

Scottish Bridge News

The Official Magazine of the Scottish Bridge Union



Eric Kokish in profile

Scottish Bridge News

Editorial

The SBU has begun a program to try to improve Scotland's status on the world stage. We have plenty of talent, but little success to show for it.

The International Committee launched a series of Thursday night seminars and Play and Discuss sessions. We report on the first 5 of these. For those who could not attend, videos of the seminars are available on the International Page of the web site sbu.org.uk. (You have to scroll down quite a long way.)

There is a theme which runs through all the discussions: players of all levels can improve by working at their game.

After the initial run of sessions the Committee will assess the feedback and decide where to go next. They welcome suggestions.

We are saddened to report the death of Eric Kokish. He was a fine player, with a lovely smile and a terrific personality, but his main claim to fame was as the World's Greatest Bridge Coach. Three of our women players were privileged to attend a coaching weekend organised by the CBAI. Their reminiscences emphasise his attention to detail, underlining the SBU efforts to encourage partnership discussion.

One way to gain valuable experience is to play in events abroad, so we are pleased to have a report from Callum McKail on a trip to Budapest.

Please note that the SBUNews now appears online every two months! Contributions should be sent to:

liz.mcgowan@blueyonder.co.uk

She really would love to hear from you!

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International Budapest Bridge Festival

Callum McKail

The SBU was invited to send a team to this event in May 2023. My partner, Martin Bateman, and I put our names forward and soon found ourselves in Budapest with Alex Adamson and Ronan Valentine as team-mates. Martin and I started playing together online during lockdown, and this was only our second face-to-face event together, having played in Peebles in March. This was also the first time Alex and Ronan played together face-to-face.

The event started with an MP pairs event with qualifying rounds on Thursday evening and Friday morning. The top 16 pairs played in a final on Friday afternoon / evening. None of us would say MP pairs is our strength, but Alex and Ronan did well to qualify for the final whilst Martin and I finished towards the bottom of the field.

The main event on Saturday and Sunday was the Swiss teams, with 12 rounds of 10 boards. The semi-final and final were played on Monday. Scotland finished 14th out of 29 teams with 124.85 VPs out of 240. A reasonable, if slightly disappointing, result.

The biggest issue for Martin and me was stamina: neither of us had played 60 boards a day for many years! Thankfully we didn't have any major issues with forgetting system and, even though we were tired, the team stayed focussed enough to win matches 10-12 after disappointing losses in matches 8 and 9.

The event was played with screens and using LoveBridge, a system where each player has a tablet at their seat and all bidding and play is done on the tablet.

It was very easy to get used to and has the benefits we have all become used to playing online (such as no revokes, insufficient bids, leads out of turn, etc.) It also has the benefit of a complete record of all bids, alerts, how long each bid took, every card played, etc. so you can do lots of analysis afterwards. The LoveBridge website also allows you to see all sorts of analysis about how you as an individual and partnership performed against others in the event, allowing serious players to identify areas they need to work on.

Enough of that and on to a few hands:

	♠AKQ765	All Vul
	♥7	Dealer N
	♦T2	
	♣JT75	
♠3		♠JT
♥A854		♥K63
♦A964		♦KQJ5
♣9632		♣AKQ8
	♠9842	
	♥QJT92	
	♦873	
	♣4	

At my table, North opened with a rather strong 3♠ bid. I doubled as East, South bid 4♣ and Martin bid 4NT with his control rich hand, suggesting at least 2 places to play. I bid 5♣ which North decided to double. South led a club, which made picking up the club suit and making my contract very straightforward for +750. At the other table, Ronan opened a more normal 1♠, East doubled, South bid 3♣ and West bid 4♥. At this point they were probably not finding a minor suit game and, when North bid 4♠, East doubled that to collect only 500, so that was a nice 6 IMPs to Scotland.

We had some luck on the next board.

	♠76	NS Vul
	♥Q9762	Dealer E
	♦T83	
	♣A92	
♠J3		♠AKQT94
♥AK		♥T54
♦J9652		♦AK4
♣QJT6		♣7
	♠852	
	♥J83	
	♦Q7	
	♣K8543	

Martin and I bid to 6♦ on the EW cards with a rather inelegant Precision 1♣ auction. Martin had no option but to drop the doubleton ♦Q and make his contract. At the other table, they bid to 6♠ which didn't make as declarer played North for ♠AK rather than dropping the doubleton ♦Q.

Luck was against us on the next board: the Danish U26s bid a thin game.

	♠82	All Vul
	♥Q97	Dealer N
	♦AT94	
	♣A742	
♠Q5		♠KJ943
♥J832		♥KT6
♦7632		♦QJ8
♣953		♣QJ
	♠AT76	
	♥A54	
	♦K5	
	♣KT86	

I opened 1♠ as East (playing a 14-16 NT). South made a light 1NT overcall, raised to game by North. With ♣QJ doubleton, this contract rolled home. Our team-mates were in the more normal 1NT making 10 tricks, so that was 9 IMPs out.

On the Monday, there was an IMP pairs event to close the festival. I'll end with a 1NT contract which I enjoyed playing.

	♠A63	All Vul
	♥K93	Dealer S
	♦QJ963	
	♣93	
♠J8		♠K9754
♥A875		♥J42
♦K8742		♦A5
♣82		♣AK7
	♠QT2	
	♥QT6	
	♦T	
	♣QJT654	

After 3 passes. I opened 1NT (14-16) as East and played there. (At some tables, North opened 1♦ in third, and NS played in 1NT. Some tables reached 2NT or 3NT as EW after a 15-17 1NT opener.) Results varied from 3NT by E making 5 tricks to 3NT by W making 10 tricks, so my 1NT contract was rather mundane! South led the ♣Q. I had 5 top tricks so had to develop 2 more from either spades or diamonds. Spades looked more promising as there was more "stuffing" and I had entries to my hand. I decided on an intra-finesse – I would play low to the ♠8 and see what happened. I erred by winning the first club (I should duck) and played a spade. South jumped in with the ♠Q and mistakenly returned a small club. North played the ♣9, so I ducked. North switched to the ♥9, ducked all round, and then switched again to a diamond. I won in dummy with the ♦K and played ♠J, ready to put up the ♠K. However, North played the ♠A, making 8 tricks all rather easy. If South had not played the Queen on the first round of spades, my 8 would probably be ducked by North (best play). I then need to play a spade to my King for maximum tricks.

Thank you to the IBBF for their invitation to an enjoyable tournament, which was played in great spirit by all.

Some tips from the International Thursday Seminars

At the time of writing there have been three Seminars.

You can watch them on video: go to the SBU website: sbu.org.uk and click on International. Scroll down till you find the links.

*A theme has emerged: **to improve your game you have to work at it.***

When your editor was young games at the Old Melville were followed by a debrief session in the nearby Afton Hotel. Experts discussed what might have been; less experienced players listened and learned. With no hand records there were frequently arguments about who held the ♣9....

Online bridge makes it possible to replay every deal and every card accurately, a golden opportunity to analyse the weaknesses in your system and your card play.

Paul Gipson gave the first Seminar, on **How to develop a System File.**

He and his brother play only in top quality events. Since they do not aspire to beat professionals in the play they try to create an advantage in the auction.

They put an incredible amount of work into their system.

They use Google.docs because that allows them both to work on the file, and because the file is accessible from all parts of the globe. Their file currently consists of a 7-page Index; 12 pages of Revision Notes and 202 pages of System!

As you may imagine, this creates some memory problems.

Paul gave lots of helpful advice, including some online tools

Cuebid.com gives 10 hands to bid each day

Bid72.com lets you bid against robots

The BBO partnership bidding table is useful

bridgewinners.com has many illuminating discussions

The BBO Forum

And an essential Reading List

“Partnership Bidding a Bridge” by Andrew Robson and Oliver Segal

“Kit’s Corner” on bridgewinners – Kit Woolsey is always good value

“The Contested Auction” by Roy Hughes

Anything by Mike Lawrence

“There are no short cuts to any place worth going”

(The Gipson brothers are both retired and have time, energy and enthusiasm to devote to bridge. If you lack the time you may be daunted by the size and scope of Paul’s system file. Take heart from Bob Hamman’s address to the GB Women’s Squad. His advice was :

“A bid means what partner interprets it to mean. Keep it simple – do not waste energy on remembering complex methods. Concentrate on “What is going on” rather than “What should I do now?”

The Second Seminar by **Brian Short** was on **Declarer Play**

“Play with 52 cards and find the Extra Chance.”

Brian focussed on the Clues that are available to declarer from the auction, the opening lead, and the defensive carding.

He illustrated how declarer can go out in search of information.

Inference and Assumption are other essential declarer skills.

It is important to know the best odds for dealing with card combinations; but just as important to appreciate that the odds may change as you gather information.

Observe opponents carding: do they always signal honestly?

It is quite legitimate to draw inferences from their tempo (but not from partner's).

Brian advised taking a few minutes to study hands that you play online, particularly those that go wrong. Was there a clue that you missed?

Paul Gipson's second seminar was on Defensive Signalling

Again, he emphasised the importance of partnership discussion.

There were some general Rules:

- ♠ Signal clearly with the highest / lowest card possible
- ♠ Do not signal with potentially important cards
- ♠ Be consistent
- ♠ Defence is Difficult – you need to Think!

And some things to remember:

- ❖ Declarer cannot see your hand
- ❖ Declarer is watching your cards
- ❖ Use more Suit Preference
- ❖ Not every card means something – that is just too difficult
- ❖ Help partner when you can: the objective is to beat the contract, not to make the perfect signal
- ❖ Bridge is a partnership game and you have to work on it together. Discuss every session, particularly online

“However good you are there will be times in your bridge life when you never want to lead another card”

Paul suggests that if you get into a rut of depression:

- ♥ Read books on the opening lead (Woolsey. Lawrence)
- ♥ Read books on defence
- ♥ Change your signalling methods for a couple of sessions
- ♥ Look more closely at the cards as they are played
- ♥ Play more bridge! Things will improve...

A Case for Count?

Paul Gipson is none too keen on Count signals. He and his brother prefer Attitude with lots of Suit Preference.

Your editor is wedded to Count.

Perhaps this stems from the influence of the late great John MacLaren. He had little respect for most of his partners and thought that Count was easiest for them to handle since it required no judgment. John employed Standard Count with Economy Peters (he once complained that my 5 from 5432 was “too blatant”.) Sandra Penfold introduced me to Upside Down Count which I much prefer. And I still recommend blatant signals for clarity.

My all-time favourite event was the inaugural Transnational Mixed Teams in Rhodes in 1996. Heather Dhondy and I played with the Icelandic Open Team that we met in the bar after we were both eliminated from the main event. We offered them the simple Convention Card that we had lodged in case of emergencies. They turned up the following day knowing the CC far better than we did. After 4 days of winning every match my partner announced that he was ditching Attitude signals and adopting Count.

Count signals allow partner to construct the distribution of the hidden hands, but they are not much use unless partner is paying attention. They need to be interpreted and conclusions drawn.

When partner leads a long suit against a NT contract, and you cannot beat dummy's card a Count signal tells them whether it is safe to continue.

Of course, as Paul points out, Count is just as informative for a declarer who is also paying attention.

It is important to know when **not** to give count. Here are some situations where a different signal is appropriate.

- 1) A lead of an Ace or Queen asks for an Attitude signal.
- 2) When your count is clear from the auction (eg you opened a Weak2) give a Suit Preference signal.
- 3) When following suit to declarer's first play in a no-trump contract – use Smith.
- 4) When partner leads an obvious singleton against a suit contract – indicate where your entry lies via Suit Preference.
- 5) When you cannot afford to signal with a potentially useful card, don't signal.
- 6) When count is clearly irrelevant:
eg declarer is about to ruff
eg dummy has a singleton and partner needs to switch – try SP

You and your partner can discuss other situations that crop up during play.

One serious point: signals must never be a substitute for thought. At one GB Women's Squad session Chris Dixon instructed us to defend without using signals. Our success rate seemed to be unaffected (still poor). We simply played our lowest card at every opportunity – and that was actually a surprisingly useful signal.

On another session he instructed us to stop play after trick 2. The defenders were asked to write down all they knew about the hidden hands. “You know more than you realise”. This turned out to be true – but until we actually verbalised what we knew we were unaware. Try it online: tell yourself out loud what you know from the auction, the opening lead and the play to the first 2 tricks. Draw conclusions. Defend like a champion!

Play and Discuss

These sessions are run online, using Real Bridge. The deals are selected so as not to be dull. Those who complain that some participants are too inexperienced have rather missed the point. The sessions are not a competition: no-one wins unless they use the deals as an opportunity for partnership discussion.

This hand came up in the first session:

Bd 6	♠52	EW Vul
	♥AKQT8	Dealer E
	♦8	
	♣KJ842	
♠QJT76		♠8
♥J		♥6543
♦A3		♦QJT76542
♣QT953		♣—
	♠AK943	
	♥972	
	♦K9	
	♣A76	

East had the first decision. Pre-empting at this vulnerability risks a large penalty, but it is unlikely that NS can profitably double an 8-card suit. Where East passed NS had an easy auction to 4♥.

Second question: how high should you pre-empt? Your aim is to use up opponents' bidding space without pushing them into a making contract they might not otherwise bid. On this deal even a pedestrian 3♦ produced problems.

Should South overcall at the 3-level with a 7-loser hand? Is 5=3=2=3 acceptable for a takeout double?

If South bids 3♠ should West double? Or should he raise, hoping for better pickings?

These questions were even harder to answer over 4♦. Three intrepid Easts who opened 5♦ deserved to lose 800, but does anybody play penalty doubles over a 5-level opener?

6♥ looks a fair contract single dummy, but it is difficult to reach – and impossible to make with these breaks. East might lead the ♦2, clearly not 4th best. If West is alert he spots the suit preference implications and returns a club for partner to ruff. Even if he dozily returns a diamond or the ♠Q declarer cannot cope with the 5-0 club break.

The most exciting result came when South overcalled 3♣ and West doubled. North redoubled, and no-one cracked. West led the ♦A, East dropped the ♦2. A club ruff now leads to one down, but West overlooked that, returning his singleton heart. Declarer won, cashed two top spades and played hearts till West ruffed. He won the diamond switch and conceded two spades, making his contract for +760.

This one had a point to the play.

Bd 8	♠5	EW Vul
	♥QJT9762	Dealer E
	♦QT654	
	♣—	
♠AKQT96		♠J72
♥4		♥AK5
♦2		♦AK987
♣T7654		♣A8
	♠843	
	♥83	
	♦J3	
	♣KQJ932	

Almost everybody reached 6♠ on the EW cards. Single dummy It looks pretty straightforward. Declarer concedes a club trick, ruffs one club in dummy and

discards the two remaining club losers on dummy's red suit winners. To be sure of the club ruff you need to tackle clubs before drawing two rounds of trump – a defender with three trump might meanly play a third round. Many players won the ♥Q lead in dummy and started on clubs right away. When the ♣A was ruffed they were one down.

Extra Careful Jones crosses to hand with a top spade at trick 2 and leads a club *towards* dummy's Ace. If North ruffs in there is no longer a club loser: when he discards you can safely concede a club to organise a ruff with the ♠J.

North normally showed a big 2-suiter in the course of the auction and that might have been a clue to the winning line, but only two players succeeded in making 6♣. To be fair, a couple of Wests were in the hopeless 7♠.

Session 2 had rather fewer pre-emptive decisions. It was a good illustration of how cross-imps are not a very good criterion for selection. Take this board:

Bd 7	♠—	EW Vul
	♥Q943	Dealer E
	♦KJT984	
	♣AK7	
♠J65		♠AKT873
♥876		♥J
♦Q73		♦652
♣QT86		♣542
	♠Q942	
	♥AKT52	
	♦A	
	♣J93	

How should North respond when partner opens 1♥? You want to tell partner about your trump support, your possible source of tricks in diamonds and your black suit controls, but no-one

has a bid that covers all three of those bits of information.

Some focussed on the spade shortage with a splinter. Most play the Splinter as limited to 11-14 these days, and the North hand is worth far more than its 13HCP. Still, South knows of a 9-card fit and at most one loser in spades, so is worth one cuebid (or a nonserious 3NT.) Some were able to show the spade void, but South could not see how to get rid of the club losers.

Others chose 2NT, the game-forcing raise. This was mostly unsuccessful when South showed a shortage in diamonds – generally not a great idea when that shortage is an Ace.

Many simply responded 2♦, a game-forcing 2/1. This allowed East to stick in a 2♠ overcall. One South doubled that, penalty in an auction that is forced to a higher level. And North, knowing of wasted spade value, settled in game.

The most effective response was 3♦, a strong jump shift. Not many play these nowadays because they rarely occur, but they can be very effective. South rebid hearts, North cue-bid clubs, South showed the ♦A and North checked on keycards and bid the Grand.

Only 2 pairs bid to 7♥. They deserved their crossimp score of 13.81 – but did their opponents deserve such a big minus?

Could You Be an Online Cheat?

Allegations of cheating mostly revolve around the use of unauthorised information, hereafter referred to as UI.

At the table, face to face, UI is all around us: bids are too fast or too slow; partner reacts positively or negatively to a bid or play; somebody alerts at the wrong time or offers a wrong explanation. (Bridge players are only human.)

Getting UI is not illegal: *making use* of UI is 100% against the Laws and spirit of the game.

How does this apply to online play?

When clubs were closed by Covid hundreds of players signed up to BBO, trying to preserve their mental health. Many rather enjoyed the opportunity to play from home.

But there was a new way to get UI. There is no limit to the number of BBO user accounts that one person can hold. There are perfectly valid reasons why you might wish to have a second account. They are essential for teachers and useful for Tournament Directors. Or you might wish to have two devices running in order to watch both tables of a match simultaneously. Nothing wrong with that. But *if you use a second account to watch your own table* (or that of your teammates) that is **cheating**. If you see all the cards you can play a perfect game – but it is not Bridge as we know it. Why would anyone want to play this way? To look good to your peers or students? Master points? Only the individuals who have done it can answer that question.

This type of cheating is easily stopped by setting competitions to “no kibitzers” which the SBU does for all its events. We strongly recommend it to all clubs.

As a result self-kibbitzing seems to be on the wane.

Another way to cheat on BBO is via **collusion**. Partners could simply talk on the telephone and relay information about their hands to each other. Sharing of computer screens is also possible for the computer literate. This is a highly risky strategy: there is an Investigation Panel which can analyse performance and demonstrate statistically that good results cannot be explained by chance. Thankfully allegations of this type of cheating have been low.

Much more common, and still perceived to be a major problem, is **playing in the same room as your partner**.

It is all too easy to talk to each other, or to compare hands when you have a decision to make, or just to glance at partner's screen. Even if you sit far apart there will still likely be UI when one of you inadvertently expresses an opinion. Best to play in different rooms, out of hearing distance!

If you think that sort of thing is not important, just think for a moment how damaging such actions can be. You may deprive another pair of a high placing that might make their day. You may even win some money. The whole event has been compromised and the results are corrupt.

The SBU knows that very few pairs actively cheat in this way. But to the small number that do, whether deliberately or not, how about stopping RIGHT NOW to let us all play in a fair competition? If we find you out and take the case to a Tribunal, the consequences for you and your bridge future could be rather severe.

If you think your opponents are doing strange things that seem remarkably successful, inform Iain Taylor (Chair of the SBU's Investigation Panel) at idtkaufer@gmail.com.

A report to him is not an accusation. It simply brings to his attention something that you found strange that might justify some analysis and may be of interest when combined with other reported incidents. A combination of reports can turn straws in the wind into a convincing haystack. All reports received are completely confidential and the name of the person who makes the report is never divulged, even if the case goes to the Disciplinary Tribunal. If strange but successful actions occur with some frequency, then maybe there is something untoward happening. If it is an outlier, then it will be properly ignored.

To all the co-habiting couples and others who play the game fairly and honestly online, keep up the good work and continue to enjoy the game we know as Bridge.

Laws and Ethics Committee

July 2023

Play Challenge

Jim Patrick

1 NS Vul Dealer West

♠A432
♥QJT8
♦AKT
♣A3

♠JT97
♥K2
♦Q6542
♣J6

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
3♣	Dbl	4♣	Dbl
Pass	4♥	Pass	4♣
End			

Contract: 4♣ Lead: ♠T

You win the ♣A and play a small heart, but East rises with the ♥A to cash the ♣K and play another club.

How do you continue?

2 None Vul Dealer West

♠KJ876
♥652
♦985
♣64

♠AT542
♥K93
♦—
♣KQ975

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	Pass	1♦	1♠
2♦	3♠	4♣	Dbl
Pass	Pass	5♦	Pass
Pass	5♠	Dbl	End

Contract: 5♠X Lead: ♦Q

When you doubled 4♣ and passed 5♦ North realised that he was being invited to the party. You have avoided a heart lead so can you enjoy this board?

Solutions on Page 13

Eric Kokish



1947-2023

Eric was a very talented player. In 1974, with Joey Silver, he was a member of the youngest ever team to win the Vanderbilt. With Peter Nagy he finished second in the 1978 World Open Pairs Championship. He won a silver medal at the 1995 Bermuda Bowl in Beijing. Latterly he played less, but in 2017 he won the prestigious Yeh Bros Cup.

But his main claim to fame was as the ultimate bridge coach: in 1985 he guided Brazil to within a whisker of a Bermuda Bowl triumph; after a spell in Indonesia and he allied with one of the greatest teams in the history of the game, the hugely successful squad captained by Nick Nickell.

Eric received the ACBL's Blackwood Award in 2011 and was elected to the ACBL Hall of Fame.

He was also a fine writer, the main contributor to the World Championship books. He collaborated on various books, including *The Rabbi's Rules* and *Close Encounters Books 1 & 2* which recount some of the greatest contests in history.

His contributions to bridge theory are too numerous to mention. The detail he went into about how to deal with various tactical opening bids is astonishing. His

'simple' defence to the Multicoloured 2 Diamonds (*The Mysterious Multi*) runs to more pages than most pairs' complete system notes. He was a strong, one might say, vociferous, advocate of the properly completed system card.

It is impossible to convey in a few brief words what a wonderful man Eric was, but if you watch these videos, you may understand why he was universally loved, admired, and respected.

<http://www.worldbridge.org/2023/06/11/eric-kokish-1947-2023>

(from the WBF website)

4 Scottish women were fortunate to attend a coaching session organised by the CBAI in Dublin. He made an impact.

Bridge Coaching in Dublin

In 2005 Anne Martin, Sheila Adamson, Diana Gerrard and I attended Eric Kokish's 3-day training programme in Dublin. It was a fantastic experience which pushed our bridge thinking to new levels. The days were long – around 10am to 10pm with short breaks for food and 'working lunches'.

I remember some of Eric's saying: "the day you give up wanting to learn, is the day you should give up bridge". The course focussed on bidding (style and agreements), hand evaluation and defence, with snippets on the importance of partnership harmony. He could put you on the spot when he'd ask: "so what was going through your mind when you made that bid?"

He encouraged bidding discipline whilst also being in favour of being bold as he'd remark: "In the game zone, tend to be aggressive... Aggressive does not mean insane." Eric asked many questions about exactly what our bids

meant, what partner understood by them and what alternative bids would have meant. He wanted to know our expectations of where the boundaries should lie with our bidding ranges and when it is acceptable (or not) to be flexible.

Ever since that course, any time I bumped into Eric at a bridge tournament, he'd always greet me with a huge infectious smile. He generously gave up a long morning at an NABC (national event in the USA) to support my sociology of bridge research project. His insightful interview, focusing largely on coaching and improving one's game, can be found in my book - *"Bridge at the Top: Behind the Screens."*

I asked him how one goes about forming a good partnership. Eric replied: *"Find a bridge partner who you really enjoy and who you have complete respect for and trust and know that both of you are seeking the truth all the time, rather than protecting your position on a given hand. That's just a fantastic thing. If you can do that and work hard with that partner, really the sky's the limit because so many partners don't put the effort into it. They think they're great and they sit down and play and they do okay for a while and then they begin to hate each other and move onto somebody else. My recommendation to anybody starting out at the game is to try and find somebody whose company you enjoy, whose attitude towards the game is similar to yours - if you have some ambition. If you don't, then it's just another social experience."*

Sam Punch

I met Eric Kokish when the CBAI organised a training session in Dublin in 2005. Four Scottish women took part - everybody else was Irish. About 3 days

of intensive work. The amount of preparation he had put into it was phenomenal. His pitch was that any partnership could improve their performance if they worked on their system and agreements. The tighter your agreements, especially in competition, the less often you would lose imps needlessly. So he gave us lots of examples to work through separately - What does this double mean? Is this bid F1 or GF? How strong do you need to be to open a weak 2 in first seat vulnerable? 2nd seat vulnerable? 3rd seat? Etc.

I always remember the absolute confidence with which he assured us that if we went through this course, and did all the homework, in two years we would win something. I guess it was two years later that Anne and I first won the Lady Milne. And it took only one year for the Irish open team to win the silver medal at the European Championships.

His approach was gentle and affable. He was fond of reminding us that we would always make mistakes at the bridge table and that we needed to keep things in perspective. "Nobody died," was a favourite saying. He made the training session feel like a safe space.

Sheila Adamson

Your editor cherishes Eric's write-up of the last 16 boards of the Final of the 1988 World Bridge Olympiad. Great Britain fought back from -31 to -5 imps with 2 boards to play. On the last board I had a chance to make 3NT by playing for an unlikely position. I failed. Eric's commentary was sympathetic, but his final sentence read: "McGowan slipped away to order a glass of hemlock."

As Anne Symons says: he was a lovely man.

Play Challenge Solutions

Jim Patrick

1 NS Vul Dealer West

	♠A432		
	♥QJT8		
	♦AKT		
	♣A3		
♠K		♠Q865	
♥973		♥A654	
♦J83		♦97	
♣QT98652		♣K74	
	♠JT97		
	♥K2		
	♦Q6542		
	♣J6		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
3♣	Dbl	4♣	Dbl
Pass	4♥	Pass	4♠
End			

Contract: 4♠ Lead: ♣T

You win the ♣A and play a small heart, but East rises with the ♥A to cash the ♠K and play another club.

This defence suggests trump may be breaking badly, so you must preserve your big trump in hand. Ruff in dummy and cross to hand with the ♥K to lead the ♠J. Win the ♠A over West's ♠K and play another trump. East must duck to give you a problem.

Now you need favourable breaks in the red suits. Cash the ♦Q and ♦A and the ♥Q. Assuming East follows he is down to ♠Q8 and just one red card. You have ♠T7 and diamond. When you lead the ♥J East has to give up whether his last red card is a heart or a diamond,

2 None Vul Dealer West

	♠KJ876		
	♥652		
	♦985		
	♣64		
♠Q93		♠—	
♥J8		♥AQT74	
♦QJ74		♦AKT632	
♣JT82		♣A4	
	♠AT542		
	♥K93		
	♦—		
	♣KQ975		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Pass	Pass	1♦	1♠
2♦	3♠	4♣	Dbl
Pass	Pass	5♦	Pass
Pass	5♠	Dbl	End

Contract: 5♠X Lead: ♦Q

You have avoided the heart lead that would lead to an automatic one down.

You need to get the clubs going, and the lead has removed one trump entry to hand. The trumps are surely 3-0 so you need to be careful.

You do not need to risk a first-round trump finesse: just don't draw 3 rounds of trump initially. Play ♠A and cross to ♠J to play a club. Then play another trump to dummy to play another club. East will win to play a diamond but dummy's last diamond goes on the high club. Ruff a club and you still have a heart entry to discard a heart on the last club.

July 2023 Bidding Challenge

Liz McGowan

Welcome to the Bidding Challenge. The problems were cobbled together at the last minute, so mistakes were made in the presentation, and some did not correspond to the 5-card major system that was advertised. The panel rose above this magnificently...

Problem 1 Teams None Vul

♠AK92	S	W	N	E
♥AKJ85	-	-	-	P
♦KT	?			
♣K5				

Is it wise to open 2NT with 5=4 in the Majors? 7 panellists believe the most important consideration here is to make the strong hand declarer.

SMITH: 2NT. I don't like opening 5-4 in the Majors with some level of NT, but this has to be an exception. I will treat my hand as 4=4 and the worst that will happen is missing a 5=3 heart fit. The problem with opening 1♥ is the high likelihood of a 1NT response. You then end up in 3NT from the wrong hand.

SHIELDS: 2NT. I much prefer opening at the 1-level on 2-suited or 3-suited hands, but when I hold both majors it is too easy for it to go P-P-P. Some partners might even pass with Txxxx-x-Axx-xxx and now I'd rather be in 6♠ than 1♥. If partner enquires over 2NT, I shall show 4-4 in the majors.

Bill avoids saying "What else?"

Ross: 2NT. (Is there an alternative?)

Only 2 other choices this time. Some consider this hand too strong for 2NT.

WHYTE: 2♣. I assume I can bid 2NT as the second bid, showing 23-24 points with a balanced non-game forcing

hand. My approach enables me to right-side the final contract, whether NT or a Major while protecting my Kings.

SIME: 2♣. I intend to rebid 2NT, 23/24 balanced. Change the Major suit Kings to minor suit Quacks, i.e. Axx, AJxx, KQJ, KQJ, to make 21 points.

No-one votes for opening 2♣ and rebidding hearts: some suggest that this would be the worst possible approach. The most popular choice was:

MARSHALL: 1♥. He shouldn't Pass with no fit for hearts and a 4+ spade suit, so no real danger that we miss a making 3NT.

DRAGIC: 1♥. I prefer to wrong-side the right contract rather than right-side the wrong one.

CLOW: 1♥. Risky, but opening 2NT could lose a spade fit. If partner can't bid we will be happy to stay low.

SHORT: 1♥. this is not even slightly close for me. If partner passes, we probably don't have a game and opponents are favourite to re-open anyway. A 2NT opener with 5/4 in the majors is not able to be bid sensibly with most methods and I can't force to game with 2♣ followed by 2♥. I'd like to play a strong club system for this hand please.

WILKINSON: 1♥. I rarely pass 1♥ bids, so I hope for the best; better to open 2♣ in Bolton bridge club, as 1♥ passed out was a flat board with 4♠ cold for 11 tricks... My views of the Pass of 1♥ as being awful found no support: doubtless 2NT will be the top scoring bid, but best to play Precision.

Problem 1	Votes	Marks
1♥	11	10
2♣	2	9
2NT	5	8

Problem 2 Teams All Vul

♠KJ4	S	W	N	E
♥AK86	-	-	-	P
♦AJ72	1♥	P	3♠*	P
♣Q8	?			

3♠ = Splinter raise

This was the first Conductor error – as most panellists pointed out with varying degrees of glee, playing 5-card Majors this is a 1♦ opener. But we are where we are, and the question is: are we now worth a slam try? A minority says no.

ASH: 4♥. This is why I like my splinter raises to be well defined. However, a slam try is a bit too much for what is essentially a balanced 14 count.

McGINLEY: 4♥. Putting my spades in the bin (where I'll find my fifth heart!)

PATERSON: 4♥. Too many holes. Give me a heart more and a spade less, or swap the ♠K and ♣Q, or give me the red-suit Tens, and I would do more. Not 3NT to play, which shows the points but 2 spade stops.

The remaining panellists make a try despite the wasted spade values. Most go with the only available cue:

ROSS: 4♦ (can't think of any other bid.)

CLOW: 4♦. Safe to cuebid under game. Slam is just possible with a max splinter from partner eg x Qxxx KQxx AKxx.

BAYER: 4♦. There are plenty of hands where slam has no play - x Qxxx KQx Axxxx - but also some where slam is excellent - x Qxxx Kxx AKxxx. I think the former are quite a bit more likely than the latter, so I can't really argue with 4♥. I hope partner doesn't take 4♦ as asking for club control: values are always more important than controls and even though splinters should be fairly narrow in range, we still need to distinguish between a minimum and a maximum.

DRAGIC: 4♦. I have 14 very useful points and potentially another trick in spades. Sign off is out of question and I will not risk an undiscussed 3NT.

SHIELDS: 4♦. (With some regular partners my choice would be 3NT with no singleton as 4m would be a shortage to help them gauge whether or not their values are working.) My puzzle is whether bidding 4♦ now, or bidding 3NT and then 4♦ over a 4♣ cue by partner sounds stronger. I feel the latter sounds stronger and with a working 14-count I have only a mild slam try to offer.

Many players favour a Serious 3NT when an 8-card major fit has been established and the hands are not limited: 3NT shows more slam interest than a cue. Others play the Nonserious 3NT, where the cue is stronger. Undaunted by possible ambiguity:

SIME: 3NT. Whatever it means – a non-serious slam try would be nice. With an "excellent first-time partner" 3NT is probably just DSI. That Something Intelligent will likely be 4♣, over which I can make one more try with 4♦. That seems a better plan than 4♦ immediately.

John has another suggestion:

MURDOCH: 4♣. Poor shape and heavy wastage but still 14 working hcp. (x Qxxxx KQx AKxx is enough), A 4♦ cue may excite partner to bid beyond game when he controls clubs. 4♣ allows him to bid 4♦ Last Train which you will convert to 4♥ content that you have tried for slam albeit somewhat vaguely.

Problem 2	Votes	Marks
4♦	10	10
3NT	2	8
4♣	1	7
4♥	5	6
4NT	0	2

Problem 3 Teams NS Vul

♠—	S	W	N	E
♥T73	-	1♠	P	3♠*
♦AKJT3	?			
♣K7642				

3♠ = 4-card raise. 0-5, Bergen style

This one is largely a question of temperament. Do you hate being stolen from enough to risk a large penalty? Two-thirds of the panel are for taking some sort of action.

Arend speaks for the majority:

BAYER: 4♦. This is why I hate bidding panels - what I am supposed to do here?? Double, and be afraid of the three most likely bids by partner (pass, 3NT, 4♥)? A ridiculous 4NT overbid? A complete misdescription with 4m? Pass and give away a double game swing?

I bid 4♦ for the best combination of some safety (they cannot easily double without trump spots), value (may find a good 5♦), and lead direction against 4♠ (I won't bid more on my own,)

PATERSON: 4♦ Or Pass! 3NT would be to play, and I am not good enough for 4NT. Of course, I would pass without the lead-directing benefit.

Others believe this may well be our hand and look for the best way to find a potential fit.

VALENTINE: DBL. Most flexible call. We can have 4♥ on, 5m or be taking 3♠x for a number. Passing or bidding anything else seems like a losing option.

DRAGIC: DBL: too much to pass and not enough for 4NT. Also, doors open to 4♥ and 3NT. 3NT would be to play, likely based on a long minor.

3NT would be ideal if it showed minors... Mike thinks partner should be able to judge the position:

MCGINLEY: 3NT, two places, probably minors. Partner can look at their spade holding and decide you don't have a spade stop.

Some just cross their fingers:

WILKINSON: 3NT. If we don't bid, they have a steal.

WHYTE: 3NT. Confidently, with panache and style

Gints goes all out for a possible Vulnerable game.

FREIMANIS: 4NT. I do not like the bid, but with likely length in spades, partner is less likely to have long hearts, and hence, a fit in a minor is by far the best chance of finding a fit. Having said that, either Pass, Double or 4♦ could easily prove to be the right bid.

Other panellists believe that discretion is the better part of valour.

SHORT: PASS. 3NT would be natural in my world and 4NT suffers badly from "sitting duck syndrome" at this vulnerability. I might try 4NT at green against red. Any action could easily be wrong if partner has 4 decent spades.

MURDOCH: PASS. Opener and partner have 25-29 hcp between them. Partner did not overcall 1NT, so he might be at best 14hcp. If partner is 4=3=3=3 doubling now may leave him struggling between losing options.

Problem 3	Votes	Marks
4♦	6	10
Pass	5	8
3NT	3	6
Dbl	3	4
4NT	1	3

Problem 4 **Teams** **None Vul**

♠A65	S	W	N	E
♥AT7542	-	-	P	P
♦AQ	1♥	P	1NT	P
♣KQ	?			

Ross: 4♥. (can't see an alternative).

There were only 5. The most popular:

MARSHALL: 3NT: Although we have 6 hearts, they are not very good. A more regular partner might deduce that a poor 6-card suit is held, otherwise 2NT would have been opened.

SHIELDS: 3NT. Surely describes this hand, as a balanced 18-19 would simply raise to 2NT. Partner is allowed to revert to 4♥ on a doubleton on this sequence.

Do you really think your unfamiliar partner is going to draw this conclusion? Others simply bid 3NT to play.

MURDOCH: 3NT. Maybe opener is closer to an 18hcp hand than his actual 19 but the heart suit can produce 4 tricks opposite a singleton.

SMITH: 3NT. This is teams so a part score when partner can dig up a response to a 19-count is losing bridge. I'm not going to insist on a heart suit of that poor quality. Indeed, even if he has 3-card support, 9 tricks in NT might still be easier than 10 in hearts.

Seems a bit precipitate to me: if partner has a singleton heart and a long minor there may be a better spot. One way to explore is to invent a reverse:

CLOW: 2♠. Both 2NT and 3NT are possible but 2♠ will let partner describe his hand using Lebensohl (I hope!) and allow me to show 'extras' by bidding 3♥. As you can see I prefer not to play this sequence as game forcing.

I confess that I had never considered lebensohl in this context, though it clearly could be useful.

SIME: 2♠. A phoney reverse is one way to explore whether we belong in 3NT or 4♥, or even a minor suit game or slam. There is a superior way, but Gazilli is not on today's menu.

Miro also mentions Gazilli as if it would solve all problems: I don't really see how it helps much on this hand.

FREIMANIS: 2♠. Partner has denied a 4-card spade suit, so likely will not take this seriously as an offer to play in a spade contract, and will show secondary support for hearts, if held.

Others invent a different second suit, expecting partner to understand:

PIPER: 3♣. Don't want to play in a 6-1 fit.

VALENTINE: 3♣. Cheapest call available. Can't bid 3♥ as it should be passable, 3NT is out as my hearts aren't good enough so I need to create a GF and be able to find the right contract. Partner knows not to drive to 5♣ here.

The others settle for a nonforcing bid.

SHORT: 2NT. I've got to bid something with 19 HCP. 2NT shows 18-19, (I have not opened a strong NT). Partner will always support hearts with 3+ and, when I have 6, his chances of having a singleton (even a void) are enhanced, so my suit is too weak for 3♥. If partner has ♥Kx, I've done the wrong thing.

PATERSON: 2NT. Clearly worth the downgrade, and works well if partner bids 3m, which I will raise.

ASH: 2NT. This 6-card suit is probably only as good as a good 5-card suit and the hand is worth less than 19 hcps, with over 50% in my shortest suits. I will look stupid (if partner has Kxx, xx, Kxxx, Jxxx when 4♥ only needs a 3/2 trump break – but even then, I need 3 rounds of diamonds to stand up – I can't afford to draw trumps if they lead spades.

Arend is particularly pessimistic:

BAYER: 3♥. An underbid, but I really don't love the hand for NT (our tricks so slow that even a double stopper in the suit they lead may not be enough), nor for 4♥, so I opt for the best description.

Problem 4	Votes	Marks
3NT	6	10
2NT	5	9
2♠	3	8
3♣	2	6
3♥	1	4
4♥	1	2

Problem 5 Teams None Vul

♠AT643	S	W	N	E
♥J			1♦	P
♦A763	1♠	2♦*	X*	3♥
♣A64	?			

2♦ = ♥S + ♠S

X = 3-card ♠ support

First question: is this hand worth a try?

SMITH: 4♠. I know we have good controls but we only have a 5-3 fit and really a minimum game raise. A simple raise to game is sufficient.

BAYER: 4♠. We could make slam, but partner is favourite to hold a weak NT in which case it can never be odds on. 4♥, the only alternative, is ambiguous.

Most of the panel think we are worth at least one cuebid:

WILKINSON: 4♥. Worth a try with Aces and a double fit.

FREIMANIS: 4♥. Showing a legitimate raise to game. Partner should be able to make a move towards slam with an appropriate hand.

ASH: 4♥. I trust my partner is not the excitable type who will get too carried away with this slam try. 5-3 trump fits when opponents have 2-suited hands are not easy to play. 4♣ is worth

considering but I think that the implication of a shortage control in hearts is a good message to send - I am only going to make one try.

Others are more enthusiastic:

SIME: 4♣. Let's see whether partner cooperates in a slam hunt. With good spades, he should. I would then convert to 6♦. That ought to be passed as I have shown only 4 spades.

DRAGIC: 4♣. I am looking at that 5NT card now.

VALENTINE: 4♣. Cue agreeing spades. 4♦ should be forcing, no need to bid it here otherwise and therefore 4♣ shows interest in slam which, with the double fit and controls, I certainly have.

MCGINLEY: 4♣. Cuebid for spades, giving partner chance to cooperate. I don't want to punish him if he has heart wastage.

PATERSON: 4♣. Many minima will give a good diamond slam. If partner rebids diamonds, or cues 4♥, I am advancing.

Some other suggestions:

MARSHALL: 4♦. Another hand where a regular partnership knows what to do, when 4♦ here would show 4 diamond cards and therefore 5 spades, as otherwise an inverted minor raise would have been made. But, even without that understanding, 4♦ is surely the correct bid, as partner can bid 4♠ en route to 5♦ if I have only 4 spade cards.

SHORT: DBL. Good problem. Game may well be enough though clearly slam is possible. Our suits may split badly. Can't trust partner to take 4♦ as forcing, as it probably should be, so double ("action" with a suit supported) seems the best option for now, though it will give partner a problem if he/she holds a weak NT, which is quite likely. North can bid 3♣ as an "out" though with, say

♠Kxx, being already marked with only 3. Don't mind torturing a partner who has made me miss the football on telly. I'll raise 4♦ to 5♦ and bid 4♠ over any other bid and partner will know that I am too good to bid the game direct.

One of Paul Gipson's suggestions was that 4 of a minor should always be forcing in uninterrupted auctions: and always artificial in competition.

Bill will not miss slam – but I fear he may regret not playing in diamonds.

WHYTE: 5♠. The message I transmit is: “do not worry about the other suits, including hearts, these are covered. How good is your 3-card spade support?” (A tad stretched, I admit.)

Problem 5	Votes	Marks
4♣	7	10
4♥	5	8
4♦	1	7
5♠	1	6
4♠	3	5
Dbl	1	3
5♦	0	2

Problem 6 Teams EW Vul

♠2	S	W	N	E
♥K9	-	-	2♦*	2♥
♦KJT94	?			
♣AKQ92				

2♦ = Weak 2

This was the second non-deliberate mistake. The situation is clearly more of a problem if NS are vulnerable. The panel politely avoid ‘What else?’

ROSS: 5♦. must be in with a shout .

CLOW 5♦. Should make if we are allowed to play there. Where are the spades?

FREIMANIS: 5♦. not expecting slam to be on the cards most of the time

MCGINLEY: 5♦. as I'll be on lead if they take the push to 5♥+.

PATERSON: 5♦. Silly to bid clubs and allow LHO room for an easy try.

A minority believe we may as well make a slam try of some sort.

SIME: 4♣. Fit Jump. I am probably talking to myself, but it is just possible that partner can cuebid the ♠A. If so, RKC would take us to an excellent slam.

Patrick opts for the try that may keep opponents quiet. The leap to RKC should not be misinterpreted...

SHIELDS: 4NT. It is very hard to believe that partner would open 2♦ with two Aces but just in case, I shall ask. A natural 4NT would surely be looking for penalties. I don't want to bid any less – I must stop LHO bidding 4♠.

One panellist considers the sort of hand that he might open 2♦. If 5♦ was making he would open at the 3-level?

VALENTINE: 3NT. A punt, but not so much less than 5♦, especially if partner can have just 5 diamonds here. Of course, we could be wide open in spades, but if we are losing a spade and a heart at least, then I still need partner to have ♦A for 5♦ to be right. I'll pay my moneys and takes my chances.

Mike has a cautionary tale:

ASH: 5♦. My opponent had a very similar hand recently and we took 6 spades and the ♥A against 3NT. Opener had a very reasonable Jxx, xxx, AQxxxx, x. I can't see opener having 2 Aces so 5♦ looks obvious.

3 panellists see the danger that would be imminent at the right vulnerability:

WHYTE: 4♦. Not a hand to leap to game, as I have no idea what to do over 5♥. I prefer to let West bid 4♥, then follow up with 5♦. I may get away with it.

DRAGIC: 2♠: how else can I stop them from bidding over our 5♦?

WILKINSON: 2♠. As the opponents are marked with at least 9 spades, a time to muddy waters.

Problem 6	Votes	Marks
5♦	10	10
4NT	3	9
4♦	1	6
2♠	2	6
4♣	1	4
3♠	0	3
3NT	1	2
3♣	0	2

Problem 7 Teams NS Vul

♠8 ♥KQ93 ♦96 ♣AT9743	S	W	N	E
	-	-	1♠	1NT
	?			

Pretty much a straight choice: double or bid clubs? Bill gives an honest answer:

ROSS: 2♣. Tossed up between Pass and 2♣ and the latter won.

Others argue that double is unlikely to end the bidding, so it is better to start to describe your hand.

FREIMANIS: 2♣. I could make a stretchy penalty double but would like to get my clubs across in case opponents attempt to play in a diamond contract. I have an easy 2♥ rebid over 2♦ from opponents.

PATERSON: 2♣. I do not want to lead blind against 1NTX, especially when it may make while we have an easy part-score or even game.

DRAGIC: 2♣: defending 1NT doubled or undoubled is a bad idea.

ASH: 2♣. Natural and non-forcing. I am not expecting to make game so even if we have a 4-4 heart fit I will settle for a plus score – it is teams scoring!

But many fear that 2♣ might end the auction, missing a vulnerable game.

WILKINSON: DBL. I regard bids as nonforcing without a double.

SHORT: DBL. Must take some action with a good 6-4. We should play as if an opening 1NT had been doubled (first X = take-out etc.) so I should be able to judge what to do as the auction develops. The danger is that the opposition have a diamond fit and can make 8 or 9 tricks, so if (say) partner doubles a 2♦ escape for take-out, I will definitely bid 3♣. I have at least now shown some decent values, which I would not do with an immediate 2♣.

VALENTINE: DBL. Seems clear to get the values across and set up a penalty pass sequence: we could have them caught.

CLOW: DBL. For now. We can show our suits if West bids diamonds.

On his own, surely not missing game:

MURDOCH: 3♣, I still don't know what I would do at the table... Pass / Double / 2♣ / 3♣? Pass and we probably play there when we can make 2+♣ or even 4♥. I think 3♣ is close to the value bid and would be my choice though I would like a slightly better suit.

Few panellists gave consideration to passing, but several competitors actually chose Pass. This might be the winning answer if the deal is a misfit, and if it is not there is a fair chance that Pass will not end the auction.

Problem 7	Votes	Marks
Dbl	9	10
2♣	8	9
3♣	1	8
Pass	0	5

At the table 1N was cold. The only making contract for EW was 3♣.

Problem 8 Teams NS Vul

♠Q2 ♥KT976 ♦7642 ♣K6	S	W	N	E
			P	2NT
	P	3♥*	P	4♠
	P	4NT	P	5♦*
	P	6♠	End	

2NT = 20-21

3♥ = transfer to spades

5♦ = 1 / 4 Keycards

What is your lead?

Votes for all four suits! The majority goes for the pedestrian passive lead:

SMITH: ♦6/7 Time for the safest lead I can find.

ASH: ♦6/7. With both Kings sitting over the presumed Aces I am not going to risk being aggressive here. Some people do jump to 4♠ with only 3 card support (IMHO, a big mistake as responder will rarely Pass 3♠ when it is making. A jump to 4♠ should be reserved for a hand with very good trumps and 4♣/♦/♥ for a spade fit and a source of tricks in bid suit) so I think declarer is likely to get the spades right.

WILKINSON: ♦6. I'm not optimistic here, but partner is not likely to have many high cards, so this may be safe...

CLOW: ♦6. All the Aces on my right so lets hope my Kings are both working.

BAYER: ♦2. Seems best to hope for one of my Kings and the ♠Q to score. Standard advice is to lead aggressively against a small slam, but here partner is very weak, so I don't want to lead from my king into the 2NT opener holding four keycards. I'd rather lead a low club than a heart - at least then I can hope for a misguess if partner has ♣J, and declarer is more likely to have length and "repeat the finesse" into my ♠K.

I have marked all diamond leads the same, but I much prefer the 2. It is not

clever to make a 'normal' lead against a slam when the only person who benefits from the information is declarer.

The others are not convinced that a passive diamond is safe. It might give declarer the tempo to organise discards Is there a good attacking choice?

MURDOCH: ♥T. Some play the jump to game as showing all the side aces. It is possible that heart losers will disappear on clubs unless I lead the suit whereas club losers are less likely to disappear on hearts. It is also possible that declarer needs successful finesses in hearts and clubs to make 12 tricks.

DRAGIC: ♥T. it is more likely that one of their minors can provide a discard or two for their heart losers than me scoring both Kings after a passive lead.

SHORT: ♥T. I favour attacking leads in these sort of auctions – doing so has served me well for more than half a century so far. I envisage declarer setting up club tricks for a heart pitch or two and the least my partner can do is have the ♥Q, after I stepped in at such short notice. But I may need to set up a club trick before I score ♥K, I hear you say? Yes, but clubs could provide several winners after a club lead and hearts probably cannot. If dummy has ♥AQx the heart finesse is available anyway and a 3rd heart may well disappear through a later discard.

Some argue that your ♠Q is probably a dead duck, so maybe a trump lead will create some confusion.

WHYTE: ♠2. A most interesting problem. They have all 5 keycards (dummy must have an Ace) but have not explored a grand slam. My partner has 0-2 HCP. Declarer has an excellent 4-card spade suit (probably AKxx) and useful points like an outside King and QJ holdings. The best theoretical

defence is to hope partner has the ♥Q. So lead the heart ♥T, and hope to cash a heart when in with the ♣K. (This is what I would lead at the table.)

How will the declarer play trumps? If he does not have the ♠T he will bang out the ♠AK. Job done. Imagine ♠Jxxxx in dummy and ♠AK9x in hand; he will still cash two rounds, but not if you lead the ♠2. You have presented him with a losing option, a free finesse on the second round. There is a simpler argument. Declarer may have two losing finesses to your Kings, no matter what he does. But a diamond lead may give away the 12th trick, and thus a spade is your only safe lead. .

SIME: ♠2. They should have nine spades and this lead might score a spectacular goal if partner has Jx (declarer playing him for QJx). Otherwise, I probably have to hope that both my Kings will take tricks.

PIPER: ♠2. Yeuch. Maybe partner has ♠Jx and ♠AK is on my right...

Since partner cannot have much, how about the other cunning deceptive shot?

SHIELDS: ♣6. Difficult, as I hate leading from honours into a strong NT hand. But losers might be disappearing on diamonds when declarer has time. If I were declarer missing ♠Qxxx I would always play the opening leader for the ♠Q when they fail to lead trump – so I will not lose much by leading a trump and maybe declarer has AKTx and partner Jx – in which case might I win a trick? But one trick is not enough. If I blow a heart trick by leading that suit I might never get it back. The ♣6 appeals a lot as if into declarer's ♣AQJ, I may still make the ♣K later. Club or spade? I toss a coin. My lack of faith in opposition slam bidding comes down in

favour of a spade but I will lead the club and hope something good happens.

MCGINLEY: ♣6. You have an 8-count, and spades are behaving so you don't want to lose a tempo in setting up a 'round' suit trick, where partner may have a Jack. If Declarer has a club fit of QTx opposite Ax(x) they will probably try the Ten. If Declarer has a heart fit of ♥Q9x opposite ♥Ax(x) they are obliged to try the ♥Q?

MARSHALL: ♣6. The ♠2 has its attractions – it seems the only hope of making a spade trick. A heart lead seems likely, given my length, to reduce declarer's heart losers from one to none. The ♣6 loses only when it gives the 12th trick. I might get endplayed, but it is more likely that declarer will take a second club finesse before clearing diamonds, allowing me to get off lead without opening up hearts.

The prize for Comment of the Month goes to:

PATERSON: ♦6. Looks like a complete guess. Is this a little joke, trying to see how creatively silly the panellists can be?

Silly is a bit harsh! Any of the leads chosen could work well on any given day, and the panel has kindly shared their thought processes to give the readers insight into a knotty problem.

Problem 8	Votes	Marks
♦x	9	10
♥T	3	7
♣6	3	7
♠2	3	7

Thanks to all the panellists for their generous contributions, giving us all food for thought. Congratulations to Robert, who has an almost uncanny ability to sniff out the most popular vote.

Panel Answers

July 2023

Problem		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Top Scoring Choice		1♥	4♦	4♦	3NT	4♣	5♦	Dbl	♦x	Tot
1	Bob Clow	1♥	4♦	Pass	2♠	4♣	5♦	Dbl	♦6	76
2	Harry Smith	2NT	4♦	4♦	3NT	4♠	5♦	Dbl	♦6	73
3=	Jack Paterson	2NT	4♥	4♦	2NT	4♣	5♦	2♣	♦6	72
	Finlay Marshall	1♥	4♦	Pass	3NT	4♦	5♦	Dbl	♣6	72
	Patrick Shields	2NT	4♦	4♦	3NT	4♥	4NT	Dbl	♣6	72
6	John Murdoch	1♥	4♣	Pass	3NT	4♣	4NT	3♣	♥T	69
7=	Mike Ash	2NT	4♥	Pass	2NT	4♥	5♦	2♣	♦6	68
	Arend Bayer	1♥	4♦	4♦	3♥	4♠	5♦	2♣	♦2	68
	Gints Freimanis	1♥	4♦	4NT	2♠	4♥	5♦	2♣	♦6	68
	Tony Wilkinson	1♥	3NT	3NT	3NT	4♥	2♠	Dbl	♦6	68
11	Mike McGinley	1♥	4♥	3NT	2NT	4♣	5♦	2♣	♣6	67
12	Miro Dragic	1♥	4♦	Dbl	3NT	4♣	2♠	2♣	♥T	66
13	Iain Sime	2♣	3NT	4♦	2♠	4♣	4♣	2♣	♠2	65
14=	Bill Ross	2NT	4♦	4♦	4♥	4♠	5♦	2♣	♦6	64
	Douglas Piper	1♥	4♦	Dbl	3♣	4♥	4NT	Dbl	♠2	64
16	Brian Short	1♥	4♥	Pass	2NT	Dbl	5♦	Dbl	♥T	63
17	Ronan Valentine	1♥	4♦	Dbl	3♣	4♣	3NT	Dbl	♦6	62
18	Bill Whyte	2♣	4♥	3NT	2NT	5♠	4♦	Dbl	♠2	59

Competitors Top Scores

Congratulations to of **Peter Moss** (New Melville) on his excellent score of **75**.

Other good scores:

Sheila Templeton	(Kyle)	71
Ken Rae	(Lerwick)	70
Paul Maiolani	(GBC)	69
David Olive	(Caledonian)	67
Margaret Clark	(New Melville)	66
Julie Menzies	(New Melville)	65
Cameron McLatchie	(GBC)	64
Walter Ewing	(Perth)	63
David Walton	(Maccabi)	62
Alasdair Adam	(Stirling)	61
Rob Hickling	(Colinton Castle)	61
Alan Morrison	(Carlton)	61
Ali Gordon	(GBC)	60

SBNews Bidding Panel Problems

July 2023

You are always South, playing with an excellent first-time partner. You have agreed to play Acol with a weak No-trump.

Please send your answers to the Editor:

liz.mcgowan@blueyonder.co.uk

quoting your SBU Membership number.

Closing date: 26 September, 2023

Problem 1 Teams None Vul

♠4	S	W	N	E
♥K	-	P	2♥	3♦
♦QJ96	?			
♣AT98765				

Problem 2 Teams NS Vul

♠-	S	W	N	E
♥2	-	1♠	P	2♥
♦AKQJ843	?			
♣QT652	?			

Problem 3 Teams NS Vul

♠A4	S	W	N	E
♥KJT5	-	-	-	2♠*
♦T65	P	P	3♣	P
♣K764	?			

2♠ = 5♠, 4+m, weak

Problem 4 Teams Both Vul

♠A65	S	W	N	E
♥AT7542	-	-	1♣	P
♦AQ	1♥	P	3♣	P
♣KK	3♦	P	3NT	P
	?			

Problem 5 Teams EW Vul

♠5	S	W	N	E
♥KQT52	1♥	P	1♠	P
♦85	2♣	P	2♦	P
♣AJ763	3♣	P	3♠	P
	?			

Problem 6 Teams Both Vul

♠AK3	S	W	N	E
♥AKT86	-	P	P	3♣
♦AK65	X	P	3NT	P
♣9	?			

Problem 7 Teams Both Vul

♠8	S	W	N	E
♥AK	-	P	P	P
♦K95	1♣	P	1♦	P
♣AKJ8753				

Problem 8 Teams None Vul

♠865	S	W	N	E
♥T987			P	2NT
♦5	P	3NT	End	
♣K9743				

What is your lead?