

The recent overcast weather has favoured our brave cricketers in dismissing their sub-continental opponents very cheaply in the first Tests of the season and both your author and his darling pussy cats have been purring contentedly at the regular fall of opponents wickets. The lads have not had to turn too often to discovering the joys of scrabble or poker while waiting for the skies to clear or otherwise listening solo to some music device or another.

At such idle times, conversation loosely related to cricket flows in the pavilion and it struck your author that much the same happens at bridge events. Much innocent merriment and erudition can be enjoyed at such moments and some of the remarks bear repeating in this column.

With my first serious partner I played a complicated version of precision club and once in a pairs event I opened on the first hand of a round a strong club showing 17+hcp any distribution. My next opponent doubled which was alerted as a 2-suiter with either the majors or the minors. My partner proceeded to redouble which I too alerted this call as conventional. Upon enquiry, I informed my opponents that it showed either the majors or the minors. This statement seemed to confuse one of my opponents who asked for some further clarification. I explained that if the initial doubler had the minors then my partner would have the majors and vice versa. I also explained that my partner had 8+ hcp and if I had 4 clubs then I was constrained to pass the redouble. The hand was eventually played in 3nt.

On the second hand my partner opened 1 heart and the next player made a “ghestem” bid which showed a spade/club 2-suiter, I doubled and this was alerted by my partner who explained that I held at least 10 cards in hearts and diamonds with 8-13hcp. This hand was eventually played in 4hearts.

On the third and last hand of the round I opened a 14-16 hcp No Trump and my next opponent overcalled 2 clubs, which showed a 2-suiter with hearts and a minor. My partner doubled which showed, as I explained, a 2-suiter with spades and the other minor 8+hcp. I also explained that if I had at least 6 cards in hearts and clubs that I was constrained to pass if the opponent passed which after some consideration he did. I had the required number of cards and so passed and the original overcaller who held a 0-5-4-4 shape hand also passed. After the smoke had cleared, declarer was 4 down and was more than slightly miffed when he found out that his partner had 5 diamonds and he would only have gone -1 if he had bid 2 diamonds.

My partner “consoled” him with the comment that it was always difficult to decide which suits to show when defending a 2-suited overcall and we had therefore decided to trust the opponents bidding since they would know what they had. We would then bid accordingly. Anyway the opponents thought our methods were not allowed and they called the director to confirm this fact. The director looked at the then book of regulations and much to his own and the opponents’ surprise confirmed that “any defence to a conventional defence” of an opening bid was permitted without any other formality.

The phrase the director used has stuck in my memory and the other day I heard it used by a military man who opined it was a saying derived from Sun Tzu in his treatise “*Art of War*”. Bridge being likened to War is certainly an apt concept!

Bye for now,

Geoffrey Wolfarth, Hove.