

# Table Talk

Otago Bridge Club: May 2008

## President's Message

I hope everyone is enjoying their bridge now we are in to the thick of it! It is great to have 48 teams at play, and good to have all divisions playing at the same time. It is sometimes a problem if a team member cannot turn up, sometimes at the last minute. Remember that Arthur Patton the convenor has a good idea of who may be available to fill in and your own divisional partner person may also be a help here. There were some problems recently because some of those changed or wrong phone numbers that were on the white board in the hall and in the bulletin had not been transcribed into members' books. I'll try to get copies of the phone numbers out for you to pick up if you missed them

**Open or All-comers?** On Wednesday night there are two rooms in play – the Wednesday Reserved Room is for members of Junior, Intermediate or Reserved Divisions, and only limited systems may be played. The other room is open to any players, and is a good chance for members from Senior or Open to play with those in other divisions, or of course for those in Intermediate or Reserve to try out or pick up new systems or try themselves out against a wider range of players. However the word 'Open' has apparently put some people off. It is too late to change your programme book for this year, but the Playing Committee suggest the name 'All-comers' to emphasise that anyone can play! We are sorry that the teams event did not take place as the lists were not up in time. There will be plenty of time to enter for the Winter Swiss in July. There is a list on the notice board in the Cargill Room for those looking for a partner for the Wednesday All-comers events.

After lots of consultation we thought we had Saturday night sussed, but through a misunderstanding

there was no-one to open up on the first Saturday in April. Don't give up, try again!

**Tutors** We are looking for anyone who may be interested in the teaching of bridge, or assisting those who are teaching. At present we are running one class on Tuesday night, with another to start in May and a class for the younger ones (10-15) on Tuesday late afternoon. We should however also like to start a class for secondary school children perhaps on Sunday afternoon. Kristen and Gary are our tutors this year, but Gary feels that it is time for him to stand down. We would therefore like to hear from anyone who would be interested in next year for one of the Tuesday evening classes - they might like to be an assistant this year - as well as someone who feels they could cope with the secondary school group. The notes that have been used as well as pre-dealt boards for all lessons are available, thanks to Gary. Tutors are paid. We have a great band of helpers but could do with more. As you need to assist the learners in the most basic systems, you do not need to be a top player! We have had many good helpers from Intermediate in the past. If you would like to find out more, please ring Kristen, 027 329 4786 or get in touch with me. There is a job description available

**Catering Convenor** Kathleen, after years of sterling work, is standing down as catering convenor after the AGM. We have had many excellent convenors over the years, and are sure that there is someone of the same ability waiting in the wings. As well as some supervision of the kitchen and cleaning affairs, I suppose the main work is during tournaments at the weekend. There is some payment attached to this, and a retired person might enjoy a little extra work. Ask Kathleen to give you the ins and outs, or contact me. There is a job description available.

Lindsay

**PS:** I am wearing one of the new Bridge Club shirts. Don't you wish you had ordered one?

## From the Disputes Committee

A number of members will be aware of an incident in the Larnach Room during play in the Teams Competition on the evening of Monday, 10 March, when a player loudly stated that his opponents were cheats, and followed this by stating that their team-mates at the other table had also been cheating. The Disputes Committee received complaints about this incident from both pairs in the team so accused and have conducted a full investigation according to the "Procedures of the Disciplinary Committee" adopted by the Club several years ago. This investigation included a hearing involving all the parties and direct witnesses to the events in dispute, and a review of the bidding of all the hands of the first set of 12 boards played, and of the first hand of the second set which was when the incident occurred.

As a result of this investigation, the Disputes Committee can state that it found no evidence whatsoever to substantiate the claims of cheating by the players concerned. Specifically, both partnerships in the team had available a system card which at least met the minimum requirement for this purpose, all the bids made were consistent with their declared system, all bids which were required to be alerted were alerted, the explanations about their bids given in response to an opponent's enquiry were adequate and accurate, and at no time was there evidence that any player in the accused team had obtained or used unauthorised information. It was also noted that the Director had not been called to either table on that evening, prior to the making of the accusation.

Since that hearing, the Disputes Committee has received a statement from the player concerned, making an unqualified withdrawal of his accusations and giving an apology to all the members of the opposing team as well as to members of the Club who may have unwittingly witnessed the incident.

The Disputes Committee is issuing this statement

in the interests of the good name and reputation of the Club and of those members who were the victims of an unjustifiable and defamatory statement.

David Stewart  
Michael Ferrari  
Dennis McCaughan

## Dear Professor Oddsfellow

*I don't usually consider myself a conspiracy theorist, but sometimes the cards we are dealt do leave me wondering about how random it really all is. Frequently we have a night when there seems to be rather a lot of x, y or z type hands. For example, on a recent evening (13 March) there were nine hands with voids and six with 7-card suits. Only three hands out of 26 played had neither a singleton nor a void. How can this have been purely random? And then there was that 11-card heart suit featured in Grahams ODT column, completed by that oh-so tricky King-rag suit. These sort of cards would never normally get dealt so why are we getting them?*

Suspicious in the Cargill Room

Dear Su,

Somehow I knew that this would be the first question that I would get to answer in my capacity as advisor to *Table Talk* on all matters mathematical. The suspicion that computer-dealt random hands are anything but has been a feature of bridge since they first came into use; and it shows no sign of abating. Let me nail my colours to the mast at the outset: I believe that computer-dealt hands *are* truly random and are not filtered or selected in any way.

At great personal expense I have managed to get access to the record of hand distribution in *all* the hands dealt at the club so far this year; a selection of about 1800 boards.<sup>1</sup> I carried out a number of statistical tests, focusing on short and long

---

<sup>1</sup>Editor: Please forgive the Professor his rhetorical flourishes – all he did was send an email to John Shanks.

suits. Over this data set, there were no significant anomalies. That is, the total number of suits of each possible length were well within normal variations on their expected values. Of course the 11 card suit is very much a one off. If it becomes a weekly feature, then there may be some cause for suspicion. On the question of singletons and voids; many people don't seem to realize that the chance of being dealt a hand containing a singleton or void is about 35%. The chance of a void in any given hand of 13 cards is a little more than 5%. So, in an average session, about one deal in five should contain a void, say about five hands total. Nine such hands, while a little unusual, is by no means extreme – again as a single observation.

So, where does this widespread suspicion of computer-dealt hands come from? A number of explanations have been proposed. Initially, these focused on the differences between true random dealing, and hand shuffling and dealing, as in rubber bridge. People don't spend nearly enough time shuffling<sup>2</sup> and collecting cards in tricks tends frequently to bring cards together in blocks of four or more of a suit. These blocks then get spread around the table, and lead to more even distributions. This same explanation works, though not quite as well, when hand shuffling from duplicate boards – the same process separates cards of the same suit in units of 13; and again if not broken up, these get spread around the table.

But actually I believe that a more significant factor has to do with our tendency to notice the unusual, and ignore the normal. This is deeply ingrained and rooted in our evolution. Even the word “remarkable” which, on the one hand, means “unusual” or “rare”, literally simply means

---

<sup>2</sup>Editor: We admire the Professor's restraint in not quoting from the studies of Persi Diaconis – basically seven or eight *good* riffle shuffles are needed; and we have observed that most players get very impatient with you after about three.

“noticeable”. As a result, sessions in which there are a small number of “remarkable” hands slip quickly out of our memory; but every time we take a finesse and lose to a singleton king we remember it for months (and tell others about it, so that they remember it too!)

## The classics, translated

### Original:

*If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well It were done quickly*

### Translation:

Take your finesses early.

## Bridge on the Net

Many members of the club use the internet as a bridge resource. If there is a particular site that you think others would enjoy please send it to the editor with a few lines of description. For example: [www.bridgeclues.com](http://www.bridgeclues.com) is an attractively presented site that offers daily problems in bidding and play. It has problems at three levels. In the play section you are presented with a hand and a series of questions designed to lead you to the solution; you can ask for a clue if you are stumped. A variety of bridge writers supply the problems and analyses. The problems are generally practical rather than arcane and provide an entertaining 5 minutes each day.

## The Night Sky

David Green's book on the history and heritage of the club is going to press. However, it will still be possible to order copies from him. David can be contacted at the club, or by email at [drgreen@paradise.net.nz](mailto:drgreen@paradise.net.nz). The hand discussed below, and mentioned in the letter to Professor Oddsfellow features!

## Long hearts

As I picked up my cards for board 24 in the second night of the championship pairs I had no idea

of the disaster that was about to befall. I had a nice hand: ♠AQJ92 ♥— ♦Q6532 ♣QJ2. It was a beautifully warm evening, my partner Chris Acklerley was in fine form, and our new opponents Jeremy Kennard and Martijn Prent were wearing expressions of sublime innocence.

Jeremy, as dealer, opened 1♥ in front of me. I thought I was about right for an eponymous Michael's cue-bid of 2♥ showing spades and a minor. Martijn passed and my good partner Chris bid 2NT. All quite calm so far but a storm was brewing. Jeremy's next bid was 6♥! This was not a situation that my mother had prepared me for and I doubled — whereupon Martijn redoubled. Chris was possibly somewhat bemused especially since he had two aces; he passed, as did Jeremy and me.

W	N	E	S
Jeremy	Me	Martijn	Chris
1♥	2♥	Pass	2NT
6♥	Double	Redouble	All pass

I was on lead. I would have liked to lead my void but that is not allowed. A spade looked unattractive and I settled on my longer minor by leading a diamond. Here is the hand:

Dealer: W	♠ AQJ92	Vul: None
	♥ —	
	♦ Q6532	
	♣ QJ2	
♠ KT		♠ 8764
♥ AKJT9876543		♥ Q
♦ —		♦ KJT9
♣ —		♣ 9754
	♠ 53	
	♥ 2	
	♦ A874	
	♣ AKT863	

Jeremy played low in dummy and ruffed Chris' ♦A. He entered dummy with a trump to discard his ♠T on the ♦K. At that point he leant on the crutch of his rather long trump suit.

Now you may think that conceding a redoubled slam is pretty bad but the calamity was actually of even greater proportions. As the cards lie our side can make 7♣! In other words, we had lost 1660 rather than gaining 1440. Well, this was pairs not teams so I should take some comfort from that – but imagining returning to ones team-mates and explaining your role in a 22 IMP swing. Chris, to his great credit, treated the whole episode as a jolly caper; not once did he bite me, vandalise my car, or insult my lineage. I, however, am a broken man – you may send sympathy and financial donations to me at any time.

I imagine that everyone who played that evening will remember the hand for the 11 card heart suit. In over twenty years of club bridge I have seen a 9 card suit twice and a 10 card suit once. The chances of being dealt an 11 card suit are microscopic – 1 in 2,746,693 according to my internet sources. So if, as I do, you play about 80 hands a week then you might expect an 11 card suit to come round once every 660 years!

A final comment on the bidding. Did you notice Jeremy's modest opening bid? He rightly estimated that there was virtually no chance of that being passed out. It was worth finding out what other hands at the table held before leaping to slam – the ♠A in Martijn's hand would have made 7♠ a certainty.

*Mike Atkinson*

## Help!

We welcome your input for *Table Talk*. Please feel free to suggest interesting hands, or consult with one of columnists. Or, provide your own material or anecdotes (so long as they are printable!) Please send submissions to Michael Albert (malbert@cs.otago.ac.nz).