

Scottish Bridge News



Willie Coyle

Scottish Bridge News

Editorial

Covid gave Scotland some unexpected invitations to World Championships. The Women's team finished 15th out of 20 teams in the 2021 European Championships but were invited to make up the numbers in Salsomaggiore when most other zones could not fulfil their quota. And this year our Under31 team were invited to the World Youth Championships – they had finished 13th out of 16 in the inaugural Under 31 European event last year. The World Bridge Federation was so desperate to make up the number to 20 teams that they also invited Germany, who finished last in the Europeans, and Slovakia, who did not compete at all! Our team did better at their second attempt: they qualified for the knockout stages in 8th place.

The International Committee has completed its first series of Thursday night seminars and Play and Discuss sessions. 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 to reach “Supporting material for Seminars and Play and Discuss....”)

This edition is largely dedicated to the memory of Willie Coyle, one of Scotland's best known, most respected and most successful players. His partnership with the late Victor Silverstone gave Scottish bridge a great reputation, and he was one of very few Scots to represent Great Britain at International level.

On a personal note, we are sorry to announce the death of Jon Baldursson, the Icelandic star who helped us to victory in the inaugural World Transnational Mixed Teams in Rhodes in 1996.

Please note that the SBNews now appears online every two months!

Contributions should be sent to:

liz.mcgowan@blueyonder.co.uk

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The World Youth Championships

Liz McGowan

The World Bridge Federation has introduced an Under-31 category into its Youth Championships. Last year six of our talented recently-ex-juniors organised themselves to the European Youth event. They finished a disappointing 13th out of 16 teams, and consequently were very surprised to receive a belated invitation to the World Youth Championships in Veldhoven.

We managed to assemble a team. Most countries were struggling post-Covid, so two slightly over-age players were allowed. We sent Abi and Jake Milne, together with Glen Falconer, Gints Freimanis and Jun Nakamaru-Pinder.

A 5-person team is difficult to juggle! The qualifying phase consisted of 4x 14-board matches per day for 5 days. Gints and Glen had worked hard at their system, and I had to play them virtually throughout, a severe test of stamina. The others played in gash partnerships. Our married pair were not at all sure they should play together – but needs must, and they actually did rather well.

Play began at 9.30, clearly too early for us: we lost every first session for 6 days on the trot. But we fought back, winning the second and fourth matches every day to qualify for the knockout stages in 8th place. (We finished 6th of the 14 European teams that had been dragged in to bring the numbers up to 20.)

Sadly, the quarter-finals proved too high a hurdle: we failed to recover from the inevitable poor morning session.

Leading against 3NT is rarely fun. Here are some problems faced by the team.

You are always West.

1 NS Vul

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		Pass	1♥
Pass	2♣	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♦	Pass	3NT
End			

♠QT64
♥T83
♦AK76
♣65

Your lead?

2 NS Vul

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1♣*	3NT
End			

*Your 1♣ is 2+

♠Q5432
♥K872
♦KJT
♣2

Your lead?

3 Love all

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	3♣	Pass	3NT
End			

♠T73
♥A872
♦T7543
♣8

Your lead?

4 Game all

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♣
1♠	X	P	3N
End			

♠KT8643
♥JT73
♦QJ
♣4

Your lead?

Problem 1 comes from Match 6 against Serbia. They are not one of the stronger teams (they finish last).

Bd 18	♠K2	NS Vul
	♥42	Dealer E
	♦T2	
	♣AKQJ972	
♠QT64		♠J75
♥T83		♥975
♦AK76		♦QJ543
♣65		♣83
	♠A983	
	♥AKQJ6	
	♦98	
	♣T4	

Your other pair found a route to 5♥ and collected +650, theoretically the best result possible. At your table it seems that each opponent expected partner to have a diamond stopper. If you lead a top diamond you collect 100 and 13 imps. If you try anything else you lose 720 and 2 imps.

Tip: don't trust opponents to know what they are doing.

Problem 2 v Chinese Taipei

Bd 25	♠J86	All Vul
	♥A42	Dealer S
	♦Q832	
	♣543	
♠Q5432		♠A97
♥K872		♥QJ5
♦KJT		♦A9764
♣2		♣87
	♠KT	
	♥T96	
	♦5	
	♣AKQJT96	

A 3NT overcall is usually based on a long running suit (which in this instance can only be clubs) with a few stoppers. What might be the weakness here? Our player claims to have considered

leading the ♦K – but decided it was too imaginative. The ♦J will do provided it does not deny a higher honour...

At the other table East opened 1♦ and South bid a stopper-asking 3♦. There was no way 3NT was making after that start, and 4♣ was one down, so you have to find a red suit lead to flatten the board.

Tip: try to find your side's best suit – it may not be yours.

Problem 3 was against Germany. They were even more fortunate to qualify than Scotland, after finishing last in the Europeans. They improve in the Worlds – only second last.

Bd 17	♠A86	Love All
	♥J4	Dealer N
	♦52	
	♣QJT972	
♠T73		♠95
♥A872		♥9653
♦T7543		♦AK8
♣8		♣K643
	♠KQJ42	
	♥KQT	
	♦Q96	
	♣A5	

Partner's failure to bid over the preempt suggests that RHO has a good hand. Your club shortage suggests that partner may have length, so clubs may not run. Which suit is most likely to produce length tricks? Here the trusty longest works well.

Your other pair bid to the superior 4♠ but the defenders were not kind enough to let that through, so you need to lead a diamond to flatten the board. Anything else loses 10 imps.

Tip: Try to avoid Axxx against 3NT!

Problem 4 comes from the Quarter-final against China:

Bd 18	♠Q52	All Vul
	♥982	Dealer S
	♦A7653	
	♣Q5	
♠KT8643		♠J97
♥JT73		♥AK654
♦QJ		♦842
♣4		♣82
	♠A	
	♥Q	
	♦KT9	
	♣AKJT9763	

You need to lead a heart to beat 3NT. Do you play Rosenkranz redoubles here? A useful convention where partner redoubles the Negative Double to show a top honour in your suit and invites you to underlead your Ace. If so partner's failure to redouble suggests trying a different attack. Our South was the only one not to punt 3NT; when he rebid 4♣ North did not trust him enough to raise. Leading a spade loses 11 imps, a heart gains 7.

Tip: trust them to have your suit stopped on this auction.

The lesson we can take from this event is that preparation, physical and mental, is the key to success at this level.

Physical preparation involves learning to relax when not actually playing, preserving the brain cells for when they need to be switched on. Some physical activity may help you to switch off so that you sleep well.

Mental preparation includes working at your card play technique and defensive agreements as well as refining your system as far as you can. Gints' and Glen's hard work was rewarded with a magnificent cross-imp score of +0.65

Are you an Ethical Player?

In the July issue we discussed how Unauthorised Information (UI) can be passed and acted upon whilst playing online, especially when playing in the same room as your partner, out of sight from your opponents.

This month we continue the theme, but in a face-to-face environment, where both partner and opponents can receive UI, albeit sometimes accidentally. As with online bridge, the important issue is not whether UI is transmitted, but whether it is acted upon.

Some examples:

- 1 You open 1♠, partner raises to 2♠. You pass. LHO protects with 3♥. Your partner has a long think, seeks some inspiration from the ceiling and finally emerges with a pass. Must you now pass because you have UI? Someone at the club may tell you that "you cannot bid or double after your partner's hesitation". That is **not** correct. You must not **use** the UI, but if your hand is worth a clearcut bid of 3♠, or a double, you are most certainly allowed to make your call. Your opponents may reserve their rights to call the director after the hand is over and they may ask to see your hand at the end. If everyone agrees that your call was quite normal the matter is closed. If opponents are unhappy with your call they will call the Director, who will consult appropriately and make a ruling. If the ruling goes against you try not to let that upset you. Your partner's hesitation has put you under pressure, you did your best not to let it influence you, but others did not agree – it was a judgment call.

2 Your RHO opens 1♣, which is alerted as possibly short (2+).

You hold ♠Ax, ♥KJxx, ♦x, ♣AJTxxx. You have agreed to play 2♣ as natural with 2♦ the substitute bid for Michaels, so you bid 2♣.

Partner alerts and is asked what it means. She answers that it is a Michaels cuebid showing 5=5 in the Majors. "Oh gosh, she has forgotten the system" you whisper quietly to yourself. She bids 2♥.

Are you allowed to bid 3♣?

NO. You have UI. You must act as if you had not heard the (mis)explanation and assume that partner has a heart suit. Raise hearts and take the consequences. Good quality opponents will appreciate your ethics and you can have a little system chat with partner in the bar later.

3 Declarer plays 5♣X. Partner doubled the final contract. You lead the ♠Q. Dummy has ♠Kx. Partner mutters "my double was Lightner", (against a high level contract a Lightner double often indicates a void).

Declarer ducks your ♠Q, leaving you on lead. You have 6 hearts – should you switch to that suit to give partner a ruff?

NO. Even if that defence is now obvious you should continue spades. If you lead a heart the director will be called and almost certainly award an adjusted score. Perhaps partner will avoid careless talk in future.

4 You overhear somebody at the next table telling his partner that a diamond lead would defeat a slam. You are due to play the hand in the next round.

You should go to the Director and tell him you have overheard something that gives you UI. He will probably tell you to play the hand out in case the UI does not affect the outcome. The bidding proceeds 1NT on your right, 6NT on your left.

You hold ♠xxx, ♥JT9x, ♦J9xx, ♣Jxx. It is normal to lean towards a major suit lead here and the ♥J looks obvious, so lead it and take what comes. If you led a diamond because you knew it would work that would be cheating.

It is all quite complicated, as you can see.

Ethical players lean over backwards to avoid making use of UI, sometimes taking it too far.

We heard of a player who overheard that "6♠ is cold" on a board.

When his partner asked how many Aces he had he showed one less than he held!

This was too much! He should have been grateful that the UI could not influence his actions and make the correct response.


Some tips from the International Thursday Seminars

The fourth Seminar was conducted by **Barnet Shenkin**

His topic was **The Opening Lead**.

He discussed many fascinating deals where expert partnerships were not on the same wavelength. This one comes from Scotland's Open Team victory over Italy in the opening match of the 2022 European Championships in Madeira.

Bd 17	♠AKQJ6	Love All
	♥QT8	Dealer N
	♦T4	
	♣AKJ	
♠973		♠842
♥743		♥A965
♦T7532		♦J53
♣97		♣864
	♠T5	
	♥KJ2	
	♦AKQ862	
	♣Q9	



W	N	E	S
<i>Duboin</i>		<i>Bocchi</i>	
			1NT
Pass	2♥	Pass	2♠
Pass	7NT	Dbf	End

Duboin interpreted the double as saying "I have an Ace, find it!" He guessed to lead a diamond.

Bocchi was adamant that the double asked for a heart lead, the suit 'bid' by dummy.

Even world class partnerships have not discussed such situations enough.

Barnet's advice: "Double a slam when it is surely going off, or to help partner with the lead. Do not double if partner might be confused."

Barnet's general tip was "Pick the opening lead most likely to succeed".

Apart from offering signed copies of his own book "Heroes, Icons and Scandals" (contact shenkinbridge@gmail.com to order) Barnet recommended only one book:

"Opening Leads" by Robert Ewen.

It is important that both you and your partner read the same book!

The Fifth Seminar by **Brian Short** was on **Defence**

"Signal Well. Think Clearly."

As Brian pointed out, we can expect to defend 50% of all deals.

We can garner information from the bidding (or lack of it); from partner's leads and plays; and from declarer's line of play. But above all, we must apply Bridge Logic.

It is essential for a partnership to establish a Basic Signalling style, but equally important to discuss exceptions.

Brian's advice was to signal as clearly as possible, but always to be aware that partner might not have the right cards.

If you were unable to watch the original seminars they are available to view (or review) on the website in the International Section. Well worth the effort'

Willie Coyle



1937-2023

William Coyle – Billy in his family, Willie to bridge players and Bill in the educational sector – was born on August 20, 1937 in Paisley, fifth child of 11 to William (Wullie) Coyle, a baker, confectioner and school janitor, and his wife Margaret (Peggy), née Andrews.

At the age of two he contracted polio, which left him with one leg incapacitated and a recognisable limp. Nonetheless he completed his education, graduating from Glasgow University with First Class Honours in mathematics.

He made a career in education, as a teacher and administrator. He was awarded an MBE for services to education in 2003.

Willie had many enthusiasms. As a student, he travelled to Lisbon to watch the Lisbon Lions beat Inter Milan 2-1 to win the 1967 European Cup. He shared a love of horse-racing with Jeremy Flint. He loved modern art and had a large collection of paintings by Peter Howson, including a portrait of Coyle himself.

He never married. Although he moved to London after retirement, his heart remained in Scotland.

Gleaned from the Obituary in 'The Telegraph'

Mike McGinley was taught by Willie.

"I can vouch that Willie was a very good teacher of maths and physics. For maintaining discipline, he preferred to use a fund of amusing catch phrases to keep the troops in order, rather than wield "the belt". He hinted to us that his outside interests were bridge, Labour Party activism, and attending and betting at horse-race meetings with Jeremy Flint."

Jim Patrick wrote about Willie in the SBNews in May 2006:

For forty years Willie Coyle has been at the top of Scottish bridge. Before Scotland was entitled to a separate entry for the European Championships and Olympiad, he was in the top echelon of British bridge, often playing internationally with several partners.

He started playing in 1960 when bridge was at the height of its popularity. Unusually, he did not learn the game at university but afterwards while working as a newly qualified maths teacher. Like most people born before television monopolised home entertainment, he had a background of card playing. Friends needed a fourth for an evening bridge game, he read a book by the great populariser, Charles Goren, and he was hooked.

Willie claims to have been lucky rather than good throughout his bridge career, always finding a partner better than himself and getting into good teams. Believe that if you like, but he had a lucky start: Victor Silverstone and Bill Whyte, a young pair on the verge of a Camrose cap, split up when Bill went to London. The Coyle / Silverstone partnership developed satisfactorily and soon had Leckie / Goldberg as regular teammates. Sam and Victor were the

strongest pair in Scotland then and were in Willie's words "the Camrose season ticket holders", a position soon to be filled by Willie and Victor.

Benefitting from excellent teammates in the other room they made rapid progress and in 1967 the four won the British trials for the European Championships. (In the aftermath of the Buenos Aires affair - Reese / Schapiro had been accused of cheating in the 1965 World Championship - Flint's team withdrew while well in the lead. The Scottish team inherited selection.)

Here is a good Coyle / Silverstone defence from the British trials.

	♠432	Both Vul
	♥KQT8	Dealer E
	♦QJ6432	
	♣-	
♠Q75		♠-
♥9		♥AJ6532
♦A75		♦KT9
♣JT8765		♣A942
	♠AKJT986	
	♥74	
	♦8	
	♣KQ3	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	1♥	4♠
Dbl	End		

4♠x was a popular contract, but no-one else found the right defence. Willie led his heart. Victor won and returned a heart, signalling for diamonds. Willie ruffed and UNDERLED his ♦A to his partner's ♦K. Victor got the message and returned another heart for the trump promotion.

At three tables a diamond was returned at trick 2 and continued at trick 3. Now declarer can succeed.

Another example from a 1970's match contested in Edinburgh between Scotland: (Coyle / Silverstone, Short / Duncan; Goldberg / Matheson, Albert Benjamin, NPC) and a Wei Precision Team which included Belladonna, Garozzo, Flint and Sharif.

	♠A632	None Vul
	♥AQ54	Dealer N
	♦J85	
	♣76	
♠T974		♠QJ
♥8		♥T7632
♦AKQT		♦762
♣QJT2		♣953
	♠K85	
	♥KJ9	
	♦943	
	♣AK84	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
WILLIE	GAROZZO	VICTOR	SHARIF
-	1♦	Pass	3NT
End			

Willie led the ♦K. Despite seeing four quick tricks for the defence, he switched at trick 2 to the ♣J. He could see that he would be under pressure in the black suits on the run of the hearts if he rectified the count by cashing his diamonds. (As it happens, partner's ♣9 saves the day, but Willie did not know that.) Sharif, recognising the theme of the hand, made the expert return of a diamond. He could see that his only hope on the hand was a squeeze, or a 3=3 spade break with the winner of the third round not able to cash the fourth diamond. Willie continued his defence by playing the ♠T. (If he played a second club and Sharif had ♣AK9x, he would be forced into the winning line.) South won the ♠K and played another diamond. Willie won and resisted temptation again by leading a second

spade. Now when declarer cashed the hearts, Willie could safely throw the low club, a spade and his diamond Ten!

After his partnership with Victor Silverstone broke up Willie played most of his bridge in Flint's team based in London. He was an early convert to Precision playing with Robert Sheehan. As well as several European Championships, Coyle / Sheehan played in the 1976 Olympiad when Britain came third.

Another major partnership was with Barnet Shenkin, with whom he also played for Britain in the European Championship and Olympiad. Willie says that he tends to play quickly, perhaps too quickly, as a result of all of his earlier partners being noted for their speed: all had no points on their licence.

I was lucky enough to play with Willie once, as a substitute in a Scottish Cup match – and I remember being impressed by his speed of thought. The strongest part of my game is my ability to notice my mistakes halfway through the next board. In that match Willie spotted the one-suit-squeeze I missed before the cards were back in the board.

Victor Goldberg and John Matheson were his other main partners. Of Goldberg he says, "Although I enjoyed playing with VG, it was not by choice but by restricted choice: his partner had decided not to play and switched to my partner! I found him an easy partner to play with."

He played twice with John Matheson in the trials – 25 years apart – and won both times. He said there was no problem with speed there. Here is a hand played by Willie, playing with John, against Martin White and me in the trials in the seventies.

	♠T76	None Vul
	♥A6	Dealer S
	♦AKQ7	
	♣KT97	
♠QJ2		♠AK84
♥J5		♥Q74
♦865		♦T943
♣Q6542		♣J8
	♠953	
	♥KT9832	
	♦J2	
	♣A3	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	-	2♦ ¹
Pass	2NT ²	Pass	3♥
Pass	4♥	End	

¹ Multi

² Enquiry

We found the ♠Q lead but erred in playing a fourth round trying for a trump promotion – we had a natural trump trick anyway. (From East's point of view, playing for the trump promotion gains when West has ♥T8 or ♥T9. It loses when he has ♥J5, ♥J3 or ♥J2.) Willie ruffed with the Ten, overruffed by the Jack and Ace. He played a heart to the nine, ♣A, ♣K and ruffed a club. Crossing with a diamond he ruffed another club. He then played a diamond to dummy at trick 11 leaving himself with the ♥K8 over East's ♥Q7.

I asked Willie about favourite players and partners, and here's what I got:

Best Scottish player: Victor Goldberg. "Technically sound with good bidding judgement. Like Sheehan, Iceberg's table presence and temperament were the best. He fears no one and is the player you would want next door."

Best British player: Jeremy Flint. "His record speaks for itself: he qualified for Britain with eight different partners, and always won the trials."

Best player: Benito Garozzo.

"I originally thought that Flint was the best, but he told me that, technically, Garozzo was on a planet of his own. He won the world par contest (*more or less, the world championship of declarer play – won later by Michael Rosenberg. Ed.*) at 65. Playing against Garozzo, once the cards were on the table, only second place was available. Bobby Wolff, a multiple world champion, told me in Istanbul that Garozzo was the best player ever."

Best pair: Bocchi & Duboin. "Again on a different planet – as bidders: system, judgement, and particularly slam bidding. They are brilliant defenders, but neither is as good technically as Garozzo was, but are better bidders."

Willie has always been interested in systems: he prepared the first winning Scottish Camrose team for Reese's dreaded Little Major. An early convert to Precision, he is now looking for a partner to play Bocchi & Duboin's methods.

Willie has won seven Scottish Cups and four, he says, Gold Cups. (His name is on the trophy five times but he said once was a spelling mistake for Atta Ullah!)

Barnet Shenkin remembers

I first met Willie at the 1965 Camrose match v England in Glasgow – I was 15 and had just started to play bridge. He sat before the match and played a few hands with me along with Victor Silverstone and Willie Whyte. This was the start of the amazing successful run of Coyle / Silverstone, the most famous pair in Scottish bridge. For 10 years they played every Camrose match but one – 29 in total – and they won the Camrose five times. They were the breakthrough pair for Scotland. Along with Leckie, Goldberg, Kelsey and

Culbertson they were the first Scottish team to win the Gold Cup. Also with Goldberg and Leckie they were the first Scottish players ever to represent Great Britain at bridge. I went to support them in Oslo in 1969 and Harold Franklin wrote in *Bridge Magazine* after the tournament: "Coyle and Silverstone were our best pair and played well." Along with Victor Silverstone he was invited 6 years running to play in the prestigious Sunday Times Invitational in London– 16 pairs were invited from around the world and played dressed in dinners jackets and bow ties.

He used to go to Albert Benjamin's club in Shields Road, Glasgow regularly on a Sunday and enjoyed discussing hands and bidding theory of which he was a leading professor. Victor Silverstone used to call me regularly and comment – "Willie changed the system yet again" mostly because of results or that he had learned a new application from Italy or another country. He taught me transfers in 1967. I remember the first time they came up: I opened 1NT, he bid 2♦, I bid 2♥, he bid 3♦, I bid 3♥. he bid 4♦ – at this point I thought I must have done something wrong and passed! He just laughed.

I played with George Cuthbertson in the Camrose on Willie's last year with Victor Silverstone before Victor moved to London. We tied with England. The following year Willie played with John Matheson, I played with Michael Rosenberg and Scotland won.

In 1976 Willie had a partnership with Robert Sheehan. In the trials for the British team for the World Olympiad they edged out Michael and myself from the British team by a single trick!! We were reserves, and I went to support and spectate in Monte Carlo. The team

was Rose / Flint, Priday./ Rodrigue ,and Coyle / Sheehan. Britain jumped off to a big lead and were still leading after more than half of the matches. For some unknown reason the captain, Terence Reese started to tinker with the partnerships, perhaps to give Flint a rest. Rose played some with Sheehan and Willie played less. This was not a success and the British team dropped from first to third, winning bronze. If Reese had not messed with the lineups perhaps Britain would have taken gold.

In 1982 I started a partnership with Willie and we won a famous Gold Cup semi-final match after being 52 down with 8 to play, and went on to beat the London stars: Flint, Rose, Sheehan, Zia, Dixon and Silverstone (who had transferred allegiance to London) in the final. We then played the trials for the Great Britain team and this time we edged Silverstone / Dixon out by a trick! We played the Olympiad for Great Britain in Seattle and the European Championships the following year. Although a fine player Willie was not the most sympathetic partner and I found trying to discuss the merits of what had gone wrong a useless exercise as, in his view, his action was always correct. Rather than argue and destroy the partnership we decided never to discuss a hand during any tournament. The captain of the British team in Seattle was John Armstrong. Early in the tournament we played France. Rixie Markus took a seat behind Willie. She hated the weak no trump and loved the French who were World Champions. The weak no trump came up a few times and we gained a bunch of points and beat France 17- 3. She wrote in the bulletin the following day: "Coyle is a fine player and Shenkin is very lucky". They say, better to be lucky.

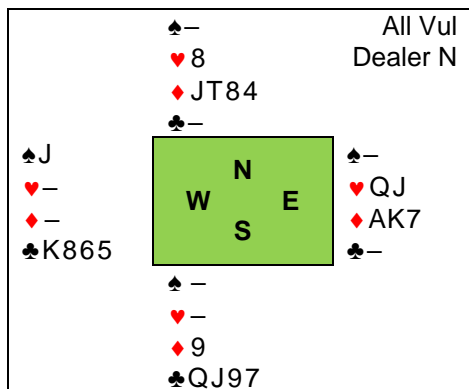
Later in the tournament Armstrong took a seat behind me. Screens were in use for the first time in competition. I opened 1♣ and LHO overcalled 1♠. Willie bid 2♦, I bid 2♠ asking for a stopper. Willie bid 3♦ and I bid 3♠ asking for half a stopper. When the bid came back to me it was 4♠ from Willie. I bid 5♦ on my doubleton, down 3 vulnerable with 3NT cold – Willie had a stopper. After the match John asked me why Willie had not bid 3NT. I said to please ask him as we never discuss hands. The next day I saw John at breakfast and asked what Willie had said. Of course it was all my fault: when I pushed the tray through the screen he had been unable to see the overcall of 1♠ and thought I was bidding spades!!

The following year we played the European Championships for Great Britain. Tony Priday was the captain. We sat down to play against Sweden.

	♠Q943		All Vul									
	♥AK86		Dealer N									
	♦JT843											
	♣—											
♠AKJ83	<div style="border: 2px solid green; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> <table style="border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> </div>		N		W		E		S		♠765	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♥42		♥QJT7										
♦Q		♦AK765										
♣K8652		♣T										
	♠T											
	♥953											
	♦92											
	♣AQJ9743											

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
<i>Barnet</i>		<i>Willie</i>	
1♠	Pass	2♦	3♣
X	End		

Declarer was Hans Gothe. I led the ♠A, then the ♦Q which held. I tried the ♠K. Declarer ruffed, cashed the ♣A and ♥A, ♠Q, then ruffed the ♠9 and crossed to the ♥K to reach this position:



He ruffed the ♥8 with the ♣Q – I pitched my spade. Now declarer could not be stopped from making two further tricks and his contract. Nothing was said until dinner with captain Priday who asked about the hand. “How did they make this?”. Willie piped up: “Well, all Barnet had to do to beat it was underuff the ♣Q and, when declarer led a diamond, pitch his spade – then I play a diamond, Barnet underuffs again and makes the last two tricks for down 1”. Then the clincher – “Of course Barnet had a glass of wine with dinner or he would always have found this defence!!” Tony Priday, a touch more sympathetic, did not bar wine for the rest of the tournament.

Willie was teetotal and a non-smoker. He looked after his health and would not even take milk in his tea.

I saw Willie about a year ago when he was in hospital. He was very friendly. He criticized many players but said – “now you were a good player.” This was an accolade from the maestro. He went on to tell me a story of how I landed up in the Gold Cup winning team along with John Matheson: “you need to put this in your book I heard you are writing.”

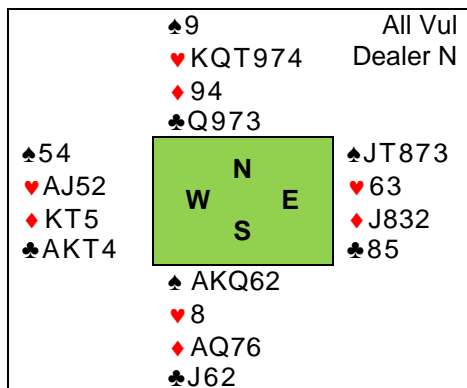
Willie was very friendly with Bernard Teltscher who used to refer to him as “Sir William”. Perhaps that is how he should be remembered.

John Matheson reminisces.

There will not be many in Scottish bridge who remember what a wonderful partnership Willie Coyle and Victor Silverstone were. In my opinion they were Scotland’s finest partnership – a partnership before their time.

I played with Willie for two periods. In the 1970s we played Super Precision. Willie was a great admirer of Italian methods and they featured largely again in our 2000 system. Willie believed strongly in working on partnership agreements. We bid thousands of hands from old World championships and DealMaster Pro.

For me, one failing of many players is that every hand is a problem for them. They never seem to have been in a similar situation. See how Willie’s preparedness here gains 16 IMPs.



WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
<i>McGann</i>	<i>John</i>	<i>Hanlon</i>	<i>Willie</i>
	2♥	Pass	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♥	Pass
3♠	Pass	Pass	Dbl
End			

Willie passed the Weak2 in tempo – and the opponents were doomed. +800. The other South thought over the Weak2 and eventually made a try ending in 4♥X for -500.

As soon as South starts thinking West should no longer consider entering the auction.

Be Prepared!

A hand from the EBU Spring 4s:

		♠J75		All Vul									
		♥QJ962											
		♦T7											
		♣K54											
♠T64	<table border="1"> <tr><td> </td><td>N</td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td> </td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td>S</td><td> </td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠82		
		N											
W			E										
		S											
♥AT53	♥74												
♦AQ93	♦KJ854												
♣J2	♣QT86												
		♠AKQ93											
		♥K8											
		♦62											
		♣A973											

The contract in both rooms was 4♣. West led a trump. The other declarer drew three rounds of trump, then led the ♥K. If West ducks declarer must finesse the ♥9 on the second round to make his contract.

Willie cashed just one high trump, leaving the ♠J as an entry to dummy, before leading the ♥K to ensure his contract against any 4=2 heart break.

Here is Willie in action in the 2004 Gold Cup semi-final which was eventually lost by a single imp.

		♠T64		All Vul									
		♥T83		Dealer N									
		♦A752											
		♣K83											
♠AQ	<table border="1"> <tr><td> </td><td>N</td><td> </td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td> </td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td> </td><td>S</td><td> </td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠KJ8752		
		N											
W			E										
		S											
♥Q752	♥KJ94												
♦Q98	♦T												
♣Q954	♣72												
		♠93											
		♥A6											
		♦KJ643											
		♣AJT6											

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
Willie		John	1♦
Pass	2♦	2♣	3♣
Pass	4♦	End	

He led the ♠A and followed with the ♠Q. John overtook and played the ♠J. Declarer was alive to the possibility of an overruff, so discarded his losing heart instead of ruffing. Willie made the key play of discarding a discouraging heart. If he had a sure club trick he would encourage hearts, so John was guided to the winning defence: a fourth spade promoted a trump trick for partner. (John's ♦T meant there was always a trump trick, but Willie could not know that).

When Scotland was recognised as a separate NBO and we sent our first teams to the European Championships in Tenerife in 2001 Willie volunteered to act as Coach to the Women's Team.

He was an excellent teacher and dedicated coach, doing his best to share his wealth of knowledge and experience. He prepared meticulous defences to opponents' methods. When our Captain left early he took over with enthusiasm. But even he could not make bricks without straw. I wish we had the chance to apologise again.

Willie and John reformed their partnership intermittently and had several more outings in Scottish teams. They played in the 2002-03 Camrose series, and in the winning Senior Camrose team in 2012. They represented Scotland in three European Senior Championships.

In 2008, in Pau, they were 3rd in the Butler rankings with a magnificent score of +0.71. They played in Ostend in 2010 and in Dublin in 2012.

Iain Sime was there:

Willie was the oldest member of the successful Scottish Senior team at the European Championships in Dublin in 2012, playing with John Matheson. The other members of the team were Derek Diamond, Victor Silverstone, John Murdoch and myself. We won the bronze medal, becoming the only Scotland team to have won a medal at a European National Teams Championship.

The team thus qualified for the 2013 World Senior Championships in Bali. John was unable to travel, so Willie partnered Victor Silverstone. Scotland qualified from the round robin to reach the Quarter Finals, losing to the eventual American winners.

Against South Africa in the round robin, Willie found a swindle to make a slam:

Bd 7	♠AK85 ♥KQ7 ♦AQ9 ♣A84	None Vul Dealer E									
♠5 ♥J854 ♦KJ752 ♣652	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠T ♥AT962 ♦T63 ♣KJ73
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠QJ76432 ♥3 ♦84 ♣QT9										

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	Victor		Willie
		Pass	3♠
Pass	6♠	End	

Only four out of 29 declarers across the three events in Bali landed this slam. Two of them received a diamond lead, buying some time to work on a pseudo squeeze. But against Willie they led ♥5. Some imagination would be required.

It looks as if declarer has sure losers in hearts and clubs. But Willie saw an extra chance, taking advantage of the opponents' leading style (3/5th from good suits). The lead could be from J85, J85x, 85x, 8543, 5x or a singleton 5. That is three combinations where West has the Jack and six where he doesn't. From East's point of view there was a decent chance that Willie held the Jack. Envisioning East's dilemma, Willie called for dummy's low card. If East had played the nine, nothing was lost. But East, thinking that declarer must hold the Jack to duck, won the Ace. Willie was able to discard his club losers on dummy's heart honours, then claim his slam when the diamond finesse succeeded. 14 imps to Scotland when 6♠ failed at the other table.

Willie was not only a great player, but a great teammate, always supportive and good-humoured. Sitting next to him at dinner one evening, he had a modest salad whilst I was guzzling the chef's special. Willie remarked "the difference between you and me is that I eat to live, and you live to eat!"

Willie had an impact on many people.

Gordon Smith remembers

My Ayrshire team, captained by Jim McClymont, consisted of Ian Adamson, myself and my father. In 1974 we had a great run in the Scottish Cup. The 64-board Final in the New Kenmure Club in Glasgow saw us trounced by the international select of Victor Silverstone, Willie Coyle, Victor Goldberg and Patrick Jourdain.

After the dinner and speeches Willie had some reassuring words for the losing team: he said he was about to go upstairs to play some Rubber Bridge!

Barbara Kay learned from Willie:

Willie to me was an inspiration. He took me under his wing at the beginning of my bridge career and he pirouetted Joyce and me into the Scottish team. He didn't suffer fools gladly and one of his sayings when we got it wrong was 'you got money in the bank?'

Willie, the Bridge world will miss you.

Nicola Smith was a friend

Willie to me was the kindest man and I remember fondly playing bridge with him a few years ago. When I asked him for help with my system he was amazing. He sent me chapter and verse on what I needed and I still play most of what he sent...

Jonathan and I remember him well from dinners with him and Kitty. His views on Scottish politics were interesting. English politics - even more interesting. He was an amazing baker and his fruit cake will be sorely missed by my family.

Willie was quiet-spoken but expressed his strong opinions with authority.

He was a master of the put down.

A player (who shall remain anonymous) said to him: "I may not be the best player at the table, but I know I have flair"

Willie's retort: "Flair! A flare is for stonnin' on!"

Your editor remembers meeting Willie in a train on the way home from an English Women's Teams that had not gone spectacularly well: His conclusion? "Of course, you are a Pairs Player". Ouch.

Play Challenge

Jim Patrick

1 NS Vul Dealer South

♠K765
♥A54
♦K83
♣JT9

♠AT4
♥6
♦A97
♣KQ8765

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	-	1♣
Pass	1♠	2NT	3♣
3♥	5♣	End	

Contract: 5♣ Lead: ♦J

Can you take advantage of the information from the auction?

2 Both Vul Dealer South

♠AQT85
♥84
♦JT9
♣AQT

♠K4
♥AT
♦AQ8642
♣KJ7

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	-	1♦
Pass	1♠	Pass	3♦
Pass	4♣ ¹	Pass	4♥
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♠ ²
Pass	6♦	End	

¹Cuebid for diamonds; ² 2 keycards +♦Q

Contract: 6♦ Lead: ♥2

The heart lead hits you in a weak spot. How do you play?

Solutions on Next Page

Play Challenge Solutions

Jim Patrick

1 NS Vul Dealer South

♠J832 ♥QT72 ♦J4 ♣432	♠K765 ♥A54 ♦K83 ♣JT9 ♠Q9 ♥KJ983 ♦QT652 ♣A ♠AT4 ♥6 ♦A97 ♣KQ8765	N W E S	♠Q9 ♥KJ983 ♦QT652 ♣A
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WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	-	1♣
Pass	1♠	2NT	3♣
3♥	5♣	End	

Contract: 5♣ Lead: ♦J

You should win the opening lead in hand to guard against it being a singleton, although you really need the diamonds to be 5-2. It is best to lead trumps now. Probably East will win to play a diamond and if West ruffs, there is no way to win unless East has ♠QJ doubleton.

When West does not ruff you draw a round of trumps noting East's singleton which should give him a doubleton spade. Noting the quality of your pips, if it comprises two of the QJ98, you can force an extra trick from spades.

Leave the last trump to give West another chance to go wrong and play a spade to the 10. West should win and lead a heart but you draw the last trump and cash the ♠A leaving you with a known finesse.

If West does not return a heart, you will make the contract on a double squeeze no matter what East's spades are.

2 Both Vul Dealer South

♠J6 ♥KJ62 ♦K5 ♣86543	♠AQT85 ♥84 ♦JT9 ♣AQT N W E S ♠K4 ♥AT ♦AQ8642 ♣KJ7	♠8732 ♥Q9753 ♦73 ♣92
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WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
-	-	-	1♦
Pass	1♠	Pass	3♦
Pass	4♣	Pass	4♥
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♣
Pass	6♦	End	

Contract: 6♦ Lead: ♥2

The straightforward diamond finesse gives you around a 50% chance. (Assuming the lead to be 4th best, West is more likely than East to have the ♦K but, if East has a diamond void, you can try 3 rounds of spades.) Does it improve your chances if you cash the ♦A and play spades?

It seems that this makes only when you fell a singleton ♦K or spades are 3=3. But it also probably makes if East has ♠Jx, even if he has 4 trumps. (He ruffs the third spade and you cross with a club to play a fourth. He ruffs and you again cross with a club to play the last spade to throw your losing heart. Only a very bad club break will beat you.)

It also makes when West has ♠Jx provided he has a singleton or King doubleton trump.

In addition, the probability of an even break in spades has increased (from 35% to 38%) when the hearts are known to be 5=4. In all, as is usual, combining your chances increases your rate of success - here from less than 48 % to over 59%..

September 2023 Bidding Challenge

Patrick Shields

We have 14 panellists this month from whom to distil wisdom about how to bid these hands – all from recent events. There were strong preferences on two of the deals and clear preferences in most of the others...

Problem 1 Teams None Vul

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

This deal arose in the Mixed/Seniors Teams in the European Open in Strasbourg recently, and your approach to this bid depends to some extent on your confidence in the opposition. They have bid diamonds in which you have a strong holding, but unless partner has four spades (which is possible these days) they have a nine-card spade fit, and you do not expect good quality opponents to miss that.

If you pass you must expect the auction to continue with 3♠-P-4♠. You might feel good at this point as you have some defensive values and partner might contribute something too. But maybe not.

If you do decide to bid your only choices are to support hearts or bid clubs. There was only one panellist chose the former

SHORT: 3♥. Unusual in that I am removing no space really, but I like to push them up a little. I know they probably have nine spades or so, but we can't stop them bidding spades anyway. East may try more diamonds.....

The strongest effect of bidding hearts here is to encourage partner to lead the suit – and if LHO chooses 3NT you might be glad that partner did not strike out with a spade against that. But there is an alternative:

DRAGIC: 4♣. I want partner to support and to lead my suit against spade contracts.

CLOW: 4♣. Stopping West bidding an easy 3♣ is paramount. We might even reach a good sacrifice if partner is 3613.

PIPER: 4♣. Pass is obvious, only a mad person would bid in the possible misfit auction.

But the best argument is put by:

WHYTE: 4♣. With trepidation...They could make 4♠, but I have useful defensive assets. The trouble is, will 4♣ be considered forcing by my partner? I think not since logic says I have other bids to show greater strength. So I hope he will react if he has useful clubs; if not, he should stay mute. I will pass if 4♠ is bid after my 4♣ and my partner stays quiet.

The clear majority, however, keep quiet, with some hope in defence:

SMITH: Pass. We have no heart fit, and no guarantee we have a club fit, so I can't see any case for coming in at this level. It's their hand and I'm happy to let them play it.

ASH: Pass. I hate it when people say "What is the problem?" but I really cannot see any alternative here. 3♥ is possible but if the cards lie well enough for us to make this part score, I would expect to beat 3♦ by at least a couple of tricks.

WILKINSON: Pass. Maybe everyone else has partners who are more reliable, but I don't have enough to double for penalties and I don't want to compete. Pass and try to beat it.

A key driver in this choice was only voiced by one panellist:

SIME: Pass. 4♣ is forcing... to a minus score, perhaps doubled.

And that is the question we need to explore. In order to bid constructively when the opponents are silent you do need a new suit to be forcing. In a competitive situation, however, there is good reason to say that helping the defence and being able to sacrifice can become more important than your attempts to bid game (or higher). That argues for 4♣ being non-forcing.

On the day, partner had 3613 shape, and the spade game which everyone was reaching was making much of the time (partner mustn't lead their singleton diamond). Only a small proportion pushed on over 4♠ as your partner would if you had bid clubs.

Problem 1	Votes	Marks
4♣	4	10
Pass	9	9
3♥	1	4
Others	0	0

Problem 2 **Teams** **NS Vul**

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

Do we have a one-suiter here or a two suiter – that's the first question the panellists need to answer. There was a clear majority for treating this hand as a one-suiter – and there were multiple arguments supporting that:

ASH: I definitely want a diamond led if we are defending a spade contract.

SMITH: There's no point in asking partner to pick a minor, as the better his clubs are the more confident you will feel about playing in diamonds.

VALENTINE: 4NT. Should be both minors here, and I will correct 5♣ to 5♦ which should hopefully get a lot of my hand across.

The second question to be answered is how high to bid – and here there were votes for high and votes for low and just one in the middle (although his confidence in partner might not be shared by everyone):

PATERSON: 4♦. At red 5♦ would be a sitting duck, but 5♦ at green is obvious. Partner will realise in this situation that 4♦ is a strong weak jump, and that club values are far more likely to help me than major values.

These who took the high road had few doubts about their choice:

PIPER: 5♦. What else?

SIME: 5♦. Jam the auction to make them guess. So, take away their Blackwood and 5♦ cue bid.

DRAGIC: 5♦. No time for exploration of best fits.

Two taking the low road were just bidding their hands, but others had thoughts of more bidding in mind:

ASH: 3♦. If 4♥ or 4♠ come round to me, I can then bid some number of NT to show a minor two suiter with better diamonds.

SMITH: 3♦. The issue here is whether to walk the dog, giving partner a chance to express his opinion on their chosen game, or to put them to a 5-level decision. As their major suits are splitting poorly, I'll go for the former.

CLOW: 3♦. For now. My next bid will probably be at the 5-level.

What do we learn from all this? Firstly that a suit as good as AKQJ843 is called "trumps". But then how high do we want to go at this vulnerability? Although we had equal numbers on the panel choosing below and above 4♦ the majority will bid over their 4-level major suit game. In which case, surely the sooner we do that the better?

At the table, partner had a useless 5332 hand and the opponents had a trivial make in 6♥ and a potential make in 6♠. The two who bid just 3♦ defended a slam, and three of the six who bid 5♦ defended a slam, while the sole 4♦ effort heard P-P-4♥-end and defended game.

Problem 2	Votes	Marks
5♦	5	10
4♦	1	9
4NT	2	9
3♦	5	5
2NT	1	3

Problem 3 Teams NS Vul

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

This problem produced only two answers from the panellists, and a clear recommendation, but there are some concerns with that choice. The minority felt the choice was easy:

ASH: 3NT. Game in clubs is likely to be harder than in no trumps.

CLOW: 3NT. Hamman's law. It might be better played by partner but we can't have everything.

VALENTINE: 3NT. If 3NT is on, I have to bid it now ... 9 tricks are easier than 11.

But one of their number was less sure

FRIEMANIS: 3NT. Could easily be the wrong spot and punish partner for bidding in the balancing seat, but most of the time they will have a reasonable hand for this to make 3NT a viable spot. I would like to give partner a chance to show preference for 5♣ over 3NT, but a 3♣ bid may talk partner into bypassing 3NT with spade holdings, like Qxx / J10x.

The real worry was something else, only picked up by one of the many who made a 3♠ cue bid:

PIPER: 3♠. I am thinking of 3NT but fear that they will lead diamonds against 3NT.

Which is what happened at some tables when either hand played 3N. This spells defeat for those who were going to pass partner's 3N, such as

SMITH: 3♠. If partner has anything in spades, 3NT will play better from his side. I would prefer to look for this spot than to rush to an 11-trick game.

MCKAY: 3♠. I think I have to do something and I don't want to miss out on 3NT "insurance" as 4♠ may well make.

Some of the cue bidders felt they were promising a good club raise but only one was explicit about his next choice:

SHORT: 3♠. Then 4♣ over 3NT. A good raise in clubs. Partner is quite wide-ranging and probably has 3+ spades (so shortish in red cards), as most Wests would raise to 3♠ with four at this vulnerability. Slam is even possible if partner has as little as

Kxxx-Ax-x-AQ10xxx!

And another hinted:

SIME: 3♠. Enough for a UCB, allowing a stop in 4♣ if partner has stretched and a slam hunt if he has something to spare.

Partner's hand on the day was QJ7-A98-9-AQJT82 and he responded to a cue bid with 3NT. We want to avoid that even if partner's diamonds are J9. It seems a shame to play 3NT when you know they have diamonds. The upside is that a number of those who ended in 3NT got a spade lead and survived. Slam in clubs is quite playable but was not often bid.

Problem 3	Votes	Marks
3♠	10	10
3NT	4	6
5♣	0	5
4♣	0	5
others	0	0

Problem 4 **Teams** **Both Vul**

♠65 ♥QT9742 ♦AK842 ♣--	S	W	N	E
	-		1♣	P
	1♥	P	3♣	P
	3♦	P	3NT	P
	?			

We have had an easy time on this hand so far, being able to describe our hand honestly with two bids. The question is whether that is enough for partner to make the final decision, or have we more to tell? The panel is finely balanced between the bidders and the passers. One choice for bidders was:

VALENTINE: 4♦. We could still, in theory, have two 8 card fits here. Give partner the choice of either red suit and he will know our shape now. Passing 3NT rates to be disastrous, I fear.

SHORT: 4♦. I don't like my club void and ♠xx. 4♥ may play ok opposite some singletons, and 5♦ may be cold with 3NT a no-hoper.

MURDOCH: 4♦. If opener has solid clubs I will pass 3NT. If opener's clubs are less than solid I will bid 4♦.

He then suggests that partner will remove to 5♦ with a stiff ♥ and three diamonds, so there is not much to gain from bidding 4♦ although he settles on:

MURDOCH: 4♦. I would guess to bid 4♦ - probably because I think my opponent will bid 4♦.

The other choice of bid was:

DRAGIC: 4♥. Not interested in a diamond contract with a 5-3 fit. 3NT could go badly wrong if partner has nothing in diamonds.

FRIEMANIS: 4♥. Partner should take it as a 6-5 hand and non-forcing. Do not want to overbid this hand as partner is likely to have an unsuitable hand with length in both black suits.

Partner will have assumed that the earlier 3♦ bid was just fishing for 3N as a contract. So when you bid 4♥ there is an implication that you had serious diamonds or you would not have shown them on the previous round. The idea that partner can deduce 6-5 shape is growing on me. The majority however decided to go with partner's choice:

SMITH: Pass I've told partner my hand and he's chosen the spot.

PIPER: Pass. I trust my partner.

WHYTE: Pass. I trust my partner ... I get out before we are doubled.

For some it was not so comfortable:

SIME: Pass. Let's hope for nine runners or a second spade trick. There might be a better game but bidding 4♦ won't necessarily find it.

ASH: Pass. Tough! I am not happy to play in 3NT with this hand but anything is a bit of a guess and partner could well have six running clubs and a spade stop, giving me nine tricks whilst 4♥ could have three trump losers.

A useful point was made by

CLOW: Pass. Partner should have bid 3♥ if he has Hx in Hearts.

Is there a "right" answer? In the event, 3NT made more often than not, but neither red suit game was close to making. The plurality of the panel did best, and we all know that 3NT as a choice of contract has a good track record.

Problem 4	Votes	Marks
Pass	7	10
4♥	3	7
4♦	4	5
Others	0	0

Problem 5 Teams EW Vul

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

It is very much in our style to open the bidding any time we can, and particularly in first seat at green. The downside is that sometime partner gets too excited, and the question is how we cope when that happens. Many did not comment on the opening bid but some did:

SIME: I approve of opening 1♥ although it may have pushed us overboard here.

WHYTE: Of course, I wish I had not opened this miserable hand; it really lacks stuffing. I prefer to pass and get my oar in later when my partner will not overestimate my strength.

Everybody was very accepting that partner was showing a game force with spades, and everyone was willing to respect that except for:

PIPER: Pass. Even if it's forcing.

This might score well but will surely distort partner's bidding in the future. There was a strong consensus on the preferred "way out" of this problem, although many were unhappy with it:

MURDOCH: 4♠. Not proud of this but it does sound weak.

SMITH: 4♠. I have nothing to add to my earlier bidding.

SHORT: 4♠. Ugh! 3♠ is forcing, so I can't pass. Least bad option. 3NT is ridiculous.

CLOW: 4♠. Another ugly bid but bidding 3NT looks very poor as the defence can cut communications so easily.

MCKAY: 4♠. I wish I hadn't opened.

And some sounded more positive:

ASH: 4♠. Looks to be the best game.

SIME: 4♠. Let's play in a suit where we won't breach David Burn's First Law.

VALENTINE: 4♠. It is either this or 3NT; I don't see any other reasonable choices. Partner has elected to show a GF hand with spades. I don't have a diamond stop, so I make my least worst bid and raise to 4♠.

There were some who felt they should not bid 4♠ (after all if it's the right place, won't partner bid it whatever I say?).

Out on his own, suggesting a suit that was playable opposite a doubleton, was:

WHYTE: 4♥. What else comes to mind?

But more comfortable were:

DRAGIC: 3NT Finally an easy problem. Raising spades would imply a doubleton.

ROSS: 3NT. I have shown my hand and assume partner has something in diamonds.

There are two issues / dangers on every hand – one is getting to the right denomination and the other is getting to the right level. The bidding so far does not make 3NT appealing, but it might be the right place. One plus side is that it might sound less positive to partner than a spade raise – which is what you would always do with a singleton diamond.

The bidding unfolded at many tables like this in the European Mixed/Seniors Teams. My teammate chose a raise to 4♠ and his partner powered into the poor spade slam. Zia's partner in the same position followed Whyte by bidding 4♥, and now Zia powered into 7♥, which also made when hearts came in and spades were 3-3. The hand opposite was AKT743-A9-AT9-KT.

Is there a good answer? Sorry but no – sometimes it's about the least bad answer.

Problem 5	Votes	Marks
4♠	10	10
4♥	1	8
3NT	2	6
4♣	0	5
Pass	1	2
other	0	0

Problem 6 Teams Both Vul

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

It's nice to have a problem with such a good hand, but it is a problem – with the panel evenly divided between passing and bidding. For the passers:

CLOW: Pass. What else?

WHYTE: Pass. Trust partner.

SHORT: Pass. I can't see a sane alternative. Partner is a passed hand after all.

PATERSON: Pass. Note that partner passed originally. If not, I would venture 4♣.

SMITH: Pass. It's easy to construct a hand for partner where slam in hearts could be good (e.g. Qxxx/QJx/xxx/Axx), but how can we get there? If I show my heart suit now, he will expect a longer suit. Pre-empts work which is why we use them, and I assume team-mates will give their opposition the same problem.

The clearest slam invite was chosen by three, one of which was:

VALENTINE: 4NT. Partner may need to bid 3NT on a lot of rubbish hands, but for when they have a proper hand, we should invite the possibility of slam even opposite a passed partner.

This point is important – partner can easily eschew a major suit that does not deserve a jump, for the sake of a possible game bonus a level lower. Two bidders did not sound terribly confident to me:

DRAGIC: 4♥. That was the original plan, I have to stick with it.

ROSS: 4♥. I don't particularly like it but don't particularly like any other bids either.

But there were two also who sounded more positive:

SIME: 4♣. Too much to Pass when thirteen tricks may be possible in more than one denomination. 4♥ loses diamonds which is most likely to be partner's long suit.

ASH: 4♣. I am worth a try for slam, even though partner has not promised much. I think a good partner will interpret 4♣ to show similar values to an invitational 4NT but looking for a fit. So we will find a slam in either red suit and can still stop in 4NT if there is no fit.

When the deal occurred, across the Seniors and Mixed knock-outs in Strasbourg, four passed 3NT, six bid 4♣, two bid 4♥ and one bid 4NT. Partner had a 3352 9-count and the diamond slam was easy. Only the 4♣ bidders were successful.

Problem 6	Votes	Marks
Pass	7	10
4♣	2	10
4NT	2	8
4♥	3	6
other	0	0

Problem 7 Teams Both Vul

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

This is possibly the lowest auction on which we could ever produce a bidding problem, and indeed it generated five different answers from the panel (which only one other problem did). The simplest way out was:

MURDOCH: 3NT. Natural strong minor one-suiter.

This is standard for many top players, who avoid this particular jump with a balanced hand. There were a few who chose to rebid clubs:

FRIEMANIS: 3♣. Hopefully the least creative and confusing bid for partner over which another bid should be found if it is the right thing to do, most of the time.

We will all agree with the first part of that answer but not the second part – everybody else sees the danger of all pass being too great. The alternative in clubs was:

ASH: 4♣. The fact that there is no good rebid here suggests that I should have opened this hand 4♣. So now I will have to go beyond 3NT but at least this shows a hand that is too strong for a non-forcing 3♣. This should get us to the right level in clubs, although I suspect that the absence of opposition bidding indicates that 3NT may be the right place to play.

CLOW: 4♣. I hope partner is on the same planet, great hand with 6+ clubs and diamond support. I wish I had four diamonds but any bid I make is flawed.

PIPER: 4♣. Don't bid 3♣ - there are no losers, they can pass 3♣.

The most common choice was:

SHORT: 2♥. I reverse with this sort of hands, though it is usually 3+ in the suit. My partners are not allowed to raise past 3NT, though obviously present partner (although "excellent") may not know this. I remove 4♥ to 5♣ obviously (yes, I know 5♦ might be better).

SIME: 2♥. A variation of the Bridge World's "nightmare hand." Too heavy for 3♣, a trump light to support partner's suit. Their panel's solution is usually the phoney reverse or the phoney Strong Jump Shift.

ROSS: 2♥. I want partner to bid again. I will bid 5♣ if he bids 4♥. I will support Diamonds if he bids anything else.

A key point they do not mention is given by:

WHYTE: 2♥. Safe, my partner does not have a four-card major; I am on the way to 5♦/6♦.

There is one appealing alternative offered by two panellists; all the choices mentioned so far have dangers, but it looks like this choice only creates issues if partner has exactly a 3343 shape. Promising an extra diamond is a lie, but only a small lie:

PATERSON: 3♠. The most intelligent lie, as I can pass 3NT comfortably. Over 4♠ I will bid 6♣, and over 4m, 4♥.

MCKAY: 3♠. Splinter agreeing diamonds - adventurous!

This hand is from the Winter Fours last January, and I must admit that at the time I thought 2♥ was best but the concept of a spade splinter is much more appealing. On the day partner held J92-852-AQ432-Q6 and 3NT is in trouble (but made more often than not) and the excellent slam rolls home.

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

Problem 8 Teams None Vul

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

What is your lead?

The dilemma faced here is between being aggressive and being passive. The latter is much more in fashion these days – the world has shied away from leading away from honours into strong no-trump hands. At least from a four-card suit – but is it different with five?

Three suits were led in response to this problem, with only diamonds avoided (for good reason). The smallest number went for spades, all with the same thought in mind:

ASH: ♠6. With only one high card I would have to be exceedingly lucky to be able to set up and cash the club suit. I need to find partner's 5-card suit, and this is more likely to be in spades than hearts. Diamonds are too risky as even if partner has (say) QJ10xxx declarer may have a second stop.

CLOW: ♠8. The ♥10 will probably be the majority view but a Spade has a better chance of reaching partner's length and strength.

VALENTINE: ♠6. I like leading my shorter major in these auctions and have found it to be quite successful. Partner has some stuff and we need to hit it. A club lead rates to give up a trick, a heart might not find partner with enough tricks anyway, and a diamond likely resolves declarer's problems – leaving me with a spade.

They have in mind beating the contract. It's not quite the same with the heart leaders:

FRIEMANIS: ♥9. Mostly because making an active lead into the strong no-trump or better is likely to cost a trick and partner is more likely to have length in the major suits.

SMITH: ♥10. I want to lead a major in this auction and fate has given me a good safe major suit lead.

Or more positively:

DRAGIC: ♥9. There are many layouts where a major suit lead is required to defeat the contract and only a few where partner has four clubs or Axx.

The third group have the plurality but not the majority:

ROSS: ♣4. 4th best of longest suit.

SIME: ♣4. A club needs the least from partner to beat 3NT, which is our objective at teams. I'd lead a top Heart at matchpoints where every trick matters.

MURDOCH: ♠4. We need a very favourable lie of the suit for a club to be productive. North probably has 8+ cards in minors which suggests leading a major. But there are chances, with luck, that the club suit can produce four tricks so I would go for that.

WHYTE: ♣4. I play by strict rules for leading. A five-card suit gives me better chances of defeating the contract. The only countervailing argument is that I don't have a side entry. My partner has most of our points. So a heart lead is a semi-close second choice, but still a second choice. The only thing I would add is that if it was a pairs event, I might lead the 1098x suit as a safe lead, and that a major suit lead is preferable to a minor suit lead if the suit length is the same.

SHORT: ♣4. Every day of the week. With partner being passed, they have about 27+ Miltons, so we need a long suit and another winner to beat this. No reason why partner can't have ♣Q10x over dummy's ♣Jxx (or similar) and declarer ♣Ax. Yes, I know responder has not asked for majors but a spade lead will be too slow and partner might just have opened 2♣ with AKxxx non-vul. He is excellent, remember! Not many points for me in Scotland though – a nation of “safe” leaders.

(He got that wrong!) A key point, suggesting we need more than average luck, is made by

PATERSON: ♣4. Note that partner lacks opening values, so the opponents are not short of points. At pairs I would lead a heart.

On the day, across the field there were 11 led a heart, 7 led a club and just one led a spade. The club leaders produced the best arguments above, and were rewarded as partner had ♣QJxx.

Problem 8	Votes	Marks
♣ any	6	10
♥ any	5	6
♠ any	3	6
♦ any	0	1

Many thanks to the panel again for all the contributions. Well done to Iain Sime with 79 points and to Jack Paterson with 78 points.

Panel Answers

September 2023

Problem		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	
Top Scoring Choice		4♣	5♦	3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass 4♣	2♥ 3♠	♣	Tot
1	Iain Sime	Pass	5♦	3♠	Pass	4♠	4♣	2♥	♣4	79
2	Jack Paterson	Pass	4♦	3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass	3♠	♣4	78
3	Bill Whyte	4♣	3♦	3♠	Pass	4♥	Pass	2♥	♣4	73
4	John Murdoch	Pass	5♦	3♠	4♦	4♠	Pass	3N	♣4	71
5	Bill Ross	Pass	5♦	3♠	4♥	3N	4♥	2♥	♣4	68
6	Tim McKay	Pass	4N	3♠	4♦	4♠	4N	3♠	♥9	67
7	Miro Dragic	4♣	5♦	3♠	4H	3N	4♥	2♥	♥9	65
8=	Robert Clow	4♣	3♦	3N	Pass	4♠	Pass	4♣	♠8	64
8=	Brian Short	3♥	3♦	3♠	4♦	4♠	Pass	2♥	♣4	64
10=	Mike Ash	Pass	3♦	3N	Pass	4♠	4♣	4♣	♠6	63
10=	Harry Smith	Pass	3♦	3♠	Pass	4♠	Pass	3♣	♥T	63
10=	Ronan Valentine	Pass	4N	3N	4♦	4♠	4N	2♥	♠6	63
10=	Douglas Piper	4♣	5♦	3♠	Pass	Pass	4N	4♣	♥9	63
14	Gints Freimanis	Pass	2N	3N	4♥	4♠	Pass	3♣	♥9	54

Competitors Top Scores

Congratulations to of **Walter Ewing** (Perth) and **Douglas Mitchell** (Buchanan) on outscoring most of the panel with **71**.

Other good scores:

Ali Gordon	(GBC)	67
Ted Black	(Buchanan)	66
Emily Garden	(Phoenix)	64
Ken Rae	(Shetland)	62
John Williams	(Montrose)	61
Paul Maiolani	(GBC)	60
Eric Priest	(Dundee)	59
John P Hamilton	(New Melville)	58
Danny Hamilton	(Buchanan)	55
Andrew Ramage	(Carlton)	54

SBNews Bidding Panel Problems

November 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@bluevonder.co.uk

quoting your SBU Membership number.

Closing date: 26 November, 2023

Problem 1 Teams None Vul

	S	W	N	E
♠AKQ65	-	-	-	3♦
♥QJ92	-	-	-	-
♦5	Dbl	P	4♦	P
♣AJ3	?			

Problem 2 Teams All Vul

	S	W	N	E
♠Q32	-	-	-	-
♥KQT432	1♥	P	2♣	P
♦A	2♥	P	3♦	P
♣J53	?			

Problem 3 Teams EW Vul

	S	W	N	E
♠-	-	-	-	-
♥AKQ984	1♥	P	1NT	2♠
♦T95	?			
♣AQT5				

(Dbl would be takeover)

Problem 4 Teams EW Vul

	S	W	N	E
♠QJ4	-	-	-	2♥
♥A9	-	-	-	-
♦Q875	P	3♥	Dbl	P
♣T973	?			

Problem 5 MP Pairs NS Vul

	S	W	N	E
♠6532	-	-	1♦	3♠
♥K8	-	-	-	-
♦KJ6	?			
♣AKT7				

Problem 6 Teams None Vul

	S	W	N	E
♠AJ97	-	1♦	1♥	P
♥92	-	-	-	-
♦AT	?			
♣QJ843				

Problem 7 Teams Both Vul

	S	W	N	E
♠A83	-	-	-	-
♥42	1♦	1♠	Dbl	3♠
♦AKJ5	P	P	Dbl	P
♣T643	?			

Problem 8 Teams NS Vul

	S	W	N	E
♠A84	-	-	-	-
♥K63	-	-	P	1NT
♦J75	P	3♣*	P	3NT
♣AT62	End			

*3♣ = natural, invitational

What is your lead?