

REFLECTIONS FROM THE SEA END – OCTOBER 2016

The nights are starting to draw in and so I turn to the odd book to while away the twilight hours and I have become engrossed with the story of the Cambridge spy ring of the 1950s and related spooks. The way the Krugers impersonated the happy families of the time and the behaviour of Philby and his acolytes who were always on the go to some exotic location, definitely inspired me to think of the dark arts and bring them to life in the real world.

Because I am far too patriotic to plot against my country, my homage to the black arts took the form of honing my skills to psyche/mislead at bridge. This led me to form various bridge partnerships with like minded souls at the Young Chelsea, one of which became a long standing friend, who I will affectionately call "Mad Dog". Our bidding system was, at first blush, very accurate and complicated, being based on an extreme variant of Precision Club, but Mad Dog and I managed to incorporate various far-fetched bidding concepts. Some of these were so "advanced" (ie mad) that we even went to the trouble of confirming the legality of our sequences with members of the L&E Committee of the EBU. My readers may be amused at some of these and may even want to think about countermeasures!! So:-

If opponents open 1nt (any strength) then, at pairs, double by the next hand showed either more points than the opener (ie very traditional) OR a flat 4-8hcp hand (seemingly insane). If responder passed the double was left in on the vast majority of balanced hands. The principle was that most pairs playing a weak no trump had some sort of escape convention over a penalty double and were very often unable or unwilling to redouble for blood. The other reason was the scoring table is in the defender's favour since it is a fact that 1nt doubled plus 2 overtricks score LESS than 3nt making 9 tricks and that even 5 doubled overtricks score less than a slam bonus. Also as declarer you may well have difficulty in placing the cards in the play and thus not play the hand to advantage. At pairs the frequency of gain/loss is the important thing, and Mad Dog insisted that statistically this agreement was more likely to bring in more match points over the year than not.

Another similar but more well known ploy was that if the bidding went 2nt –pass-pass that 4th hand should always double for penalties. This again Mad Dog and I played for a full year and again it was a positive winner at match points. It also helps to improve your defence!

However the convention, I enjoyed most, was in response to our opening 1nt (10-12 hcp) an immediate jump to 3nt showed either 4hcps or less but at least 6 in a minor or a balanced 15-19 hcp. If doubled (which was rare) responder would show which type of hand he held by either passing (if strong) or redoubling (if weak). I was left a few times in 3nt making not a lot of tricks but for invariably good scores.

Pairs is such a random game sometimes, but for those who wish to do well, a little fore thought may be a wise investment. Well back to the cricket and the company of my pussycats!.

Geoffrey Wolfarth, Hove.