

The Kibitzer



Winter 2021 | Volume 68, Number 4



The culture of bridge



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Have you ever played bridge in another country? It's one of the dozens of reasons our game is so cool—you can play it anywhere. You can find bridge players all over the globe. And we here in Canada are a hub for immigrants—many of whom bring their bridge forte with them. In this issue the Kib sat down with Ontario players who hail from other countries. You can read all about their stories starting on page 10.

Of note, two of them became partners: **Uday Maitra** and **Terrence Rego**. They're originally from India and now regular competitors at the national level. **Wiebe Hoogland** is from the Netherlands, **Ruth Falkenstein** is from South Africa, and while **Danielle Gosselin** is Canadian, she spent many years in Montreal and just as many in London, England. So, it felt like she was living in a foreign country when she settled in Mississauga.

Can we expect more bridge players to settle here? Yes, we can! According to Reuters, Canada is on track to receive just over 400,000 residents this year. Over 100,000 will be from India, 35,500 will be from China, 32,600 from the Philippines, and significant numbers from Nigeria, Pakistan, the US, Syria, Eritrea, South Korea, and Iran. The GTA must be one of the most diverse areas in the world as immigrants now make up 46% of the population. Of those immigrating to Canada from the years 1980 through 2016, about half were “economic immigrants,” over a third were sponsored by family, and 15% were refugees.

Two things to look forward to in another generation: Canada cultivating world class bridge players, and world class soccer players. Could a World Cup berth be far behind?

In this issue we have some new contributors, and they have the same surname! **Olivia Laufer**, one of our top juniors, takes over the Junior column, while **Howard Laufer** (no relation) writes about his introduction to bridge. Thanks to our regulars who wrote this

issue: **Janet Galbraith, Ray Jotcham, David Ellis, Robert Griffiths** and **David Turner**. Special thanks to **David Colbert** for the final column of his series *Bridge by the Numbers*.

Thanks to Debra Kestenberg for adding bridge related captions to the animal photos. They originally appeared in *The Guardian* and were finalists in the **2021 Comedy Wildlife Photography Awards**.

Congrats to Josée Hamill, Barbara Seagram, Brian Gray and Enid Roitman. See page 8 for why they deserve a high five.

And once again, it's that time of year for Unit 166 members to submit their choices for our annual awards: the Kate Buckman Award (for someone who contributes to others' enjoyment of the game of bridge), and the Audrey Grant Award (for the bridge teacher who exemplifies the best of the profession). Please submit your nominations to David Ellis, ellis2106@gmail.com before Dec. 31, 2021.

Andy Stark
andy.kibitzer@gmail.com
 647 530 1360

On the cover (clockwise from top left): Wiebe Hoogland, Ruth Falkenstein, Danielle Gosselin, Uday Maitra and Terrence Rego

BRIDGE CONFIDENTIAL

[Bridge Confidential](#) is a musical under development. It is an inspirational and engaging story about partnership, community, and overcoming personal obstacles. We're now looking for investors to [partner](#) with us to help bring Bridge Confidential to the stage.

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See you online and/or at the bridge table!



Joanne Gray

A recent Life Master!

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For Unit 166 members: Nominations please! Do you know someone who contributes to others' enjoyment of bridge? Do you know an amazing bridge teacher? If so, please submit your nominations for the Kate Buckman Award and the Audrey Grant Award to David Ellis before Dec. 31, 2021. David's email is ellis2106@gmail.com

Dear District and Unit Presidents and Secretaries,

We are happy to inform you of the results of your recent election for the Regional Director for Region 1. Jonathan Steinberg has been elected to serve a 3-year term as your Regional Director. Results of the other elections held this year can be found on our website at <https://web2.acbl.org/documentLibrary/about/2021ElectionChart.pdf>. Please disseminate to your District and Unit Boards.

Sincerely,
Director of Elections

The next Board meeting is scheduled for 9:00 am, Sat., Jan. 8, 2022 by video conference.

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) will follow at 11:00 am also by video conference. We encourage members of Unit 166 to attend the AGM. To be added to the guest list, kindly send an email with the header "Attend Unit 166 AGM" to Andy Risman at arismanca@rogers.com. Be sure to include your name and ACBL number. In January you will be sent attendance instructions via email.

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(Visit www.unit246.com for details)

- 1st time members of the ACBL can apply to the Unit 246 Board for a \$20 rebate for their 2nd year of ACBL membership
- Bridge teachers can list their services on the Unit 246 website free

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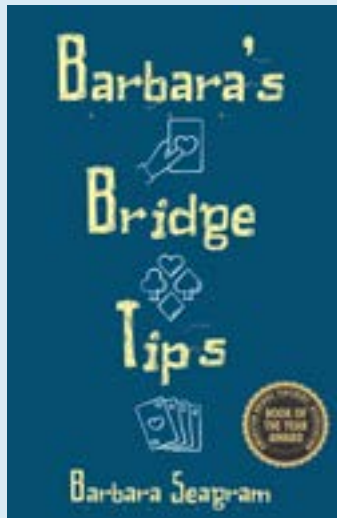
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Ginny Schuett for *'Work Before Vacation'*
in a 3-way tie for the Applebasket Award

Congratulations to all the winners!

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Issue:	Deadline:	Posted online by:
Spring 2022	Jan. 15	Feb. 15
Summer 2022	Apr. 15	May 15
Fall 2022	July. 15	Aug. 15
Winter 2022	Oct. 15	Nov. 15

Kibitzer Editorial Policy

The Kibitzer is published to promote bridge and to inform members of ACBL Units 166, 238, 246, 249 and 255 about tournaments and special events, as well as to entertain with deals and articles of interest. It is also a forum for the exchange of information and opinion among the members. Opinions expressed in articles or letters to the Editor are those of the contributors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Unit Boards of Directors or the Editor. The Kibitzer reserves the right to edit or exclude submitted material.



The Culture of Bridge

As Clint Eastwood asked, “Do you feel lucky?” You’re a bridge player—do you feel lucky that you get to play this wonderful game? (Maybe not on the days the finesses are all off.) But even when you’re not playing bridge per se, to know and fraternize with other bridge players, to be part of this wonderful bridge community we have here in Ontario... surely that counts for something.

There are numerous benefits for learning and playing bridge. One of the biggest is that bridge offers us a community, a sense of belonging. Yes, being part of a crochet club or a bowling team can do the same thing, but what is it about bridge? Bridge can be more than a hobby or a pastime; for some it’s a way of life. Bridge is international. You might find yourself in Colombia or Madagascar and you can probably find a bridge game.

What do ‘newcomers’ to Canada think? Do newcomers to Canada adapt to their new way of life better because of bridge? The Kib asked a few Ontario players to tell us about their experiences acclimatizing to life in Canada.

Wiebe Hoogland

I’m originally from Herbayum, Holland. I attended college there, taking Soil Improvement in Arnhem, The Netherlands. In college I had two opportunities to complete practical work experience: in Norway at an agricultural school and in Surinam on a banana plantation.

Following college, I had already made up my mind to miss compulsory military service and emigrate to Canada. My parents always mentioned the Canadian soldiers that freed the Dutch from the Germans during WWII when I was not even one year old, so that made it an easy choice to go to Canada. Here, after applying to the Ministry of Natural Resources, which was a good fit for my education, I had to

turn down the offer as it was located in Maple with no bus service. After that I applied to the Department of Highways as a surveyor and was hired in the Engineering Audit section. This required travel to various project locations with a crew of 4 and staying out in motels and sharing a room. I got to know the southern part of the province pretty well. I moved through the ranks over the years and was eventual supervisor over field monitoring of the province-wide construction projects and travelled all over the province. Then along came Harris who fired everyone he could. Luckily, I was able to take early retirement with 29 years service and was fortunate to land a contract position with a consulting engineer firm in Toronto doing basically the same work as with the MTO. I am still on contract with them after 25 years.



Sometimes...partners seem to be of a different species

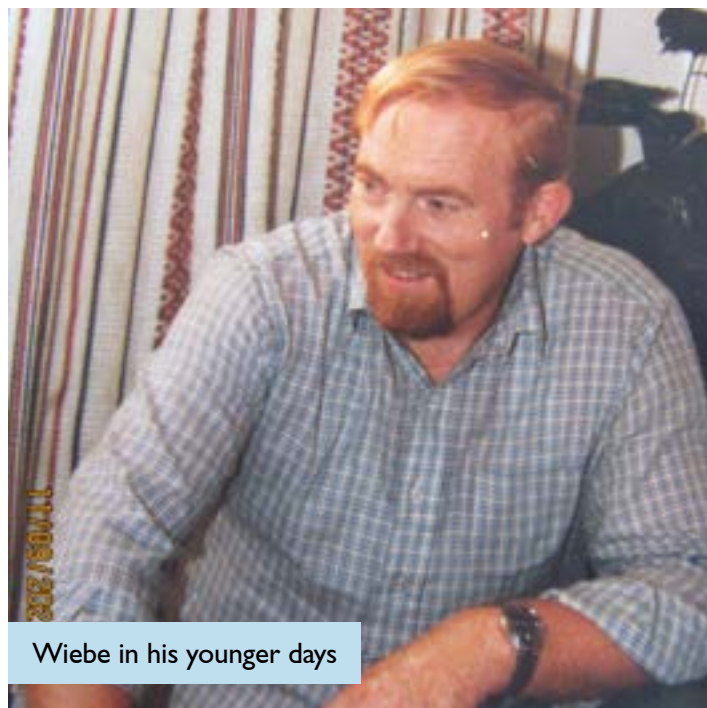
I did not learn bridge until I was 40 years old. It was through my spouse who was in a Monday morning babysitting bridge session at the community centre in Ajax. I was asked to play on days that I was off work. I self-taught by reading Goren and practicing bidding and the play of the hand with my spouse.

I did not play bridge until after I became a Canadian citizen. Through the internet I got into contact with Dutch players on BBO around 2000 and when the Dutch Bridge Association (NBB) started their own online bridge site (Stepbridge) in 2001 I became a member of the NBB as only members can play on Stepbridge. I learned the Dutch system of bidding, which is far less restrictive than what the ACBL allows. Conventions such as Multi 2 Diamonds are used commonly and also other systems showing certain 2-suiters, Muiderberg, for example. It was challenging at the start but currently I like playing the Dutch system more than the ACBL system. Since we went on vacation every year in Holland, I was invited to play in bridge drives, which I probably attended a dozen times. These drives are a lot of fun as they are being held at different locations within walking distance and each round is played in a different location. These locations are usually restaurants and cafés. Some of them are held in one location similar to the ACBL tournaments. In general, they include lunch or dinner and always have great prizes.

I decided to immigrate to Canada when I was in college and had to spend two years in the army (at that time Holland still had subscription) and found that a waste of time. I was going to immigrate with another guy from college, but he found a girl in the meantime and decided not to go any longer; they got married and are still together after 50 years. I applied for immigration and once I got the required papers I flew at the cost of the Dutch government to Toronto in April 1968. The process to get landed immigrant papers did not take too long. When I arrived at the Toronto airport someone from the Dutch Reformed Church took me in and I stayed the first three months with the pastor of the church. They were helpful, getting me a job and a place of my own across from High Park. I met a Dutch family with five children and befriended them. I met my wife at their house where she was an au pair (nanny). We got married in Holland at her parents' place and moved to an apartment in Toronto. We had our first child in Toronto and decided to buy a house as the apartment was quite small. We bought a house in Ajax close to the lake and had our second child there. We

moved to a larger house one street over in Ajax and when the MTO moved their office to St. Catharines they moved us free of charge and we were lucky to find a nice large home with a large lot where I still live with our son.

I did not play bridge when living in Toronto. We started to play at an ACBL affiliated club in 1984 in Ajax. Playing for the first time at the Ajax club was pretty good as the members of the club welcomed us with open arms. As we got better at playing the game it was an evening we looked forward to and eventually we played at the GM club in Oshawa and the Brooklin club. I also played at the Humphries game in Scarborough.



Wiebe in his younger days

However, playing against top players in Canada, such as Keith Balcombe, was a challenge to say the least. We also played against Trevor Dundas and Peter Mott and others from that area. I played mostly with my wife but later I partnered with Walter Soetens.

I have played at different locations as a result of my work taking me all over the province. I would phone and the club would arrange a player. I played in Midland, Cornwall, Guelph, Kitchener, and London. Currently I play only at the Bridge Centre of Niagara (BCON) in St. Catharines two or three times a week, which has increased to five sessions online during the pandemic. We are now open for face-to-face bridge on Wednesday and Thursday afternoons. Other

games will open up in the near future.

Canada and Holland are similar in culture. The biggest difference was not having the pub life in Canada while in Holland everyone went to the pub every so often. Also, the fact that people here did a lot of outdoor activities, in particular going to parks. Since I did not play bridge at the time of immigration, bridge had no impact on assimilating into the Canadian way of life. The first years my friends were all of Dutch origin and therefore assimilation was mostly through work which made it easier as I was on the road with three other guys during the summer and therefore was exposed to their way of living.

Once I became a member of the ACBL the first goal was to become a Life Master which took almost 20 years as the point awards were minuscule in those days, (0.1 MP was not as bad as it sounds today). In those days we played tournaments within a radius of 300 km from our home and got our pigmented points slowly because with children we could first only play local tournaments and thereafter on weekends. I achieved my next goal this past week by going over 1500 points. I do not have any real personal goals except for playing with newer players, which is challenging but also rewarding.

I am very much involved in the administration and governance of bridge as president of the Bridge Centre of Niagara and also of Unit 255. In addition, I sit on the Board of Directors for District 2 and as a District 2 representative on the ACBL Board of Governors (to be renamed the Advisory Counsel). I'm a sounding board for issues and situations, and it gives me a good feeling knowing that the members appreciate all the work I am doing for them. Bridge forms a large part of my daily life and is keeping me connected with many people, which I would otherwise not have. Playing five times per week keeps me mentally alert. Without bridge my social life would be empty, especially after losing my wife who passed away in 2020.

Uday Maitra

I'm from Calcutta, India. I completed my Engineering from the Indian Institute of Technology in New Delhi, followed by an MBA from the Indian Institute of Management in Calcutta. After a gap of many years, I completed a Master's program in Clinical Psychology from Harvard University. My work has involved handling mid to large size IT projects

all over the world.

I first learned to play bridge in the early 80s while in university and working my first job. It was a great learning experience. A lot of senior bridge players with national and international bridge experience helped me to fast-track my bridge development.

I immigrated from the Middle East in the early 90s and settled in Toronto with a brief stay in Montreal. The motivation was to provide my two young children with exposure to good education. The company I worked for in Dubai offered me a job in Canada, so the process of relocation was not difficult at all, except for the significant weather adjustment (in winter).

My work involved significant travel, so my bridge attention was sporadic. This was true for most of the nineties and almost all the entire first decade of 2000.



Uday and his family

I have always enjoyed playing bridge and it was no different in Canada. I played briefly with Lino D'Souza in the early nineties and then with Junaid Said and Manju Law. In the last decade I have played with Terrence Rego as also with Lino. Some tough opponents have been John Rayner and Martin Hunter, both of whom I hold in high esteem for their skills, as well as how they conduct themselves at and away from the table.

I am an infrequent visitor to the bridge clubs, occasionally playing at John Rayner's (now MOBridge) or Hazel's.

Since my free time has been at a premium, I prefer playing tournament bridge. There is a bit of a Catch 22 here. One can't play serious tournament bridge without serious time investment in one's partnership. Hence my tournament play has also been quite sporadic.

Adapting to Canada was quite easy for me (other than the weather). As mentioned above, my work has always involved significant travel, so I have not been able to devote steady time to bridge. When in Canada, my priority was to spend time with my family. In fact, bridge has helped me more when traveling to other countries. Many evenings, be it in London, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, or Nicosia, I found it easy to go to the local bridge club and get a game with a pick-up partner. Boredom was never a concern during travels.

I do enjoy competitive tournament bridge. Within the limited time that I have competed in tournaments, I have been fortunate to have had partners such as Manju Law with whom I got to the semi-finals of the Mini Spingold in the 2000 NABC in Toronto, all the more fun because we picked up a pair from the partnership desk to be our teammates. Lino D'Souza and I won the Canadian Open Pairs in 2012 and the national IMP Pairs in 2013. Terrence Rego and I won the Canadian Online Team Championship in 2020 and we got to the quarter finals of the 2020-21 CNTC. I am happy with those achievements. Now that the pandemic is easing up, I see myself traveling a lot more to visit my children and grandchildren in Dubai and London. I will play bridge when I can find the time, but I can see that it will be taking a backseat in the immediate future.



Uday

Uday finds a squeeze

Here's Uday in action in a Canadian national team event.

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

As South, Uday opened 1♥. West overcalled 5♦. When this came back to Uday he bid 5♥; nobody knows what is making so he 'took out insurance' as the saying goes. West then doubled, perhaps to show a good 5♦ bid.

West led the club queen which East overtook to play the ♦9. Uday won his ♦A and ruffed a diamond in dummy. He then ruffed a club in hand with the 9 and exited a high heart to West who returned a heart. Uday now had a strong inferential count: West started life with the singleton ♣Q, 2 hearts, 8 diamonds (for his bid of 5♦) and therefore 2 spades. Rather than rely on West to hold the ♠Q, Uday went for the squeeze. He ran all his hearts to come down to this position:

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

When Uday cashes the ♥10 from hand and pitches the small spade from dummy, East has no good pitch. If he lets go a spade, then Uday runs the spades, the ♠3 taking the 13th trick. If East pitches the ♣A, then the ♣10 becomes high: a classic squeeze on East. This result won some imps when Uday's teammate got to play in 5♦, going down one.

Culture Shock

Do you feel blue and distressed living in a foreign country where you have recently moved? It's absolutely normal.

The term culture shock is a relatively recent name coined by the Finnish-Canadian anthropologist Kalervo Oberg, in 1960. Until recently this concept was assumed to be a constant negative experience described by Oberg as a "disease."

According to Oberg there are six negative aspects produced by culture shock which are:

- Stress provoked by the psychological effort of adjusting to the new environment
- A sense of loss derived from the removal or deprivation of friends, status and role
- Rejection of the host country's culture
- Uncertainty about role expectations and self-identity
- Anxiety and rejection towards the new way of living of the host country
- Feeling of helplessness for not being able to cope well in the new environment

Furthermore, Oberg identified four stages of this "disease": honeymoon, frustration, adjustment and acceptance.

Honeymoon

Is characterised by the enthusiasm for being in a different environment. This stage can last from a few days to a few months and is usually experienced by those people who hold high-profile positions and do not find themselves forced to face daily life difficulties.

For example, businesspeople who are pampered in luxury hotels, showed the best places and taken to dine in fine restaurants. If the individual does not go further beyond

this stage, they describe their stay abroad as an enjoyable experience when they return home.

Frustration

Beyond this superficial stage, there is the stage of rejection which happens when an individual of any background is compelled to cope with daily difficulties in the host country. Conditions of living, including the weather can be hostile and in this stage the visitor does not respond well to these variations.

They feel a sense of rejection towards those problems such as language, shopping, and transportation trouble.

Adjustment

They perceive the hosts of the new culture to be insensitive to their situation and seek the help of their countryman in most cases feeling a sense of dependency from them. However, the latter, if well established in the new culture, usually avoids their countryman suffering from culture shock.

This is the critical stage of crisis where the visitor either overcomes their frustration and sickness or leaves. (Fight or flight?)

Acceptance

Usually after going through a period in a new country and after struggling with the emotional stages, the final stage of culture shock is acceptance. Acceptance does not mean that new cultures or contexts are completely understood, but it means an understanding that full awareness is not necessary to function and thrive in the new environment. During the acceptance stage, foreigners are able to gather the resources they need to feel at home.

~Adapted from <https://www.languagesalive.com/culture-shock-effects/>

Terrence Rego

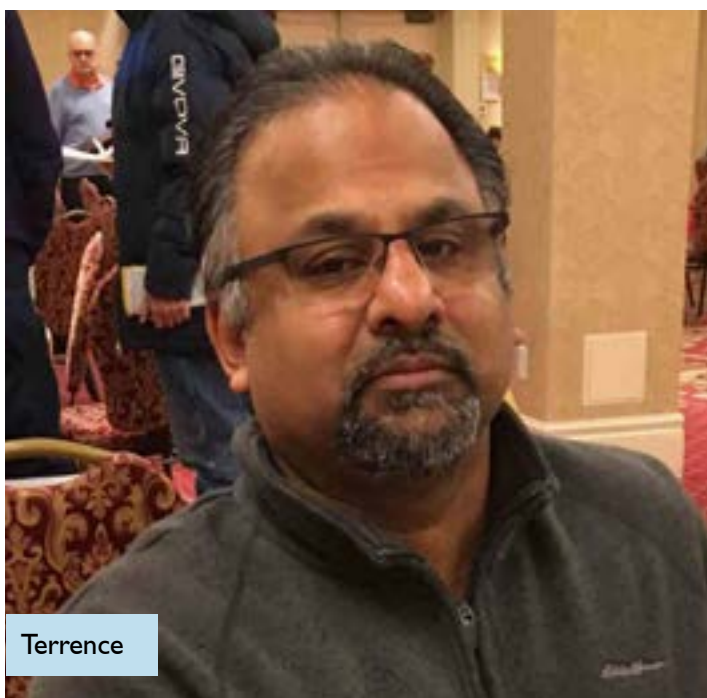
I'm originally from Bombay, now known as Mumbai, India. I graduated with my Bachelor's in Commerce, from Bombay University. It's been almost 19 years since I first arrived in Canada—I've been working with Walmart.

I first learned to play bridge when I was about 16 years old during the summer holidays. My dad taught my

mother, brother, and me, and also some of our closest friends from the neighbourhood. We played very basic bridge: we opened our longest suit with 13 points, a 1NT opening was 13-19, no Stayman, all two-level openings were strong. 4NT Blackwood was the only convention.

Playing bridge in India was enjoyable, be it travelling for tournaments in crowded trains, or getting to local tournaments on my motorbike. Every tournament,

regardless of its size, including weeklies, had prize money, free snacks, and sometimes free lunch. I remember that appeals would be frequent and had to be resolved before the start of the next round often causing delays. Can't forget about the good-old precision we played with alpha, beta, gamma, delta, epsilon, but the fun part was socializing after the game, and going through the hands. We didn't have hand records in those days, but we all could remember the cards the next day. Bridge results and write-ups always make the sports pages of the local newspapers.



Terrence

I left India in 1991 and worked in Saudi Arabia and Dubai for 10 years. There I would often see advertisements in the newspapers welcoming immigrants to Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. I chose Canada because I had my sister and other relatives here. I went through an immigration lawyer who filed my application. The process took about two years. Based on my education, finances, job skills, relatives, and fluency in English I got through easily. I first lived with my sister in Brampton, then moved to and continue to live in Mississauga

I played my first tournament right away, even before I got a job or a driver's license. Lino D'Souza dragged me out for a game. Roger Snowing and Gary Westfall were regular early teammates.

Bridge in Canada is structured and disciplined. I was used

to an easy come easy go attitude. Games here start and finish on time. The director is the boss; we were used to a director yelling several times at the top of his voice to get the game started. Bridge players are much older here than in the UAE or India. Masterpoints are what people play for; many have amassed a few thousand but are extremely weak. I was surprised that there are no cash prizes. The fun part is missing, lack of younger players, and no cash prizes; that's why it's hard to bring in and retain new players to the game.

Pandemic or no pandemic, I don't play at clubs. It's not fun and a total waste of time. Why would one pay money and waste time playing against weak players in a club? I was used to playing for a small fee and taking home some cash prize whenever I finished among the winners. I play a lot on BBO most often with equal or better players and have absolutely no interest in having more masterpoints to my name.

I can truly say that coming to Canada is the best thing that has happened to me. I work in a small capacity at Walmart, and still am able to live comfortably. Playing at Sectionals and Regionals gives me an opportunity to interact with different people, most who are much smarter than me. Without bridge it would be just work, family, and a few friends.



**Reaching into memory banks
for what's been played**

My team won the Canadian Online team Championship last year, so we decided to field the same team for the CNTC. We sailed through comfortably to the quarter finals and believed that we had a fair chance of winning the event, but at some point, the CNTC officials disallowed our best pair on the team to continue.

I enjoy playing against the strongest opposition and being an outstanding partner and a teammate.

Ruth Falkenstein

Some friends call me Ruthie. I came to Canada from Johannesburg, South Africa. But my birth country was Zambia in a town called Mufulira.

I attended college for beauty and cosmetology in South Africa for 4 years. I'm a qualified hairstylist, having owned two salons in South Africa, and I've worked as a hairdresser in Canada although I am not practicing hairdressing now.



Ruth

I own my own business in selling gifts for all occasions. I started playing bridge in 2004 and became an ACBL member in 2006. I never played bridge back in South Africa, however they do have very good bridge clubs there.

My husband and I knew that we would definitely not bring up our children in South Africa. The process of our immigration was quite quick. We were sponsored by my brother-in-law, so the process took about six months. We immigrated with our daughter who was 18 months old at the time; our son is Canadian born. We have the strange accent that our kids do not.



Partners are in sync today!

The culture adjustment was huge, especially getting accustomed to Canadian weather. But 33 years later and our kids and grandkids and family are complete in this great country we call Canada. New friendships were made, and life is good.

I didn't start playing bridge when we immigrated: I was too busy with hairdressing and family duties as a mom and wife. I started to learn bridge with six friends and have never looked back. Love the game. Love the challenge and keep learning new things all the time.

We were all playing social bridge in the beginning at each other's homes and built up a great friendship and had lots

of fun. It was quite the challenge to experience duplicate bridge and we encountered many uncomfortable incidents with stronger players. But we plucked up the courage and embarrassed ourselves on many occasions and now we are hooked.

I played a bit at Hazel's bridge club but was soon introduced to the bridge scene at Thornhill Seniors Club and have been a member for many years. I've taken lots of courses and played in many tournaments and love the challenge. I have made 4many friends at bridge and have learned a lot from playing in a stronger field. During the pandemic I have been playing on BBO and also at the virtual clubs, especially the Thornhill club.

In my experience I can say being a bridge player has enlightened my life. Meeting wonderful friends and making new acquaintances all around while travelling to tournaments. It has filled a real void especially during the pandemic. I miss face-to-face bridge and the one-on-one interaction with people and friends. Hope to resume all this soon and connect again in good health and peace.

Danielle Gosselin

I was born in Montreal and lived there my first 29 years. While growing up in Quebec, my parents always used the threat of sending us to Ontario if we misbehaved.



Just happy to be playing bridge

I learned bridge in London, England, in 2005. I was hooked. I could not get enough of it and made a nuisance of myself trying to find games with anyone willing to play me. I was lucky that two teachers spent some playing time with me.

Then I came back to Canada in 2013. While still living in London, I googled nearby clubs in Mississauga. I found Steve Overholt's club then went to John Rayner's. My current regular partners are Ann Shaw, Sherrill Bain, Linda Lane, and Eileen Grady.



Martin Hunter & Danielle

I was afraid that I would not be able to replicate what I considered the best bridge club in the world. My London club was truly the best! But I quickly found the clubs here to be warm and welcoming. I found partners in no time and made great friends. I usually play in Etobicoke and Mississauga and love to play in tournaments.

Toronto was as foreign to me as China. 29 years in French speaking Montreal and 29 years in Europe made Ontario a true foreign country to me. Bridge was my social introduction to this new life. It also provided me with a new career of sorts: teaching bridge for beginners. It anchored me to this "foreign landscape," and I was able to quickly establish some normalcy.



Meet your new Regional Director: Jonathan Steinberg

I am proud and honoured to have just been elected to the position of ACBL Regional Director for the combined Districts 1 & 2. Once the process is complete, the new ACBL Board of Directors will have been reduced from 25 to 13 members but the original Districts will remain for the purposes of special events, NAP, etc.

I served on the ACBL Board from 1994-2008. Since then, the ACBL has made many poor decisions costing (literally) millions of dollars of membership money. To wit: the poor choice of CEOs, the ACBL Score fiasco (loss of \$1,000,000?), the Hawaii NABC disaster (\$600,000+ loss?), the CEO Bahar being fired leading to an \$800,000 payout, a lawsuit from a former ACBL Board member that led to a \$550,000 payout.

Then the worldwide pandemic changed all of our lives. Notwithstanding all of the above, the ACBL remains solvent. BBO has proven to be an excellent source of revenue that is keeping the ACBL alive...financially, at least. But membership has understandably declined 5-10%. Not to mention that a large percentage of ACBL members do not play online.

During most of my time on the Board, I served on the ACBL Appeals & Charges Committee. We had excellent legal advice from Jeff Polisner and the late Peter Rank. In the past dozen years or so, the ACBL has struggled on the cheating file. I am not a fan of "negotiated settlements" for serious ethical infractions but given the large number of cases, it may be the only viable option. Several decisions by the ACBL Appeals & Charges Committee have been controversial. They seem to always come down on the side of being too lenient. In addition, there is a huge backlog of cases. The current system is struggling.

Major items that I will be following up on:

1) The Pandemic of Cheating that has infected our game and threatens to destroy it.

2) An improvement of relations between Canada and the ACBL; do everything I can to persuade ACBL management to reschedule a future Montreal NABC in Summer 2026 or 2027. The Montreal 2020 NABC was canceled due to the pandemic.

3) Restore equity to ACBL's selling of masterpoints. Please do not confuse that with inflation. I have been told the Board has finally approved a Strength of Field formula to address some of the issues, but that management is still doing the programming. Given the current pandemic, hopefully, it will be complete by the time F2F tournament bridge resumes.

Related to this is the question of online "colourless" masterpoints. The ACBL has multiple yearly masterpoint races that cover every conceivable category. In every situation, points won online are separate from points won in F2F bridge. As it should be.

But there is one exception. Lifetime masterpoint totals are combined. Given how different F2F is compared to online, this makes no sense. For example, playing against robots, Leo La Sota, the King of online bridge, won 8,000 masterpoints in 2020. He may well win as many as 10,000 in 2021. It is only a matter of time before he becomes ACBL's Number One Masterpoint Leader leaving Meckstroth, Wold, Passell, etc. in his dust. Does this make sense to anyone? In my opinion, there should be two distinct All-Time masterpoint lists, one for F2F play and one for online play.

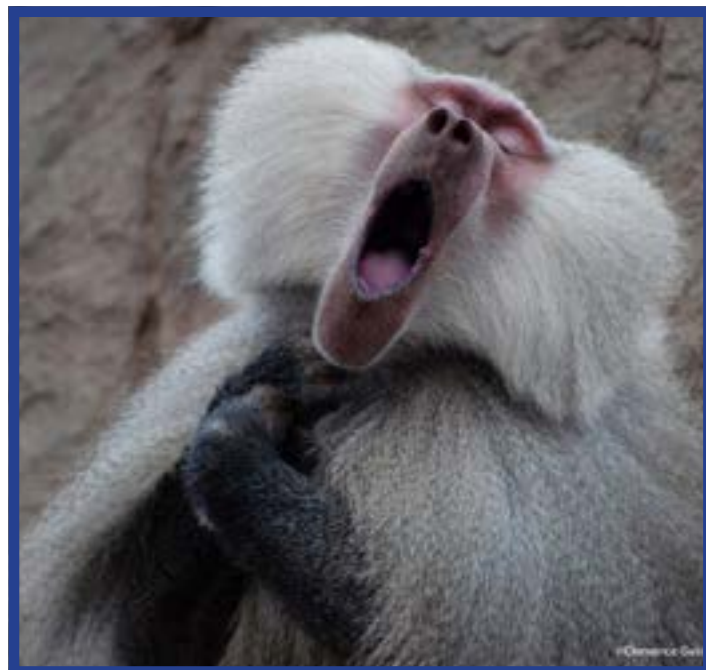
4) Perhaps the number one issue as we emerge from the pandemic, and as F2F bridge clubs and tournaments prepare to resume, is: How will F2F bridge clubs coexist with online virtual bridge clubs? Will the dramatic increase in masterpoints currently given online, remain as is or...what? Will online masterpoint awards be equitable with F2F bridge club awards? How will the online virtual club sanction fees compare to F2F table fees? Will it be a level playing field?

The relationship between the ACBL and BBO is complex. How it will be resolved going forward will be critical to ACBL's future. I know that the ACBL Board has spent hours discussing these issues and the process is ongoing.

I invite your input on any and all of the above issues. I look forward to hearing your thoughts and suggestions. But above all, I am eagerly anticipating the resumption of F2F Sectional and Regional tournaments during 2022 where we can meet and greet in person.

Salut/Cheers!

~Jonathan



16 hands; No points

Jonathan Steinberg, ACBL# L207293 Unit 166
ACBL Regional Director, Region 1 (Districts 1 & 2)

Education:

B.A. McGill University, 1973;
M.B.A. University of Western Ontario, 1982

Bridge:

Platinum Life Master
2nd North American Swiss Teams, 1985
2nd Wernher Open Pairs, 2007
2nd Canadian National Team Championships, 2012

Non-playing captain (NPC), Team Canada:

7th World Junior Team Championships, Ft. Lauderdale, 1999
Hero International Youth Bridge Festival, Hertogensbosch, Netherlands, 1999 (Canada won) & 2000
1st World Schools Team Championship, New York City, 2004
10th World Youth Bridge Championships, Sydney, Australia, 2005 (Canada won the Bronze medal)

Administration:

ACBL Board of Governors, 1990-1993
ACBL Board of Directors, 1994-2008
ACBL Educational Foundation, 1998-2002
WBF Executive Committee, 2009-2011

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For Newer Players

By Robert Griffiths

Finding The Right Slam

I was East and opened 1NT, passed to partner who bid 3♣. This is Puppet Stayman, asking if I have 4- or 5-card majors. I replied 3NT, showing no major suits longer than 3 cards.

After a little thought, my partner bid 4NT. This is not Blackwood; my partner is suggesting that I bid 6NT if my hand is a maximum.

Board 1
North Deals
None Vul

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

EW 6♣; EW 3♥; EW 2N; EW 2♠;
Par -920

Well, is 16 points a maximum? I decided that with a nice 5-card club suit, I would consider my hand a max so I bid 6NT. Wrong! I was quickly down when South led the ace and another diamond.

I did have a good hand with a nice 5-card suit, but I had the chance to show both. A bid of 6♣ after the 4NT invitation would suggest a maximum with a good club suit. With 5 clubs and an outside singleton, partner would have been happy to play the club slam which is unbeatable.

Oddly, most of the pairs that played 3NT by East scored the same -50 that I did in 6NT. A lead of South's fourth best diamond gives NS the first 5 tricks against 3NT. Against the slam, South's lead of his ace restricted his side to 2 diamond tricks---my queen had become a stopper.

Taking Your 10 Tricks

South dealt and opened 1♣, to which North responded 1♥. East passed and South mulled over a 3-card raise to 2♥ but decided on a 1♠ bid.

North wanted to try 2NT, but his diamond 'stopper' was just a wee bit sketchy. He settled on 2♠, ready to explain that he had a club mixed in with his spades. South jumped to 4♠.

West led the ♦Q and continued the suit after East encouraged.

Board 12
South Deals
EW Vul

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

South has an easy ten tricks: 4 spades, 3 hearts, and 3 clubs but if he ruffs a diamond in his hand, he will only be able to take all of his tricks if the spade split is 3-3 which is less likely than a 4-2 split.

But South can make sure of his contract by discarding a club on both the second and third round of diamonds. Now, another diamond can be ruffed in dummy with the 3 and South has the ten tricks that he counted at the start. He unblocks spades, and comes to hand with a heart to pull the two remaining trumps. If West leads their singleton club, South takes the first ten tricks.

Watching The 8s and 9s

South dealt and opened with a preemptive 2♥. West passed and North jumped to 4♥ which was passed out.

West led a fourth best ♦3 and South counted his losers: 1 heart, 1 spade and 1 or 2 clubs. He might hope for a miracle and try to win trick one with the ♦K, but found a better use for that card.

Assuming that East held the ♦A, declarer played low on the diamond lead and East won with his jack. East found his only safe exit: a small trump which declarer won in the dummy.

Board 12
South Deals
EW Vul

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

Now the declarer, who had been paying attention to the diamond spots, led the ♦K off the board. This was covered by East's ace and ruffed by South. He would have thrown a club if East hadn't covered.

Next, he crossed to dummy with a trump (drawing the last one from East) to lead the ♦9 and, instead of ruffing, declarer threw a losing club from his hand. West won the ♦Q and switched to a club, but it was too late for the defence. Declarer rose with dummy's ♣A and led the established ♦8 from

the board, throwing away his last club.

In the end, South lost just 1 spade and 2 diamonds. By setting up his diamond spots while discarding 2 club losers, he avoided having to try the club finesse and brought his game home. Sometimes your tricks aren't where they seem to be.

Playing Against The Field

I was South, with my usual moderate hand. After East passed, I opened 2♣ and my partner bid 2♦, which promises values and is forcing to game. I bid 2♥ and partner responded 2♠.

I was unsure of where to go next; 3♥ would show the length and strength of my hearts but if 3NT were the best spot for our side a 3♦ bid would likely be needed to get us there. I tried 3♦ and sure enough, partner bid 3NT which was passed out.

Board 6
East Deals
EW Vul

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

East led the ♣K and North considered. With any lead except a club, there would be 12 easy tricks: 6 hearts, 3 spades, 2 diamonds and 1 club. But the club lead would use up the only entry to

his hand while the ♠A in dummy (my hand) blocked that suit. If he took trick 1 with his ♣A, he would win only ten tricks. If this were a team game, this would just be an inconvenience---ten tricks made and the contract secure.

But this was a matchpoint pairs game. North has to consider what will happen at the other tables. A more common contract will be 4♥ which will have the same spade blockage problem if a club is led. But in a heart contract, with a normal diamond division, only a club and a diamond will be lost.

North can see that to avoid falling behind all of the heart bidders, he needs to take 11 tricks in NT.

He ducked the ♣K at trick 1 and the continuation of the ♣Q at trick 2. West had given his partner count signals in clubs, so East knew that both his partner and North had one club each. East led a third club to knock out North's ace.

That was all North needed to make his 11th trick. On the third club North threw dummy's ♠A and so was able to cash his king and queen of spades, throwing dummy's 2 diamond losers on the spades. The dummy was now high and 11 tricks were made, losing just 2 club tricks.

Note that East can foil declarer's plan by shifting to any other suit at trick 3. If he does that, North will never get to his hand and the defence will win a third trick.

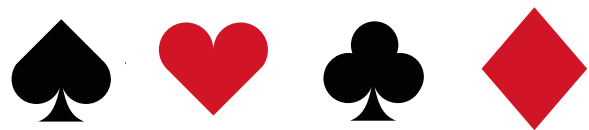
Making 11 tricks in 3NT gave us a score well above average while 10 tricks would have been well below average.



Securing the Contract Quiz

By David Ellis

As Marty Bergen says, the most frequent game contract in bridge is 3NT. (The second most common game is 4♠.) Therefore, declaring 3NT becomes critical; you should think about using the Concept of Securing the Contract. The concept of making your contract includes play techniques in notrump that help you succeed by diminishing the risk.



Question #1

Contract: 3NT by South
West leads the ♠J which South wins with the A.
What card should South play and why?

♠ 8
♥ 6 5 4
♦ A Q 7 6 4 2
♣ K 7 6

♠ A K 4 2
♥ K Q 3
♦ J 10 3
♣ A 5 2

Assessment:

Winners: Spades: 2, Hearts: 1, Diamonds: 1, Clubs: 2,
Total = 6

Need 3 more tricks

Project suit: Diamonds

Question #2

Contract: 3NT by South

♠ 5 4 2
♥ 6 5
♦ A K 6 5 4
♣ A 9 6

♠ J 10 9 8 6
♥ A 7 4 3
♦ Q J 8
♣ 8

♠ Q 7 3
♥ Q J 10 9 8
♦ 10 9
♣ Q 7 3

♠ A K
♥ K 2
♦ 7 3 2
♣ K J 10 5 4 2

West leads J which South wins with the A.
What is the best way to play the clubs?

Assessment:

Winners: Spades: 2, Hearts: 0, Diamonds: 2, Clubs: 2,
Total = 6

Need 3 more tricks

Project suit: Clubs

ANSWERS

#1

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

The meaning of West's 7 is that there are probably five hearts in West's hand which means East has two hearts. South must play the 3. East will win and return a heart. You will play the K in which West will probably win with the A to play a third heart, which South will win with the Q. South will finesse diamonds which loses to East's K. East now does not have a heart to lead back to West. If West started with four hearts, then the opponents will only win three heart tricks and the contract is secure. Playing the 3 is always the correct play. This will secure the contract when hearts are divided 5-2.



Sometimes....it drives you to this....

#2

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

The dangerous hand is East because if East gets the lead and shifts to a heart, then declarer will lose a number of tricks when the ace is with West.

The plan:

While the '8 Ever, 9 Never' rule says you should play for the club queen to drop, you must finesse East for that card. Say the club finesse loses to West's ♣Q: a heart lead from West will not defeat you. Therefore, at trick 2, play a club to the A then a low club to the J or run the ♣9. This sequence will secure the contract. Since East can never win with the club queen, East cannot get in to make the contract-defeating heart switch. When East is dealt the club queen you take the first ten tricks with proper technique.



Anticipating a sneaky play



Bridge by the Numbers: Five Tips for Better Defence

By David Colbert

I play a lot with intermediate and advanced players who are still honing their games, and the following are five things I see that are constantly done wrong or are inferior:

Start playing informative kings and queens on defense when discarding or following suit.

If you have as your last five cards $\spadesuit KQJ$ and $\clubsuit K9$ and decide to throw a spade, throw the king. Partner needs to know that you hold $\spadesuit KQJ$. If you toss a jack, you deny the queen of a suit. When partner leads the $\clubsuit A$ promising the king and you hold $\clubsuit QJ3$, play the queen. This guarantees the jack. Partner will usually now lead low to your hand. But whatever she does, she knows where all the honours are at trick one. Did you overcall $1\diamond$ with $\diamond J10985$? Your first discard should be the $\diamond J$!

Don't preempt with values.

You have a partner who is entitled to information. Over $1\clubsuit$ by them, bid $1\spadesuit$, not $2\spadesuit$, with $\spadesuit KQJ985$ $\heartsuit A34$ $\diamond 765$ $\clubsuit 3$. A bid of $2\spadesuit$ should show a one-suited hand with not much outside. If partner knows this, she can carry the ball further and sacrifice or compete as she sees fit. I see players jumping to $2\spadesuit$ on all kinds of hands with six spades. This effectively takes your partner out of the game in terms of making future judgments in the auction.

You have $\spadesuit x$ $\heartsuit AQxxx$ $\diamond Ajxx$ $\clubsuit Jxx$ and partner opens $1\heartsuit$. RHO bids $2\clubsuit$. What is your call? Say you are white vs red. Why do people jump to $4\heartsuit$? This shows a weak freak. Make a cuebid of $3\clubsuit$ to show at least a limit raise. Yes, you will probably make $4\heartsuit$ but sometimes the auction isn't over. Maybe partner almost opened $2\clubsuit$. Maybe the opps bid $5\clubsuit$ next and partner has to decide

what to do, expecting almost no defence from you. This will not turn out well. He may miss a double or he may sacrifice, expecting them to make $5\clubsuit$.

But, if I am Opener, my bid is more descriptive than pre-emptive. I don't mind opening a weak two bid with two aces for example. An opening Weak 2 is wide ranging, not necessarily a preempt; it shows 4 to 11 points and a reasonable 6-card suit.

Stop leading the ace from AK.

Exception: unless it is the opening lead in my unsupported suit, and they are in a suit contract. If you and partner have bid a suit and supported it, lead the king. This shows either the KQ or AK of the suit. The ace denies the king. The reason for this is that sometimes we choose to lead an unsupported ace in our bid-and-raised suit. We are a bit stuck for a lead. Maybe I overcalled with $A109xxx$ and partner raised. The general assumption that the ace shows the king is based on the fact that it is generally unsound to lead a lone ace otherwise. After a suit has been bid and raised there are usually only five of that suit left. Partner will figure out what is going on. She will see the queen or ace somewhere probably, and signal appropriately. With Jxx she will discourage anyway. In the midgame it is necessary to lead this way: if dummy has Jxx of a suit and I lead the ace, partner can signal encouragement with the king and discourage without it. 35 years ago, ace from AK on opening lead was unheard of. Now it is done in all kinds of situations. I think people do it out of habit and partner often has no idea where a king is when an ace is led!

Before returning lead at trick two, ask yourself what dummy is providing.

In the following three hands, the declarer opened 1♠ and partner led a low heart to your ace. You have to analyze what you see and then take your best shot. Think about your play at trick two for each of these scenarios:

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

Contract: 4♠ Dummy
 ♠ A 5 4
 ♥ 6 5
 ♦ A K J 10
 ♣ J 9 4 2 You
 ♠ 8 7
 ♥ A 4 3 2
 ♦ 8 5 3
 ♣ K 10 8 3

Contract: 2♠ Dummy
 ♠ A 5 4
 ♥ 7 6 5
 ♦ 10 9 2
 ♣ 9 6 5 4 You
 ♠ 8 7
 ♥ A 4 3 2
 ♦ Q 8 5 4
 ♣ K 10 8

Our hand is somewhat similar in each case but dummy tells us what to lead next.

In a) we have controlling cards in both minors and dummy's main asset is the heart shortage. Lead a trump to cut down the heart ruffs.

In b) the diamonds are ready to run for discards:

declarer is close to five spade tricks and four diamond tricks. Lead a low club now to set up a possible club trick or two. We have to hope we get in, maybe with a spade, and can then take four tricks. Partner knows we don't have the heart king and will defend accordingly.

In c) dummy is "dead." This is a frequent situation whereby we will strain not to help declarer with our leads. He probably has only one dummy entry and has cards he would like to lead up to. Lead a heart back. The ♥2 is best, to show three remaining. This can't possibly hurt; I am not underleading a minor suit honour—I'll let declarer break the minors.

Play upside down attitude signals (UDCA).

A shout of encouragement should be clear. The 2 says: "Keep leading this suit," or, if it's a discard, it says: "I have one of the top two missing cards in this suit." So, with ♥K1083, I get to play the 3 and keep the K108.

To discourage, we play the highest card we can afford. From J986, play the 9. And from 874, the 8. The rationale for UDCA is we are less likely to need high cards in suits we discourage. And we want the encouraging signals to be as clear as possible. Very low spot cards are easier to identify than high spots. Some of the intermediate players in our club are now playing upside down attitude signals. They are liking it better and finding it to be an easy adjustment from standard signals. Try it, you'll like it. Note: upside down signals are only used the first time the suit is broached.

Try these 5 pointers to move your defence up a level!





Get Psyched

By Olivia Laufer

Here is a hand that I played with some of my fellow bridge juniors recently on BBO:

North Deals
EW Vul

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

How do you think the bidding would go? Take a minute and think about how you would bid it with your partner and how it might have actually happened at the table. I'll wait.

Did you think of something? Good guess but you're probably wrong. A reasonable player came up with this potential auction when questioned (although many reasonable auctions are possible):

West	North	East	South
	Pass	1♥	1♠
2♠	Pass	3♦	Pass
4♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

But if you expected that, you probably forgot the first clue that I gave, that this is junior bridge. The bidding actually went:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	1♥	1♠
3♥	Pass	4♥	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

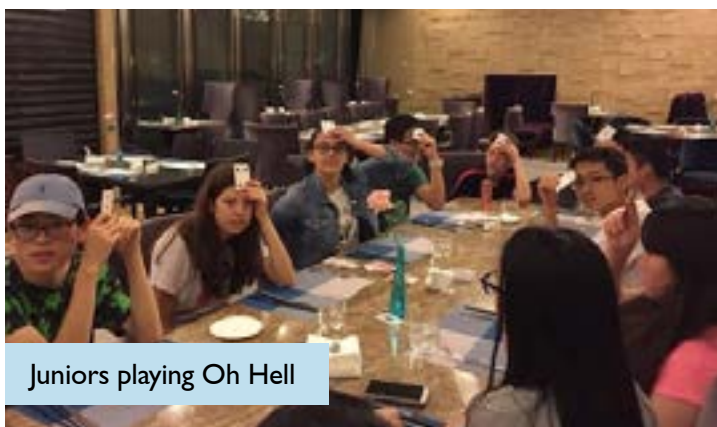
The result was 4♠ making. Such is the nature of junior bridge. To be fair this is a rather tame junior bridge auction.

Juniors like to experiment with bidding and play, and we sometimes make up our own absurd conventions. But this can be a good thing, trying different and unconventional tactics can allow us to learn what works and what does not. Bridge is known to be a game in need of new blood, but there is already a very vibrant junior community. I have gotten to meet and play with many diverse and interesting young bridge players from all over the world. Once I played bridge with a girl in Finland who didn't speak English, whereas I did not speak any Finnish. I learned how to say heart, diamond, spade, club, big, little and the names of the cards in Finnish and we started the game. When I didn't like the way she had played a hand I simply glared at her afterwards instead of being able to discuss a post-mortem analysis. Not surprisingly, we scored a whopping 25%. My favourite bridge experiences have been those playing with other youth, such as the yearly National Youth Tournament at the Summer Nationals. Some of the best trips of my life have been getting the opportunity to travel to Italy and to China for the Youth Bridge World Championship.

To no one's surprise, if you put a bunch of bridge kids together in a foreign country they will play a lot of card games. Even during our "time off" from playing in the tournaments, we would often relax with a deck of cards whether it be in the bus on the way to the hotel or between sets. Our love of card games does not extend only to Bridge. The Canadian youth bridge team

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can often be found playing Hearts, Cutthroat Bridge, Oh-Hell, second-best bridge (which our coach tries his best to keep us away from) or Barboo. Perhaps the constant card games fuel our competitive spirits.



Juniors playing Oh Hell

My partner of a decade and I have embarrassed ourselves at our fair share of bridge tournaments, and in front of a fair number of very serious bridge players. Sometimes we like to kibitz some of the biggest names in bridge (if they let us) and we sit at the edge of the table, starstruck, taking in their every move. Once we stayed up way past our bedtimes to play in the Werner and we both dropped all of our cards several times each respectively during the bidding and play of one of the hands.



Olivia and Albena Vassileva

Bridge is more than just an endless slog of collecting more imaginary points and ugly t-shirts, it's a lifestyle. And for me, it has been a community. When you sit down at the bridge table with someone, you'll probably learn a lot about them, whether it be that they have a grandson that they'd love to set you up with or that they find that the convention centre is much too drafty. Either way, the people that I've met playing bridge, young and old, have always been keen to encourage new players, and I am glad to have met them.



Albena, Victor Lamoureux, Olivia, and Jasmine Xiong



Olivia and Albena on St. Patrick's Day



For Advancing Players

By David Turner

“ABC” Plus

I apologize if you’ve seen this hand before, but it’s a beauty. If you don’t get it right, you’ll be in good company.

Rubber Bridge, NS vulnerable.

West	North	East	South
3♥	Pass	Pass	3NT
Pass	4NT	Pass	6NT

♠ K Q 9 2
♥ 10 3 2
♦ A 10 2
♣ J 3 2

♠ A 4 3
♥ A 5 4
♦ K J
♣ A K Q 9 4

On the lead of the ♥K, East pitches a middling diamond.

Regarding the auction, the balancing 3NT is very wide range (my partnership puts it from 17 to 24 points), so dummy’s raise was aggressive—but she had reason to suspect that if partner were to bid the slam, he’d probably make it.

The Play:

It seems to me I haven’t stressed the need for counting enough in my previous hands...nothing is more important. With apologies to David Mamet, “ABC: Always Be Counting” should be your motto. Keep careful track of West’s distribution on this deal.

Assuming clubs come in for 5 tricks, you have 11 top tricks. The most obvious sources of manufacturing that 12th trick are spades dividing 3-3 or by taking a winning diamond finesse, probably through East. (It might seem that East could

be squeezed in the pointed suits if we duck the first trick, but both threats are in the dummy, so that won’t work). The other thing to watch for is the paucity of dummy entries—if we successfully finesse East for the diamond queen, we’ll need an entry back to the diamond ace afterwards.

So, we win the first trick and run five clubs. West surprisingly follows to three of the clubs, then pitches two hearts, as does dummy. East follows to two clubs, then pitches three more diamonds. West already counts out for 7 hearts and 3 clubs, so spades could still be divided 3-3. Let’s now see about the spades. But be careful...you’ll need to play the ace off first to make sure you can get back to dummy if you take the diamond finesse through East. So: ♠A, ♠Q...West follows twice, so 12 of his cards are accounted for. If we play off the ♠K now, and West shows out, we won’t be able to finesse East’s queen for three diamond tricks—and it’s 7-1 or 8-0 that East has the queen. What’s your play now?

Think for a moment before reading on.

The actual declarer took those great odds and finessed the jack of diamonds into West’s stiff queen for down 4! Sorry to give you another hand with a defender holding a singleton queen!

Do you see what he should have done at the crucial moment? Play a diamond to the king...if West shows out, spades are 3-3. If he follows small to the diamond, play the ♠K, and a spade to East, throwing the blocking ♦J away and forcing East to lead from his ♦Qx into dummy’s ♦A10!

Not easy to see. In fact, the actual declarer was one of the greatest declarers ever: multiple world champion Pietro Forquet of the Italian Blue Team! He told this story on himself later, after he realized his mistake, and apologized to his poor partner—his wife.

Counting is *almost* the Alpha and Omega of dummy and defensive play... but occasionally technique is the deciding factor.



Hidden Costs II

By Ray Jotcham

Hidden Costs II
By Ray Jotcham

I played my first hand of bridge on May 17, 1959 in a Regional Men's Pairs. I had memorized Goren's Fundamentals of Contract Bridge and thought I knew the game cold. The eight zeros we achieved suggested otherwise. However, these were more than compensated for by our fourteen tops and four other reasonable results for a 63% score. We were leading the field! The evening session was well below average, so we didn't place overall. My partner then said to me that we won 2.50 masterpoints(?) and I would have to join the ACBL(?) to get them. I was mystified but agreed to meet him at the Vanderbilt Bridge Club in downtown Montreal the following week.

After I signed up, the owner of the club asked me if I would like to play some rubber bridge. Having learned my inadequacies the previous week, I declined. Then she asked if I would play as their guest, and they would cover any losses. Wow—a chance to play for free! The economics were right, so I said okay. At 1/10 cent a point, one would have to play really badly to lose much. I actually won a few dollars. A couple of days later, I went back to the club, and was again asked to play as their guest. Again, I won a few dollars. Then the manager asked me if I would like to play as an employee of the club: my stipend would be half my winnings, no table fees, and dinner. Dinner was the clincher since they had a great cook. Here I was, a bridge pro two weeks after I played my first game!

I managed to keep winning somehow, but my lack of experience did show. I was playing with a rather loud partner who sent people to the Emerald Isle (Dublin!) and yelled out with joy when he pulled off a "Vienna Cuppie." One evening, he opened 1♠, and I responded 3♠ (forcing). After a couple of cue-bids, he bid 5NT. I had no idea what this meant, but I bid 6♠. When the opening lead was made, I proudly lay down the ♦KQxx. Before seeing the rest of the dummy, he started shouting at me.

"Don't you know anything about this game? 5NT was the Grand Slam Force! How long have you been playing this game anyway?"

"About two weeks."

He was flabbergasted and started to explain the convention to me. He became a mentor and helped me over some hurdles in the bidding and play.

I quickly learned a few of the basics of playing with partners of different levels and learned which tactics worked and which didn't. In those days, a jump response bid of 2NT showed 13-15 HCP, while 3NT showed 16-18 HCP. Unless partner had a long major suit of 6+ cards, this 3NT call usually ended the auction. I noticed that when the 3NT bidder had more than one ace, slam was sometimes missed. Since missing a slam would cost \$.50 or \$.75 depending on the vulnerability, I decided not to respond 3NT unless my hand had a large number of queens and jacks. My income went up.

Al Roth was one of the great scientists of the game. He invented the Unusual Notrump overcall, the Forcing INT response to a major suit opening, and “Sputnik” doubles (because they came from outer space). These are now called negative doubles. He must have noticed the same problems with 3NT responses that I did, so he decided that in his partnerships, a 2NT response was game-forcing and unlimited in strength. If partner raised to 3NT, he would rebid according to the following scale:

13-16 HCP - Pass
 17-18 HCP - bid 4NT
 19-20 HCP - bid 4♦
 21+ HCP - bid 4♣

If opener was balanced, he could simply add the points shown to his own and choose the appropriate level at which to play. No longer was opener dragged kicking and screaming to slam just because he opened the bidding.

As long as partner raised to 3NT, there was no problem. However, if partner bid a new suit or rebid his own suit, how did the 2NT bidder indicate whether he had slam interest or not. Roth never filled me in on how he coped. After all, some 14-point hands might easily produce a slam opposite a minimum opener, while some 18-counts may not. I thought about this for a while and decided that the 2NT bidder would show controls with a fit and slam interest and show points with either no fit or no slam interest despite a fit. An ace counts as two controls and a king or the QJ of partner’s suit counts as one control. With 0-3 controls, you have a quacky hand full of secondary values unsuitable for slam. With 4+ controls and a fit, your aces and kings may cover opener’s losers; a mild try towards slam is warranted. If this slam try can be made below the game level, so much the better!

Let’s examine some auctions to illustrate the principle:

1♠	2NT	
3♠	?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3NT - no fit, 0-3 controls (therefore lots of secondary values and stoppers). - 4♠ - fit, 0-3 controls - 4♣ - fit, 4-5 controls (could be 4 kings, one ace and 2-3 kings, or 2 aces with possibly a king) - 4♦ - fit, 6-7 controls (one ace and four kings, or two aces and 2-3 kings, or 3 aces with a possible king) - 4♥ - fit, 8+ controls (4 aces or 3 aces and two or more kings or two aces and four kings) - 4NT - no fit, 17-18 HCP (not asking for aces) - may be passed - 5♣ - no fit, 19-20 HCP - 5♦ = no fit, 21+ HCP - with the last three sequences, opener sets the contract

1♠	2NT	
3♣	?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3NT - no spade fit, may have a club fit with 0-3 controls - 3♠ - spade fit, 4+ controls - 4♠ - spade fit, 0-3 controls - 3♦ - club fit, 4-5 controls - 3♥ - club fit, 6-7 controls - opener may bid 3S or 3NT to show no slam interest - 4♣ - club fit, 8+ controls - slam will usually be reached - 4NT, 5♣, 5♦ - as above.

In summary, with no fit or poor controls, the 2NT bidder signs off. With a fit, the 2NT bidder sets the suit prior to showing his controls or shows his controls directly with support for opener’s last-bid suit. In slam-try auctions, it is always necessary to set the suit before starting any investigation.

An example:

South	North
♠ A x	♠ K x x
♥ A K Q x x x	♥ x x x
♦ K x x	♦ Q J x
♣ x x	♣ A K Q x

South: 1♥

North: 2NT - 13+ HCP, forcing

South: 3♥

North: 3♠ - Heart fit, 4-5 controls

South - 3NT - since hearts are agreed, this suggests interest in bigger things

North - 4♣ - I have some interest with good clubs

South - 4♦ - I have a diamond control

North - 4♥ - Nothing more to say at this point

South - 4♠ - I have a spade control

North - 4NT - Things are looking up. How many keycards do you have?

South - 5♣ - Zero or three (I don't play 1430)

North - 5♦ - Do you have the heart queen?

South - 6♦ - Yes I do, and the diamond king as well

North - 6NT - I can count twelve tricks in notrump

The hand above occurred in an online team match, and gave us a big pickup when the opponents bid:

1♥	3NT
6♥	Pass

Going down one when my teammates found an immediate diamond ruff.

If you decide to play 2NT as unlimited and forcing, you can't play Jacoby 2NT. Roth suggested using 3♣ as the forcing raise, along with splinter bids. As I pointed out in my previous article, splinters give away too much information, and a nebulous 3♣ bid (Hey pard, I have four or more of your trumps and may or may not have good controls, but I have enough to suggest being in game. How's your guessing?) has its drawbacks. Since opener may be distributional, it seems advantageous if responder can show mild slam interest with his initial call. I have played the following responses (the Swiss Convention) for about 59 years, so they must be workable (or I've been very lucky so far).

Opener	Responder
1♠	? - 4♣ - I have 4+ spades, and at least 3 aces or 2 aces + the trump king (in modern terms, at least three keycards). - 4♦ - I have 4+ spades, and at least 5 controls (not three keycards) - 3NT - I have 4+ spades, and a side singleton or void - 2NT - I may have 4 spades, but I don't have the controls to bid 4♣ or 4♦
1♥	? - 4♣ - I have 4+ hearts and at least 3 keycards - 4♦ - I have 4+ hearts and at least 5 controls - 3♠ - I have 4+ hearts and a side singleton or void - 2NT - maybe 4 hearts, but not the values for 4♣ or 4♦

Both 4♣ and 4♦ suggest raises with strong controls. If Opener simply bids game, Responder can pass with no qualms, since he has already made a mild slam try. However, the convention can lead to interesting auctions, such as the following:

Opener	Responder
♠ x	♠ A J x x
♥ K J x x x x	♥ A Q x x
♦ x	♦ A Q x x
♣ A 10 9 8 x	♣ K
1♥	4♣
6♥	7♥
Pass	

Opener might have gone more slowly but thought that he would have a play for slam opposite three aces and four or more hearts. Responder suffered a bruise from falling off her chair when partner bid slam opposite her 20-count but recovered quickly enough to evaluate the king of clubs as pure gold and bid the grand. This was worth a top in a 16-table game.

In the sequences 1♥ - 3♠, and 1♠ - 3NT, showing splinter raises, Opener can simply bid game without asking for the location of Responder's shortage if he deems his hand unsuitable for a slam try. This gives away no information to the opponents who are always trying to take advantage of opponent's bidding in any way they can. (A proponent of this was Al Roth. It was said that everybody kept the auction open until Roth decided what to do!) If you do have a hand that might be able to use the knowledge of the location of partner's shortage (an "aces and spaces" hand), you simply bid the next suit to ask. My wife and I have had few bad results from simply bidding the splinter in reply. Note that if bidding your singleton would take you beyond the game level in your suit, a return to 4♥ would show shortage in spades and a return to 4♠ would show club shortage.

A slightly more powerful method is to bid the suit below the shortage; this requires a little more memory work, but it takes away the lead-directing double of a splinter to ask for a particular lead, especially since you might have a playable spot in that suit.

1♥	3♠
3NT	?

- 4♣ - diamond shortage
- 4♦ - spade shortage
- 4♥ - club shortage

1♠	3NT
4♣	?

- 4♦ - heart shortage
- 4♥ - club shortage
- 4♠ - diamond shortage

Again, we can make a slam try without getting beyond the game level. An added benefit of this method is that it allows you to use the bid of responder's short suit as an asking bid of some sort (e.g., controls, extra values): your choice!

A hand from the past (1963):

♠ A Q x x x	♠ K J x x
♥ x x	♥ A K x
♦ A K x x	♦ x x
♣ K x	♣ A x x x

1♠ - normal opening bid

4♣ - 3+ keycards

4♦ - cue bid, do you have anything extra?

4♥ - I have the king here, as well as my 3 keycards

5♦ - Second cue bid, anything more

5♠ - Nope

6♣ - I'm interested in a grand slam. Are you?

7♠ - My doubleton diamond may be the ticket!

Sometimes the convention can prevent an embarrassing result by keeping you from getting too high. Jacoby 2NT bidders would get to the five-level down on a diamond ruff, while Swiss bidders stop at the 4-level.

Opener	Responder	Swiss auction	Jacoby 2NT auction
♠ K Q J x x x	♠ x x x x	1♠ 4♦	1♠ 2NT
♥ x.	♥ A K Q	4♠ Pass	4♦ 4NT
♦ K Q J x x	♦ x x x		5♦ 5♠ (oops!)
♣ x	♣ A K Q		Pass (I play 3014)

In the Swiss auction, Opener knows the side is off two keycards, and signs off in 4♠. In the Jacoby auction, Responder believes the hand is close to slam and asks for keycards, ending at the “Binsky Level” (so-called because Bob Binsky, a Montreal expert with whom I often played, ended up playing at the five-level so often). It is difficult to find a pass over 4♠ with Responder’s hand, but he has shown his lack of keycards; the Opener is captain.

Note that if Responder’s hand were slightly different and he had been able to bid 4♣, the knowledge that he had three or more keycards would allow you to ask for aces. No matter how many keycards he showed, you would be able to determine the right level at which to play (6♠ opposite three keycards, and 7NT opposite four keycards).

Speaking of keycards, how many keycards should you hold to ask partner for his keycards? In my younger days, I played Culbertson 4-5NT, where a bid of 4NT showed either three aces or two aces and the king of a bid suit (sounds like three keycards, even though in the 1930s the term had not yet been invented). This worked very well, so I trained my partners that they should have at least two aces to ask for aces from partner. With a major suit agreed, this usually meant that the five-level was safe. In a minor suit, this isn’t always the case. If clubs is agreed, and you have three keycards, playing 1430 keycard, a 5♦ response by partner puts you in jeopardy. Therefore, if clubs are agreed, you should have four keycards yourself, or switch to playing 3014. Playing 3014, you can ask for keycards with only three since you can stop at 5♣ if partner refuses to cooperate. Otherwise, 1430 works if any other suit is trump.

In summary, everything in this article stems from a complete dislike of the “classical” 3NT response to an opening bid. My methods may not be for everyone, but they can give a partnership a better understanding of how their hands fit together, and hence a more cohesive system. I do enjoy having any possible advantage in the bidding that I can get!



A Winkle in Time – an introduction to Bridge Squeezes

By Janet Galbraith

The term, squeeze, conjures up visuals of players squirming in their seats trying to wriggle out of their inevitable doom. There are few greater thrills in bridge than identifying and executing a proper squeeze – and few greater miseries than being the opponent caught in the crosshairs.

What is a squeeze in bridge? A simple definition is that it is a play that forces an opponent to discard something they would rather not. The situation usually appears at the end of a hand, with only a few cards remaining.

The term “squeeze” originated in the 1920s with Sidney Lenz, who named the play after the same play in baseball. Prior to that, the action was called “forcing discards” and “putting the opponent to the discard,” and originally, a coup. In a baseball squeeze, the hitter bunts when a runner is on third base – the hitter expects to be thrown out at first base, but the runner will score, since the fielder cannot get them both out. The baseball term was invented in 1894 during a game at Yale University.

In his 1934 book, *Red Book on Play*, Ely Culbertson published the following rule for squeezes:

Count the number of busy cards in plain suits (non-trump) held by one adversary. This number is represented by the symbol N. N minus 1 equals the number of uninterrupted winners the declarer needs for a squeeze.

Let’s take a look at some terminology commonly used for this topic.

Squeeze card – when this card is played, it forces the opponent to give up a key card

Threat card – also called a *menace*, is a potential winner that will take a trick if the opponent’s holding becomes unguarded.

Guard – this card prevents declarer from establishing extra winners in that suit

Busy card – this card will either win a trick or guard a potential winner

Idle card – this card can be discarded with no impact on the play

Rectifying the Count – this is a technique of purposely losing tricks in order to reach a certain number of remaining losers (usually one). It tightens the end position so that a squeeze on one or both opponents is achieved. Usually, a defender cannot be squeezed unless all their cards are busy guarding against a threat. If they have idle cards, they can easily pitch them while keeping their guards. To make sure that all the remaining cards are busy, a declarer should lose all of the tricks they can afford to lose early in the play. For example, if you are declaring 4H, lose three tricks early, and in 6S, lose one.

Vienna Coup – this is an unblocking technique used to avoid entry problems when executing a squeeze. It was first recorded in Vienna during the whist era. Below is an example:

♠ A J
♥ A
♦ --
♣ 2

♠ K Q
♥ K 4
♦ --
♣ –

♠ 4
♥ Q 2
♦ --
♣ A

On the play of the ♣A by South, East is squeezed but can escape by throwing a small heart. Although the ♥Q is now set up, South must next play either the ♥Q, ♥2, or ♠4 to be won in dummy and has no entry back to cash it; he must now lose a spade to East. However, if South first plays the ♥2 to the ♥A, East is squeezed when declarer next leads the ♣2 to the ace.

If East discards the ♥K, declarer cashes the ♥Q discarding the ♠J and leads to the ♠A.

If East discards the ♠K or ♠Q, declarer cashes the ♠A and ♠J. As long as declarer plays their cards in the proper order, East will be helpless.

Clyde Love wrote a classic text, *Bridge Squeezes Complete*, in 1959 (2nd edition 2010) and created a mnemonic that is still used today: **BLUE**

B – *Busy*, one defender has both controls stopping your threat cards from becoming winners

L – *Loser*, you have one loser remaining, so the count has been rectified

U – *Upper*, at least one of your threat cards is in the Upper Hand (which plays after the person being squeezed)

E – *Entries*, you have entries to any winners that are established

In 1928, Sidney Lenz created this famous deal for a contest sponsored by Vaniva Shaving Cream. Try figuring out the play even seeing all four hands. South is to make 7♥ after the lead of the ♣Q.

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

Solution:

North wins the first trick, South discarding a diamond. North leads the other top club.

If East trumps, South overruffs and cashes the ♠A, North ruffs out West's ♠K, and one trump finesse captures East's queen.

If East sheds a spade, South ruffs in hand and cashes the ♠A, then ruffs out West's ♠K. South wins the trump finesse and his remaining spades. North wins a top diamond and South ruffs a club. North wins another diamond and coups East's trumps.

If East sheds a diamond, South sheds a spade and finesses trumps. North wins a top diamond and South finesses and runs all his trumps to triple squeeze West.

For example, here is the five-card ending, when South goes to cash their final trump:

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

On South's play of the ♥4, West has no good pitch. If West lets go a club, dummy's clubs are high. If West lets go a spade, the ace will drop the king and the queen-jack are high. If West lets go a diamond, the squeeze will repeat. South will cross to the ♦K in dummy and cash the ♦7 which is now high. That card will squeeze West again.

There are all kinds of different types of squeezes, beginning with the *Simple Squeeze* and *Automatic Squeeze*, but some of the names are very entertaining. The *Winkle Squeeze*, referenced in the title of this article, was originally analyzed and named by Terence Reese. In this play, declarer offers a trick to the opponents, but whoever wins the trick will be endplayed. If a defender tries to unblock a high card, it will

just promote a card in declarer's hand. This technique is used when declarer's cards are winners but there are entry problems to cash them.

The *Suicide Squeeze*, also called the *Cannibal Squeeze*, is unique in that the squeeze card is unfortunately played by a defender (the infamous middle opponent!) This often results when a defender is too eager to cash their winners and forgets there is a partner across the table also holding cards.

The *Hedgehog Squeeze* was analyzed and named by Hugh Darwen in 1968. It might have been named due to Darwen's association with the Hideous Hog, one of Victor Mollo's *Menagerie* characters. In this squeeze, one opponent is squeezed in two or three suits, while the other opponent is squeezed in three suits.

The *Backwash Squeeze* was described by Geza Ottlik in a 1974 issue of *The Bridge World*, although a variation of

this, known as the *Sydney Squeeze* or *Seres Squeeze*, was discovered in a rubber bridge game in Sydney, Australia in 1965, by Tim Seres. The play is a trump squeeze where a defender holds guards in two suits and a losing trump. Declarer has high trumps but must not draw the opponents' remaining trumps. Instead, he ruffs a card high, and the defender, still having trump, must choose to either under-ruff or give up one of their guards. The name refers to the idea that the defender is caught in the backwash of declarer's ruff.

Squeezes can be complicated even when you can see all the cards in an example. But don't be discouraged—it often happens automatically when you rectify the count and run your long suit. When it matters which order you cash your tricks, sometimes you'll miss the correct squeeze position. Take time to do a post-mortem to identify the correct order of play needed and your success rate will improve. The key is to count, watch all the discards, and picture what end position you need when you play the final squeeze card.



A Little Knowledge Is A Dangerous Thing

By Howard Laufer

"You can't pass a take out double!" Alex shrieked at me from across the table.

"What's a take out double?" I sheepishly asked.

That's where my story begins. Clearly, I was sitting in a bridge game that was way over my head. What was I thinking when I said, "yes" to Ron when he invited me to play bridge because they needed a "sub" to fill in for one of their absent regulars. Once a week like clockwork, the same four men played bridge in the back room at the Legion Hall. Back then, cigarette smoke filled the room with an unmistakable pungent odor. As well, the smell of draft beer lingered in the air circulating throughout the Hall. I wasn't much of a bridge player in those days. I had graduated from "kitchen"

bridge or social bridge as some people liked to call it, to playing the "quarter game", a bridge game, invented by some of my cronies during our teaching days together in a small rural town in southern Ontario. Yes, it was a form of bridge but not anything that resembled real bridge. To make matters worse, these guys were playing for money. What a mistake for me to have thought for one moment that I could play bridge with seasoned veterans. I wondered to myself, "Could I bluff my way out of this mess?" At least, I had the good sense to just own up and tell the truth. I really didn't know that much about playing serious bridge. Fortunately, my fellow compatriots were sympathetic. The money game came to an abrupt halt and a new fun game began. The three of them were determined now to teach me something about take out doubles before our bridge session ended

Howard Laufer is a former high school English teacher, now long retired. He and his wife Diane spend their time living in Clearwater, FL and Tillsonburg, ON. Howard and Diane are avid golfers, travelers, and bridge players. They started playing duplicate bridge in 2010 and became hooked on the game. Howard started writing short stories about bridge in 2020 and continues today.

that afternoon.

I continued playing social bridge with a variety of people and gradually I picked up a tip or two that helped me bid better contracts. But as far as play of the hand, I was pretty much on my own. When I retired, and spent my winters in Florida, I first played duplicate bridge in an unsanctioned game that was conveniently located in the retirement community where I lived. There were lots of activities to participate in. My wife and I dedicated our time to golf and to bridge. The game was now duplicate bridge—something new compared to anything else I had tried before. I had a rough start adapting to sophisticated bidding “conventions”. Actually, any convention was sophisticated because I wasn’t aware they existed before. It was in this unsanctioned game run by a kindly, old director named, Walter where I “met” Mr. Stayman and Mr. Blackwood for the first time. I had heard some talk about the Stayman convention so I decided to try it out. After my wife opened the bidding with 1 no trump, I responded 2 clubs. I wanted to find out if she had a four card major. The contract failed miserably because I held a hand with only a few points and no four major. Our opponents, experienced players, very politely said, “You know you have to have certain requirements fulfilled in your own hand before you can use Stayman.” They suggested that I read a book on bridge. Enough said. I was off to the library the next morning. Oh by the way, Blackwood didn’t quite work out either. I took my partner to a slam which, of course, failed when our opponents played the ace and king of the suit that contained my useless doubleton. Some famous poet or philosopher once said, “a little knowledge is a dangerous thing” Boy, was he ever right. Try using a convention that you half know--- and see how that works for you.

Another great thing about duplicate bridge is that you get to meet all kinds of people. Most bridge players are kind and courteous but some can be downright rude. My favorite “meanie” was old Hazel. I can’t even call her a curmudgeon--that would be too kind. It wasn’t that she was hard to

like; she was impossible to like. At least, she was consistent because she treated everyone the same way. Hazel was a card “snapper”. Yes, every single card she ever held, she snapped. Finally, after my patience was completely exhausted, I politely asked her to stop snapping the cards. She looked me straight in the eye and barked back. “Get used to it!” Needless to say, the partnership desk was never happy to see her coming.

The first experts that I ever encountered in that unsanctioned duplicate game were Bob and Betty, a brother and sister act, who could play bridge blindfolded. They grew up in a bridge playing family in Pittsburg where they learned the game at an early age. Betty played slowly and with such precision that I thought that she might have been a brain surgeon in a previous life. Bob, on the other hand, played quickly and decisively. I mention these two only because I discovered something else in bridge that I never knew. Remember, at that time, only “travelers” were used for recording the hands played, and there were no hand records at the end of the session. After the game, doing post mortems, Bob talked to me about the hand that we played against them in round one. I could barely remember the last hand that I played let alone the first one. Looking quite serious, he said, “Remember when you led the two of spades.” Wait a minute! Did he actually remember the lead? At that moment, I realized for the first time how gifted some players are. How do you ever compete against players with that kind of ability? Fortunately, I found out that duplicate bridge uses something called “stratification” to balance the skill level of all players. So I am not really competing against Bob and Betty, only against players in my own “strat”. Still, small comfort for a guy who likes to win at bridge.

While on the topic of genius bridge players, two come to mind. First, I have to mention the only mentor that I ever had. Now that I had finally read Audrey Grant and Barbara Seagram, I decided that I needed a mentor to take my game to the next level. Back home in Canada, the director of our

club, Doug, suggested to me that a new arrival at our club was looking for partners or looking to mentor someone. Perfect! The director did warn me that I should proceed slowly and cautiously while learning new material. My new mentor, Ed, surely knew his bridge. That's what 50 years of playing will do for you. The first words of wisdom I heard from Ed were, "The three level and the five level are for you opponents". This was great advice but unfortunately it all went downhill from there. In one week, Ed had me learning Lavinthal, Cappelletti, Flannery, Smolen, Snapdragon doubles and other stuff I couldn't even pronounce. As you can imagine, after drowning in terminology, I decided to return to something called Standard American that most normal people played. In a parting gesture, Ed also told me that 2 over I was a great convention when used properly. He was probably right but I was so far away by now that I could hardly hear him.

The next bridge savant was my own sister. She was only a little bit older than me but I always acted like her big brother. I liked to protect her when she needed help which seemed quite often during those elementary school days. We were still kids when I tried to teach her to play "Hearts". She tried to learn but it just didn't take. She wasn't interested in playing cards---any cards not even "Fish". Well, you can't say that I didn't try. Years later, all grown up and married to an avid bridge player, my sister now tried to learn to play bridge. Who was she kidding? She didn't even like playing cards. She went to the local bridge club three times a week and played with a number of club pros. After a year of frustration and not "getting it" and on the verge of giving it all up, she suddenly, in one Eureka, moment saw it all! She intuitively had absorbed every aspect of the game—almost overnight. It truly was a revelation. She became so good at the game that when she sat at the table, she felt as if she could see right through her opponents' cards. All of a sudden the game came easy to her. One day, we asked her to teach us some of the nuances of the game. Sitting at the kitchen table, we all bid our hands and I ended up in a game contact. After her lead into my hand and a few more plays, she abruptly stopped the play and said to me, "Why don't you claim?" I looked up a little bewildered. When she saw the puzzlement written all over my face, she went on. "You pull twice more and then take the finesse which will work and all the remaining tricks will be yours." I looked at her again with another quizzical expression. "Can't you see it?" She questioned. It was at that precise moment that I had my own epiphany. I still had a lot to learn about this game!

Now that gets me to the end of my story. When I first joined the Clearwater Bridge Club back in 2010, I discovered a little known fact about myself. Sometimes, I miss the big picture. The very first day that I set foot inside the club room, I noticed something peculiar right away. Almost all the bridge players were old people. I slowly looked around the room and all I could see was a sea of white hair. Did I make a mistake and walk into an old folks' home? I wondered for a moment if I would fit in. I was so much younger than the rest of them. After registering to play, I headed off to the restroom. As I washed my hands in the basin sink, I gradually looked up into the large mirror in front of me. What I saw surprised me. There, staring back at me was an old guy with white hair and a craggy face. I looked like all the other players in the bridge room outside that washroom door. Then I got it. I was just like them! These were my people. This was where I belonged.

I was home!



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