

Victorian Bridge Association Bulletin

December 2018

Editor: Bill Jacobs

THE SOAPBOX Ben Thompson



As the old year comes to an end and a new year looms, we have some big changes at the VBA.

Colin Campbell, our State Masterpoint Secretary since 2012, is retiring at the end of the year. Colin has done a marvellous job in his characteristically calm way of managing the often complex masterpointing process in Victoria, and educating club masterpoint secretaries on how it all works. Thank you, Colin!

Neil Ewart, our Treasurer since 2010, retired at the AGM last month. Neil has been Treasurer the whole time I've been President. Far more than just "the numbers guy", Neil has been a valuable adviser to me and a great counterpoint to my natural enthusiasm and optimism. Thank you, Neil!

Perhaps most noticeable to Victorian players will be the retirement of Bill Jacobs after what seems like a couple of decades as the standard-setting editor (and chief writer) of this Bulletin. Bill has the rare skill amongst expert players of being able to communicate complex ideas simply, which has made him an ever-popular teacher, writer and vu-graph commentator. Thank you, Bill!

I'm very pleased to announce strong replacements in all three of those key roles.

Our new State Masterpoint Secretary is David Beckett. David ("Bucket" to many) is a recently-retired schoolteacher. He shares Colin's calm manner and I'm sure he'll be a terrific replacement for Colin.

Our new Treasurer is Kim Hoff. Kim is a financial planner, having previously worked around the world for Shell. In bridge, he has extensive experience in administration including as President of Waverley.

Our new Bulletin Editor is Dee Harley. Dee retired earlier this year after a brief career in teaching and a long one in IT in his native Scotland. He is very well-known on the Victorian congress circuit – if you have a story, he's very easy to find!

Welcome Bucket, Kim and Dee!

Finally, I'd like to thank everyone around Victoria who contributes to our great game, and to wish everyone a happy and healthy 2019.

FROM THE EDITOR ...

As Ben has mentioned, this will be my last bulletin as editor. I'd like to say that after 15 years, I'd run out of material, but that would be quite untrue. One never runs out of material with this multi-faceted game.

Many thanks to all those who have contributed articles. Ben Thompson and Kim Frazer have reliably provided VBA news and perspectives month after month. I should also pay special mention to Christine Heesom, who has supplied many delightful snippets from that hotbed of bridge at Paynesville, Lakes Entrance and Bairnsdale. If you're down that way, visit them!

Happy bridging in 2019, may all your finesses win (or lose if you've stayed low).

... Bill

FOR STARTERS

Playing in a congress Swiss Pairs, you are dealer with everyone vulnerable:

♠ - ♥ AJ1093 ♦ A87642 ♣ 64

Do you open this hand, and if so, with what?

I've almost lost count of the number of ways of deciding whether to open a hand with one of a suit. Here are four factors, all having some merit:

Rule of 20. Length of the longest two suits plus HCP equalling at least 20

Losing Trick Count. You need at most a 7 loser hand to open the bidding

Quick Tricks. To ensure that you have sufficient trick taking power should you end up on defence, one wants to have at least two defensive tricks in sight (aces, or king-queens, etc - a king, for example, is half a defensive trick).

Rebidding issues. You should be prepared with a comfortable rebid, should partner make a likely if not particularly helpful response.

Let's check.

Rule of 20: 6 diamonds + 5 hearts + 9 HCP = 20. ✓

Losing trick count: 0 spade losers, 2 heart losers (the missing KQ), 2 diamond losers (the missing KQ) and 2 club losers = 6. More than adequate. ✓

Quick tricks. 2 aces = 2 tricks. ✓

Rebidding. If you open 1♦ and partner responds 1♠ or 2♣ (likely!), you're in a mess. A 2♥ rebid would be a reverse, showing extra values, when you've got less than minimum values. But if you open 1♥, and partner responds 1♠ or 2♣, then you can bid 2♦, not a reverse. Essentially you are re-imaging your hand as 5-5 shape, and opening the higher 5-card suit. If you open 1♥, that's a ✓.

This hand is a clear opening bid on all formulae. The auction continues:

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
Pass	3♥	Pass	1♥ ?

3♥ shows about 10-12 total points and 3+ card heart support. Do you bid 4♥?

Having found a fit, count your total points. 9 HCP + 6 distribution points (5 for the void, 1 for the doubleton) = 15. Now you have extra values (!), and should bid 4♥.

Of course, if you're going to bid 'em up, you need to play 'em up. The ♠K is led:

4♥, South	♠ J7653		
	♥ K82		
	♦ J3		
	♣ AJ5		
♠K led	<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	S
N			
S			
	♠ -		
	♥ AJ1093		
	♦ A87642		
	♣ 64		

Dummy and RHO play low and you trump. Now what?

Don't draw trumps. You plan to use dummy's trumps to ruff your diamonds good: it's your only chance. Instead play ♦A and another diamond. LHO wins ♦Q (RHO follows) and plays a second spade. You trump this (this is getting uncomfortable - you are down to three trumps in your hand), and play a third diamond. LHO discards a club, and you ruff, as RHO's ♦K falls. The position is:

♠ J76		
♥ K8		
♦ -		
♣ AJ5		
<table border="1" style="display: inline-table; vertical-align: middle;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	S
N		
S		
♠ -		
♥ AJ10		
♦ 642		
♣ 64		

Now what?

Now is the time to draw trumps. But don't try to fish out the ♥Q. Play the ♥K and ♥A. As long as both opponents follow (hearts being 3-2), you can now play the winning diamonds. An opponent is welcome to trump a diamond with their winning heart queen, but you will still have a trump left to ruff in and run the rest of the diamonds.

You will lose just one trump, one diamond and one club at the end. The full deal:

♠ KQ4	♠ J7653	♠ A10982									
♥ Q76	♥ K82	♥ 54									
♦ Q9	♦ J3	♦ K105									
♣ Q10873	♣ AJ5	♣ K92									
	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ -										
	♥ AJ1093										
	♦ A87642										
	♣ 64										

A 19 HCP game. Bidding and making those contracts is what leads to high place finishes in congress Swiss Pairs events.

Points to remember:

- The Rule of 20 is truly a useful guide to opening bids. But don't forget the "Ease of Rebid" parameter. This is what led you to open in the 5-card suit, rather than the 6-card suit.

- Check out how the bidding might go if you open 1♦. Talk about awkward!

- One of the most common scenarios where it's unwise to immediately draw trumps is when you have to do some ruffing in the short-trump hand, usually the dummy.

- The normal play in hearts here is to take a finesse against the ♥Q. It's part of the "eight ever, nine never" rule. But unlike the Rule of 20, that's a rule that should often be ignored. On this deal, if hearts divide 3-2, then you have a lock on the contract by playing trumps from the top, but if they are 4-1, you are unlikely to make it, whatever you do.

TEST YOUR BIDDING

High Level Tensions

nil vulnerable

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♠	D'ble	4♠	?

Your opponents are at it again, forcing the bidding into the stratosphere before you've had a chance to speak.

One of the difficulties with this sort of auction is that you can't tell what sort of hand RHO has. He could have decent points with a spade fit (hoping to make 4♠), or he could be yanking your chain with rubbish and long spades. And of course you don't know much about LHO's hand either.

New suit bids and pass speak for themselves, but there are two choices that need a level of partnership understanding.

Double should just show some points, about 8+ HCP. It says to partner: I think they are sacrificing. It's then up to partner to decide whether to try for our own contract (if he has good distribution), or play for penalties (with a more balanced hand).

4NT is a takeout bid. It expresses the view that we are best off going for our own contract, but are not sure where. It shows at least two 4+ card suits where we could play. Partner will bid his lowest 4+ card suit, and we will take it from there. Trust me: you will never get a hand where you simply want to find out how many aces partner has.

Like democracy, this scheme is not much good, but everything else is worse. Try applying it with these awkward hands:

- (a) ♠ 842 ♥ A2 ♦ A954 ♣ 10872
- (b) ♠ 842 ♥ Q92 ♦ 4 ♣ KJ10872
- (c) ♠ 42 ♥ A2 ♦ KJ10872 ♣ Q92
- (d) ♠ 842 ♥ QJ92 ♦ KQ872 ♣ 7
- (e) ♠ KQJ ♥ 92 ♦ K954 ♣ J872
- (f) ♠ 842 ♥ A932 ♦ 7 ♣ AKQ72

Solutions over page.

TEST YOUR BIDDING - SOLUTIONS

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♠	D'ble	4♠	?

(a) ♠ 842 ♥ A2 ♦ A954 ♣ 10872

D'ble. Show some points. With most hands, partner will pass, and 4♠ should go down. With more extreme shape, partner will bid, and you would be quite happy with that. By the way, if partner wants to bid on, *he* can bid 4NT, asking for you to start bidding your suits. That way, you will reach 5 of the right minor. That 4NT gadget is neat, isn't it?

(b) ♠ 842 ♥ Q92 ♦ 4 ♣ KJ10872

5♣. Could work well, could work badly. I think that covers all contingencies. There's quite a lot of distribution working in your side's favour. This could be a save or a make.

(c) ♠ 42 ♥ A2 ♦ KJ10872 ♣ Q92

5♦. Similar to (b), on this setup, there may be less shape but more high cards to help you make your contract.

(d) ♠ 842 ♥ QJ92 ♦ KQ872 ♣ 7

4NT. You don't want to commit to hearts or diamonds, but this hand looks better for offence than defence. If partner bids 5♣, take it out to 5♦, implying that you have hearts as well.

(e) ♠ KQJ ♥ 92 ♦ K954 ♣ J872

Pass. Yes, you want to double for penalties, but there's too much chance that partner will bid, and you won't like that. You have to be content to take them 50 or 100 or 150 down right now. On a really good day, partner will make another takeout double, and you can pass that for penalties.

(f) ♠ 842 ♥ A932 ♦ 7 ♣ AKQ72

4NT. This looks like a slam, but where? Clubs or hearts. Bid 4NT to get partner to name a suit. If he bids 5♣, raise him to 6♣. If he bids 5♦, he clearly has hearts as well, so bid 6♥. A 4NT bid is the best way to solve this hand.

STATE RESULTS

Victorian State Teams (Pennant)

- 1 D. Beckett, N. Ewart, C. Hughes, S. Henbest, B. Thompson, W. Jacobs
- 2 J. Ebery, L. Gold, E. Moskovsky, J. Coutts, J. Thompson, S. Hinge
- 3 S. Klofa, D. Harley, A. St Clair, C. Fernando, L. Robinson, M. Gurfinkiel

Victorian Swiss Pairs

- 1 B. Thompson – D. Thompson
- 2 S. Weisz – R. Gallus
- 3 D. Harley – D. Morgan

CONGRESS RESULTS

Victorian Simultaneous Pairs

- 1 T. Ranasinghe – G. Ghali
- 2 A. Robbins – G. Ridgway
- 3 K. Delcourt – D. Delcourt

Waverley Congress

Swiss Pairs

North-South

- 1 K. Frazer – J. Ebery
- 2 A. St Clair – D. Harley
- 3 P. Edwards – M. Decouto

East-West

- 1 N. Ewart – D. Beckett
- 2 J. Jay – E. Gralinska
- 3 M. Willcox – R. Kingham

Swiss Teams

- 1 L. Milne, J. Coutts, L. Gold, J. Ebery
- 2 M. Zhang, J. Yang, S. Klofa, M. Gurfinkiel
- 3 K. Frazer, R. Gallus, T. Ranasinghe, G. Lovrecz

South Gippsland Congress

Swiss Pairs

- 1 K. Frazer – J. Ebery
- 2 W. Mroz – J. Rothlisberger
- 3 M. Lambert – S. Hall

Swiss Teams

- 1 K. Frazer, J. Ebery, R. Gallus, S. Weisz
- 2 J. Kuiper, D. Anglim, R. Moss, A. Drury
- 3 S. Klofa, M. Gurfinkiel, D. Harley, A. St Clair

Kooyong Lawn Tennis Club Congress*Swiss Pairs*

- 1 M. Glover – J. Coventry
- 2 D. Harley – S. Klofa
- 3 D. Sharp – D. Roseman

Tivoli Congress*Butler Pairs*

- 1 D. Harley – S. Klofa
- 2 R. O'Dell – M. Allison
- 3 M. Decouto – P. Edwards

Swiss Pairs

- 1 J. Mill – M. Darling
- 2 C. Arul – K. Nainanayake
- 3 T. Ranasinghe – G. Lovrecz

Queen's Slipper Nationwide Pairs*Event 21 (November 3)*

- 3 A. Race – C. Parkin (Yarra Valley)

Event 22 (November 18)

- 1 K. Douglas – R. Moss (Phillip Island)
- 2 D. Nicol – H. Saunders (Berwick)

UPCOMING CONGRESSES & EVENTS**VBA Summer Congress**

Saturday 8th December, 10 am: Swiss Pairs
 Sunday 9th December, 10 am: Swiss Teams

Venue VBA
 131 Poath Rd, Murrumbena

Contact: Andrew MacReady-Bryan,
 0417 543 076

Enter: <http://vba.asn.au/entries/enter-an-event/>

Yarra Valley Mini Congress

Saturday 15th December, 10 am: Swiss Pairs

Venue East Ringwood Senior Citizens Centre
 Laurence Gve, Ringwood East

Contact: Christine Parkin, 9884 9889

Enter: <http://bridgeunlimited.com>

Gardenvale Congress

Wednesday 26th December, 10 am: Swiss Pairs
 Thursday 27th December, 10 am: MP Swiss Pairs
 Saturday 29th December, 10 am: Swiss Teams
 Sunday 30th December, 10 am: Swiss Pairs
 Saturday 5th January, 10 am: MP Swiss Pairs
 Sunday 6th January, 10 am: Swiss Pairs

Venue 20 Spink St
 Brighton North

Contact: Jeff Fust, 9530 6622

Enter: www.gvbridge.com.au

**DIRECTOR'S TRAINING
 WITH LAURIE KELSO**

The VBA is pleased to announce the next all-day director's course.

The course is targeted at those who have done no directing before – it is a beginner's course. Clubs are welcome and encouraged to nominate up to two subsidised attendees for this course, which will be run by Laurie Kelso.

Non-metro clubs are eligible to receive a petrol allowance for their subsidised attendees.

The course will be split into two halves – the first in the morning focusing on rules, the second, in the afternoon focusing on directing issues and scoring.

Interested players are welcome to attend the morning session, which will constitute our Saturday seminar for that fortnight. The cost for this (for non-nominated attendees) will be \$20.

Location: VBA Clubrooms

Date: Saturday January 26th, 2019

Time: 9:30 am to approx. 4:45 pm
 Break for lunch at around 12 pm

Bookings: Essential: email info@vba.asn.au

TIP OF THE MONTH

On Caution

Last month we looked at being brave, taking calculated risks when fighting for the contract at a low level.

Is there a flip side, where *cowardice* is the watchword? Certainly. Take a look at this bidding decision.

♠ Q9762 ♥ AK864 ♦ 6 ♣ K9

Nice hand, but partner doesn't please you by opening 2♦, a natural weak two, with everyone vulnerable. RHO passes and it's your call.

Your hand has been ruined. Perhaps there is a fit in one of the majors but how are you to reliably find it? If you bid a major but partner has 3 cards in the other major, you are no closer to discovering your fit.

Remember that if you bid a new suit after partner's pre-empt, *it's forcing*.

Partner's actual hand:

♠ 84	N W E S	♠ Q9762
♥ 10		♥ AK864
♦ KQ10972		♦ 6
♣ A764		♣ K9

Partner had a solid opener, but the hand record said that 2♦ was your last making contract.

Show caution when responding to partner's opening pre-empt (lacking a fit for partner's suit).

Here's another painful example. This time you hold:

♠ KQJ973 ♥ 962 ♦ AJ3 ♣ A

Nice hand, but partner doesn't please you by opening 3♣, your side vulnerable. RHO passes and it's your call.

Your hand has been ruined. The temptation to bid spades is overwhelming, but let me tell you from experience, *partner doesn't have spades*.

Partners never have what you want.

Suppose you bid 3♠. You're going to hear a strangled 4♣ from partner, 9 times out of 10.

Partner's actual hand:

♠ -	N W E S	♠ KQJ973
♥ 54		♥ 962
♦ Q8762		♦ AJ3
♣ KQJ973		♣ A

Partner's 3♣ was, shall we say, imaginative, but not unreasonable. Put it in the category of an aggressive, calculated risk.

I'm sure you can see the logic of this lesson, but putting it into practice at the bridge table is another matter. Part of the reason is emotional, your excellent hand having been degraded before your eyes by partner's bid.

One way to deal with the emotional disappointment is *visualization*. This involves randomly constructing a typical hand for partner and putting it opposite your actual hand to see what the contract should be.

When partner pre-empts, he defines his hand within relatively narrow limits, so visualization is a useful tool. Give partner the correct number of cards in his suit (6 or 7) and *two* top honours. If he is non-vulnerable, leave it at that. If he is vulnerable, give him another honour card elsewhere, say a king or a queen. (You might vary the visualization according to partner's style.)

Assume partner is short in your suit(s), because that is where the percentages lie.

In both the above examples, visualization will solve your problem. It doesn't always work, of course (imagine your responding hand on the second example having a fistful of diamonds!), but it usually does. The ability to visualize is the mark of an advanced bridge player.

The bridge teacher is called over to a table by a student who tells him she only has 12 cards. Sure enough she is right. The teacher looks around and finds the ♠A on the floor and gives it to her. She was previously void in spades. Now she says to him: "You've ruined my entire hand."

Australian Open Team Playoff

Whilst a 4-man Sydney juggernaut swept all before it in this event, congratulations to David Morgan, and Ben and Jamie Thompson for getting to the semi-finals of the Playoff.

YOUR BID ... YOUR PLAY

With no one vulnerable, you are in second seat, holding:

♠ 852 ♥ K10432 ♦ 932 ♣ J6

The auction proceeds:

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		Pass	Pass
1♥	D'ble	Pass	??

Playing imps, how do you respond (if at all) to partner's takeout double?

Decide, and then read on.

Responding to partner's takeout double of 1♥, most experienced pairs play that 1NT shows a decent hand, around 7-10 points, with a heart stopper. This hand doesn't qualify, and a 1NT response will likely drive your side too high. It's unpleasant, but the expert bid is 1♠, on the 3-card suit.

But in a teams event, several players who faced this problem did in fact bid 1NT. They were raised to 3NT by partner – I told you, you would get too high.

The opening lead is ♥8 (fourth best):

♠ AKQ
♥ Q
♦ KQ7654
♣ A97

♠ 852
♥ K10432
♦ 932
♣ J6

That dummy is perhaps more than you deserve. Anyway, dummy's ♥Q holds the trick, RHO following ♥7. Your play.

Decide, and then read on.

Here is the full deal:

	♠ AKQ		
	♥ Q		
	♦ KQ7654		
	♣ A97		
♠ 1094		N	♠ J763
♥ AJ985			♥ 76
♦ A			♦ J108
♣ KQ84			♣ 10532
	♠ 852		
	♥ K10432		
	♦ 932		
	♣ J6		

Don't tell me you fell for that line about "♥Q holding the trick".

In 3NT you should overtake the ♥Q with the ♥K to lead a diamond up. You will make 3NT if LHO has ♦A singleton or the suit is 2-2. Even with your cavalier play of the heart honours, it is *impossible* for the defenders to take 4 heart tricks after winning their ♦A.

But if you fail to take advantage of the offered entry to your hand, you are forced to lead diamonds from dummy, and are likely to go down by leading an honour.

THE TWELFTH TRICK

Dir: South
Vul: all

♠ Q62
♥ J1083
♦ 104
♣ 9872

N
S

♠ A
♥ AQ972
♦ AQJ7
♣ AK6

West	North	East	South
			2♣
Pass	2♦	Pass	2♥
Pass	4♥	Pass	6♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West leads the ♠J. Plan the play. Solution over page.

NEWS FROM THE COUNCIL

The 2019 Council is:

President:	Ben Thompson
Vice President:	Christopher Leach
Vice President:	Kim Frazer
Treasurer:	Kim Hoff
Councillor:	Jenny Thompson
Councillor:	David Morgan
Councillor:	Margaret Yuill
Special Councillor:	Bruce Minchinton
Special Councillor:	Rob Quirk

Vacancies exist for two additional councillors, Special Councillor for Western Zone and Special Councillor for Melbourne Arc.

Nominations are invited to fill the vacancies on council. Contact secretary@vba.asn.au for further information.

The Secretary position is vacant and we expect will be filled shortly. Kim Frazer will continue to act in this role in the interim.

In other appointments, Bruce Minchinton has taken on the role of Regional Super Congress Organiser, taking over from Richard Giles who stepped down from council and the role earlier this year due to health reasons. We thank Richard for his contribution during his time on the council.

Neil Ewart has also stepped down as Treasurer after over nine years in the role, however Neil will continue as VBA Webmaster and will also act as the VBA bookkeeper.

My Favourite Photo?



From 2012 and those bridge enthusiasts in East Gippsland. I should have run a caption competition!

BRIDGE AND DROUGHT RELIEF

Australia is in the grip of the worst drought in many years and it is taking a heavy toll on our farmers.

Although Aussie farmers may be a tough, resilient and uncomplaining lot, many now find themselves between a rock and a hard place, with no relief in sight.

We rely on their produce and take it for granted, without realising that many are desperate and struggling to survive.

We hear about their plight through the media and I'm sure we all sympathise but not many of us are able to help substantially, on our own.

To this end, a bridge club in Melbourne recently organised a regular duplicate competition to raise funds and make a donation to a Farmers' relief organisation.

The event was well supported by the members and table fees and donations totalled \$1600. The Club generously contributed another \$1600 and the Buy A Bale Foundation received a tidy \$3200.

I have been advised that the ABF has waived masterpoint fees for any drought relief event run by clubs and that club masterpoint secretaries would be aware of the process required to arrange this.

I would like to appeal to all affiliated clubs to consider organising such an event. With some good will from members and a little work by committees and club secretaries, considerable financial assistance could be provided to families that really deserve all the help they can get.

We would be giving not only financial but also a spiritual lift to many, who are facing a bleak Christmas and New Year, simply by playing the game we love. How easy is that?

The effort might even spread interstate?

Please do what you can. A very sincere thank you to all.

... a concerned bridge player.

WHEN IS A CARD PLAYED?

This is a contentious issue that can occasionally result in a lot of heat. Someone 'half-plays' a card, and an opponent says: "you played that card".

But did you?

Let's see what the laws say about this. The rule varies according to who it is.

Declarer

"Declarer is deemed to have played a card from his hand if it is:

- (a) held face up, touching or nearly touching the table, or
- (b) maintained in such a position as to indicate that it has been played"

Defender

"A defender's card held so that it is possible for his partner to see its face is deemed played to the current trick"

So now you know when a card is played! If you are in doubt, then of course call the director, who will probably ask all four players exactly what was done, in order to rule as stated above.

Note the following about this rule:

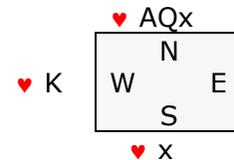
- The wording is different for declarers and defenders.
- Pulling a card out of your hand does not mean it is played.
- Seeing an opponent's card does not mean it is played.
- Just because a defender didn't see his partner's card it still might be considered played. It is enough that he **could** have seen it.
- Cards that accidentally drop on to the table are not considered as played.

Dummy

"A card is played if declarer names or otherwise designates it as the card he proposes to play.

Declarer may correct an unintended designation of a card from dummy until he next plays a card from either his own hand or from dummy. A change of designation may be made after a slip of the tongue, but not after a loss of concentration or reconsideration of action."

The issue of when a card has been played from dummy can therefore require some level of interpretation. For example:



You lead a heart from hand, intending to finesse, so call for the queen from dummy. Then you see that LHO has played the king.

This is not a slip of the tongue, but a loss of concentration and reconsideration of action. Sadly, the queen has been played. Try to pay more attention next time!

By the way, be careful with your designations. Saying "a spade" means your smallest spade. If you really want a high one, either name the rank or say "top spade" or "high spade".

Finally, if someone (dummy or a defender) mishears the designation, call the director. Defenders who mishear, or play based on the card that dummy picked out are usually allowed to take their card back.

THE PREMATURE POST-MORTEM

You've seen it all before, probably been an active participant. The deal has just finished, and one player starts having a go at their partner, putting him or her on trial for the crime of Murder of a Bridge Hand.

Their partner usually pleads Not Guilty, and counter-sues, and they go at it hammer and tongs for a while, whilst the score is entered and the next board retrieved.

I like to listen to these post-mortems and silently sit in judgment. Often it's hard to decide who is right and who is wrong,

because of a fundamental truth: what happens on a bridge deal tends to be more complicated than you first realise. You can't easily come to an instant decision on who is to blame for a muffed auction or defence.

You be the judge on this post-mortem from a recent Swiss Pairs event:

Dealer: W	♠ 9654	
Vul: Both	♥ K76	
	♦ AK4	
	♣ A92	
♠ AQJ3	N	♠ K872
♥ AJ543		♥ Q982
♦ -		♦ Q86
♣ K754		♣ Q8
	♠ 10	
	♥ 10	
	♦ J1097532	
	♣ J1063	

West	North	East	South
1♥	D'ble	3♥*	Pass
4♥	Pass	Pass	5♦
Pass	Pass	D'ble	All pass

* preemptive

West led ♥A, East played the ♥2 (upside down count and attitude). West continued hearts – declarer pitched a losing spade and went just down 1.

East led the post-mortem charge. "Why didn't you switch to a spade? It was so obvious!"

Fair point or not? (My opinion later.)

30 years ago, there was more basis for these instant post-mortems, because the hand is fresh in your mind and would then disappear forever. But nowadays there are hand records: both hard-copy and on the internet: there's no hurry to review what went wrong.

Post mortems are an essential part of the game: they can be an excellent driver for improvement, but they can also be destructive. The key is to not rush them.

What's more, we have so many ways to communicate these days. Beyond just meeting over coffee, the old-fashioned phone call still works, or there is email, or texting,

or blogging. I suppose you could even tweet your post-mortems.

You will find considered after-the-game post-mortems more valuable than instant at-the-table post-mortems.

It's not easy to stop yourself post-morteming at the table, but you should try. Whatever you do, stay away from two particularly virulent forms of the disease.

The first is pre-morteming: a post-mortem conducted when dummy is laid down. Dummy comes down, the contract is wrong, and both declarer and dummy start "discussing" it ("discussing" is the polite term for what sometimes goes on). Pre-morteming is unethical, because it distracts the defenders, who still have a role to play.

The second is dummy post-morteming the declarer play. Talk about pointless! Yes, yes, of course partner doesn't play the cards as well as you do, but there's nothing you can do about it. Don't fall into the trap of one emotive pair many years ago, who conducted the following post-mortem:

Dummy: "You misplayed that."

Declarer: "No I didn't."

Dummy: "Yes you did."

Declarer: "No I didn't."

Dummy: "Look, I'll tell you. Now, what was your hand?"

As for the 5♦ contract, I'd say that West probably should have switched to a spade, although it could be costly if South has ♠K.

The real solution is for East to have played a suit-preference card at trick one, ♥9, or even better ♥Q: encouraging a spade switch (the high suit). The heart suit is clear to the defence: declarer has either a singleton or void. So a suit-preference card could be useful.

This is where a properly conducted post-mortem can be so valuable. If the pair could sit down after the match, emotions will have cooled, and they can have a worthwhile discussion on suit-preferencing, and when it should be applied.

The post-mortem, like revenge, is a dish best served cold.

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Locale: *Beautiful views overlooking valley. Wake to cocks crowing and church bells calling to service.

Hosts: *Host facility was excellent. Rosalinda was an excellent host, very friendly, even under pressure.

Tours: *Every trip was well organised and interesting.

Food: *Utterly delicious. Suited me very well.

Bridge: *Good bridge play and lessons.

Overall: * Excellent two week holiday. Enjoyed every minute of it.