

# MOUNTNESSING BRIDGE CLUB

Meets every Thursday at 7.25 for 7.30  
at Mountnessing Village Hall, Roman Road, Mountnessing, Essex, England, CM15 0UG

## “2020” Comments on “Points” do not necessarily point accurately!

Submission by Alaric Cundy: [Click here](#)

Commentary by Alaric Cundy

Firstly, it is worth reminding readers that anybody can download the ‘Bridge Solver’ analytical tool for free, and use it to analyse different Declarer plays and / or defences, on any hand of their choosing – such as this one! To access ‘Bridge Solver Online’ go to this link:  
<https://mirgo2.co.uk/bridgesolver/upload.htm> It is also available to download as an App for Android devices or Chromebooks or as a Windows desktop App here:  
<https://mirgo2.co.uk/bridgesolver/index.php?section=1> This tool is embedded into the Bridgewebs website and it is used by the ‘Play it Again’ facility.

This example is mostly about hand evaluation, so before looking at the bidding, play, and other things that might have happened, we will look at this primary focus.

Nobody should argue with Sandra Landy’s premise that the very familiar *Milton High Card Points* system is only really valid for balanced hands played in No Trump contracts, because trumps give additional opportunities to win tricks.

It is observed that many players still try to apply the system slavishly to *unbalanced hands*. If I had a pound for every time I have heard opponents say something like “We only had 28 points partner, so that {lay-down} slam wasn’t biddable” I would by now be a very rich man! Too many players still try to adapt the system, by, for example, “counting a void as 4 points”. That void could be a real *liability* if it turns out that partner wants to insist on playing in a No Trump contract, or, even worse, in that void! Some players are also a bit reluctant to *devalue* their hand when it is appropriate. For example, a singleton Queen is *usually* of no more value than a singleton 2!

A much better scheme for evaluating unbalanced hands is the *Losing Trick Count*, which strictly should only be used when a playable trump fit has been established. This scheme essentially gives extra value to long suits, including to a long side-suit, which can often be a real asset when playing in a Trump contract. Since the original article was written in 2009, the *Losing Trick Count* concept has become much more widely adopted by tournament players, but if you want to read more about it then see, for example,

[https://mrbridge.co.uk/assets/docs/library/articles/bidding/LTC\\_1.pdf](https://mrbridge.co.uk/assets/docs/library/articles/bidding/LTC_1.pdf)

So now let’s have a good look at the bidding and possible alternative outcomes on this board, and where better to start than by turning to *Bridge Solver*?

*Bridge Solver* confirms that 6♥ can be made from either hand on any lead. The play is not exactly ‘Rocket Science’! It takes a trump lead to beat the inferior, but plausible, contract of 6♦; otherwise, Declarer has time to ruff 2 Diamonds in the East hand before drawing trumps, and then enjoying the hearts. In practice, either North or South might be tempted to lead a top card from their respective long suits, in which case the 6♣ contract would be made.

North / South have a good save against the slam in 6♠ – especially if the Diamond suit is played optimally, as it should be. Whether or not that happens depends a bit on how the bidding went exactly, and therefore what inferences about the lie of the diamonds can be drawn. If West is tempted to lead a heart at trick 1, and Declarer times the hand to perfection, he can now get

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away with just 2 off for -300, a good save even against 4S♦+2. Try it for yourself using *Bridge Solver*.

The next question to ask is about West's choice of opening bid. Some players would advocate a 1♣ opening; I do not. The problem is, of course, that if the bidding starts 1♣ 1♠, or 1♣ 1NT, West will not be able to bid the hearts without grossly over-stating the hand's strength courtesy of an enforced *Reverse Bid*. With the actual lie of the cards, West would (undeservedly) land on his feet, because East would, of course, respond 1♥, and now the West hand is suddenly good enough to game force via a Spade suit Splinter Bid.

Back to the bidding as it actually unfolded at the table. I am very surprised that North didn't overcall 2♦ – especially at favourable vulnerability. *Please don't tell me "but you need 10 HCPs to overcall at the 2 level...."* With such an overcall, East / West need to have a clear understanding as to what impact it has on their subsequent bidding. In this example, East / West were playing an agreement such that Splinter bids in the overcalled suit were still valid, so North's intervention wouldn't have prevented East from making the 4♦ bid anyway. But that simple overcall *could have* sown seeds of confusion, and possibly would have been enough to have kept East / West out of the slam.

From East's perspective, opposite the 1♥ opener, this is a 6-loser hand – one *better* than required to force to game despite the “only 11 HCPs” tag – so the 4♦ Splinter bid, which promises heart support and Game+ values, should be automatic. I think it extraordinary that, whereas North felt unable to bid at the 2-level, then South, with a near identical hand, albeit in different suits, felt moved to try a 4-level bid. I would have done the same with the South hand – but I wouldn't have passed the North hand! If South had passed, East / West's passage to 6♥ would, I think, have been even easier; West can now himself bid 4♣ – a first round cue bid, showing better than bare opening values. And, yes, this hand **is** ‘better than ‘bare opening values’ opposite partner’s Splinter bid!

I have to concede that there is an element of good fortune with the East / West bidding. Bidding a slam *knowingly* missing two of the five key cards requires a little bit of faith that one of the two missing key cards is covered by West's void in Spades. 4NT from West does not really sound right, and perhaps a 5♣ Cue bid would be better - showing Slam interest *without the ability to bid 4NT*; East should now be able to deduce that West has a void in Spades, and can bid on to 6♥.