

Christmas continued

three rounds of hearts, finishing in dummy, and a third diamond ruff leave the following position:

♠ A 9		
♥ J		
♦ Void		
♣ Void		
♠ J 7 5	♠ Q 8	
♥ Void	♥ Void	
♦ Void	♦ Void	
♣ Void	♣ 10	
	♠ K 10	
	♥ Void	
	♦ Void	
	♣ 8	

South is on lead and plays the eight of clubs. If West ruffs low, the nine of spades wins and declarer must take the last two tricks. If West tries the jack of spades, the ace wins and then a simple finesse against East's queen is equally productive. The name for this particular gambit – as I explain to Gloria – is the Devil's Coup. To succeed, the side suits always have to be kindly distributed.

Devil's Coup

When we get home, I inform Cindy that Gloria could have made her contract via the Devil's Coup. Maybe I am imagining it, but I think Cindy gives me a disapproving look. Ah! The Devil at Christmas, I see; that is what Cindy thinks is inappropriate. Maybe she is right. 'I'll tell you what,' I say to her, 'Let's give it our own name. How about calling it the Paul Daniels Coup in honour of that famous magician? After all, declarer did make that trump trick disappear!'

Cindy wags her tail, which settles it. ■

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Expiry: CVV..... Issue No.....

(CVV is the last 3 numbers on the signature strip)

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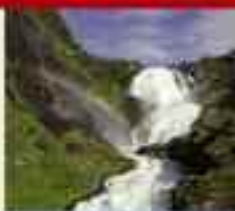
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Voyages
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Bidding the Opponents' Suit

Q On the following hand, I was North and, being baffled and suspecting a misfit, I left my partner in a hopeless contract.

I suspect we were both partly at fault. How would you have bid the hands?

♠ 7
♥ K J 10 6 5
♦ A Q 10 7 2
♣ 7 5

W	N	E
S		

♠ A 10 6 4
♥ Q 7
♦ 8 4 3
♣ A Q 6 3

West	North	East	South
	1♥	1♠	2♣
2♦	Dbl	Pass	2♠
End			

W E Kaye,
East Wickham, Kent.

A For a start, I would have responded 2NT on the South hand rather than 2♣. With one bid, this shows the values (10-12 points), the shape (balanced) and the spade stoppers. If the correct contract is in clubs, opener can bid 3♣ over 2NT. In theory, North should pass over 2NT, though I suspect I would rebid 3♦ (forcing).

Lacking three-card support, but with a maximum for the 10-12 range, South would then bid 3NT.

On your actual sequence, you had a misunderstanding about what the double of 2♦ meant. You must have meant it for penalties while partner took it for take-out. As both of you have bid, the normal meaning of the double is for penalties, in which case South has an easy pass.

As you suggest, your final pass was wrong. Even if you thought partner had a lot of black cards, you could have given preference to 3♣ or tried to say you thought the deal was a misfit by bidding 2NT. Unless you have agreed to the contrary, a bid in the opponent's suit is forcing.

♣♦♥♠

Q If partner bids a suit that an opponent has bid already, how do you know if partner has the suit also?

David and Janet Strange,
Ipswich.

A Without partnership agreement, a bid of the opposing suit is rarely natural (it usually shows strength and forces

partner to bid). However, if your partner has not bid and you have previously turned down the chance to double the suit for take-out then the bid is natural:

West	North	East	South
			1♣
Pass	1♠	Pass	1NT
2♣			

2♣ is natural. If you did not have clubs, you might have doubled 1♣, bid one of the red suits or an unusual 2NT.

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♦	Pass	Pass
2♥			

2♥ is natural. If you did not have hearts, you could have doubled at either turn, bid one of the black suits or made an unusual 2NT.

A bid of the opposing suit is also natural if the suit is responder's and partner has doubled opener's suit for take-out:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Dbl	1♠
2♠			

East is likely to have spades for the double, so you may want to play in the suit even if South has four (and 1♠ might be a psyche, of course). If you want to

make a general force, you bid opener's suit, 2♦.

♣♦♥♠

Q 1. On page 47 of BRIDGE 89 why does West not lead the ace of clubs (from A-x-x-x) rather than a diamond from Q-J-10-x-x?

2. On page 17 of BRIDGE 89, when East plays the ten from K-10-x-x when dummy has Q-x, is this not finessing against partner? Mrs P A Bailey, Guildford.

A 1. With some opponents, it can be a good idea to bash out an ace against a slam since they might be missing the ace-king of the suit. In general, however, it works better to try to set up a winner in some other suit that you can cash when you get in with your ace. Here West hopes to set up a diamond trick.

2. When the player in third seat has K-10-x-x, playing the ten is a finesse against dummy if dummy has the queen or jack (i.e. a card ranking above the ten but below the king) but a 'finesse against partner' if dummy has only low cards (or the ace but neither the queen nor the jack). ▶

Q Playing rubber bridge in an unfamiliar partnership, my partner and I bid these hands to 7NT:

♠ A K 7 5 3
♥ A
♦ A Q J 7 4 3
♣ K

N
W S E

♠ Void
♥ 9 5 4 3
♦ K 8 5 2
♣ A J 7 5 3

North	South
2♣ ¹	3♣
3♦	4♠ ²
4NT ³	5♥ ⁴
5NT ⁵	6♦ ⁶
7NT	End

¹Acol ²see below
³KCB ⁴two key-cards
⁵for kings ⁶one king

Clearly, we should have been in 7♦, which I would have bid if partner had bid 4♦ instead of 4♠ (though we had agreed to play splinters). How should we have bid?

Dr Segall, London.

A It is marginal whether you open 2♦ or 2♣. If you count the singleton king as half a quick trick, you have the requisite five quick tricks for 2♣.

If, as you say, you had agreed to play splinters, partner's 4♠ was an excellent bid. It showed the diamond support and the spade shortage at one go – 4♦ would show the diamond support, but is less helpful overall. On the next round, you could work out that 4♠ agreed diamonds: the only way partner could have two

key cards (to bid 5♥) was if one was the king of diamonds: you had three aces and both black kings.

Having shown the king of diamonds already by bidding 5♥, I would expect partner to deny any kings in response to 5NT – perhaps you had agreed that the way to show no kings was to sign off in six of the agreed suit, in which case I agree with the 6♦ bid.

Apart from the final bid, which should have been 7♦ rather than 7NT, you seem to have had a very good auction.

♣♦♥♠

Q This was my hand (West) at a local club duplicate:

♠ Q J 9 8 7
♥ 10
♦ K 8 7 2
♣ 10 7 5

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♣	2♥	1NT
End			3NT

I led the queen of spades and declarer made the contract. Partner said I should have led a heart. The contract would still have made on a heart lead. Only a diamond lead would have worked. What was the correct lead?

Mike Rennolds,
East Wickham, Kent.

A I would have led a heart, the result notwithstanding. There are two main points here.

Firstly, it is very dangerous to bid a major after an opponent has used Stayman. This is because, if

either opponent has four cards in the suit, then they are likely to be in a position to double. Therefore partner's overcall suggests a strong six-card suit. You would need a very good reason not to lead it. Secondly, knowing that dummy is very likely to have four spades, a spade lead is highly risky. Very often, when the ten of spades is in dummy, the lead is going to cost a trick. For example, the opposing holding could be K-10-x-x facing A-x or A-10-x-x facing K-x-x.

By the way, the opposing bidding is unusual. In Acob, the 2♣ Stayman enquiry does not promise any values – opener cannot possibly rebid 3NT!

♣♦♥♠

Q At a duplicate session at a small, friendly bridge club in Quanton, my partner and I held:

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

The bidding went 2♠ by East, 4♠ by West. How should we have reached 6♠?

Beryl Williams,
Whitchurch, Bucks.

A By tradition, the jump raise of a strong two shows positive values but no ace or void.

With both an ace and a void, I would not bid 4♠. A jump to 4♣ used to show a solid club suit, but nowadays it is more common to play a jump to 4♣ as a splinter bid, agreeing spades and showing a singleton or void in clubs. Facing a singleton or void in

clubs, East could bash 6♠, expecting to ruff any club losers in dummy and presuming that West will have a high card to cover one of the red losers. It would be more scientific for East to proceed with 4NT, since if West has an ace and a king then 7♠ could be on. It is debatable over 4NT whether West tries to show the club void as well as the ace (by jumping to 6♠ perhaps); simplest is just to bid 5♦ to show one ace. Then East checks on kings with 5NT and gives up on a grand slam when West shows none.

♣♦♥♠

Q I was on lead after the opponents bid 1NT-2NT-3NT. I had ♠8-7-5-3 and ♦J-5-4-2. I led a diamond, which was disastrous as declarer won cheaply with the ten in hand, having ♦A-K-Q-x in dummy. A spade lead would have worked better because my partner had ♠K-Q-J-x. What would you have led, and why?
James Galmont, Leeds.

A I would have led a spade (the seven). Firstly, the bidding suggests leading a major. This is because with a five-card major, two four-card majors, or a four-card major and a ruffing value, responder would surely have investigated a possible fit in one of the majors.

Secondly, the bidding suggests a passive lead, as the opponents clearly do not have values to spare.

The lack of intermediates in your diamond suit provides a third reason for not leading the suit. There is a big difference between J-5-4-2 and J-9-7-2 in terms of what you need from partner to set up tricks in the suit. ▶

Q My RHO opened 1♣. I had 17 points with five clubs and overcalled 2♣. Is this correct in Acol?

Mrs C Cheney, Emberton, Bucks.

A I am afraid you cannot make a natural overcall in a suit the opposition has bid. The traditional meaning of a bid in the opponent's suit is to show a very strong hand, like an Acol 2♣ opener. Nowadays, most tournament and club players use the cue-bid to show a two-suited hand, the majors in this instance. Depending upon the actual hand and the vulnerability, I would either pass (what Culbertson called a 'trap pass'), in the hope that the opponents go too high, or overcall INT.



Q From Dave Huggett's play quiz, I have the impression that leading the fourth-highest card of the longest suit against NT helps declarer more than partner. What do the experts think?

James Seddon, Kenilworth.

A Fourth-highest leads are common the world over. If they were so bad, they would be a lot less popular! Most people take the view that defending is difficult and that it is better to give some signals to help partner even if it means giving information to declarer also.

In expert circles, it is quite common to switch to third and fifth leads if you are leading a suit partner has bid – this is because you will often be leading from a

three-card suit. Even then, the lead gives information to declarer as well as partner.



Q What are the guidelines for the number of points and shape in a hand when pre-empting. Is it correct to say it should be between 7 to 11 points and at least 7 cards in the suit called?

Does it matter whether the pre-emptor is the first to bid or overcalling? Finally, is it wrong to pre-empt if one holds an outside ace?

D Cook, Holmfirth, Yorks.

A The idea of a pre-emptive bid is to make life difficult for the opponents because you believe they can make a contract and you do not mind going down a few tricks. You want to have as many values in your suit as possible and as little outside as possible. The better and longer your suit is, the greater the chance that playing in the suit will be a good idea. A textbook three-level pre-empt when non-vulnerable is K-Q-J-x-x-x in your suit and nothing of value outside. Nobody will argue if the suit is 'only' K-Q-x-x-x-x. Vulnerable you would like to have some chance of making seven tricks, so A-Q-J-x-x-x would be preferable.

On your ace question, Q-J-10-x-x-x and an outside ace would be fine to open at the three level when non-vulnerable. Vulnerable you would again be looking for some chance of making seven tricks for such an opening, so K-J-10-x-x-x or better and a trick on the side would be preferable.

Point count is not the main

guide for pre-emptive bidding, though if you have enough points to open at the one level (about 10 or 11 with a 7-card suit) you would tend to do that. I would put the range for pre-empting at more like 5-10 than 7-11.

Similar rules apply if the opponents open, though many play a single jump (e.g. they open 1♥ and you overcall 3♦) as a strong bid. If the overcall is a double jump (e.g. they open 1♥ and you overcall 3♠), or if you play weak jump overcalls, the rules are the same for a pre-emptive overcall as for an opening.



Q At my local club, my partner (West) opened a pre-emptive 3♦; North doubled for take out; I, East, passed and South jumped to 4♠, which was passed out. My partner had four spades, which surprised our opponents. 4♠ went two off. At most other tables North was in 5♣, making. Was my partner wrong to pre-empt with seven of the suit and 10 points?

Maureen Crick by e-mail.

A The idea of a pre-emptive bid is to make life difficult for the opponents and to tell partner that you are keen on having your long suit as trumps. If you have a four-card major on the side, you risk missing a contract in the major. Of course, the weaker your hand (particularly in values outside your long suit), the less the chance that the deal belongs to your side, in which case it will not matter if you miss a fit in a major. In answer to your question, a hand with 10 points in high cards and two

singletons (or a doubleton and a void) is likely to be too strong for a three-level pre-empt (or to pass). For instance with ♠K-J-x-x and ♦A-Q-x-x-x-x, you should open 1♦, not 3♦. It would be quite easy to construct a hand for partner that would pass a 3♦ opening but would give good play for a slam in spades.



Q At love all, rubber bridge, I opened 4♣ on the North hand below. Partner took it as Gerber and we ended in 6♣. East did not lead a spade and we made all 13 tricks (West had ♠K-x). Someone said I should have opened 2♣ rather than 4♣. Who was right?

♠	8 3									
♥	Q 7									
♦	9									
♣	A Q J 10 5 4 3 2									
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	N									
W		E								
	S									
♠	Q 10 7 5									
♥	A K 8 5 4									
♦	A 8 4									
♣	9									

Mrs M Schwartz, Ilford.

A Non-vulnerable, your 4♣ opening seems fine to me. You have an eight-card club suit and seven playing tricks (thereby obeying the rule of two and three). A 4♣ opening is a pre-emptive bid, like 3♣ but with more playing strength, not Gerber. I shudder at the suggestion that you might open 2♣. In Acol, a 2♣ opening shows a very strong hand, 23 points in high cards or a powerful game-going hand. Had your partner understood your bid correctly, a raise to 5♣ would seem in order. ▶

Q If you had fewer than 23 points in an unbalanced hand and three or four losers, would you open 2♣? Mrs Freeman, Chigwell.

A In general, a 4-loser hand is more likely to be an Acol Two and a 3-loser hand a 2♣ opening. Having five quick or defensive tricks are also important – A-K is two, A-Q is one and a half, A or K-Q is one and K is a half. You need five quick tricks in a powerful game-going hand to open 2♣. The losing trick count tells you only whether the hand is ‘game-going’.



Q I read with interest your reply to a query in BRIDGE 90, as your advice differs from what I have seen elsewhere. The advice to open the major with four clubs and a four-card major can cause rebid problems. John Martin, Dingwall.

A Players divide into three camps on the question of what to open when holding a four-card major. Some always open the major. Some always open the minor. Some vary, depending upon the quality of suits or ease of rebid. The three methods all have their benefits and drawbacks. In each case, you will usually show a balanced hand on the next round rather than introducing the second suit. The most important thing is that you and your partner know what you do and that you do the same thing to avoid the risk of a misunderstanding. On a Mr Bridge cruise or

weekend, the teaching style is to open the major, so other players are likely to be doing the same thing.



Q With a balanced 4432 with two 16 points, which of the majors do I open, before re-bidding no-trumps? Eddy Kent by e-mail.

A You should open 1♥. This way you will not miss a 4-4 fit in either major because you make it easy for partner either to raise to 2♥ or to bid 1♠. If you open 1♠ mistakenly, you will often miss a 4-4 heart fit. You may even miss a 5-4 heart fit if partner lacks the 9-10 points required for a 2♥ response to 1♠.

West	East
♠ A K 6 5	♠ J 7
♥ K J 6 3	♥ Q 10 7 5 4
♦ A 6 5	♦ K Q 4
♣ J 5	♣ 9 6 4

With these hands, I much prefer the auction 1♥-3♥-4♥ to 1♠-1NT.



Q My partner opened a weak no-trump. It was doubled and I, with a very weak hand – one point and no five-card suit, passed; the opposition got a very good score. I understand there was a way out of the situation.

Can you help?
J. F. Lambert by e-mail.
(Similar from Michael Rice, Chichester and Carmen Issacharoff, London NW4).

A There are a variety of methods on offer. In most, the basic idea is that immediate bids by responder show two suits (including the suit bid) and with a single-suited hand responder redoubles. The redouble asks opener to bid 2♣ and responder then passes (to show clubs) or bids the suit held. If responder bids a suit directly (showing two suits), what opener does depends on how specific the response is; if it just shows the lower of two suits, opener passes with tolerance for the suit and otherwise bids the next suit up. I like to play that responder can pass over 1NT doubled to play there, but in some methods, pass forces opener to redouble. I regard it as unsound to play the pass as forcing. With something like a flat 6 points you do not mind playing in 1NT doubled (rather than play in a 4-3 fit at the two level, possibly also doubled) but you really do not want to play in 1NT redoubled.

A	♠ 9 7 4
	♥ J 8 6 4 3
	♦ 9 6 3
	♣ 7 2
B	♠ 9 5
	♥ J 8 6 4
	♦ J 10 4 3
	♣ 5 3 2
C	♠ 9 6 3
	♥ 10 7 5
	♦ J 6 4
	♣ J 6 4 3

With hand A, you redouble, planning to bid 2♥ over opener’s forced 2♣. With hand B, you bid 2♦, planning to play in 2♦ or 2♥. With C, you have no ideal action. If you play a pass as non-forcing, you can pass, ready to take the

medicine, but hoping that LHO removes the double. If you decide to run (the right thing to do against opponents too polite to double anything other than 1NT), you either redouble (planning to show just clubs) or bid 2♣ (pretending you have diamonds as well as clubs).

SWINE, which you may come across if you play on the Internet, is slightly different: a direct 2♥/2♠ is single suited (and constructive). You have to use the pass as forcing to redouble with SWINE, so I would not recommend it.



Q I am confused about when a bid is forcing in a competitive auction. If the bidding round the table is 1♥, 2♦, 3♣, is 3♣ forcing, and does it show support for hearts? Alan Hanson by e-mail.

A In normal circumstances, 3♣ is forcing but does not indicate support for hearts. In general, a new suit at the three level after partner has bid is forcing. 3♣ would only be non-forcing if 3♣ gave you game (for instance if you were playing rubber bridge and already had a part-score of 40 or more) or perhaps if the player who bids 3♣ had passed previously.

Some people play that 3♣ by a passed hand would show heart support (on the basis that you had the chance to open 3♣ and chose not to), but this would be a matter of partnership agreement. If you were doing this, 3♣ would be forcing if it showed club length and 4-card heart support but non-forcing if it showed club length and 3-card heart support. ▶

Q Below are the hands that my partner and I held. How should we have bid?

♠ 10 7 3
♥ K Q J 10 9
♦ K Q 8 5 2
♣ Void



♠ A K
♥ A 6 4
♦ A 7
♣ A K Q 10 8 4

Mrs A Carter, Carlisle.

A If North deals, you can more or less bid 1♥-7NT. It is hard for South to envisage an opening bid for North that does not offer at least reasonable play for a grand slam. It is tougher if South opens:

North	South
	2♣
2♥	3♣
3♦	3♥
4♦	5NT
7♥	7NT
End	

2♣ is Acol, forcing to game unless followed by a 2NT rebid over a 2♦ negative. North gives a positive response of 2♥ and then shows the diamonds on the next round. South gives preference to 3♥ and North shows more diamonds (the ace or king) with a cue bid of 4♦. South then bids 5NT, the grand-slam force, asking North to bid 7♥ if holding two of the top three hearts.

Whether South converts 7♥ to 7NT is a moot point. 7♥ is better if the clubs are not solid and North does not have the queen of diamonds.

7NT is better if you swap North's red suits (when a 4-1 heart split would beat 7♥) and on the actual layout.

At rubber bridge, scoring 150 for honours is another reason for bidding 7NT.



Q I picked up the following hand:

♠ K Q J 5 4
♥ K 7 5 3
♦ A 6 3
♣ 7

I opened 1♠ and my partner replied 1NT. What would you have done next? I rebid 2♥ and my partner passed with:

♠ 10 9
♥ Q 8 4
♦ 9 7 5 2
♣ K J 8 5

Hearts split 5-1 and we went one down. Most played in 2♠ and did better.

Simon Loveday, Wells by e-mail.

A Your rebid of 2♥ is correct. With the singleton, a suit contract should play better than 1NT. Besides, if partner really likes hearts, you might make game. A 2♠ rebid would be poor. By opening 1♠ and rebidding 2♥, you promise at least five spades and four hearts. It is much better to show two features than one.

I suspect that most of the pairs who played in 2♠ got there because responder gave

false preference to 2♠. The thinking is that if opener is 5-4 or 6-4 then the contract is likely to play better in the first suit than the second. Only if opener is 5-5 is the second suit likely to play better.

That said, I might well have passed 2♥ on your partner's hand. With 6 points, there is no hope of game, so responder does not want to give opener the chance to bid again.



Q I have heard of the system '2 over 1.' Do you publish any articles on it?

Can you include something on this in Mr Bridge? Do you think it a good system?
Christine Townend, Chalfont St Giles, Bucks.

A The '2 over 1' system means that a change of suit response at the two level, e.g. 1♠-2♦, creates a game force. The idea is that, by creating a game force at a low level, you leave the partnership maximum room to explore the right strain and level.

When you have the strength to make the two-over-one bid (i.e. an opening bid yourself), the system usually works well. The problem arises when responder has 6-11 or 6-12 points, as then the range for a 1NT response becomes very wide.

Normal in the 2-over-1 system is to play that a 1NT response is forcing. This way, with 10-12 points responder will be able to bid again over opener's rebid. Another snag with 2-over-1 is that, in all but the most experience partnerships, it can be difficult to tell whether partner is trying to show extra values.

'2 over 1' is rare in the

UK, and even many US experts regard it as unsound. If you search for 'two-over-one bidding' on the internet, you can find further details.

Its lack of popularity in the UK and its relative complexity make it unlikely we will do an article on it.



Q At our club, some use a response of 2♠ to a 12-14 1NT as 11 points (balanced), and a response of 2NT as 12 points. Others use 2♠ as 11 or 12 points, and 2NT as a transfer to minors.

I believe Michelle Brunner recommends a variation: 2NT as natural and 2♠ for the minors. Which do you recommend?
Tony Betts, Northallerton. (Similar from J F Lambert).

A It is wasteful to use both 2♠ and 2NT as ways to invite 3NT. With a good 12 points (e.g. nice intermediates or a decent five-card suit) just bid 3NT. With a poor 12 points (e.g. 4333 shape or unsupported honours), treat it as 11 points.

However, rather than playing that 2♠ shows specifically a game-invitational hand, you can use it to show either game interest or slam interest. Opener has to bid again over 2♠ (2NT with a minimum and 3♣ with a maximum), so responder will get another chance.

If responder does anything other than pass 2NT or convert 3♣ to 3NT, it shows a four-card suit (usually a good one) and slam interest.

The option to use 2♠ on both game and slam hands illustrates why it is better to play it this way round rather than Michelle's. ▶

Q What would you open on this hand?

♠ A K J 10 7
♥ Void
♦ A 10 8 7 5 3 2
♣ A

B Nothern,
Mobberley, Cheshire.

A Playing standard Acol, I open 2♦. An Acol Two does not have to be a single-suited hand.

You have far more playing strength than partner would expect if you opened 1♦, but not enough quick tricks to open an Acol 2♣.

Playing Benjamin, the best opening is less clear. If the bidding starts 2♣-2♦, you cannot show your long suit below the three level; also, partner will get to play the hand if you end up in diamonds. I would probably open 2♣ despite this. If the bidding goes 2♣-2♦-3♦-3♥-3♠-3NT-4♠ or 2♣-2♦-3♦-3NT-4♠, partner will get the idea of a big two-suited hand with longer diamonds than spades.

♣♦♥♠

Q Have you ever heard of a deal on which one pair had all 40 points between them? This happened to our opponents in the penultimate deal during a friendly bridge evening. Is this as rare as I believe it must be?

Gerald Sacks,
West Byfleet, Surrey.

A By my reckoning the chance that the opponents have all 40 points between them is 1 in 1,951,000. This is 36 choose 10 divided by 52 choose 26. The 36 is the number of non-picture cards, of which the opponents must have 10 if they have all 16 picture cards.

36 choose 10 means 36! / (10!x(36-10)!) and 36! (36 factorial) means 36x35x34 ... 3x2x1 and likewise for 52 choose 26.

♣♦♥♠

Q What should I have opened on the South hand below and was a slam makeable? None of our foursome came up with the same answer.

Dealer South. N/S Vul.

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

I cannot remember all the calls. I, South, opened 2NT. We did not mention any majors. North at some point called 4♣ asking for aces, then 5♣ asking for kings and we ended up in 6♣ (played from the wrong hand!) going down two. Mrs G R Menzies, Lyme Regis.

A First, I would like to make a plea to all readers. In card diagrams, spades always come at the top, then hearts, then diamonds and finally clubs. (I misread the question originally as the clubs were at the top.)

This is a very tricky hand to bid in Acol. A possible sequence is this:

North	South
	2♣ ¹
2NT ²	3♣
3♦ ³	3NT
6NT ⁴	

1 If South's long suit were anything other than clubs, an Acol two would fit the bill. With three losers and 20 HCP, South is too good to open 1♣. 2NT is wrong with the singleton and this much playing strength, while 2♣ is a bit of a stretch with only four and a half quick tricks. Out of 1♣, 2NT and 2♣, I rate 2NT least highly as it is both an underbid and wrong on shape. I prefer 2♣ to 1♣ as 2♣ is less of an overbid than 1♣ is an underbid. Moreover, with 3-card support for both majors, game chances seem very good.

2 This shows positive values and no five-card suit.

3 Since South could have a second suit, North keeps the bidding low.

4 North knows that South might have had to open 2♣ a little light, but often the singleton king of clubs will be enough to make the suit solid.

As the cards lie, you can make 11 tricks playing in any denomination other than diamonds. I am not sure you really want to be in a slam – the blocked major suits make life awkward. 6NT by North would fail here even if East kindly leads a diamond into the ace-queen. I did a computer simulation and 6♠ by North seems to be the

best (or least bad) slam, making about 50% of the time – though that assumes double-dummy play.

If South opens 2NT, North should bid 3♣, whether you play it as Baron (asking opener to bid four-card suits up the line) or Stayman. 4♣, Gerber, is not the right bid (indeed, it rarely is). You only check on aces when you know what suit you intend to play in. You say that you played 6♣ the wrong way up, but most contracts play better by North to protect the diamond tenace.

♣♦♥♠

Q My bridge partner has posed me a problem. He said that it was in BRIDGE a few issues ago.

The contract is 7NT by South and West leads the four of spades. I cannot seem to see how I would get back to my hand!

♠ 6	♥ A K
♦ A K Q	♣ A 9 8 7 4 3 2
N W E S	
♠ A K Q	♥ Q J 10
♦ J 10 9 8 7 6	♣ 6

Susan Lee,
Christchurch, Dorset.

A There is a neat way around the blockages. Take three rounds of spades, discarding dummy's hearts on the second and third rounds. Then take three rounds of hearts, discarding dummy's three diamonds.

After that, run the diamonds and take the last trick with the ace of clubs. ■

E-mail your questions for Julian to:
julianpottage@mrbridge.co.uk.



Benjaminised Acol and the Lion of the North

Consider your opening bid on these hands:

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

Hand a) is the classic game-going hand, a 2♣ bid in standard Acol. Such a bid compels partner to keep bidding until you reach game. As you can see, as little as three small hearts in partner's hand will make game playable; any useful honour card would make it certain.

Hand b) is the classic Acol Two Bid. The hand will play for in excess of eight tricks, but partner does need something to convert this hand to game. Pick what you would like partner to have by way of support: a few hearts; the queen of diamonds; a black ace. Any one of those will be enough for you to make game, yet partner can hold an ace without having the six points needed to scrape up a response to a one-level bid.

Hand c) is a standard Weak Two Bid, a hand too weak to open with a normal 1-of-a-suit bid, but at the same time, a constructive limit bid. Rather like when you open 1NT, a Weak Two bid describes your hand within tight parameters at one go and leaves further action to partner. Weak Twos are an effective competitive weapon.

Which of these treatments of Two Bids came first? I am sure that most readers would find the answer surprising. Weak Twos appear in the literature as far back as the 1920s. If Harold Vanderbilt, the 'inventor' of modern contract bridge, had had his way, then we would all be playing a strong club system. Indeed, in his book, *Contract Bridge*, published in 1929, he clearly sets out a form of Weak Two. Vanderbilt's ideas did not hold sway in the golden era of bridge in the 1930s. Americans *en masse* followed the ideas of Ely Culbertson. Culbertson espoused the 'Forcing Two'. Using the Forcing Two, all opening two bids were strong, natural and forcing to game. Thus Culbertson would have recommended an opening bid of 2♥, forcing to game, on Hand a) above.

The Acol group of players, led by Jack Marx and SJ Simon, recognised that Culbertson's idea of having four separate bids for forcing-to-game type hands was inefficient use of precious bidding resources – you have only 35 different bids to describe all the hands you might hold. They devised the Acol 2♣ bid for hands such as a) above and invented the strong Acol Two Bid for the 'I have nearly a game' hands. Acol Two Bids are forcing for at least one round, but the bidding may stop below game if partner is completely unsuitable. Acol Two Bids became, and remain, the basis for standard bidding in Britain.

In America, the Acol Two Bid never caught on. In the 1950s, it was the new American 'Mr Contract Bridge', Charles Goren, who brought Standard American up to date. The popularity of Weak Two Bids began to rise at the same time and eventually Culbertson's Forcing Two was consigned to history. Modern Standard American has adopted the Acol 2♣ for forcing-to-game hands; it uses the other bids as Weak Two Bids. Players at your club, who say they use 'Three Weak Twos', play in this style.

The rise of the Weak Two gave European bridge players a problem. Should they start playing the clearly successful 'American Weak Two Bids' or stick with the traditional strong two bids, on which most European experience was based? The Scottish bridge international, Albert Benjamin, devised the solution. Benjamin realised that if it was inefficient to play the Forcing Two with separate natural bids for all the rare forcing-to-game hands, so it was just as inefficient to have separate natural bids for the just as rare 'nearly-a-game' hands. What was his solution? Make 2♣ and 2♦ the big bids, and free 2♥ and 2♠ to be Weak Twos. For reasons I discuss below, 2♣ became the hand for 8+ tricks, with 2♦ the outright force to game.

The system, which Benjamin described in a short published article, some time in the 1960s, became known in Britain as 'Benjaminised Acol' – or 'Benji' for short and is certainly one of the more common systems you will encounter in duplicate bridge clubs. This system of two bids is also normal in France, where, although not attributed to Benjamin, it is included as part of the modern French 'Super Majeure Cinqüième' as taught throughout France.

So much for the Benjamin bids, what of Benjamin the man? Albert Benjamin was one of the foremost figures of Scottish Bridge. He became known as 'the Lion of the North'. Born in 1909, he discovered bridge at Glasgow University and soon immersed himself in bridge journalism, even launching *Scottish Bridge Weekly*. After the war, he opened the Ken Muir Bridge Club in Glasgow, which quickly acquired the nickname 'Benjamin's'. He continued writing also, contributing a daily hand to a Glasgow newspaper as well as weekly and monthly columns in other publications. As a player, he represented Scotland in the home internationals for the

Camrose Trophy, mostly in partnership with Victor Goldberg.

A Scot through and through, Benjamin's greatest moment came when his beloved Scottish team bested England and won the Camrose for the first time in 1964. An amusing incident happened during the late stages of the close-fought match against the 'auld enemy'. Benjamin actually dozed off during a deal. A nudge from the table recorder woke him up with a start. 'No bid' he said out of turn and without looking at his hand. He now had to pass despite holding a good take-out double of 1♠, and his opponents then reached 4♠ unopposed. Albert fell asleep again (metaphorically only this time) and missed the killing defence. It looked like a poor time to let chances slip. In the other room, the English pair did double and reached a contract of 3♦ redoubled with a trump suit of jack to four opposite four low. The contract collapsed when Scotland's Sam Leckie, holding A-K-Q-10 was able to draw trumps. The penalty was 2200 and Scotland won the match.

A word about the system – 'Benji', as devised, uses 2♣ for the 8+ trick 'nearly-a-game' hands. Usually partner makes a 2♦ relay response to enable opener to specify the suit opener actually holds. An opening 2♦ is the 'big' bid, the equivalent of 2♣ in traditional Acol. Some club pairs play 'Reverse Benji', keeping the 2♣ bid unchanged and using 2♦ for the 8+ trick hands. In my opinion, this is unsound. The 2♦ bid tends to trigger a 2♥ relay and opener if holding hearts, one of the important major suits, now has to bid 3♥ to show his suit naturally, a dreadfully high level at which to start bidding a strong hand. Not only that, responder has also 'wrong-sided' the contract with the relay. No, Albert was right to publish it how he did and we should all bow to his superior technical insight.

Benjamin was a great raconteur and loved to jest. He loved also to mentor younger players. He helped launch the bridge careers of Michael Rosenberg and Barnet Shenkin, both of whom became USA-based bridge professionals. By all accounts, he decried his own bidding system and did not play it. Albert Benjamin died in 2006, aged 96, but Benjaminised Acol lives on. ■

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The Baron Outwits the Grand Duke

by Dick Atkinson

Everyone has his favourite partner. Most of us, I suspect, also have a favourite opponent. My uncle, Baron von Münchhausen, is no exception. Every year, he plays in a discreet but prestigious event held in Luxembourg, the Almanach de Gotha Tournament. There it used to be his pleasure, in the middle years of the century, to meet Grand Duke Vassily Romanov at a green velvet battlefield.

I get the impression that their enmity is not unconnected with the fair sex and perhaps, with that mysterious duelling scar. This, as you will remember, disfigured the Grand Duke's otherwise handsome features.

The deal below illustrates the Baron's ability to reject smoothly a play that an opponent tries to force on him.

On this particular occasion, from the final session of the pairs, my uncle held a particularly moderate hand as dealer at Game All:

♠ 6 4 2	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <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	
		N								
W			E							
		S								
♥ Q 7										
♦ 9 8 7 6 4 3										
♣ 10 2										

He passed, as did North and East, the Marquis de Sade. The Grand Duke was playing with an exiled Baltic Margrave, and their auction was allegedly Culbertson:

West	North	East	South
Baron	B.M.	M.S.	G.D.
Pass	Pass	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♠	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♣	Pass	5NT
Pass	6♦	Pass	6NT
End			

♠ 6 4 2	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <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		♠ 10 9 8 7
		N									
W			E								
		S									
♥ Q 7		♥ 9 8 6 5 4 2									
♦ 9 8 7 6 4 3	♦ K										
♣ 10 2	♣ 8 7										
		♠ A									
		♥ A K 10									
		♦ A Q 10									
		♣ A K Q J 5 4									

The Grand Duke's Analysis

The lead was the ♠2 to the ♠A and the G.D. was horrified to find that the B.M. had virtually nothing outside his advertised suit. He fingered the ♣A for a moment, before absorbing the fact that 7♣, a likely contract, would presumably be rock solid if the ♣10 fell in two rounds. This made that line a poor one in terms of profit and loss. 7♠ would be the likely top score for anyone who stumbled into it. 6NT would be solid on a friendlier lead.

The G.D. considered playing the ♦Q, but that would be rather obvious and whoever held the king would presumably hold off. Then he conceived a simple plan to get back into the money. 6NT could be an excellent score, if the majors broke badly and one opponent held, say, ♣10-x-x and a doubleton in one of the majors. Still, it couldn't hurt to take the ♣A first, could it? It certainly couldn't gain in the scenario envisaged; but what if East held ♣10-8-7, and also the red suit honours? He could be thrown in, with the lead of any of the four suits providing access to dummy. Cashing the ♣A first would give him the

easy option of returning his top club.

Having analysed the hand to his own satisfaction, the G.D. led a *small* club immediately towards the nine. My uncle followed low smoothly. Well now, could it be right to put up the nine? The G.D. realised that would ruin his throw-in line. The six lost to the seven, and back came the eight! The G.D. hesitated only a second before following low, losing to the ten. One down. Even those timid souls in 6♣ plus one outscored the Grand Duke.

Two Tricks Lost in Easy Slam

'You seem a little agitated, Vassily Vassilievitch. Perhaps you foresee some embarrassment in explaining to our acquaintance how you managed to lose two tricks in a suit holding nine cards to the A-K-Q-J? Don't give it a second thought. Have no fear – it shall be my *pleasure* to explain – to everyone. It was just that unfortunate break. Two-two... You know, I thought I'd gone to bed with my ten for a moment there! I would have had a hard time explaining that one away.'

'Sorry partner,' piped up the B.M. at last, anxious to justify his positive response. 'If I'd only stuck to my guns and bid 7♣, we'd probably have a top!'

'Come, come, mein Herr, you insult me,' returned the Baron. 'I am capable of ruffing the third heart high in a good cause!' His little ♠6 would promote a trick in the Marquis' hand. 'No, it's only in no-trumps that you have 17 tricks on top... and clubs, of course.' ■

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