



Talking Bridge

Winter 2022 Issue 6

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Fighting the Covid collapse

BRIDGE CLUBS were hit by Covid with many closing or merging. Many players moved online and some stopped playing at all, but when lockdown restrictions relaxed, many decided not to return to playing face-to-face.

A recent trustee meeting of the Norfolk Contract Bridge Association was told that there are less people playing now than there were before Covid 19 changed not just Britain, but the planet.

'The game faces an uncertain future. Even clubs in large counties are reporting low attendances at face-to-face events, and lower numbers are playing online' says retiring NCBA chairman Robert Smith.

'When a club closed, some members joined other clubs. but unfortunately many didn't. Something needs to be done and the issue addressed if the game is to flourish and hence the Bridge In Need Appeal (BIN).

'For all players, if you want the game we all enjoy to progress, there is a NEED to play in live events. So club members please support club events, participate in county competitions and challenge yourself.

'Established county event players NEED to welcome and encourage both new players and the less experienced at these events.

'If you love the game, don't BIN it. Just see what you can do to help in its time of NEED.'

Covid

Key dates for the diary are the Eastern Counties Cup on January 8, 2023, and the Face-to-Face Congress to be held at the Wensum Valley Hotel on April 1-2.

A well as being a teams event, the Eastern Counties Cup is the NCBA qualifier for the EBU's Pachabo Trophy which will be held online. Norfolk will use RealBridge starting at 11.00. To enter, go to the website and scroll down to **Entry Forms** in the left hand menu: £4 per player. Green Points are awarded.

Although lockdown is over (at least for

now!), many Norfolk players continue to play online rather than returning to their clubs as is the case in some other parts of the country. There were 57 tables for the summer meeting in Eastbourne this year, 38 at Somerset's West of England Congress. Closer to home Suffolk attracted 14 and 15 tables to their two autumn Sunday pairs events. Details of some nearby events are on Page 9

Free workshop

Rob Richardson has planned a workshop designed to get the basics of the game across to newcomers in five hours. All the details are on the next page.

Another, later initiative is possible at Wymondham. Keep an eye on the website or the next issue of Talking Bridge.

The U3 is active throughout East Anglia, and as many of its branches put on regular bridge sessions, some players have graduated to joining local bridge clubs and there are surely many more who could be encouraged to follow suit. The U3A in Dereham has produced players who have moved on to the Dereham Bridge Club and are reported not only to be playing to a good standard, but also that the standard is rising all the time.

Some of those who started the game at the U3A competed in the Dereham Bridge League, a Mid/West Norfolk competition that before Covid had two divisions. Teams from that league also competed in the Norfolk and Norwich League, and the one from Swaffham is currently holding its own or better in Division 2.

The Dereham club is thriving which owes a lot to the efforts of one lady who has since moved nearer to her family in Bedfordshire who ran free classes and provided cake, tea and coffee at her home.

So there are ways of introducing new players to the game. Borrowing the words of Norwich FC enthusiast and celebrity chef Delia Smith, 'Let's be having you.'

Learn Bridge in a day

And tell your friends!

The disappearance of so many people from bridge clubs is being blamed on Covid-19 and the social restrictions imposed on everybody.

While this is clearly correct, the reduction in the number of players camouflages an even bigger problem: encouraging the younger generation to the table.

Many of us remember when most homes had several packs of cards that regularly appeared when families got together at weekends, high days and holidays.

There were a huge variety of games for two or more people that could be played by all generations, and the initial outlay was relatively small.

Devices

But the 21st century is one of ‘devices’, and a humble pack of cards rarely figures in the game plans of the next generation.

This is not solely a UK problem. The United States, the country that did so much to turn Bridge into a sophisticated, international pastime, is suffering, too.

There are any number of initiatives designed to reverse the trend, but one where the word has spread across the Atlantic is Whirlwind Bridge.

It was founded over a decade ago by bridge teachers Patty Tucker and Melissa Bernhardt. Their approach was designed to ‘sell’ Bridge as a game that can bring a lifetime of enjoyment, hoping particularly to encourage younger people to the game.

‘For card-loving bridge players, attracting youth is the ultimate puzzle’ they believe. ‘At the North American Bridge championships, thousands showed up to play. But perhaps the hardest puzzle this card game has to solve is how to attract youth.’

Patty and Melissa took a broad view and didn’t attempt to take their students along the path of learning a relatively sophisticated bidding system, but instead got the rudiments of the game across, explained the points

system and gave their students all the ammunition they needed to take the game forward for themselves either with teachers, books or online sources.

They feel that Bridge offers a ‘perfect combination of mental challenge and social interaction’, as it is a game that offers people with busy lives ‘the most effective and convenient bridge learning experience possible, regardless of skill levels.’

Whirlwind Bridge caught the eye of Rob Richardson and inspired him to dream up a scheme where strangers to the game can get their heads round the basics in five hours and go away with the tools they need to develop their skills to the point they will at least consider introducing themselves to a local club.

Rob’s plan owes nothing more to Whirlwind Bridge, Patty Tucker and Melissa Bernhardt than the initial inspiration. He will do it in his own way, one that will be suitable for East Anglia.

Gorleston

He’s planned a five-hour workshop beginning at 10.30 am on Saturday, January 21 in the Carnegie Room at Gorleston Library. There will be a half an hour break for lunch.

It will enable people to learn the rudiments of bridge in a day, totally free of charge. Participants will go away understanding the points system, the need for partners to explain their cards to each other and an appreciation of the skills needed to develop.

Anyone wishing to attend should email Rob at:

robbierichardson@live.co.uk

‘At the end of the day learners will be able to play bridge socially at home, and, if they wish, be put into contact with a local club, or a teacher to progress their game

Stately Homes

From the Diaries of Wendy Wensum

OUR LONG-TIME friends: Dave and Sally were visiting Norfolk on a short weekend break with their ramblers club. Spouse and I joined them for a fairly substantial walk starting from Felbrigg Hall on the long-distance footpath, Weaver's Way.

We stopped for lunch at a village pub, where Spouse introduced Dave and other members to a number of beers from the local micro-breweries.

Rather belatedly, we walked on (*Staggered? Editor*) to Blickling Hall where there was just time for tea and cake before returning to Norwich on the club minibus.

Rather than attending an evening seminar with the rest of their group: *A History of Rambling in Nineteenth Century Norfolk*, Dave and Sally joined us for bridge at the Riverside.

While Sally and I went through our system card, Spouse and Dave were in the bar checking the real ale on offer.

Half empty

They returned with pint glasses already half empty and joined us for the first round of bridge. They were by now quite merry and all seemed set for a carefree evening which allowed Sally and I to get off to a good start with the first set of boards. A little later Millie and George arrived at the table.

'George, can you see my two-pound coin on the floor?' said Millie. George's head disappeared under the table.

'No, I didn't see you drop it,' he said, his voice muffled by the green baize.

'I lost it last week at this table and thought it might still be here,' she said as if her request for a search was completely obvious.

George's head reappeared with a grin like the Cheshire cat. He is clearly getting used to Millie's strange ways.

At the time I thought that Sally and I were a bit unlucky in this awkward little deal in which both sides were vulnerable. Millie, sitting West, was the dealer.

**Dealer West: game all
Sally**

♠ QJ 6 4 3
♥ A 10
♦ A J 10 3
♣ 10 6

Millie

♠ K 7 5 2
♥ 9 8 6 4 2
♦ 8 4 2
♣ 7

George

♠ A 10 9
♥ J 7 5 3
♦ K Q 5
♣ A K 3

♠ 8
♥ KQ
♦ 976
♣ QJ 9 8 5 4 2

Millie passed and Sally opened one no-trump (12-14). With 17 points, George doubled. I didn't know whether to bid two or three clubs, as after the double both were non-forcing. I realised that a heart contract might be on for the opposition, so assuming that Sally held at least a doubleton, I bid three clubs which ended the auction.

West	North	East	South
Millie	Sally	George	Wendy
Pass	1N	Double	3♣

The nine of hearts was led and as dummy went down Sally apologised for her one no-trump bid. She said that she had a spade between her two clubs and didn't notice that she had two doubletons and should have opened one spade. Our heart honours were wasted and I was one off for minus 100, losing a spade, two diamonds and two clubs.

Herbal tea

In the pub later, Sally and I sipped herbal tea much to the disapproval of Millie who was nursing a tumbler full of brandy. The men continued with more pints of beer. When Dave and Spouse played the

board, North opened one spade. With his balanced seventeen count, Spouse overcalled one no-trump. South bid two clubs and Dave with a singleton club bid, and knowing that there would be at least two hearts opposite, bid two hearts.

West	North	East	South
Dave		Spouse	
Pass	1♠	1NT	2♣
2♥	End		

North led the ten of clubs, Dave won with the ace and led a trump. He won the club return in dummy and led another trump which cleared the suit. So he lost two trumps, a diamond and a spade for an overtrick and plus 140. At this point Millie,

clearly looking through rose-tinted glasses, claimed that she would have bid two hearts had I only bid two clubs. Hindsight and tumblers full of brandy makes bidding so much easier.

By this time the men had lost interest in Bridge, instead continuing their search for the perfect pint.

Millie felt she had already discovered the perfect cognac. Dave and Sally enjoyed their Norfolk trip, both for the walking and the Bridge. Judging by the amount of real ale the men demolished, I think Dave enjoyed the beer, too. Predictably, Spouse reminded me later:

‘Norfolk is famous, not only for its stately homes and long-distance footpaths, but also for its micro breweries.’

Be honest: would you have bid the lay down slam?

THIS HAND shows the importance of having an agreement with your partner about what to do when your opponents pre-empt with a weak two, writes **Rob Richardson**.

West dealt with both sides vulnerable.

West and North passed, East bid two hearts.

If you were sitting N/S with your favourite partner, do you think you would reach the lay-down slam in either of the minor suits?

The board was played nine times on a bridge holiday earlier this year and only one pair even managed to find game.

The other eight all scored between 170 and 200 for defending a heart contract, or making a part score.

I think the best action from South is 3♦ over the weak two hearts. West will probably raise partner’s hearts to four.

What can North do?

Three small cards in the opponent’s suit suggests that South is void and should not consider defending.

5♦ looks like the only remaining option.

Now imagine that East doesn’t play weak twos and passes on the first round. Now what happens?

West is no longer able to enter the auction which gives N/S something of a fighting chance of finding the slam.

Admittedly this was a bridge holiday with a wide range of standards, but weak twos are an essential component of Standard Acol these days.

They are also used in the currently played variations of Standard American or ‘strong and fives’ as they tend to be described at the table.

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

Double and quits

THANKS TO the billions of possible card combinations, you never know what to expect in Bridge and that's one of the reasons that attracts us to the game, says retiring NCBA chairman **Robert Smith**. was South and played the first three boards against the same opponents. What was unusual was that West doubled each contract and South made all three contracts.

First Board

	♠ Q 5	
	♥ Q873	
	♦ 965	
	♣ KJ72	
♠ K732		♠ J10864
♥ KJ9		♥ 1062
♦ KJ8		♦ 1074
♣ AQ3		♣ 96
	♠ A9	
	♥ A54	
	♦ AQ32	
	♣ 10854	

Playing a weak no-trump, South opens 1NT, West doubles and it's passed out. When West leads a spade, South makes the queen, returns to hand with the diamond ace and plays the club finesse which gives him three club tricks. That takes his total to five and he still has the spade and heart aces.

Second Board

	♠ AQJ8	
	♥ A6	
	♦ 7632	
	♣ KQ10	
♠ K76		♠ 10
♥ K93		♥ J7542
♦ K84		♦ AQJ93
♣ AJ75		♣ 98
	♠ 95432	
	♥ Q108	
	♦ 10	
	♣ 44	

Better not to give the bidding!

West opens, North doubles and takes out the double with a spade bid. North propels his partner's miserable two points into four spades which West doubles.

The king of hearts lead gives South an entry to take a Spade finesse. The diamond return was won by East who switched to a club won by West.

Declarer ruffed the diamond king and took another spade finesse. The trump ace dropped the king, so the contract was made declarer losing a diamond and two clubs.

Third Board

	♠ A10 5	
	♥ K8	
	♦ K54	
	♣ QJ765	
♠ K64		♠ J10864
♥ AQ32		♥ 1062
♦ Q764		♦ 1074
♣ 108		♣ 96
	♠ A3	
	♥ 754	
	♦ AJ10982	
	♣ 832	

North opens no-trump East bids two spades and South's three diamonds is doubled by West, presumably on the basis of third time often being lucky.

The four of spades lead was won by the ace. Declarer then ruffed a spade and led the diamond jack. The finesse was repeated with the diamond ten. The diamond king was followed by a club to the ace and the last diamond. Contract made.

Diplomacy

Ever the diplomat, Robert fails to reveal what West said afterwards. The words may be unrepeatable, West might snarled and ground his teeth or smiled graciously and vowed never to do it again.

Keeping tabs on 2/1

WHILE international player, club owner and Times Bridge correspondent **Andrew Robson** is still teaching Acol, and will continue to do so, he's bowed to popular demand and launched an on-line course on five-card majors and a strong no-trump.

When he's playing in international matches he uses a strong and fives, which is now pretty-well universal across the planet, but remains committed to Acol and as well teaching uses it when playing with pick-up partners.

Five years ago you didn't come across it that often in UK bridge clubs, but now its everywhere and spreading fast. Note that both the European and World Bridge championship were recently won using one version of strong and fives or another.

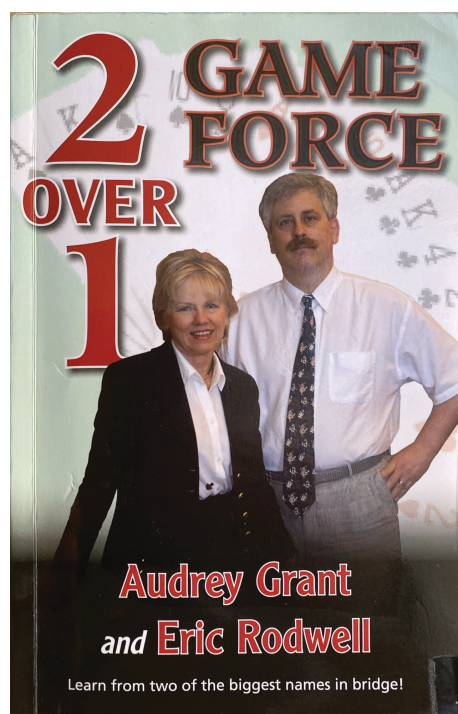
Since the high and far off days of Ely Culbertson, most American players have used strong and fives as the basis of their bidding system. Like Acol, strong and fives have varied enormously over the years. The current fashionable variation is the so-called 2/1 which forces a partnership to game when responder bids two of a new suit .

It's sweeping through the clubs and even if you don't intend to desert Acol, it's worth knowing something about what the opposition might be up to.

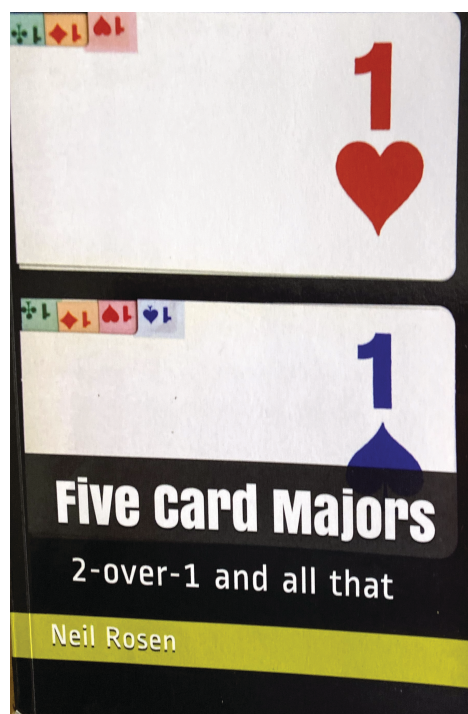
Plenty of strong and fives material is available online much of it free and frequently accompanied with sessions on YouTube.

For those who prefer books there are two that are usually recommended: the *English Five-card Majors 2-over1 and all that* by Neil Rosen, and the *American 2 over 1 Game Force* by Audrey Grant and Erica Rodwell.

Although the American book is a slicker production and more stylishly written, both are good in different ways. Grant and Rodwell take their readers through the system slowly and thoroughly. Some hands are also played through which some experienced players may find irritating. Rosen cleverly offers individual partnerships different ways to develop their own variations on the basic system. This will appeal particularly to players who prefer to develop their 'own' system than follow a painting-by-numbers style guide.



Both of these frequently recommended books are available from Amazon: £16.97 for the one on the left, £11.95 for the other



The Revolving Discard

More from the diaries of Wendy Wensum

IT WAS THE monthly team event at the Riverside and as usual Millie and I were playing with Kate and Jo.

'I've misplaced my bridge glasses so I'm using my driving ones. I'm not seeing the cards too well; they're blurred' said a hassled west as he arrived at the table.

'It's just as well it's that way round otherwise you could be driving home using your bridge glasses, very dangerous' said Millie, suddenly a safety expert.

'I do all the driving not Jason' said his wife. 'I wear the trousers in our house.'

Tartan kilt

'You do' agreed her husband smoothing his tartan kilt as he took his seat. His wife continued,

'We're new members' the wife who wears the trousers continued. 'I'm Gertrude by the way, but just call me Gert and leave out the *rude* bit.' I was wondering why Jason needed driving glasses if he didn't drive.

'Gert treats me more like a pet than a bridge partner' Jason said softly to no one in particular as we picked up our cards.

Dealer West; Game all

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

After Jason passed, Millie opened one diamond. Gertrude decided that two hearts

described her hand. Hoping that Millie might double, I considered passing, but in the end decided to show my clubs and bid three. After Jason's pass, Millie cue bid with three hearts asking for a stop in that suit. Gertrude doubled hoping it would result in a heart lead. I bid three no trumps.

West	North	East	South
Jason	Millie	Gertrude	Wendy
Pass	1♦	2♥	3♣
Pass	3♥	double	3NT

Jason led his singleton heart; Gert won with the ace and returned the jack. I won with the king. As Jason attempted to discard the nine of diamonds intending to suggest a holding in spades. But with his restricted vision, the card spun out of his hand and performed a spectacular loop the loop and landed in Millie's handbag which was by her chair.

'D'you play revolving discards?' inquired Millie unnecessarily and, as dummy, unethically. However, the signal was intended, but it made no difference as I made two hearts, five clubs and five diamonds. Plus three for 690.

Thespian antics

While scoring up later we discovered that Jo and Kate had played the hand against James and his wife, Monica, known as the Drama Queen because of her thespian antics.

'She's no friend of mine' said Millie.

'I'm not surprised after all the things you say about her behind her back. I've even heard you referring to her a Moaning Mona' said Jo.

The start of their auction was rather different to our's. Over James' opening diamond, Kate overcalled a conservative one heart.

Monica bid two clubs over which James

bid two diamonds. Dangerously, Kate bid two hearts, which Monica dramatically doubled for penalties, venomously placing the red double card on the table.

West	North	East	South
Jo	James	Kate	Monica
Pass	1♦	1♥	2♣
Pass	2♦	2♥	double

Monica led the club ace on which James inadvertently played the three. She followed with the king and James played the five. Expecting James to ruff, she continued with another club. Kate won the trick with the two of trumps and led a diamond. At his point Monica became visibly irritated.

Second ruff

Kate entered dummy via the king of spades and ruffed another diamond. Monica over-ruffed and exited with a club, ruffed by declarer who continued with the ace of spades following it with a low one taken by James' queen.

James played a diamond, which was ruffed and over-ruffed. Monica was end played. Kate won the next two tricks before

conceding the last trick for one off and minus 200. The opposition took two clubs, a spade and three hearts.

Monica upbraided James for encouraging a club continuation on the opening lead. He said that he had simply pulled out the wrong card.

Brain transplant

An eye test was first suggested by Monica who then said that she suspected he'd forgotten their switch to reverse attitude signals and recommended a brain transplant rather than a visit to the optician. James wisely didn't respond.

In the pub later Millie wondered whether on the club lead and a favourable continuation, two hearts might have been made by Kate.

I doubted it, but fortunately my purchase of a round of drinks quelled any further discussion on the issue.

'Poor Jim' said Jo. 'He's really under Monica's thumb.'

'I think Jason is too' said Millie.

'In Jason's case I think Gertrude's thumb may also be involved' said Kate. What a night. Strange carding signals, defective vision and henpecked husbands.

Local events to consider

SADLY, THE NEWS that lockdown has ended appears not to have reached many Norfolk bridge players, many of whom continue to play online instead of returning to their clubs.

To help you along, here are a few upcoming events in the area that you should consider entering. We've included some from Suffolk as their now favourite venue, Elmswell, is only just outside our area,

Friday, December 30	11.00	Bah Humbug Pairs	Elmswell	£9
Sunday, January 29	10.30	Bury Swiss Pairs	Elmswell	£10
Sunday, February 19	11.00	Committee Cup	Costessey	
Saturday, April 1	13.30	Norfolk Congress Pairs	Wensum Valley Hotel	tbc
Sunday, April 2	11.00	Norfolk Congress Teams		

Losing club is ruff justice for Augusta

My Aunt Augusta is without question the worst Bridge player I've ever had as a partner. I find myself frequently sitting opposite her simply because my mother is forever asking me to play with my late father's oldest sister who, coincidentally, is unspeakably rich.

'It's not her money' Mother says, 'it's just that she's so lonely, and it's not asking much of you to spend a couple of hours with her over a friendly game of cards.'

Of course it's the money; there can be no other reason.

Aunt Augusta is obscenely overweight, of an indeterminate age, probably not too far short of three figures.

Mother says she's likely to go at any time, but when she does you can bet against your next Yarborough that not even a small fraction of her riches will go in Mother's direction. It will probably be

steered towards a charity for those mentally challenged miniature dogs whose bites are invariably worse than their barks.

Augusta is lonely because she has no friends, she is insufferably rude to anyone who speaks, and although she radiates perfect health, claims to suffer from a series of lingering diseases.

Is there no man in her life, you might ask? There've been several, all of them after her money, but she's despatched them all to early graves, a couple under somewhat dubious circumstances. In once decidedly more than somewhat.

My Mother is also wrong to describe Bridge as a 'friendly game of cards.' It's certainly a game of cards, but it's so ruthlessly cutthroat that it makes the House

of Commons at Prime Minister's Question Time sound like Songs of Praise.

Where possible Augusta will play all the hands where we have the balance of points; when defending she fails to recognise my signals, but hectors me when I choose to ignore her's.

The deal below is what I had to suffer last week. North dealt and opened a spade. Augusta looked at N/S's vulnerability, peered defiantly at north and bid two hearts.

South bid three clubs. I raised to three

hearts confident that if North/South went to four spades my protected queen suggested that we'd get them off. North glanced at the red flash on the board and peered back at Augusta, a challenging look in his eye as he passed. Augusta declared in four hearts.

North lead the ace-king of spades and, seeing his partner's high/low, led a third

spade which Augusta ruffed. South over-ruffed with the queen and followed with the club king which fell to Augusta's ace.

My aunt then led a trump to my king and dropped the singleton jack. Augusta cashed the ace of diamonds, followed with the two, finessing the nine and ditched a club on the diamond king.

It looked as if the contract was sailing home, but too late she realised she was stuck with a losing club for one off.

'You shouldn't have ruffed the third spade, Augusta. South has signalled that he has no more and I've got the queen anyway. On the third trick you should have discarded your losing club seven.'

'All facts and no vision that's the trouble with your generation' she said.

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