If you played or practised using Bridge Base Online, it was impossible to avoid the robots and you obviously had to familiarise yourself with their bidding system, writes **Rob Richardson**.

Acol players had to get used to five-card majors and a strong no trump along with a number of gadgets some of which I like.

## Third seat madness

These include Drury, a system developed by bridge teacher and club owner Douglas Drury of Sebastopol, California. When he was playing in Canada, his partner Eric Murray had a habit after two passes of opening on ludicrously light hands when he was in the third seat.

Drury devised his convention to stop the partnership going too high which it was easy to do when some sort of suit fit had been found and if his partner hadn't opened too light, game was a possibility.

Although his was a passed hand, Douglas Drury would bid two clubs if his third-seat partner had opened a spade or a heart.

It shows a near-maximum pass of around ten points with at least three-card support for partner's major. Opener cannot pass, but if there's an intervening bid, the convention is ignored. It didn't take long for players to realise that the convention was almost as useful opposite fourth seat openings.

I've ignored five-card majors and strong no-trump systems in the following example and presented the convention as if it were being used in Acol.

You're sitting South and are dealt this hand:

♠ 73  
♥ K 10 8 3  
♦ QJ 5  
♣ AJ 8 3

As South you pass, as does West. Your partner opens one heart showing at this vulnerability anything from ten to nineteen points.

South could invite to game by bidding three hearts, but if North is near the bottom end of the range he will pass and the contract may be impossible. This is where Drury is useful. South bids two clubs, which partner must alert. It shows, as mentioned above, around ten points and at least four cards in partner's major. North can either sign off in two, bid four or investigate a possible slam.

You could ask whether Douglas Drury might have been better advised to find himself a new partner, one that didn't open on tram tickets.

But if Eric Murray passed there was every chance that East had a powerful hand and a winning contract easily found by the opposition without the risk of any intervention.

## Downside

All gadgets have their downsides and Drury is no exception, the main one being that it takes away the natural two-club bid. Look at this hand:

♠ A K  
♥ 8 7 4  
♦ 7 5 4  
♣ QJ 7 5 3

Sitting South with ten points you pass, so does East. Partner opens a spade. Assuming West passes, if playing Drury, your neat little two club bid with ten or eleven points is no longer available.

With both red suits wide open, no-trumps is not an attractive option. But although it takes up a lot of bidding space, three clubs gets the message across. It may of course be too high opposite a minimum with no fit located.

# Go for it or play for one off

PLAYING EAST ONLINE AT THE NOVERRE earlier this month, my occasionally irascible partner was not happy when I failed to make one no trump on these cards.

'With your eighteen points and my five you should make one no trump standing on your head' he said after a snort and a big smile.

I wasn't so sure, but decided to keep quiet rather than start a prickly dialogue that might do no more than entertain our happy opponents.

Anyway, I've not stood my head since the last century when at school.

The board was played seventeen times, fourteen of the East-Wests in one or two no trumps. The contract made three times and went off in nine. One club made, but one and two diamonds also failed.

Where did I go wrong? Well not just me; where did nine of us go wrong

## Play for one off?

East had four winners, three aces and the diamond king. I needed to make the club queen and two spades, a tall order. Perhaps it was best to force out the spade ace and play for one off.

Ever the optimist, I tried to make the contract, but failed to spot the heart ten as a potential winner, providing the suit split three-three and there was an entry to dummy.

Most Souths led the diamond queen. Declarer should duck, win the continuation and lead a club towards dummy. If South wins, dummy's club queen becomes an entry. If South ducks the queen wins.

Continue with a heart to the ace, then a

second heart. Win the next diamond with the king and lead a third heart. Played this way you win the club queen, a heart and two diamonds.

After losing two more diamonds either a club or spade will be led. North will duck a spade forcing out the queen; a club runs to the ace. North's spade ace should be preserved to kill the king entry.

Still one away whether you stand on your head or not. As for the other pairs, one no trump was bid the other way round once, that is by North/South, and also went one off. Sadly, not at our table.

While I played a lot of online bridge during lockdown, that was exclusively with Bridge

Base Online and my Noverre experience was my first time with Real Bridge.

Undoubtedly, the technology adds something to the online game in that you can see who you're playing against.

But it's still nothing like as satisfactory as face-to-face. For me bridge will always be a people game; the individuals you meet are as unpredictable as the cards you're dealt.

My BBO experience was mostly in Cornwall where on the few occasions it wasn't raining, the weather was occasionally so unstable that some players' broadband went haywire.

## Robots in a flash

On the frequent occasions that happened, a robot would in a flash steal my partner's seat without knowing what bidding system we might have been attempting to play. The bots didn't care and stuck rigidly to their own version of strong no trump and five-card majors.

	♠ A J 10 5	
	♥ Q 7 2	
	♦ 9 6	
	♣ J 10 9 3	
♠ K 9 7 6		♠ Q 8 4
♥ 10 6 5 4		♥ A J 8
♦ 5 3 2		♦ A K 7
♣ Q 8		♣ A 7 5 2
	♠ 3 2	
	♥ K 9 3	
	♦ Q J 10 8 4	
	♣ K 6 4	



# Augusta done by diamonds

MY GREAT AUNT AUGUSTA is one of those Bridge addicts who believe that the finesse is a panacea for all a struggling declarer's ills.

If she holds a suit headed by the Ace-Queen or King-Jack, either in-hand and/or in dummy, she will invariably take the finesse without thinking, flashing her specialist black look at the winning half of the opposition, or muttering about her perennial bad luck.

'It's 50-50 chance everybody knows that, East or West either has the missing honour or they haven't, but not in my case. I win about one finesse in five.'

## In the longest holding

She could reduce the odds considerably by taking account of the bidding and assume that the court card she was trying to locate was more likely to be the in the hand of the opponent with the longest holding in that suit.

I explained as diplomatically as possible, and after the first few boards had to conclude that for once Augusta had taken notice of what I said instead of ignoring every one of my words and falling back on her favourite piece of body language, the rolling eyes.

This was the next board:

### Dealer North North-South vulnerable

♠ J	
♥ A 6 4 3	
♦ A 5 3	
♣ K Q J 10 7	
♠ K 10 8 3	♠ Q 7 6 5 4 2
♥ K 8	♥ J 10 9
♦ K Q J 10 2	♦ 9
♣ 6 4	♣ 8 5 2
♠ A 9	
♥ Q 7 5 2	
♦ 8 7 6 4	
♣ A 9 3	

I opened a Club, East passed and Aunt Augusta responded with a Heart. When West overcalled with two Diamonds, North raised to three Hearts and Augusta bid the game.

I could almost hear the wheels turning under Augusta's afternoon perm. She added West's signalled five diamonds to Dummy's three and her four making twelve. Realising with a flash of lightening on the road to Dereham that East had a singleton, she won the ace.

Augusta followed with the ace and another trump on which East played the nine. I swallowed hard at Augusta's uncomfortably long pause and fully expected her to play the queen. But she ducked and let East's nine fall to West's king.

West triumphantly played the diamonds and Augusta was one off. I avoided one of her Stygian looks, but suffered under a 'told-you-so' stare which is almost as bad.

## Only one winner

All the tables reached four hearts, but only one made it.

'Impossible. How did they manage that,' asked Augusta snatching the travellers from the director's hand.

The winning declarer took the ace of Diamonds and continued with the jack of Spades to their ace.

They led the trump queen at trick three, but West played the king and forced declarer to win the trick with the ace in dummy and continue with another trump falling to East's ten.

East won his last trump and led a Spade, but it was all over. Declarer dumped two of her losing diamonds on dummy's clubs and made the contract.

'Next time you choose to lecture me about my card play, be sure that your argument has no holes in it which is more than can be said about the finesse' she said pushing her empty wine glass in my direction.

# Four players five contracts

by  
Graham Hardman

ONE OF THE THINGS I love about bridge is its unpredictability.

Many hands in a club session are played in the same suit, sometimes at different levels, but every now and again a hand comes along where the players all take a different view about how to bid it.

The hand below comes from a Hellesdon & Taverham club session a couple of years ago, but it stuck with me because at different tables the hand was played with all four suits as trumps and no-trumps as well.

So what do you think? And how would you have bid it.

## Dealer North

♠ K 8	
♥ A 10 8 6	
♦ K 8 5 4 3	
♣ J 5	
♠ J 10 9 3 2	♠ A 7 5
♥ 9 7	♥ J 5 2
♦ 10 9	♦ A 6 2
♣ K 8 7 6	♣ A Q 9 2
♠ Q 6 4	
♥ K Q 4 3	
♦ Q J 7	
♣ 10 4 3	

Does North open one diamond on the basis of the Rule of Twenty or do they pass, as I did?

With fifteen points, those playing East and a twelve to fourteen point no-trump will open one club.

## South has no bid

South doesn't have a bid, so what about West: pass, bid a spade or two clubs?

In my case West passed, one club came to me and I bid a diamond. This was passed round to West who bid two clubs.

More passes took it round to South who bid two diamonds. This became the

contract and nine tricks were made comfortably.

We missed the heart fit, but two North/South pairs found it and got a better score. Meanwhile, four East/West pairs were brave enough to bid up to the three level in either spades or clubs.

No-trumps was tried both by one North/South pair and one East/West, but the contract failed on both occasions.

Of course, there's nothing like the benefit of hindsight and analysis tells us that the optimum making contract is three spades by East/West.

This can only happen when North opens, which allows East to overcall one no-trump. Either that or North passes which allows East to open a fifteen-seventeen point one no-trump.

This hand throws up the delight of this amazing game. Sadly, this deal was online so there was no discussion in the bar afterwards.

Such a shame.

## Only one winner

While the five contracts produced a freak situation. the cards were anything but freakish. They couldn't be more mundane with the points evenly split.

Freak hands are usually those that contain eight, nine or ten-card suits along with a void or two. As the Encyclopedia of Bridge (Crown Publishers, 1976) says:

'These hands defy scientific evaluation, and past experiences are of no help in appraising these anomalies.

'So the exper, like the average player, has to guess what he should bid; and when it comes to guessing, anybody is as good good as anybody else.'

Scientific evaluation is not necessary with the hand above, but that doesn't make it any less interesting



# Rixi slams weak weak weak

Although the weak no-trump comes in for the odd castigation, you don't hear much criticism these days about weak twos in three suits or weak jump overcalls.

And the pre-emptive value of the weak no-trump is so effective in messing up the opposition, that when it gets clobbered two down doubled and vulnerable it's still worth continuing because that doesn't happen often.

It wasn't always like this. Austrian-born Rixi Markus was said to be one of the greatest-ever woman players and a lightning fast analyst.

She won twelve international championships, more than any other woman player of the time, won the first two European Women's Championships in 1935-6 and the World Woman's Championship the year after that.

## Legendary Partnership

After World War 2 she became a British citizen and formed a legendary partnership with Fritzi Gordon which through the 1960s and early 1970s was said to be the strongest ladies pair in world bridge.

Rixi (originally Rika) wrote several books the most well known of which was *Play Boldly, Play Safe* which is now probably a collector's item.

'I am particularly biased against the weak no-trump and the weak jump overcall as well as against the weak two' she wrote in 1977.

'For this reason I endeavour to prove their supports wrong as often as I possibly can and, while it must be admitted that I do not succeed to proving my point on every occasion, I am always quite pleased to play against an opponent whose convention card reads weak-weak-weak.'

Rixi never missed an opportunity to air her prejudices in the pieces she wrote for the *London Evening Standard* and *The Guardian*.

Here's a hand from the Mixed Pairs at the 1975 Don Pepe Festival in Marbella on which she scored well and her weak-two

judgement was proved to be correct. West dealt with North-South vulnerable.

Jack Odry (Belgium)

♠ QJ 7 4  
♥ 5  
♦ A QJ 9 7 6 5  
♣ Q

♠ A J 10 9 8  
♥ Q 10 8  
♦ 10 6 5  
♣ J 3

♠ K 7 5 3  
♥ K  
♦ K 9 7 3  
♣ 9 6 4

Rixi

♠  
♥ A J 9 7 6 5 4 3  
♦ A 4  
♣ A Q 7

West	North	East	South
2♥ (1)	3♦	4♥	4NT (2)
NB	5♦	NB	6♦ (3)
NB	NB	6♥	7♦ (4)
NB	NB	Double (5)	NB
NB	NB		

1. A weak-two bid

2. Blackwood

3. Rixi was convinced that seven diamonds was on, but was 'afraid that that seven hearts would prove to be fairly cheap for the opponents.' She therefore opted top play in six diamonds....

4. .... And rise to seven if pushed

5. 'The unfortunate East completely misjudged the situation. First he pushed us into a cold grand slam, and then he doubled it,' she wrote.

Rixi argued that the weak two is 'utterly useless' because 'it gives the opponents valuable information about your hand without effectively hindering them from exchanging information about their own, and also that it eliminates the invaluable two-bid of intermediate strength, thereby making the strength of a one-bid inhibitingly indefinite.

# Last Word

## Talking Bridge's this and that diary

AFTER ONE TOO MANY pints in the the student bar, a live-wire undergraduate in his last year at UEA decided to pump Hamlet's personal details into a piece of Loughborough University's careers software.

He didn't hold back and made references to the young Dane's obsession with his mother's sex life, his problems after his girlfriend drowned herself, his weakness for conspiracy theories, talking to himself and his possible mental instability.

The virtual wheels of the software clunked away and after a longer than average pause said he needed to be in a position that allowed him to present information and communicate with, manage and influence others.

So he should look for a job in the media, become a tour operator, archaeologist or bridge tournament director.

Luckily the undergraduate steered clear of Falstaff, who was sadly dependant on alcohol, and Othello, who was likely to throttle his misses if she went down three doubled in a small slam.

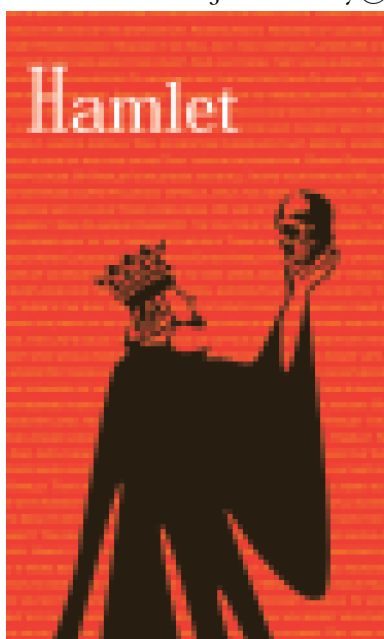
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Some bridge teachers are doing all they to get more people playing face-to-face. Rob Richardson is currently gathering names for the next stage of his course, the first of which was held back in January at the Carnegie Room at Gorleston.

There's also a new initiative at Wymondham held by John Bailey downstairs at the Abbey Schoolrooms in Church Street.

It's an eight week course, suitable for beginners and improvers held on Tuesday mornings through March and April between

10.30 and 12.30 through April. The sixteen-hour course costs £50. To book a place or for more information contact John on his mobile (07947 861378) or email him: johnrbailey@btinternet.com.



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It's not too late to join the Norfolk Congress weekend at the Wensum Valley Hotel on April 1-2. More teams are needed for Sunday's Swiss Teams which kick off at 11 am.

Saturday's Swiss Pairs start at 1.30 while the Really Easy session begins at 1.45.

Entry fee for the Saturday and Sunday Swiss Teams: £25; Saturday's Really Easy costs £2.50 per player.

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Anyone curious about the signature at the bottom of the page should know that the word 'kibitzer' is Yiddish for one who looks on and offers unwanted advice or comment, notably in card games, particularly in bridge.

The word is derived from the German 'kiebitzen' which means to look on, or more broadly, one who offers uncalled for opinions.

When I started playing duplicate at West Hampstead's Acol Bridge Club there were plenty of Jewish players and you heard the word often, usually in a negative context.

But some kibitzers are worse than others. By far the worst are those who don't speak, but purse their lips and breathe in heavily the instant the player whose shoulder they're peering over touches the card they intend to play.

*Kibitzer*