

## OXFORDSHIRE V WARWICKSHIRE

### Oxford Bridge Club: 11<sup>th</sup> December 2016

Sorry! Sorry! Sorry!

During the period following the debacle v Warwicks I was inundated with carol services, organ playing and all the other musical endeavours which precede Christmas, then – just before Christmas Eve - the lurgy struck and I've been laid low ever since. Too late now to contemplate an in-depth survey of the wreckage (we've all managed to forget some of the horrors). I won't even show the stats this time (I'm sure I've still got them somewhere) but to save a little face I'll write a few words about some deals which still resonate – for reasons I'd rather forget.

#### Board 7: game all dealer S

	AK6	
	1072	
	AKJ108	
	107	
Q1084		J9
KJ8		A653
5		Q9632
AJ852		Q6
	7532	
	Q94	
	74	
	K943	

West had just been on the wrong end of a partscore at my table, losing 200 after a minor miscalculation, and was obviously intent on re-imposing himself: so he wheeled out a system bid of 2D (any 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0 with short diamonds with 11-15 HCPs) – well, it was close. Partner bid 3D and played there, going 4 down for -400.

The only reason for mentioning this is that the choice between doubling to show the suit bid conventionally by the opponents, and bidding the actual suit, occurs quite frequently, and it's good to have some distinction between the two. To my mind, the double is primarily lead-directing (though it obviously doesn't prohibit partner from bidding the suit (or indeed any other) with a suitable hand) and should promise a decent 5-card holding in a primarily defensive hand (as here).

To bid the suit at the 3-level, particularly when vulnerable, needs playing trick potential (AQJXXXX and out would be an example) and some recognition of the rule of 500. On the one hand, you have 5 trumps and there may 8 out: partner may have half of them but may not; on the other hand, you have 15 points so there may be 14 out, and partner may not have half. Partner, as can be seen, contributed exactly bugger-all on this occasion but after a double of 2D this wouldn't have mattered.

To make matters even more piquant, East pointed out after the hand was over that she could and should have doubled, with certain knowledge that this would be for penalties. In case it sounds as though I'm merely getting at partner, this is certainly not the case: any member of the RMN (Result Merchants Navy) might feel entitled to say his piece at the table (and I say this with feeling as I play regularly with an Admiral of the Fleet) but results merchanting is destructive of morale and more importantly of partner, who is sure to be feeling low anyway. Bidding 3D here looks innocent, just taking into account the actual hand held; clearly it would be wrong to pass – recognising that there is a viable alternative is all that matters. Anyway, as it's a time for New Year resolutions, let's all resign our commissions in the RMV.

In passing, I should add that ours wasn't the only horror result on this innocent little hand: Geary/Patterson have been honest enough to reveal a knotty auction which backed them freely into a contract of 3 spades – down 5 for -500 (again the failure to double showed seasonal goodwill on the part of the oppo – though perhaps it was a mite less clear-cut than in our case).

**Board 9: EW game, dealer N**

	K7542	
	95	
	985	
	Q102	
AJ		Q86
A10874		KQJ6
K1073		AQJ2
98		A7
	1093	
	32	
	64	
	KJ6543	

*Prologue*

Getting on for 30 years ago, I was privileged to undertake a foreign bridge tour in partnership with a fine player and generous partner, Dave Huggett of Southampton. We had ample opportunity to discuss system whilst crossing the Russian Steppes on the trans-Siberian express. There were two aspects of bidding where he was anxious to establish rules of thumb (no doubt following disasters in different company). One was to establish exactly when 4NT was Ace-asking and when not.

I found this a very instructive exercise and I only fell foul of RKCB on one occasion with him, which was due to the fact that we were using Russian playing cards where the honours were T for Tus (Ace), R for Roi (King), D for Dame (Queen) and V for Valet (Jack). In the Cyrillic alphabet, a D is a sort of squashed A. In the semi-final of the international event in which we were to play, we agreed a suit and Dave asked for Aces, in response to which – in a moment of sheer aberration – I confessed to having two squashed Aces. He duly bid the slam, against which the opponents unkindly led two Ts. Fortunately we won the semi-final (but no, not the final) and, in any case, we managed to laugh off the calamity.

The other rule of thumb on which Dave insisted (and this one clearly hid a story he never told me) was that we should agree that once we had agreed a suit to play in, we should then never attempt to play in a different suit – even if there was a possible good reason to try to do so. We never needed to put this into practice but on my return to England I was quick to suggest to my then partner Brian that we adopt the same two rules. Those who remember him (ie most of us – and all with great affection) know that Brian loved gadgets and the wheeling out of same, a shame because he never could remember them accurately. However, I don't recall that among our many adventures in the backwoods of bidding, we ever had to avoid a critical change of suit.

It's easy to spot that on this hand, 6H is off on a club lead whilst 6D makes on any lead, the losing club being discarded on the long heart. However, as far as I can see, only one pair in the entire field (Lishkov/Wilson) bid 6H and went down, whilst only one pair bid and made 6D. This extraordinary fact is due to how easily the bidding becomes locked into hearts and how difficult it is for the oppo to lead a club against 6H, unless they have had (and taken) an opportunity to double a cue-bid or RKCB response in clubs. I suspect that Lishkov/Wilson started with 1H by East (as would all the 4-card majorites) so the diamond suit got lost.

Playing 5-card Ms I opened 1D and raised the 1H response to 4H. Sandra followed up with 4NT and I showed 0 or 3 with 5C. At this point, after long deliberation, she emerged with 6D and my thoughts went back to the Russian Steppes: was this an attempt to play there, or was it a Grand Slam try showing the King of diamonds? In fairness, I have to admit that I know Sandra to be one whose instinct is to shoot from the hip rather than indulge in “fancy” bids. Nonetheless, I found it impossible to avoid the second interpretation and so leapt to 7H.

After putting down the dummy, no doubt looking like an expectant puppy-dog, I noticed two things, in order: first, a look of horror on partner’s face which didn’t bode well; second, a red card on my left which I had failed to spot when discreetly laid there by my LHO, no doubt following my 5C. What more can I say? Well, a bit more. Firstly, going 2 down in 7H is no different really to 1 down in 6H. The trick is to pass 6D and make it. Sandra had done brilliantly but had cast her pearls before swine.

### *Epilogue*

About a week later I was playing with the Rear-Admiral in the second round of the Seniors KO in the depths of rural Surrey. Our oppo were undistinguished but very determined. We displayed our usual mix of inspiration and crud, to the extent that playing the third set we were down 8 IMPs, plus two horrors as yet unscored, when the following deal occurred:

	J10XX	
	10X	
	QJXX	
	QJX	
X		AKXX
Q87X		KJXX
AK642		X
AK8		XXXX
	QXXX	
	AXX	
	10XX	
	10XX	

At the table where team-mates (Procter/Robinson) sat EW. Rob decided not to open the East hand (which playing 5-card M would have entailed opening 1C on 4 small. So the bidding went P-1D-1H-3S-4H (end), Rob deciding that, despite his extra values, they were poorly placed (ie opposite shortage). This was a view destined to turn out very well or very badly, depending on events at my table. 6H is an OK spot on passive defence (indeed 12 tricks were made by ruffing the diamonds good before tackling trumps) but is in deep trouble against best defence: try it after a low trump lead, for example: you can win but can’t lead another trump because a third round will follow, leaving you a trick short; if on the other hand you tackle diamonds, you have to use up top clubs and then, when you revert to trumps, you will have a club loser.

So everything depended on us. At our table East did open the East hand 1C and the bidding proceeded 1C-1D-1H-3S-4H-5C-5D-6C. East took the same view to downgrade his hand after the splinter in spades but was bound to cue-bid in response to 5C. He then had to decide what to do after 6C. Was this a Grand Slam try in hearts, or an attempt to play in his first-bid suit? He eventually settled on the latter and passed 6C. As it happened, it didn’t matter much what I led but I put a small trump face down on the table before asking questions about the auction, all answered confidently until it came to the last one. He eventually said that it had to be a sign-off in clubs.

Just before the lead was turned over, dummy-elect spoke: “there is an alternative explanation, which is that partner has just passed a cue-bid in search of a Grand Slam”. 6C was hopeless, of course, but futile attempts to make it led to three down, meaning that after taking into account an impossible game brought in by Procter on another board, we were all-square with 8 to play (and went on to win when another cock-up by the oppo in the last set proved terminal). So sometimes in life, what goes up comes down again. (And what did West think he was doing anyway, inviting a Grand when partner had already signed off in game?) Somehow, none of this makes me feel any better on the Warwickshire deal....

Above all, I have to agree that the lead-directing double alters everything, so I have no defence: failing to see all the bidding on display is lamentable. I reckon even Dave Huggett would agree there – but I’m not about to ask him...

### Board 17: love all, dealer N

	A9	
	943	
	J942	
	10954	
K1042		Q85
A106		KQ72
8		K763
AQ732		K6
	J763	
	J85	
	AQ105	
	J8	

This is in some ways the most amazing board of the set. Looking at all four hands, 3NT by East has zero play and yet, only one pair in the entire field managed to defeat it. Nick Smith led a spade, Alan Wilson won the Ace and switched unerringly to the diamond 9. When this held the trick he knew for sure that partner held the 10 (as otherwise declarer would surely have played it on the 9) so he continued with DJ: South was able to play the 10 under this and wait for a further diamond through for 1 down.

I don’t know what happened at most tables but I was also on lead after the auction 1D-1S-1NT-3NT. A diamond lead was now unattractive so I tried the H5. When H10 held the trick in dummy and declarer followed with four rounds of clubs (throwing two spades from hand) I could have written his original hand down on a piece of paper. In with C10, partner switched also to the D9 (good stuff!) and I was in the happy position of being able to encourage with the 5 (we play upside-down attitude signals).

Unfortunately, partner didn’t pick up the inference that I was marked with the 10 when the 9 held, and continued with the D2, end-playing me somewhat. However, I knew that she was marked with SA so could switch to S7, denying interest in the suit apart from the means of re-entry to her hand. What I hadn’t anticipated was the spade being ducked (with declarer claiming four clubs, four hearts and a spade for his contract. So what was obvious to me wasn’t quite so obvious to partner, who

might have been distracted by the thought that declarer had started with 5 diamonds and me with King to 4 hearts or some-such. We always have to remember that perspectives can differ according to one's side of the table. This felt like a solitary disaster but turned out to be a virtually universal one. Incredible!

**Board 30: love all, dealer E**

	J	
	None	
	QJ109654	
	J10854	
AQ9		108754
AKQ95		J10743
K		A2
AK72		9
	K632	
	862	
	873	
	Q63	

Another amazing board. After two passes partner held one of the biggest hands sh'e ever likely to see and duly opened 2C (our only big bid). North did well to bash an immediate 5D and I doubled, which surprisingly ended the auction. I say surprisingly, because a double in this kind of auction merely shows a smattering of points and is preferable to a pass. After all, what else can one do? 6D to invite a slam in a major looks a bit far-fetched and bidding 5 of a major is almost as uncertain (partner may have an Acol 2 in clubs, for instance). Had partner risked a 5H bid I would have had an easy raise to 6H (but that would have secured me an advanced rank in the RMN).

However, 5D\* was no disaster, provided we defended properly. I led my singleton club, which being the 9 was difficult for partner to read as a singleton. Still, continuing with CA after the King would have revealed that declarer had twelve cards at least in the minors, the 13<sup>th</sup> card perhaps being a spade. Anyway, no hearts. The play would then have gone club, club, club ruff, spade to Q and another club, allowing us to score our top trumps separately for +800, within touching distance of the 980 available in hearts. Sadly, trick two saw an attempt to cash a top heart and when declarer ruffed and advanced DQ, I managed to rise with DA, killing our other top trump to complete our corporate embarrassment.

Well, that's all folks. I'm sorry again (a) for the long delay and (b) for ignoring so many comments sent in by fellow-sufferers.

I do hope our fortunes turn for the better in the New Year and that we all enjoy the festivities.

JOHN WILLIAMS  
31/12/16