



**Palmerston North
Bridge Club
October 2008**

A New Grand Master!

Just before play on one Tuesday evening earlier this month, Alan Doddridge called me over and whispered something in my ear. What I thought he said was “Ray, I am GM.” Goodness, I thought, I knew that tomatoes had been genetically modified but I hadn’t realized the same process could be applied to humans. Only later, did it dawn on me that he had said “Ray, I am a GM.” Yes folks, following on from Jan Whyte’s elevation a few months back, we have a new grand master in the club. At this rate, we will need a breakaway group, like the European Soccer Champions League. Perhaps they could all play together on a Friday night.

Seriously, though, it is great to have so many high class players to pit our wits against. Although, somehow, Alan doesn’t seem like a typical GM. He appears to treat the game too lightly. He often jokes at the table and it is easy to be lulled into thinking he isn’t trying. This is a mistake! Despite the affable manner and running commentary he is really concentrating hard and will take you to the cleaners if you are not careful. I talked to him about his hobby.

So, Alan, when and where did you learn your bridge?

I was brought up in England and used to play whist as a teenager. At University, I tried a bit of rubber bridge, but other students played for money so I quickly gave that away.

But you didn’t play at a club in England?

No. I started playing competitively at Otaki Bridge Club in the late 1980s and then at Levin. We even used to go down to the Hutt Club to get more experience.

I remember that the first competition I entered was an A point tournament, in which I had very little idea about what was going on. I thought we were doing quite well, although my partner was rather dubious. I was quite taken aback to find we had got 29% in the first session.

So where did you win your first A point?

It was in Otaki in about 1991. My partner and I came fifth or sixth in an A point tournament.

I guess no one can accumulate 500 A points without being either a natural or an obsessive – which are you?

I think I would have to say I was more of an obsessive than a natural. 500 A points may seem a lot but it is surprising how quickly they can accumulate if you play tournaments regularly.

In a former life you were a GP. Do you think your bedside manner gives you an advantage at the bridge table?

No. I sometimes think that it is a drawback. I tend to be too chatty during play and can get distracted.

In addition to playing bridge you also play some golf. Which would you rather do – win our bridge championship or win the local club golf championship?

Since the standard of my golf is rather poorer than my bridge, I doubt if I could win the golf championship, but that would be my preference, if only because it is so unlikely.

What is the worst thing you have done at the bridge table?

Like every bridge player, I have made many mistakes. Most recently, during the Senior Interprovincials Final, I revoked in a spectacular fashion. The opponents were in an unmakeable four hearts contract where we had four certain tricks including the ace of clubs which was in my hand. When declarer took out trumps, instead of following suit with my singleton heart, I picked out the wrong card and saw my ace of clubs hitting the table! This, of course, became a major penalty card and I now had to substitute my trump. All declarer had to do was to lead another round of hearts, and since I now had none left, I had to discard my ace. That swing lost us 13 imps. As it happened, Wellington were 16 imps ahead at the end or I would still be wringing my hands.

And the best moment?

I don't know about the best, but certainly one of the most satisfying and funniest hands was at Congress one year in the Individual tournament. In this event, you have to play with a different partner during each round, so, as you can imagine, misunderstandings are commonplace. During the session, I picked up the best hand I have ever held:

♠ A
♥ KQJxxx
♦ AKQJxx
♣ -

Clearly, it was likely that a grand slam depended on the location of the ace of hearts. Acol has a special opener of 4 no trumps which requests partner, if they have an ace, to bid the suit of that ace [this bid was discussed in the May newsletter]. Although making such a bid is risky with an unfamiliar partner, I judged that my partner for that round would be aware of the convention and that he would respond accordingly. He replied with a bid of five diamonds. Since I had the ace of diamonds I inferred that he had misinterpreted my opener and was just telling me he had one ace.

This left me in a quandary. If he had the ace of hearts then the grand slam was cold. If it was the ace of clubs then we were likely to lose a heart trick. In the end, I decided to go for broke and bid seven diamonds. My left hand opponent quickly doubled, and, when this became the final contract, he eagerly placed his ace of clubs on the table. Unfortunately for him, of course, he wasn't on lead. Since my partner had bid five diamonds, the player on my right should have led.

The director was called and the usual options listed for the benefit of my partner. After thinking long and hard, he chose to accept the lead and let me play the contract. I was now able to ruff the ace of clubs and, since partner did indeed possess the ace of hearts I could take out trumps and claim the rest of the tricks.

What do you think is the strongest part of your game?

Probably my defence. I have played with Johnny Lenart quite often, and he has taught me a

great deal about how to put declarer under pressure.

And any weaknesses that we should know about?

I am too busy during auctions. I don't pass enough.

You mentioned Johnny Lenart. Are there any other players who have particularly influenced you?

I once attended a course held by Paul Marston, a New Zealander who lives in Australia. He taught me a lot about bidding.

So, do you have any unfulfilled ambitions?

Not really for myself. It would be nice to win the interprovincials with the Open team but I don't think that is realistic. I have been in the winning Senior team twice, and runner up once. I think that is about my level. However, I still have a goal for Jennie [Wilson], and that is to get her up to 500 A points!

Ray Kemp

News and Views

Numbers at Tuesday night bridge were depleted at the end of September, which was a sure sign that it was Congress Week. We had several members playing in the Interprovincials with Central Districts posting a first, a second and a third. The Women's team in which Lorraine Stachurski and Liz Burrows played won their event. Liz later claimed she was nervous in the finals but it's not clear why since their team won by a country mile. In the Senior team we had Alan Doddridge and Jenny Wilson. They played Wellington in the final and couldn't surmount the capital's large carryover. Even so, they will have been well-satisfied with their second placing. The Intermediate team included that sharp combination of Janice Willoughby and Gail Kirton. Their team didn't quite make the final but came in at a comfortable and commendable third.

Interestingly, the final of the Open event could be viewed via Bridge Base Online. It was available on Vugraph which allowed anyone to tune in and watch the cards as they were played and also get expert commentary. One of the

commentators was our very own Wayne Burrows and another was David Bird, a British bridge writer whose weekly column is syndicated in the Listener. A strong Auckland team had a 20 imps carryover into the final two sets against Wellington and it looked like a dead match. However, Auckland (who had possibly decided not to take chances) missed a slam and game early on and suddenly it was neck and neck. The lead kept switching sides right until the final board. Alan Grant from Wellington was in 1NT and as long as he only went one down, Wellington would win (although, of course, he didn't know this.) He had already accumulated five tricks and still had the ace of spades. All he had to do was to cash this card and the trophy was theirs. He took a full two minutes to decide what to do. Eventually, he decided to lose the lead in an attempt to make his contract. Unluckily for him, the opponents could take the rest of the tricks and he never made his ace. So, the final outcome was a tie, which was probably a fair result. As David Bird commented afterwards, he hadn't realized a one no trump contract could be so exciting!

In the Congress proper, various local players figured prominently. Ken Bateman had a very good week, winning the rubber bridge competition with Jan Whyte and coming eighth with Johnny Lenart (from an initial field of 228 pairs) in the New Zealand Pairs. At one stage they were actually leading this event during the last round. Wayne Burrows was in the team that reached the semi-final of the New Zealand Teams. Lorraine Stachurski and Alister Stuck were in the team that came second in the Back to the Future Teams. Wayne Burrows and partner came second in the same sex pairs, John Lenart and partner came third in the Senior Pairs and Bob and Evelyn Hurley were third in the mixed pairs.

Since the last newsletter there have been two club tournaments. In September, the Intermediate Tournament was held at the club. The winners were Kay Townsley and Jo Haddon, with Val Pain and Jenny Tuck close behind. In third place were Bev Colville and Susan Parker. Lorraine headed the organizing team and Gayle Leader was in charge of the catering arrangements. Apparently, the daytime nibbles were delicious as were the bought-in meals at the end of play.

Earlier this month the Junior tournament had a good turnout of ten tables. Helpers were marshalled by Pam Mason including several Seniors as well as the usual stalwarts. Again, Lorraine ran the show. The winners were from Masterton, with John Ayers and Teresa Thorn coming second. Kevin Lawrence playing with Tammy Smith and Helen Bevin partnering Dorothy Hodges were joint third.

You will have noticed the smart new tablecloths we have, in a chic dark blue. Thanks to Bev Colville and her team of helpers who put in a lot of time to order and fit them.

The next tri-series match to be held between our club, Wanganui and Hawera is on Sunday 2nd November at Wanganui. At the time of going to press we still need volunteers to play for our team which consists of eight juniors, eight intermediates and eight seniors, so please contact Martin Carryer if you are available.

On Friday 7th November, we host the Babich NZ Wide Pairs. This is a single session competition where all the hands are pre-dealt and are played at the same time in clubs throughout the country. Each hand has one or more challenging aspect to it: bidding, playing or defence. Best of all, you get a booklet afterwards which explains what you might have done on each hand, so it is instructive as well as entertaining. The club is holding a pot-luck supper starting at 6.30 and play commences at 7.30. See the notice board for more details.

There is another Ron Klinger weekend being held next year in New Zealand. Those who went to the last one, held in Wellington during June this year said it was good value. The next one is to be held in the new year on the Kapiti Coast. It will follow on from the last one but would also be useful for anyone who missed out last time. Bookings are required by the end of November. Again, see the notice board for details.

Lastly, an old XP desktop computer that Lorraine used for generating bridge hands for the club has expired. If you have moved onto a laptop and have an old XP machine that is gathering dust but is still serviceable then contact Lorraine. We would be pleased to take it off your hands.

Ray Kemp

Counting Losers

Often the most dramatic moment in the playing of a bridge hand is when dummy goes down. In his classic text *Advanced Play at Bridge* Hugh Kelsey hits the nail on the head: “This is a hopeful moment in time. No mistake has yet been made. All things are possible. You may earn admiration for the masterly competence of your play, or you may make a complete mess of the hand and end up ashamed to look your partner in the eye.”

Of course, we all know what we should do at this point since it is drilled into us by colleagues, tutors, partners and books – *make a plan*. I don’t think I always do this, and I am sure that some of my opponents don’t, since they sometimes ask for a card to be played even before the whole of dummy has gone down. At least, if they have got a plan, they are faster thinkers than I am.

As part of this process in suit contracts, we are first urged to count losers. When I started bridge this advice always used to confuse me since it wasn’t clear exactly which cards were losers, which were winners and which were somewhere in between. As a result, I would stumble through hands with a vague notion of what I wanted to do and when.

With experience, we all learn how to estimate what the winners and losers are likely to be, but it is still an inexact science with a great deal of guesswork involved in many cases. And plans often have to be modified or even completely changed as the hand progresses.

Another issue that used to perplex me was *which* hand to count losers in. Books generally say that declarer should count the losers in their own hand. But what about the losers in dummy? Should they be included? I eventually worked out that you can count the losers in *either* hand. How do you decide which to choose? The answer is simple: determine which is easier. If it is more straightforward to count the losers in dummy and to make your plan from that hand, then do so.

I was reminded of this strategy when playing a hand during the Tuesday evening pairs in September. Both sides vulnerable, I was sitting West with the hand shown in the next column:

♠ AJT
♥ AJ86
♦ Q762
♣ Q4

The bidding went:

South	West	North	East
Pass	1NT	Pass	2H
Pass	2S	Pass	3D
Pass	4S	All Pass	

East’s two hearts bid was a transfer, requiring me to bid two spades and showing at least five of that suit. After her subsequent call of three diamonds I was happy to bid game with a two suit fit.

North led the king of hearts, and here are the two hands together:

♠ AJT	♠ KQ854
♥ AJ86	♥ 9
♦ Q762	♦ AK53
♣ Q4	♣ K76

My first thought was that we had such a good fit that we might have been in a slam but, since we were in pairs, I just concentrated on working out how to make as many tricks as possible. Usually, the best plan involves ‘getting the kids off the street’ by taking out trumps straight away. Sometimes the opponents are kind enough to start that process for you by leading trumps to the contract but not on this occasion. However, what I needed to do was to count losers and then plan how to get rid of them before making any move at all.

On this deal, it was much simpler to count the losers in dummy’s hand than in mine, partly because it had the longer trumps but also because my hand had a poor heart suit. Counting losers from dummy it was clear that, as long as the diamonds behaved, I just had two potential club losers. One would need to be ruffed, so it would have been a big mistake to draw all the trumps straight away. One club would need to be ruffed in hand whilst I still had trumps there. So, I immediately led up to the king of clubs. This was taken by South who returned a trump.

However, this didn't help the defence since I was able to take this in hand, cash my queen of clubs, return to dummy with a trump, ruff dummy's last club, return to dummy with a diamond and take out the last trump. Diamonds broke three-two so I ended up making twelve tricks.

Some club players may look at this hand and wonder why I bothered including it, since the play is so obvious. But the simple fact is that over half the field on Senior night only made eleven tricks. Of course, I don't know how the play went at other tables but I can only think that declarers were so eager to take out trumps that they didn't count their losers first.

Ray Kemp

Postscript (Do as I say ...)

Like some other members of the club, I followed the bridge competition in the World Mind Sports Games held in Beijing this month. None of the New Zealand teams got past the qualifying round although our Open team did well to finish sixth out of eighteen in their group. Still having some ties to the mother country, I kept an eye on England's progress. Both their Open and Women's Team reached the final.

I was particularly interested in what happened to the Women's Team since two of their players, Sally Brock and Nicole Smith were drafted in together at the last minute because of a withdrawal.

Although they are both seasoned internationals they hadn't really played much as a partnership before this championship, and apparently spent the three weeks leading up to the event practising together every day.

This certainly paid off, and they eventually won the final against China, albeit by the smallest margin possible – one imp! I watched them on Vu-graph in the quarter-finals and they had several misunderstandings. One of the worst was when Sally Brock mistook her partner's obvious takeout double of two hearts for a penalty double and left it in when she only had Qx in the suit herself. The opponents made the contract comfortably (they had ten hearts between them!) which produced a big swing against the English. One of the worst mistakes one can make in a teams event, of course, is to double the opponents into game.

This error triggered a memory, and I looked through my old bridge books. Sure enough there on my shelves was a tome from 1993 by Sally Brock (called Sally Horton in those days) entitled "Double Trouble" which explains the situations in which doubles may be used and when they are for penalty and when for takeout. On the cover is a cartoon of an irate little man saying "When I said 'DOUBLE' I meant 'Double' not 'DOUBLE!!'."

Maybe Sally should have taken some time off before the event to re-read her book.

Ray Kemp