



News and Views

The Palmerston North Club Charity Tournament was a great success with forty-five pairs. In fact, exactly half the players were from outside clubs which is unusual. Enthusiastic bridgers came from as far away as Auckland, Hutt, Wellington, New Plymouth and Hawkes Bay.

The winners were Janice Coleman and Ken Bateman. Mike Park and Yvonne Pene were second, with Kay Townsley and Jo Haddon coming third. The top Junior pair were Shirley Barnett and Julie Bunnell.

Many thanks to everyone who contributed. All the entry and raffle money went to the charity (Camellia House) so everyone who entered, donated a prize or bought a raffle ticket helped this worthwhile cause. Behind the scenes, Lorraine Stachurski masterminded everything, and was ably assisted by many others, notably Elsie Beale who organized the sponsors and prizes. Pam Mason helped to provide an impressive display of prizes. Gayle Leader, as usual, organized the plates, and morning and lunchtime teas and snacks. The Soroptimists organized the delicious main meal. I was particularly pleased to have a tasty selection of freshly cooked vegetables to choose from. Altogether, what great value for twenty dollars!

One of our new players had her car window smashed when she parked on the road one Monday evening. We currently have a student, Rony, keeping an eye on the car park during evening bridge sessions so you are safer to park in the car park if there is space.

On the topic of security, we have applied for lottery money to help pay for a fence which we want to erect around our grounds. We will let you know when we hear the result of this application.

I have had some feedback to my comments on experienced players playing down one or more grades, and so far it has been positive. One player felt it was good to see some new faces. Thanks for that!

In June, we experimented with more advanced players partnering novices in the Junior room for the month. This worked well, and it was impressive to see the number of players from other rooms who were prepared to give up their time to help out. A special thanks to Lynn Wilson who did a great job organizing partners.

Ray Kemp

Terrible Twos

“How do you play your two bids?”. This is one of the first questions I ask a new partner. There are significant differences even between players who use the same basic system. When I started playing Acol, it wasn't an issue. Two clubs was a game force hand, and the other two bids ('strong twos') were forcing for one round showing a powerful hand containing eight or nine tricks in the bid suit.

Whatever their basic system, most players nowadays, certainly in New Zealand, use some variant on the 'weak two' scheme. Most commonly, an opening bid of two of a major shows 6-10 points and a six card suit. This leaves two-openers in the minor suits to show strong hands. Looking into the history of bridge, the idea of playing opening twos as weak has a surprisingly long history. As early as 1910 the bids were valued for their pre-emptive effect. Weak twos were readily incorporated into five card major systems but only much later did they infiltrate Acol.

Acol players were probably reluctant to change because of the usefulness of the strong two. However, in terms of frequency, the weak two wins hands down. A partnership is likely have a weak two hand between them about every one in fifteen deals. The bid also has a considerable pre-emptive effect, often forcing opponents to start competing at the three level.

More good news is that even if the opponents double you and the contract goes down you are likely to squeeze out enough tricks to make the sacrifice worthwhile. Certainly, if your partner has two or more of your suit you are virtually bullet-proof. If your side has at least eight cards between you in your trump suit then, however low your total point count, you are very likely to make a profit on the hand.

If the partner of the weak two opener has a strong hand then you should agree upon a way of showing it. A common understanding is that, without intervention, any change of suit is forcing. A two no trump response is often used as an asking bid, either requiring opener to show some other feature of their hand (if they have one!) or inquiring about the suit quality of the opener and the points range. An example of the latter is the very useful Ogust convention.

With different ways of showing a strong hand, you can use a raise of a weak two as pre-emptive. You can raise two spades to three spades with virtually no points as long as you have three cards in the suit. This may cause the opponents great difficulties and they may miss game or even a slam. I remember once raising my partner's two heart opener to five hearts when I had three points and four hearts. The opponents were so dumbfounded they didn't even double us although they had a cold six spades themselves.

Another way of showing a weak two is via the 'multi', most commonly using a two diamond opener to show either a weak two in a major or a strong balanced hand. We adopted this convention pretty early on and used to have great fun for a while since most opponents were puzzled by this exotic bid. As it gained popularity, however, it lost its novelty effect and its impact. Many tournament players have a defence to the multi nowadays, and, in competitive auctions, there is a danger of confusing partner as much as the opponents. In my view, the convention is more trouble than it is worth.

One touted advantage for the multi is that it frees up two heart and two spade openers to show weak two suiters, commonly at least five-four in the bid major and an unspecified minor. Again this can cause as much confusion to the bidders as to the opponents, so that is another gadget I have been happy to jettison.

A variant that is gaining in popularity is to open a weak two with a five card suit when non-vulnerable. This is slightly more dangerous, of course, but if you agree that you must have at least two of the top three honours for the bid then the theory is that you are unlikely to lose out.

We have been experimenting with this five card variant recently, although, so far, it has led to as many bad results as good ones. It failed most spectacularly in the very first deal we played at the Charity Tournament.

Our opponents' day started off very well with a near top board. Here is my hand:

S AK754
H T96
D 6
C Q972

At nil vulnerability, and sitting South as dealer, it seemed a good idea to start the bidding with a weak two spades. At the very least, I thought, it would indicate a good suit for partner to lead if the opponents played the contract. However, the bidding didn't go quite as expected:

North	East	South	West
		2S	Db1
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West led the ace of clubs and when dummy (shown below) went down, the outlook didn't look too bleak.

S Q
H AKJ85
D T754
C 865

OK, we have missed a heart fit, but if I can get a couple of ruffs of the diamonds in hand and, possibly win the queen of clubs, then I will only go one down. With a bit of luck I might even make the contract. Well, that was never going to be the case. There was a big problem. Here are the four hands.

S Q
H AKJ85
D T754
C 865

S -	S JT98632
H Q432	H 7
D AQJ832	D K9
C AKJ	C T43

S AK754
H T96
D 6
C Q972

I can't remember having played a contract with a seven-nil trump split before, but there is always a first time. I went two down for -300, which wouldn't have been too disastrous if the opponents had a sensible game on but this was not so. Looking down the score sheet later, I found we weren't completely bottom. One bold NS pair had played in four hearts doubled, going three down, and one enterprising EW pair had bid and made three no trumps. It's interesting to speculate how this contract was defended!

During the afternoon, there was another bad trump split after a weak two opener, but this time we were the recipients of the good luck. Sitting East, vulnerable against non-vulnerable opponents, I picked up

S AQJ43
H 9872
D 85
C A7

I hoped the dealer, North, would pass so I could open one spade. However, to my surprise he opened a weak two spades in front of me. I have no sensible bid so passed initially. With a bit of luck, I thought, my partner would double for takeout giving me the choice of leaving it in or bidding four hearts. However, again, the bidding didn't quite proceed as I had expected:

North	East	South	West
2S	Pass	Pass	3D
Pass	Pass	3S	Pass
Pass	Db1	All Pass	

Here are the four hands:

	S K98652		
	H KT3		
	D Q2		
	C 52		
S -		S AQJ43	
H Q65		H 9872	
D KJ743		D 85	
C KT864		C A7	
	S T7		
	H AJ4		
	D AT96		
	C QJ93		

According to the hand record, we should take seven tricks. We only managed six but that was enough to get a near-top board.

Perhaps we should all go back to playing strong twos...

Ray Kemp

Postscript

The law of total tricks proposes a way of determining what to do in competitive auctions when both sides have found a fit. It is often not clear, particularly at a high level, whether to pass, bid upwards or double the opponents. Larry Cohen's book *To Bid or Not to Bid: The LAW of Total Tricks* claims to have solved this problem. We have a copy in the library if you would like to find out more. Basically, the idea is that if you can estimate the number of cards each side has in their longest suit, then you can work out how many tricks are available.

Since the book came out in 1992, it has polarized the bridge community. Some players swear by it, and others think the basic principle is less than useful. In the latter camp is the bridge writer, David Burn. He kibitzed hands at a bridge Olympiad and developed his own set of tongue-in-cheek precepts based on the mistakes he observed at some of the tables. Here are his laws:

The Law of Total Trumps

When you are declarer, the total number of trumps held by your side should be greater than the total number of trumps held by your opponents.

The Law of Eight

During the auction, ascertain how many aces are held by your opponents. Subtract this number from eight. Do not bid at the level given by the answer.

The Law of No Trumps

You cannot make 3NT on a cross-ruff

The third law was developed when he noted that during the bidding of one hand, both partners had bid hearts but ended up in no trumps. The poor confused declarer, believing they were in hearts, attempted to make the contract on a cross ruff.

Burn has examples of contraventions of each of the above 'laws' which led to poor results. See his website www.blakjak.demon.co.uk/burn_law.htm).

It is amusing and reassuring – even the best players occasionally make the same mistakes as the rest of us.

Ray Kemp