



SEPTEMBER 2020

NEWSLETTER



THE REPEAT ISSUE

This issue of our newsletter has a lot of repeats. No member contributions, repeat, no rank changes, repeat, no political commentary due to continued PC Police surveillance, repeat. How to use the Common Game site for seeing results, repeat, how to self alert, repeat.

There is, however, another report about our virtual games, including some robot news, an article about cheating at bridge, and even an article having something to do with playing bridge.

In the spirit of this issue and after playing online against many of you again this month, I feel kind of compelled to repeat from last month one of the best and most abused rules in bridge. It has to do with bidding. Try it, you may like it.

“If you have nothing to say, say nothing.”

I went bald at an early age. But I have kept my comb I just can't part with it



SEPTEMBER SCHEDULE

September is a bit different than the last five months because we actually know in advance what special games the ACBL has planned for us.

On Labor Day (Monday, September 7th) our game will be double points.

The really interesting special event will be held the last week in September (Monday the 21st through Sunday the 27th). The ACBL has dubbed this week:

Club Championship Week

All online games during this week will award double points of which 25% will be **gold**. This is a very rare opportunity to win **gold** points at your own virtual club. We will pass on the additional ACBL fees for Club Championship Week and charge \$4.00 per session. We will also add three additional games. We will have games every day Monday through Saturday, but never on Sunday.

The start time Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday will be our usual 1:30 PM. During the last Silver Linings Week we held the Tuesday and Thursday games at 10:00 AM but our attendance was lower than the afternoon games.

We are asking your opinion about when we should have the Tuesday and Thursday games, morning or afternoon?

As soon as you decide, we will notify you by email.

Game Schedule - September 2020

Monday 1:30pm	Wednesday 1:30pm	Friday 1:30pm
	2-Sep Open Pairs	4-Sep Open Pairs
7-Sep Open Pairs	9-Sep Open Pairs	11-Sep Open Pairs
14-Sep Open Pairs	16-Sep Open Pairs	18-Sep Open Pairs
21-Sep Open Pairs	23-Sep Open Pairs	25-Sep Open Pairs
28-Sep Open Pairs	30-Sep Open Pairs	

VIRTUAL CLUB THINGY REPORT

WOW! Can you believe it has been 173 days since we last played face to face bridge at the Croft House? Strange times, these. I think we should all be grateful that, due to the combined efforts of the folks at Common Game, BBO, the ACBL, and our game directors (Alan, Lauren, Jay, Jesse and Steve) we are still able to play bridge and to play with each other. No, it's not even close to the real thing. I really miss seeing all you guys and hope you are all well. Hang in there, this thing will be defeated, and we will embark on the new normal.

August was our fifth month playing on BBO. We held our usual 3 games per week and averaged 13.2 tables. This is the same as it's been for the last few months, so, I think critical mass has been achieved. Do you know what critical mass means? Me neither. Back in the day when I was playing business instead of playing bridge, I had a number of folk around me who listed their educational credentials as "BS, MBA Whatever University." They used that critical mass terminology much too frequently and I concluded it was just MBA BS.

Whoops, looks like I got sidetracked. Let's talk about some other BBO related stuff.

Who Can Play – amazingly, this thing did not change this month. Furthermore, I think this may actually be the final iteration. I hope so, because it seems like a fair solution to the problem of protecting individual club revenue while allowing players the freedom to play in different games.

The current (and hopefully final) rule is that anyone can play anywhere with the approval of the sponsoring club. However, a club is limited to 15% guests averaged over time. A guest is defined as someone who has not played in the club's face to face venue in the prior 18 months and has not been authorized to play at the club by the ACBL through its "poaching" protocol. It is also now allowable for two guests to play together in our games. Our policy, however, is to not allow pairs with no affiliation with our club to play in our games. Should we exceed the 15% limitation, we will have to refuse entry to some guests. I have been tracking this number since the new rule was put in place and we are currently averaging 7.9% guests, so I doubt this will be an issue for us.

Robots – you may or may not have noticed that when you go to register for our games, there is an option to play with a robot for \$.25. Originally, the ACBL did not want to allow robots in the virtual games, but a while back, they changed their mind. While I am not particularly fond of person/robot partnerships in our games, I do think they serve a useful purpose. If your partner cancels on you at the last moment but you really want to play, the robot is a good solution. Likewise, if you hadn't planned to play and change your mind, the robot is an alternative

Please understand that playing with a robot partner can be a bit of a trip. They play a pretty sophisticated system which you may not be familiar with. They use Soloway Jump Shifts, Support Doubles, Mixed Raises, Fit Jumps, Smolen, Cappelletti, regular and self splinters, just to name a few. I know quite a few of our players say they don't do reverses, well, the robots do. They really don't care what you play – you are expected to play what they play – no ifs, ands, or buts. If you think you are only competing, they will think you have extra stuff. Their opening leads can also be a bit eccentric. Thus far, we have had two person/robot partnerships play in our games. One good result, one bad result. So, who knows?

So, while we will allow person/robot partnerships in our games, we are kind of discouraging it except for the special circumstances mentioned above.

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On the other hand, we are going to try using robot pairs to fill in the movement if we have half a table. Currently we have to seek subs to fill in, and they are frequently hard to find. Then, after their first bad board or if they decide they don't like their partner, they leave and we need to find another and on and on. The robots, on the other hand, will play till the bitter end without any complaining.

We have not used robot pairs for filling out the movement in the past because we did not want them to earn any masterpoints that should go to our players (the random subs do earn points even if they are not ACBL members).

The robot pairs will do well. They know all the percentage plays and they never ever forget the conventions they are playing. However, the masterpoint problem has been fixed by making the robots ineligible to win points. For example, if the robot pair comes in second, they will be skipped and the third place pair becomes second.

The scores that come up on BBO after our game is over will show the robot pair's result and masterpoints won. However, when the results are sent to the ACBL, the robots will be made ineligible.

Note: The masterpoint awards shown on BBO, Common Game, and ACBL Live for Clubs are frequently different. The official awards are those shown on ACBL Live for Clubs.

Like everything we try, if you don't like it, just let us know.

Common Game Hands – as predicted, here is the fourpeat. Since I only had three questions during the last month about where you can see the hand records and results I will put this to bed after this newsletter. You can review all the results and hand records on the Common Game web site. By clicking on player names in the board by board recaps, you can see their auction as well as the play of the hand. The link is in the email Common Game sends you. It is also here,

[The Common Game ClubWebResults Page](#)

Self Alerting – while it appears the Common Game Hand comments are ending with the fourpeat, it looks like the Self Alerting comments are going to be an infinipeat. We still don't quite get this, so here we go again. On BBO, you should **self alert** any bid or announcement you would make playing F2F (face to face). To do this, press the "Alert" box in your bidding box, enter the description and then make the bid. The alert will be seen only by your opponents, your partner, as usual, remains in the dark. **Do not alert by chatting to the table** (which kind of defeats the purpose of the self alert – that the opponents know what your bid means even if your partner doesn't) **or to your opponents.**

Thus far we have put links to three videos in our Newsletter, plus a few different written explanations of the Self Alert process. Despite all this, we still don't get it. So, for this month's try we refer you to page 18 of the August ACBL Bulletin where you will find a graphic presentation. Please read it. For your convenience, we have also reproduced it on the next page of this newsletter, but it's kind of fuzzy.

House Rules -- for those of you playing Montreal Relay, Kennedy Club, etc., you must alert that 1 club could be short, that a one diamond response denies a five card major (and if it shows a 4 card major or not), and that a one heart or one spade response shows a five card suit.

It is no longer necessary to self alert a no trump range that falls within 15 to 18 high card points. There is also no need to alert Stayman or major suit transfers over no trump bids.

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If you wish to play more often, there are ABCL sponsored Support Your Club games every day at 10:00 am, 5:10 pm and 7:30 pm. These games are open to all players and cost \$6.00. The lion's share of the entry fee goes back to support your home club or clubs. That would be us.

BBO Help Desk **How to Alert your bids on Bridge Base Online**

In face-to-face bridge, you Alert your partner's bids. In online bridge, you Alert your own bids. Here's how to do that.



It's your turn to bid, and you realize the call you're about to make requires an Alert. In this case, partner has opened INT and you want to transfer. Before doing anything else, click the Alert button.



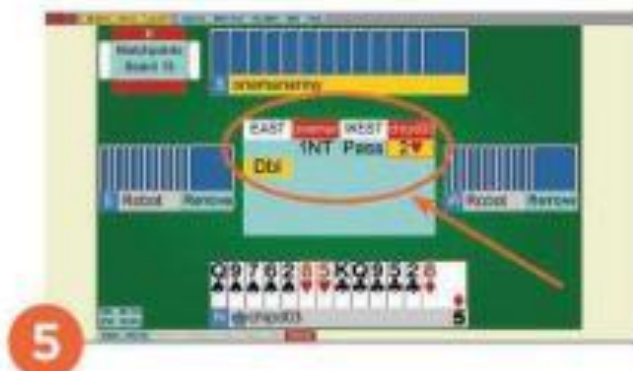
The Alert button will turn red and a cursor will appear. Type an explanation for your call here.



After you have entered your Alert and explanation, you are ready to select your call. Once you bid, it's too late to Alert. Select the level of your bid.



Once you select a level, the strains appear. Select the appropriate strain. In this case we want to bid 2♥ to transfer to spades.



When you click the suit symbol, your bid appears in the auction diagram highlighted in yellow and outlined in red. The auction continues. Note that although partner Alerted his INT bid as 15-17, you don't see his Alert and he can't see yours.



During or after the auction, you can hover over any call highlighted in yellow to see the explanation. If there is a red outline but no yellow, you can click the bid to prompt the person who made the Alert to fill in the explanation.

CHEATING AT BRIDGE

In the Board Meeting Report in the previous newsletter I mentioned that cheating at online bridge was a known problem. I said there would be an article about cheating in this month's newsletter.

Well, here it is!

I'm sure most of you are, like me, very surprised that people would cheat at our elegant game. Oh sure, petty cheating at the kitchen table game with its grimaces, coffee housing, unnecessary comments, etc., is known to all, and is, in a way, part of the deal. But, cheating in competitive bridge must surely be a rarity. Well, thankfully, it is pretty rare, but exists at all levels of the game. It even exists among world class players competing for National and World Championships.

Following is a very condensed inglorious history of some of the more egregious episodes promulgated by world class players. Most all of these incidents occurred during very prestigious knockout team events.

- ***The Buenos Aires Affair*** – at the Bermuda Bowl World Championships in 1965, Terrance Reese and Boris Schapiro (the top British pair) were accused and later convicted of cheating. Their method was holding their cards with X number of fingers exposed; where X was the number of cards they held in a particular suit.

While this information may not seem to be a big deal to some of us, for a world class player it is enormous. The bidding combined with this illicit knowledge enables the player to figure out the distribution of the hand fairly easily.

Reese and Schapiro received an extremely lenient three year suspension for their transgressions, but their reputations were permanently stained. The World Bridge Federation (WBF) was, however, moved to require screens for their competitions. The screens were diagonal barriers across the table making it impossible to see one's partner. When the bidding is complete, a curtain (later a door) across the bottom of the screen is opened so the players can see the cards being played.

Here is a picture of what a table with a screen looks like.



The screen divides the table diagonally with one player from each pair as screenmates. The rectangular thing in the middle of the table with a board on it is called a bidding tray. The screenmates place their bids in the area surrounding the board, open the door in the screen and pass it through the screen to the other screenmates. This continues until the bidding is complete. After the bidding is complete the door is left open so everyone can see the cards, but not their partner's pretty face.

Self alerting is used by writing the bid's meaning on paper for your screenmate.

Problem solved! Maybe not so much, as marching in are

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- ➡ **The Foot Soldiers** – during the 1975 Bermuda Bowl held, coincidentally, in Bermuda, Gianfranco Facchini and Sergio Zucchelli of the Italian Team were accused of exchanging unauthorized information by, get ready for this, tapping toes under the table. The Foot Soldiers (previously known as the Vegetables) were similarly accused the prior year while winning a highly prestigious pairs event in Monaco. While these allegations were never proven, the pair just kind of disappeared from the international bridge scene after the 1975 incident.

The WBF was now moved to decree that the screens would henceforth be extended to the floor under the table to stop this footsy playing in its track.

So let's move on to ACBL Land and begin with

- ➡ **The Houston Affair** – during the 1977 North American Team Trials allegations of improper illicit communication were leveled against the pair of Richard Katz and Larry T. Cohen (NOTE: This is not Larry N. Cohen, expert player, writer, teacher and promulgator of The Law of Total Tricks, who will soon be inducted into the ACBL Hall of Fame). Their method of communication, coughing and sniffing in various sequences. Rather than face the allegations, they resigned from the ACBL right there and then, and left the event causing their team to forfeit its matches.

Shortly thereafter, Katz and Cohen sued the ACBL for \$44 million alleging, among other things, defamation of character. The ACBL countersued and this sordid affair dragged its way through the legal system for five years before being settled for next to nothing.

Next up, another ACBL pair, one of them a two time loser

- ➡ **The Pencil Coders** – in 1979, Steve Sion and Alan Cokin were under observation for unusual bids and opening leads that were too frequently successful. The observers concluded that they were signally their distribution, particularly in short suits, by the directions and locations they placed their pencils on the table. They confessed and were barred from ACBL play for five years.

After five years they applied for and were granted reinstatement with stipulations, one being they could never again play together. Cokin, trying to make amends, went on to devote himself to promoting youth bridge programs. Sion, on the other hand, went on to get involved in another serious improprieties case and was expelled for life in 1997.

While there were numerous incidents before and after those mentioned, let's speed forward 25 years and introduce you to

- ➡ **The Racecars** – in 2005 at the European Team Championships, Italian team members Andrea Buratti and Massimo Lanzarotti (for the automotive challenged, the nickname 'Racecars' comes from the similarity of their names to that of two high performance automakers, Bugatti (with its 1578 horsepower engine and an entry level price of \$3 million) and Maserati) were accused of having dummy peak at the opponents hands and convey what they saw to their partner by the direction of their folded arms on the table and the number of fingers exposed. They were adjudicated guilty by the tournament staff and forfeited their matches. Upon appeal, the committee voted unanimously against them.

They were expelled from the ACBL for five years and denied readmission in 2011. In 2018, Lanzarotti once again applied for readmission to the ACBL, which for some odd reason or another, was granted. So, this guy is back on the streets. We will see.

OK, OK. So, you want to know what a \$3 million car with a top end speed of over 300 mph looks like. Well, here it is!



Next up, even the senior citizens get involved, here's your appointment with

- ➡ **The Coughing Doctors** – in 2013, in the Senior World Championship, the US team met the German team in the finals. One of the German pairs, Michael Elinescu and Entschow Wladow, both retired medical physicians, were thought to be conveying information by how many times they coughed and when the coughs occurred. The code was broken by Donna Compton, the Non Playing US Captain.

After the usual denials and string of appeals, the good doctors were barred from playing in any WBF event for ten years and from playing with each other for life. They were also required to return the gold medal they won in this event, but refused to do so.

So, that's not really a lot of incidents over a long period of time. True. The reason for that is the governing bodies of bridge, from the WBF and all the national and zonal organizations were very reluctant to get involved in cheating allegations, since they were very hard to prove, frequently resulted in expensive litigation and, in their opinion, tainted the image of our great game.

Over the years there were many pairs suspected of being dirty by their peers, who frequently lodged complaints and calls for investigations with the governing bodies. Unfortunately, the bridge organizations chose to keep their collective heads in the sand, causing much frustration among the clean professionals, and consequently nobody did anything and nothing happened. In 2015, that was about to change due primarily to the efforts of a youngish (not youngish by our standards (under 80)), but more like little 40's) professional player from Norway. So, let's take a look at

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➡ **Boye's Battle** – after losing the Spingold Teams Championship to a team which included one of the pairs many thought to be cheating, Boye Brogeland began a campaign to out not only that pair, but other highly ranked pairs suspected by their peers of communicating unauthorized information by nefarious methods (aka cheating). In doing so, Boye was violating one of the sacred unwritten laws of bridge – you do not publicly accuse someone of cheating, even if you are positively sure that they are. Possible repercussions would be shunning from the bridge community, thus ending his career and livelihood. As the campaign went on, Boye was sued by some of the accused and actually threatened with violence by others.

Boye's campaign resonated with many of the clean players who volunteered to help analyze countless hands for seemingly odd but successful actions, and study video after video to try to break the cheating code. Note: these highly prestigious championships are routinely recorded and broadcast on BBO VuGraph, so the play by play of each hand is readily available.

Long story short. These efforts were very successful resulting in the condemnation of four extremely prominent pairs, presented in chronological order of their outing.

Lotan Fisher and Ron Schwartz – young Israeli International players whose quick rise to prominence included winning three North American Team Championships. Their method of communication was how and where they placed the board on the table after removing it from the bidding tray showing strength in various suits. Later, coughing codes were added to the allegations. They were found guilty as charged and expelled from the ACBL, the Israeli Bridge Federation and the European Bridge League.

Fulvio Fantoni and Claudio Nunes – the then Number 1 and Number 2 ranked players in the world. Winners of numerous World Championships, North American Championships, and on and on. Their trick was signaling strength and/or suit preference on defense by the direction they placed their leads on the table, vertical, horizontal, or at an angle. In addition, the manner in which they placed quit tricks held additional meaning. They were suspended or expelled by virtually every bridge organization for various time periods.

Alex Smirnov and Josef Piekarek – German Internationalists who after being confronted by Brogeland confessed to unethical behavior playing bridge going back many years. Banned from the European Bridge League for four years and from playing together for life.

Cezary Balicky and Adam Zmudzinski – their method was indicating the relative strength of their bids by the distance the current bidding card was placed from the previous bidding card. Despite overwhelming evidence, the pair was exonerated.

Fast forward five years to 2020 and the Covid 19 era of online bridge, where we find yet another way to cheat, the new art of

➡ **Self-kibitzing** – what the hell is that? Since face to face bridge has disappeared from the planet, there have been a number of online knockout team events held on BBO. These events have attracted many high level players and their sponsors as replacements for the team games not held at our cancelled National and International Tournaments. Events featuring world class players are routinely played on BBO VuGraph so we mere mortals can watch the big boys play (If you haven't tried this, it is a great way to learn). As a kibitzer you can see all four hands displayed as you watch the bidding and play.

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So, the ethically challenged might think they could play better if they saw all four hands. So they do. They simply log on to BBO with another User ID and/or on a different device. They then join the table they are playing at as a kibitzer, and there they are, in all their glory, the 52 cards in everyone's hand. BBO kind of frowns on this sort of behavior and does their best to find and banish the perps.

Has BBO caught anyone doing this? They actually have. I will mention three cases which have occurred in the last two months or so. Once again, in chronological order, let's meet

Peter Friedland – BBO determined that Friedland was using unauthorized information, probably from self-kibitzing, during the Reynolds Spring Knockout event. He and the rest of his team (against whom no allegations were made) were disqualified from the event, and Friedland was suspended from BBO and the results of the investigation were sent to the ACBL.

The next two cases involve young bridge Superstars and are somewhat different than Friedland, in that the players themselves posted articles on the Bridgewinners web site confessing that they were guilty of self-kibitzing. I give you

Michal Nowosadzki – age 32 is a Polish Internationalist and Professional Player who is currently ranked 5th in the world by the World Bridge Federation. He is (was) a member of the powerhouse Josef Blass Team which has won numerous ACBL National Team Championships in recent years. Say it ain't so, Nowo, say it ain't so.

Sylvia Shi – yes, that Sylvia Shi. The 32 year old Professional Player was the cover girl for the January 2020 ACBL Bulletin on occasion of her becoming the youngest woman to achieve ACBL's highest rank, Grand Life Master. Shi is currently under suspension from the ACBL pending a hearing. Sheesh! **Update – just today I found out that Shi has been suspended from the ACBL for three years.**

The bridge world and its governing bodies appear to believe that cheaters who have confessed deserve less drastic sanctions than those who chose to engage in endless denial and frequent litigation. In both of these cases, the "confessions" occurred after they were confronted with the evidence from BBO investigations. Both basically said they stopped when the guilt set in. With the risk of being cynical, I wonder if we are looking at mitigation of impending damage (**see above**).

So, is there cheating at bridge? Well, it sure as hell looks like it, even at the highest levels of the game. Is there cheating at online bridge? Well, it sure as hell looks like it, even at the highest levels of the game.

Let's take a look at the online virtual games at our little olde club. Thankfully, self-kibitzing is not an issue. We do not allow kibitzers (except during the final round if you have finished play) at our games and the computer is really good at controlling that. That leaves us with the most obvious method of cheating, communicating with your partner by phone, text, email, voice (if you live together), whatever, at the same time you are playing.

BBO insists it has computer algorithms that can identify this brand of collusive cheating. If they find someone in violation they simply ban them from BBO. Their company, their rules. If it's an ACBL event the results of their investigation are sent to the ACBL to do with what they want. From my brief perusal of the ACBL Suspension/Expulsion document, it appears that about 20 or more people have been suspended due to unethical behavior in online play. Since we have been only doing this for about five months that, to me, seems like quite a few.

So, is there anything we can do about this other than wait for BBO and/or the ACBL to catch the miscreants? Well, yes there is. The ACBL has a Recorder whose job is to investigate inappropriate behavior, be it behavioral or ethical. The recorder will only investigate situations where there is something concrete to investigate. For example, insinuating that Sally and Harry must be communicating with each other when playing because their results are better online than they were at the club is meritless in the eyes of the Recorder. On the other hand, if Sally underleads the Ace fourth of an unbid suit and Harry turns up with King doubleton and scores a ruff, well that's a tad interesting. However, if Sally and Harry frequently find bizarre and effective defenses, that becomes quite interesting. Same with bidding, if Sally and Harry frequently overcall or balance on four cards suits and always find four or more card support, that is quite interesting.

Collusive cheating at bridge is the highest crime in the game. But remember, falsely (whether intentional or not) accusing someone of cheating is the second highest crime.

So, let me leave you with a question. It's a yes/no question, but I'll bet you won't be happy with your answer, whatever it is.

Have you stopped cheating at online bridge?

DON'T JUST THE BOX JACOBY TWO NO TRUMP

This is the second article in our new series about commonly used, misused and abused conventions. You remember the scenario. Right? No. OK, here it is again. You have a bridge date with a new partner or one you haven't played with for a long time. You are meeting with her to fill out your convention card. You get to the part about major suit openings and ask "Jacoby 2NT?" She responds "Yes." So check the box and move on and fill out the rest of your card.

It being the first Wednesday of the month, you get your second piece of Birthday cake and mosey on over to your table. First hand out of the box you gaze at this nice but somewhat modest collection:

♠ AJ10xx
♥ xx
♦ Axx
♣ AJx

Your partner opens 1♠ and as you bid 2NT you are thinking about what a great idea it was to check that 2NT Jacoby box. The opponents remain silent and partner rebids 4♣ -- what in the world does that mean. You think, could it be Gerber? Another suit? How about a void? If 3♣ would be a singleton maybe it is a void. So now, wondering why you ever checked that box, you realize you have no idea what to do. Oh well, my hand is not that great anyway, so I'll just bid 4♠. So you score up your +510 and move on.

So, what did it mean? Here's partner's hand:

♠ KQ9xx
♥ Ax
♦ x
♣ KQxxx

Yep, it meant five ♣'s with two of the top three honors. Had you known that you would have bid Key Card Blackwood and partner would have admitted to having KQ♠ and the A♥. Since you can now count about 15 or more tricks, you bid the Spade Grand Salami and rack up +1510.

As an aside, what do you do if partner denies the Q♠? The same thing, 7♠. Wait a minute, don't you need all the Key Cards and the trump Q to bid a grand. Not if you have extra length. With 10 trump, the other three will split 2-1 78% of the time, and you will pick up the 3-0 split half the time, making the Grand Slam an 89% proposition. Without the Q♠, you have an 89% grand slam on 26 HCP with the J♣ not even necessary.

What I am suggesting is that if you agree with your partner to play a convention, don't just check the box, discuss and agree what all the continuations mean.

Following is a structure of responses to Jacoby 2NT. Please understand that this is just one of many structures on the market. The one shown is pretty standard and is not as memory taxing as some of the other structures. The most important thing, as always, is not what conventions you play, but that you and partner are playing the same ones the same way.

After a major suit opening and a Jacoby 2NT response, here are the suggested rebids:

3♣, 3♦ or 3 of the other major	Singleton or void in the bid suit Rebid at four level shows a void
3 of the major	16+ points with slam interest
3NT	14 to 15 HCP, balanced If you open all balanced hands with a five card major 1NT, then you might consider 18+ balanced
4♣, 4♦	Five card suit with two of the top three honors
4♥	If ♥ are trump, minimum, no slam ambitions If ♠ are trump, 5+♥'s
4♠	If ♠ are trump, minimum, no slam ambitions

So, you checked that Jacoby 2NT box, and as Paul Harvey said, "And that's the rest of the story."