

County Matters - Peter Watts

Since the last Newsletter, the County have completed their Western League season and have made steady progress throughout. In the last 3 sets of matches, 8 matches were won with a solitary defeat in matches against Dorset, Cornwall and Devon, although the latter were all forfeited wins as Devon failed disappointingly to find teams. The A team finished a very creditable 3rd in their league, while the B and C Teams finished 4th and 5th in their respective Divisions. At the Western League AGM, it was agreed that all matches would use Duplimate boards from next season, a move which was welcomed by all the Counties.

Outside the Western League, the Paske boys have continued to compete at the highest levels and recently Tom finished 3rd in a London Easter Pairs competition while Ben finished 6th from a field of 156 pairs. Otherwise, it has been a relatively quiet period outside the County borders for Herefordshire players.

Excitingly, it is pleasing to report that the Hereford Club finished an excellent 2nd in the Regional Final of the Garden Cities Competition in Bristol and they will be playing in the National Final with 7 other Regional Qualifiers in June.

As we look forward, the Summer will see some continued events including the Midland Bowl in Alcester (May 31st), the President's Cup (a mini-Tollemache event) in August and a Midland Pairs event in September, before the Western League resumes again in October.

During the Summer, County Training continues at Putson, Hereford, and as usual, we will be looking for new players and possible changed pairings as we go forward.

Calendar dates

Saturday June 20 @ 1 pm: Green Point Swiss Pairs, Ross-on-Wye

Sunday June 21 @ 11 am: Green Point Swiss Teams, Ross-on-Wye

Friday September 11 @ 7 pm: AGM @ duplicate pairs, Putson, Hereford

Please make use of the County Website and make constructive criticisms.

[County website: www.herefordshirebridge.co.uk]

HEREFORDSHIRE BRIDGE

Newsletter 94

Herefordshire Bridge Association

MAY/JUNE 2009

Chairman' Chat

This issue marks the end of Stephen Booth's editorship of the Newsletter. He has now served a lengthy spell in this role and it is high time we turn to a fresh helper, leaving him to give his undivided attention to his twin passions of Bridge and Bowls. On behalf of our members and our clubs I want to record our appreciation for all the time and effort he has devoted to this task. We will now be searching for a new Editor, and any reader who has an interest is cordially invited to contact me in the first instance.

Looking around the Ledbury Community Hall the other day when playing in the final round of the Inter-Club Teams, I marvelled at the turnout – 17 teams from our County Clubs with some Clubs fielding as many as 3 or more teams. That's 68 players, and with substitutes we probably saw as many as 80-90 members over the 4 rounds of the competition.

I could not help but contrast this with the turnout just a week earlier at Tarrington. We held the Multiple Teams of 4 competition there and just 6 teams entered. That is 24 members, way below 10% of our membership. It was a super day – enjoyable but competitive bridge and excellently run.

In truth, many of our County events suffer from lack of support. Given an annual programme designed to appeal to all levels of skill and inclination, we find it immensely difficult to generate wide interest. Why so ?

The set-up and system is really quite simple. Bridge payers combine to form clubs, funding activities through their subscriptions and table money. Likewise, clubs combine to form their County Association, leaving it with the role of representing their members' interests in the outside world and, crucially, leaving it also to stage bridge-playing opportunities in the County beyond the club.

So you and I, dear reader, are paying the County Association to stage these events !

Now how does this stack up ? If we grass roots members are financing the Association, and if the Association is organizing events for our delectation, then we must , we really must, find a way of bringing it all together. It happens only fitfully at present.

This is what I am going to do. I am going to ask the Chairpersons of every one of our Clubs to nominate (if they have not already done so) someone at their Club – a sort of Team Captain role - whose responsibility it is to generate and capture the interest of club members in playing at County events, so organizing the Club's representation in a full and coherent way throughout the year.

One more thing. I will tell anyone who will listen to me that I used to avoid playing in County events like the plague. Beyond my comfort zone, I feared they would be far too advanced, far too unfriendly and far too intimidating. I would be out of my depth, and I just play bridge to enjoy myself.

Wrong, wrong, wrong ! I may still play like a rabbit at times but I have enjoyed the competitions. They are certainly not unfriendly affairs and I have enjoyed them precisely because I have met so many fellow players I did not know before whose company I appreciate and whose accomplishments I admire. I have benefited from this in so many ways.

Before the end of the course, two learners were encouraged to play as a pair at Fownhope Club's Wednesday Bridge session and came about half-way on the night's results. More recently 4 learners attended the ordinary club night and all have applied for membership. Some of the pupils were reluctant to start club Bridge but had organised Bridge sessions between themselves in each other's homes. Geoff has arranged that eight or more of them can continue to play on their own (and at their own expense) in the committee room at Hampton Bishop hall, using Fownhope club's facilities and to qualify for this, they are asked to join Fownhope Bridge Club. It's hoped that with a little more over-the-table experience they will be confident enough to play at the club.

The first course has now ended but Geoff is considering starting a new one in the Autumn as the initiative has been successful in finding new players (and members).

"It's been an encouraging experience," says Geoff, "The only trouble is that after teaching in the afternoon and going straight on to club night, one's own performance begins to tail off by the end of the evening - but it's in a good cause!"

The final session ended with a small presentation by the pupils who thanked Geoff and Ted for introducing them to Bridge and helping them with time and patience

Teaching can damage your score !

Ted Dutton

In common with other clubs, until recently Fownhope Bridge Club was concerned at falling membership. In fact, of late, attendance at Fownhope's Riverbed Restaurant and Hampton Bishop Village Hall venues has improved - thanks at least in part to the club's friendly reputation.

However, before this improvement, Geoff Cole decided to do something to attack the problem of finding new members. Geoff is a qualified Bridge teacher and had been teaching a few people at his home but he decided to hold teaching sessions in conjunction with Fownhope Bridge Club. After discussions with the committee and co-opting Ted Dutton as an assistant (members may know that Ted never had a Bridge lesson and certainly no teacher training!) it was decided to run a 12 week course at Hampton Bishop Village Hall on Wednesday afternoons between 4pm and 6pm. As Wednesday was Fownhope's Hampton Bishop club night, this meant Geoff and Ted could have a snack meal before the evening club session.

Advertisements were placed in local papers and the first session was offered free so that potential learners could sample the training that was on offer without any commitment. Eighteen people turned up for the inaugural lesson and of these 16 continued, although of course there were occasional absences through holiday, family or other pressures. Usually there were about 12 learners per session. Table money charged was sufficient to meet the cost of hall hire with Fownhope Club guaranteeing any shortfall.

Obviously there were variations in ability but at least 8 players showed real promise. Geoff taught basic English and made sure that at least about half of each lesson involved actually playing Bridge. All the pupils said they enjoyed the experience.

And from this experience I am trying to eliminate the kind of bloopers that are my speciality. At the Ledbury event to which I referred at the outset, I regret to say that I declined to bid 2NT (having 12 points and a singleton Q of diamonds) in response to partner's opening bid of 1NT. I managed to get us into a 3Club contract when 3NT was a dead cert ! It lost us the match.

Wrong, wrong, wrong !

Tony Shadforth

Hand evaluation

John Thacker

Accurate hand evaluation is at the heart of successful bridge. In this issue I will examine the initial evaluation techniques, and next issue the constant re-evaluation that takes place as the bidding evolves.

Evaluation begins with high card points (HCPs), then the following factors will affect your point count –

1. Distribution. The more unbalanced your becomes the greater its playing strength.
2. Location of honour cards. Honours work better together and particularly when positioned in the long suits.
3. Intermediates. 10's, 9's & 8's will always increase the strength of your hand.

Note that, at the outset, shortage in a particular suit is not an advantage, its value will be determined by the subsequent bidding.

It is no good paying lip service to the above factors, you must apply them to your HCPs to obtain your true point count (TPC) and this is the count that should be applied to all your point-count ranges in your bidding system.

Look at these two balanced hands –

| | | | | |
|--------|-----|------|--------|-------|
| Hand A | Sp | QJ | Hand B | xx |
| | Hts | Kxxx | | KQJx |
| | Dia | Qxxx | | KQ10x |
| | Cl | KJx | | 109x |

The TPC of Hand A is about 10 pts and Hand B 13 pts, and your bidding must reflect this. Hand A will Pass as opener or if Partner opens 1NT (12-14 pts). Hand B will open 1NT and raise Partner's 1NT opening bid to 3NT.

Try these more unbalanced hands –

| | | | | |
|--------|-----|-------|--------|--------|
| Hand C | Sp | QJ | Hand D | x |
| | Hts | Qxxx | | KQ10x |
| | Dia | Qxxxx | | AJ109x |
| | Cl | KQ | | 109x |

| | |
|------------------------------|--------------------------|
| TPC = 9 pts | TPC = 13 pts |
| HCP = 12.0 | HCP = 10 |
| Less : Short suit honours +1 | Add : Supporting Honours |
| Unsupported Queen -0.5 | (in long suit) |
| No intermediates -1.0 | Good 5 card suit |
| +1 | Good intermed's +1 |

Hand C would Pass as opener, cannot overcall Right Hand Opponent or raise Partner's 1 Ht opener to 3 HTs.

Hand D opens 1Dia and would raise Partner's 1Ht opener to 4 Hts.

Next Issue, the all important re-evaluation that takes place during the auction.

Does the muse amuse ?

Tony Shadforth

It is nearing the end of May as I write this, and if you listen to, or watch, the BBC channels, you cannot help but noticing that 'poetry is all'. Have you ever thought of expressing your love for the game of bridge in poetic terms ? The EBU offers a prize for the winning limerick in its Club Focus magazine. If the muse grabs you why not contribute a poetic offering to our Newsletter ? Here's something to get you thinking:

Sitting at the table, waiting for the lead;
praying so very quietly for the one I exactly need
I'm trying to think of nothing but what has just been bid
and I've already forgotten what my partner did !

Oh goodness me, I'm sorry, I seem to have revoked.
'That hardly seemed to be necessary', my long-suffering partner croaked.
Better get the Director over and see how many tricks we lose.
Dear Lord, all this is quite enough to drive me to the booze.

Wait a bit, fortune's smiling on us and it all begins to go well.
We do a lot of defending and our actions seem to gel,
and then I am in a contract where I play a finesse so deep
that when I see it succeed I felt my spirits leap.

The evening's nearly over now and I'm rounding the final bend;
relations with my partner are truly on the mend.
Then on the very last hand I forgot to draw all the trumps;
Bit of a sticky wicket – time to pull the stumps !