

# Cambs & Hunts Bridge

Number 42, January 2006

## News

Congratulations to Roger Gibbons on winning the NICKO Plate in the Welwyn Garden City team.

The new Discussion Forum on the County Website has been a success so far, with 600 views of articles, and 38 submissions posted. There are so far 16 registered users, as well a number of people who are logging on as guests – please register – it makes the figures look better!

The great thing about the internet is the ability to use it at any time and from anywhere far and wide. It has been great to see Fiske Warren entering the fray from deepest, darkest Oxfordshire. Predictably there have already been discussions about the lightness of a certain county player's bids.

## In this issue...

We have a report on 'the Golly', otherwise known as the Llangollen Swiss Teams and an article on a difficult opening lead from Peter Burrows. Brush up your bidding with a series of graded tips from Chris Jagger on when to open 1NT, developing your use of splinter bids and what to do with those tricky 4441 hands. Chris also gives some more advice on handling hesitations in his laws and ethics column.

Aunt Agony is on sabbatical in the US, but her column is covered by her Naïve Nephew – turn to the back to see if he can succeed in outwitting the almost infallible Auntie.

We also report the sad losses of Emile Habib, a stalwart of many of Cambridge's local clubs, and Ray Porter, who contributed so much to Huntingdon Bridge Club and the Cambs and Hunts managing committee.

Visit the county's website at

**<http://www.cambsbridge.org.uk>**

- information on bridge clubs
- this and previous newsletters
- details of competitions and results
- discuss how you should have bid or played tricky hands on the new discussion board

Please send items for the website to **David Allen** on [david@djallen.org.uk](mailto:david@djallen.org.uk)

The next newsletter is scheduled to be published in May.

Please send in news, letters and hands no later than 15<sup>th</sup> April. All contributions welcome!

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## Bidding Tips by Chris Jagger

### When to open 1NT

Balanced hands are best shown by bidding no trumps as soon as possible, so that partner knows what type of hand you have. For example, with 12-14 points you open 1NT, telling partner instantly that you have a balanced hand with 12-14 points (we shall assume throughout that you are playing a weak no trump, though the same principles would apply to other no trump ranges).

So what is a balanced hand? Any hand with a 4333, 4432 or 5332 shape is normally considered to be balanced. With these shapes and 12-14 points, you should open the bidding with 1NT, regardless of where your points lie. For example AKx xxx xxx AQxx would open 1NT, as would AQx xx xxx KQ109x, in both cases instantly telling partner the nature of your hand (balanced) and the strength (12-14).

The only exception to this is with a five card major and a 5332 shape. A five card major is an important asset, and usually you should open these hands with the major, though you might choose instead to show them as balanced. This depends on your style, but as an example, with KQ109x Axx xx Kxx, open 1♠, happy to rebid 2♠ over partner's two level response, or pass a 1NT response. However, with J9xxx KQx Kx KQx open 1NT, because of the poor quality spade suit.

### When to open 1NT – part 2

Another hand type that you might wish to consider as being balanced are those that have a 5422 distribution. Normally you would want to open your longest suit here, but if this is a minor suit you should consider what rebid you will

make: With five diamonds and four clubs you would happily open 1♦ and rebid 2♣, but if the suits were the other way round, you would not be strong enough to open 1♣ and 'reverse' into 2♦. You would have to rebid 2♣. For this reason you might decide that it is better simply to open 1NT in the first place. For example Kx Qx Kxxx AJxxx would be an easy 1NT opening in my view. A similar principle might apply with a five card minor and a heart suit. However, with a five card minor and a four card spade suit you are likely to be able to rebid the spades, so it is better not to open 1NT.

Similarly with a six card minor, and a 6322 shape you might open 1NT, though here it is generally better to show your six card suit.

(Mathematicians may be interested in a Pythagorean-style definition – that a hand is balanced if the sum of the squares of the lengths of the suits is at most 49. While this is an intriguing idea, it is not something we want to be calculating at the bridge table!)

### Using more bids as splinters

Many people play 1♠-4♣ (and similar auctions) as splinters, showing four card support and a singleton or void in the bid suit. The key here is that it is a double jump – alternatively you could have bid the suit simply or jumped to show the suit – would you really want a third way to show the suit bid?!

However, these useful gadgets can be played in all sorts of other sequences as well. If responder can use them, then why not let opener get in on the act too: with AKxx x KQx AQxxx if the auction starts 1♣-1♠, jump to 3♥ to show four card spade support, a singleton heart and enough values for

game opposite a minimum response. If you had a good hand with clubs and hearts you would have made a forcing 2♥ bid, so there is no need to use 3♥ as a natural bid.

This is the key to an agreement about broadening your use of splinters:

*If you can bid a suit naturally and forcing at the two level, then a jump to the three level is a splinter.*

The same idea can apply at higher levels too. For example, as 1♥-1♠-2♣ is natural and not forcing, 3♣ (instead of 2♣) is needed as natural and forcing, but 4♣ can be a splinter agreeing spades.

1♠-2♣-2♦ was originally not forcing in Acol. But nowadays many people play two-over-one responses as showing at least a ten count (or good nine) so it is very rare that they are going to want to pass 2♦, and opener having to jump to 3♦ on most decent opening hands in order to force is unwieldy. Thus it is recommended that 1♠-2♣-2♦ is forcing. This then means that 1♠-2♣-3♦ is a splinter agreeing clubs. This is fantastic as it keeps the auction low enough for partner to opt for 3NT if he has a decent diamond stop and no slam interest. Without this you would be really struggling on many hands with minor suit support.

### **Advanced ideas on 4441s**

Ever heard the old-fashioned wisdom that with a 4441 hand you open the suit below the singleton? It makes good sense with a singleton diamond, but less sense with other singletons, and most people nowadays do otherwise:

4441: Open 1♥

4414: Open 1♣

4144: Open 1♦ or 1♣

1444: Open 1♦

For example, with 4441 opening 1♥ allows you to find a fit in either major at the one level or to rebid 2♦ over 2♣.

With 1444 some people would open 1♥, but this leaves you with several awkward auctions where partner might think that you have five hearts. For example 1♥-2♦-3♦ – will he hope you have five hearts and try to play in four hearts? If the auction starts 1♥-1♠, will you be within your no trump range to rebid no trumps, or will you have to rebid a minor (when again partner may assume you to have five hearts).

However, there is one further view that some players take nowadays on the 4441 hand. They open it 1♦. This sounds horrible when you are minimum, as you will have to rebid 2♦ over a 2♣ response. However, that is really not too bad – it is only likely to come unstuck if partner has only clubs and around about a 10-11 count. With fewer he would respond 1NT, and with more he will bid on. And even on these hand types it is by no means clear that you would do better by opening 1♥. Partner would still respond 2♣, you would still rebid 2♦, and he will most of the time put you back to 2♥ which could just as easily be a bad fit as 2♦ was! The big advantage of opening 1♦ is that partner will never assume you have five hearts when you only have four, and also strangely not starting with a major actually makes it easier to find a major suit fit – I've often seen the auction start 1♥-2♣-2♦ on these hands, and then responder with four spades simply bids 3NT, missing the superior spade fit.

So why not give it a try – it'll rarely come up, but will avoid you losing sleep every time it starts 1♥-2♣-2♦ wondering whether partner really does have five hearts or not. And if it all goes wrong, and you play in that awful 2♦ contract, you can always blame me.

## Slight Odds Against by Peter Burrows

Here is an intriguing lead problem from a recent teams match. As West I held

♠AQ1094 ♥KJ42 ♦Q2 ♣86

| N  | E  | S   | W        |
|----|----|-----|----------|
|    |    | 1C  | 1S       |
| X  | 2S | 3C  | P        |
| 3H | P  | 3NT | P        |
| 4D | P  | 5C  | P        |
| 5D | P  | 6NT | All Pass |

I assume that North-South were playing that an immediate change of suit after the overcall would have been non-forcing, hence the double was the way to start with a strong hand with hearts and diamonds. I thought about doubling on the auction, but was deterred partly because I didn't have a clue what I was going to lead, and partly by the fact that contracts bid after an auction that I can't fathom seem to have an uncanny habit of making more often than not.

I must have spent three minutes deciding what to lead, and I suggest that you ponder for a while also. A small clue: eight of your cards let the contract through easily, the other five defeat it. So, as the title suggests, you are slight odds against.

South obviously held ♠K, and a very good club suit. A spade lead was obviously out, and a heart could have been dangerous. So the choice was between the minors. I could see no point in leading a club (though it was presumably unlikely to give anything away) and the ♦Q looked unnecessary. So I tried the ♦2 with a heavy heart, as I didn't really expect that to do any good either. How wrong I was!

The full deal was:

|          |           |   |         |     |   |        |
|----------|-----------|---|---------|-----|---|--------|
| N/S vul  | ♠ x       |   |         |     |   |        |
| Dealer S | ♥ Axxxx   |   |         |     |   |        |
|          | ♦ AK9xxxx |   |         |     |   |        |
|          | ♣ —       |   |         |     |   |        |
| ♠ AQ109x |           | <table border="1" style="display: inline-table; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> </table> | N       | W E | S | ♠ Jxxx |
| N        |           |   |         |     |   |        |
| W E      |           |   |         |     |   |        |
| S        |           |   |         |     |   |        |
| ♥ KJxx   |           |   | ♥ Q10xx |     |   |        |
| ♦ Qx     |           |   | ♦ J     |     |   |        |
| ♣ xx     |           |   | ♣ xxxxx |     |   |        |
|          | ♠ Kxx     |   |         |     |   |        |
|          | ♥ —       |   |         |     |   |        |
|          | ♦ 10xx    |   |         |     |   |        |
|          | ♣ AKQJxxx |   |         |     |   |        |

Partner was rather surprised to win the first trick with the ♦J, but not so surprised as to forget to shunt the ♠J through at trick two.

At first sight you might ask how declarer could play a small diamond from dummy at trick one. Take another look, and all will become clear. For if he rises with the ace then his only entry back to hand will be the third round ♦10, but that leaves all of dummy's tricks stranded from declarer. So he has the unenviable choice of either winning eight tricks in dummy, and never getting back to hand to make the club suit, or cutting himself off from dummy, having to lose a couple of spades in the ending. His only alternative to running the diamond was to assume the ♠A was right, and after my huddle it seems he thought it was more likely that I had led a diamond from QJx, and if so, running the lead would make the contract easily.

Note that any black suit lead lets the contract through, as does the ♦Q. Though it was not essential to lead diamonds to break the contract, it was necessary to select the two if I did choose to lead the suit. It is a position of a type that I have seen several times in textbooks, but never previously encountered in real life.

## Laws and Ethics – Hesitations by Chris Jagger

This edition we dispel a couple of myths about hesitations. Before we start, I must stress that bridge is a logical game, and using logic involves hesitating. Indeed one of my partners is famous for his thinking – by the time he has decided what to do on a particular hand, I have often considered every possible lie of the cards, planned what we are going to eat for the next three weeks, and consulted the oracle!

However the key thing about hesitations is that you must not do anything that might take advantage of the hesitation – this is information that only your opponents are entitled to know.

The first myth about hesitations is that if your partner hesitates, then you must pass. This is clearly not the case – if your partner hesitates and then makes a transfer bid, then clearly you must not pass! In fact you must do the very reverse – after partner hesitates you must try and take the most normal action you can find.

Consider this hand:

AK xx A10xxxxx xx

The auction starts

1♦-1♠-X-2♣  
2♦-3♣

If this got passed round to you you would bid 3♦. You have seven of them and there is no way most people would pass out 3♣. Thus, if partner hesitates and then passes, you must still bid 3♦ – in fact partner could hesitate for three hours here and you would still bid 3♦!

The second myth about hesitating is even written into much EBU guidance, but can lead even experienced directors astray. This is that a bid made after a

hesitation usually shows extra values. Whilst this may well be the case, every situation needs to be considered on its merits.

1♣-2♥-X-P  
3♣-3♥-P-4♥

This sequence came up, with the 2♥ bid being a strong jump overcall. He later paused before bidding 3♥.

Do you think his partner was justified in raising to 4♥?

The director ruled that 4♥ was not allowed after the hesitation, on the grounds that hesitating before a bid usually suggests extra values.

However this is not actually the correct ruling.

You need to consider what the 3♥ bidder was hesitating about? Was he considering a leap to 4♥ having previously contented himself with only 2♥? Had he found an extra ace?

Almost certainly not. It is most likely that he was choosing between passing 3♣ and bidding 3♥.

In this case the pause actually suggests fewer values, and now 4♥ is perfectly legitimate no matter what hand he has! Indeed a pass of 3♥ is the only action which could be called into question here, for the pause is suggesting something slightly less than a 3♥ bid.

So what is the moral of the tale?

First of all, you must take a normal action once partner hesitates, if anything inclining away from taking actions suggested by the hesitation.

And secondly, when bidding or directing, you must think what the hesitation is likely to be suggesting before you take your action.

## Golly it's not the Tolle by Chris Jagger

Following the unfortunate exit of the county from the Tollemache, we instead report on a couple of interesting play problems from the Llangollen Swiss Teams, known locally as the Golly. They get progressively harder.

|          |         |         |  |
|----------|---------|---------|--|
| N/S vul  | ♠ J83   |         |  |
| Dealer E | ♥ J83   |         |  |
|          | ♦ K7    |         |  |
|          | ♣ AK954 |         |  |
| ♠ Q1092  |         | ♠ K65   |  |
| ♥ Q754   |         | ♥ 92    |  |
| ♦ A104   |         | ♦ J9862 |  |
| ♣ QJ     |         | ♣ 872   |  |
|          |         |         |  |
|          |         | ♠ A74   |  |
|          |         | ♥ AK106 |  |
|          |         | ♦ Q53   |  |
|          |         | ♣ 1063  |  |

You arrive in 3NT on the lead of the ♠10. Plan the play.

Duck the first two rounds and win the third spade. When you play up to the clubs you find the fortunate lie in this suit. At this point you are up to eight tricks, and simply need a ninth, having lost two spades and still having the ace of diamonds to lose, and a possible spade to come. Now you cannot afford to take the heart finesse for the ninth trick, as this will lead to one off when it loses. Instead, play the king of diamonds, setting up a certain ninth trick and only allowing the defence to come to four.

Note: It looks irrelevant, and indeed it is on this occasion, but it is correct to play low at trick one, intending to duck the trick. Playing the jack only gains in the unlikely event that the person on lead has found the marvellous lead of the ten from KQ109, whilst playing low will work if the person on the right has Kx or Qx as a second duck will

block the suit, and they will have to switch to a different suit.

Note that there is some danger that they will switch to diamonds, so ducking the spades is not necessarily a good idea. Against that, it does allow you to establish that the spades are splitting, which then gives the hand away later on, when you can simply establish a diamond rather than taking the heart finesse, which might be needed if West had a five-card spade suit.

|          |         |          |  |
|----------|---------|----------|--|
| Love all | ♠ 10743 |          |  |
| Dealer W | ♥ AK985 |          |  |
|          | ♦ K     |          |  |
|          | ♣ 1087  |          |  |
| ♠ —      |         | ♠ J985   |  |
| ♥ QJ73   |         | ♥ 62     |  |
| ♦ AJ96   |         | ♦ 108732 |  |
| ♣ KJ943  |         | ♣ 65     |  |
|          |         |          |  |
|          |         | ♠ AKQ62  |  |
|          |         | ♥ 104    |  |
|          |         | ♦ Q54    |  |
|          |         | ♣ AQ2    |  |

After a heart overcall from North, South closed the proceedings by bidding 3NT. Plan the play on ♣4 lead.

Win the opening lead with the ten and stop to count your winners. You appear to have four certain spades, two clubs, two hearts and a diamond, making nine. But can anything go wrong?

Declarer started with a spade to the ace, and carried on playing spades. East won the fourth round and returned a club, and now declarer went one off – he couldn't set up his diamond before allowing the defence to come to a spade, three clubs and a diamond. Can you spot a better line early on?

The key is in the entries, and the play of the spade suit. Even if declarer loses a spade trick he can still make the

contract as long as he loses the lead to West, as he cannot profitably continue clubs, and declarer thus can make his nine tricks by setting up a diamond winner. He simply plays a spade to the 6 at trick two, expecting it to lose, but even happier when it wins. Would you have spotted this?

Note: It is far from clear that this is the right play. It looks like most people will reach game on this contract, and even at teams, the extra imps available for the overtricks do mount up, and the traditional wisdom of always playing safe for your contract does not always hold good.

Note also that declarer could still have made his contract, by taking the double heart finesse early on – he needs to be able to lead from hand twice for this to succeed, and on the line chosen the ace of clubs was his last entry to hand. (Demon analysts may also note that by playing as he did (which only allowed him one chance to finesse the hearts), but then taking the heart finesse, declarer can still make the contract by means of a ‘strip squeeze’ – he plays a heart to the jack and king, and then exits with a diamond to the ace. West then has to lead a heart allowing declarer to finesse again.)

## **Dr Emile Habib** **by Roger Courtney**

Emile was one of the first people I played with when I moved to Cambridge in the mid-1990s. At that time I was a fairly inexperienced player with even more to learn than now. The first board we played he raised my 1♥ opener to 4♥ on AK doubleton, then we defended and he ruffed the third round. On the next board I opened 1♠, he raised to game on AK doubleton and it was the only playable contract with most of the room going off in 3NT. This wasn't the bridge I was used to – it was more fun, more adventurous and infectious.

Emile retired to Cambridge and was well known in many of the local clubs. He was of Lebanese extraction, though born and brought up in Egypt. A dentist like his father and grandfather (mostly in Egypt and the Middle East), he had graduated from university in Alexandria (where he met his wife while sheltering from a rainstorm – she was on holiday with her family from Greece). His two sons became doctors and one of the things he took most

pride in during the last few months of his life was that his grandson was studying dentistry, picking up the family tradition.

They say that the hardest part of bridge is defence, but it isn't really true – the hardest part of bridge is being a good partner, being able to encourage partner with enthusiasm when he makes even a simple contract and shrugging off bad results with a smile. I will remember Emile as one of the best partners around – friendly, always courteous and taking a great joy in the game. The more outrageous a result the greater the joy he took in it, even if sometimes it was outrageously good for the opponents.

Our results varied over the years but I can honestly say that when playing with Emile I never had an evening which was boring and I never had an evening which wasn't great fun. His enthusiasm and quick smile, equally present in triumph and disaster, will be sorely missed.

## Ray Porter by Mary Knights/Cath Jagger

Ray Porter, who died recently, will be remembered fondly in Cambs & Hunts and Northants.

For many years Ray and his wife Janet were leading players at the Huntingdon Bridge Club, where he was particularly appreciated for his patient directing and excellent organisation.

He represented the county regularly (again with his wife), and served for

many years during the 1980s and 1990s on the Cambs & Hunts managing committee, as Club Rep., Chairman and then the thankless job of Tournament Organiser.

He taught bridge at evening classes in the Ramsey area, and his son Alan also plays. His other passion was golf.

The county extends everyone's best wishes to Janet.

## Results round-up

### National competitions

Jagger, Jagger, Wightwick and Pagan have already been knocked out of the 2005/06 Hubert Phillips so will not be able to retain their 2004/05 title.

### Cambs & Hunts Open Swiss Teams

1. Chris Larlham, David Kendrick, Rod Oakford, Sue Oakford
2. M Hill, Paul Huggins, Paul Darby, Simon Gottschalk
3. Iain Watson, Alex Green, Catherine Curtis, Paul Fegarty
4. John Liebeschultz, Sheila Parker, Boris Ewart, P Foster
5. Mike Seaver, Peter Morgan, Lorna Manning, Eileen Manning
6. John Heath, Maureen Heath, Rick Waters, Fleur Waters
7. Matt May, Niel Pimblett, Kit Orde-Powlett, Vida Flawn
8. Peter Cowley, Alison Lloyd, Richard Collis, Robert Wright
- 9= Alex Foley, Elizabeth Roberts, Toby Kenney, Rob Morris
- 9= Peter Last, Susan Mealing, Annette Gerloch, Bryan Last

The Ascender's Prize was won by M Hill, P Huggins, P Darby, & S Gottschalk.

### Cambs & Hunts Newcomers Teams

1. Alison Woolford, Graeme Hansford, Phil Day, Colin Sills
2. Jan Goddard, Leslie Goddard, Val Beaumont, Dennis Beaumont
- 3= M McDougall, Sue Paine, Richard Evans, Mary Evans
- 3= Jayne Curry, Sabine Viuhlemeyer, Chris Penkett, Fred Jacobsberg

### Eastern Counties League

The county scored 9-11, 2-18, and 17-3 against Norfolk and 10-10, 14-6, and 12-8 against Bedfordshire.

### Tollemache Qualifier

The county finished fifth in its qualifying group. The team was J Wightwick, R Gibbons, P Fegarty, C Curtis, D Kendrick, V Milman, R Oakford, D MacFarlane.

### Garden Cities

The Garden Cities qualifier was won by Cambridge (Sheila Parker, John Liebeschultz, Catherine Curtis, Paul Fegarty, Eric Campbell, Eryl Howard, Mike Seaver, Iain Watson). The University came second, Saffron Walden third and Balsham fourth.

**Cambs & Hunts Bridge League**

Current standings in divisions 1 and 3:

| # | Division 1   | P | W | L | D | VPs | Ave  |
|---|--------------|---|---|---|---|-----|------|
| 1 | Cambridge 2  | 4 | 2 | 2 | 0 | 47  | 11.8 |
| 2 | University 1 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 30  | 10.0 |
| 3 | Cambridge 1  | 2 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 26  | 13.0 |
| 4 | Thursday 1   | 1 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 12  | 12.0 |

| # | Division 3  | P | W | L | D | VPs | Ave  |
|---|-------------|---|---|---|---|-----|------|
| 1 | Cambridge 3 | 3 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 43  | 14.3 |
| 2 | Royston 1   | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 27  | 13.5 |
| 3 | Crafts Hill | 3 | 1 | 2 | 0 | 26  | 8.7  |
| 4 | Balsham 2   | 2 | 1 | 1 | 0 | 21  | 10.5 |

**County Knockout**

In Round 1

CARMICHAEL beat FOLEY

ABEL beat HARRISON

PARKER beat OAKFORD

CLARK beat KENNEY

In Round 2

PARKER beat CLARK

JAGGER beat MAN

LARLHAM beat MAY

JACOBSBERG beat JONES

YERGER beat LAWRENCE

DE VRIES beat RICHER

**Diary Dates**

22nd January: County Individual Final

19th February: County Pairs Final

18th March: New Players Tournament

30th April: Jubilee Swiss Pairs

**Around the Clubs****Blinco**

The Doric Cup was won by Ann Beytell & Janice Wilson.

**Cambridge**

The May Pamplin Swiss Teams was won by Eryl Howard, Eric Campbell, Nadia Stelmashenko, Victor Milman.

Mike Seaver & Peter Bhagat won the Autumn Equinox handicap pairs.

**Cottenham**

David Larman, Ann Aplin, Ted Shaw & Zona Lacy won the Club Teams Championship for the second year.

Vin Vachher & Bernard Buckley won the Evans Handicap Cup.

**North Cambridge  
(formerly Shire Hall BC)**

The Club Pairs was won by Ian McDonald and Joanne Caldwell.

**Thursday**

The September Unusual Partner Pairs was won by Mike Tedham and Bernard Buckley.

The 2004–05 Ladder for the Doric Cup was won by Joanne Caldwell.

The club celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary with a party on 17 November.

**A Blast from the Past** by Chris Jagger

I recently bumped into two former top university players – anyone remember:

Richard Silcock, who left Cambridge in 1989, has now started playing again in some Northern and Welsh events. He was a regular in the university team for four years, ending up playing with Richard Lawrence.

William Hawkins – former president of the University Bridge Club, now a dry stone wall mason in the middle of the Scottish Highlands – he has hardly played bridge for 17 years, but has now been tempted out to the Peebles Congress. He was president in 1987, partnering Alex Hsieh.

## Naïve Nephew by Chris Jagger

Sadly Aunt Agony has been away on sabbatical in the United States for the past few months, a much-needed rest, though I still felt the need to consult her on the following hand:

|          |             |
|----------|-------------|
| N/S vul  | ♠ K92       |
| Dealer E | ♥ K6        |
|          | ♦ K3        |
|          | ♣ AJ7642    |
| ♠ AQJ105 | ♠ 643       |
| ♥ AQ102  | ♥ J954      |
| ♦ J      | ♦ 84        |
| ♣ 985    | ♣ KQ103     |
|          | ♠ 87        |
|          | ♥ 873       |
|          | ♦ AQ1097652 |
|          | ♣ —         |

The bidding was straightforward, and I started off with a safe club. Declarer won with the ace, throwing a spade, and ruffed a club, before playing a heart up. I am too much of an old hand not to go promptly in with my ace, but what now? After some thought I returned a third club. Can you see what happened now?

Her reply was terse.

Dear Nephew,

You blithering idiot. Of course I can see what happened now, as indeed you should. Declarer ruffed the third round, played ace and king of diamonds before ruffing a fourth club, and then pitched her two major suit losers on the established club suit. Even at teams these overtricks mount up, my boy.

I also wonder why you forgot to make a takeout double of four diamonds, and I really don't like your choice of lead. I am not a fan of the old maxim about leading aces against preempts, but on this occasion there is a serious danger of declarer's losers going on club

winners – dummy seems to have few values in the majors, so I would have started with the ♠A.

Incidentally, can you not take a hint? I am on sabbatical – a rest – please send all future letters not to me but to Father Christmas at the North Pole.

Yours,

Aunt Agony

For once I could see my cunning had been overlooked by my aunt. Ignoring her suggestion about Father Christmas, I immediately penned the following response (in fact I tell a lie – I actually had the letter ready and waiting for her inevitable response).

Dear Auntie,

As usual, your technical analysis reigns supreme. Your sarcasm was somewhat below par I felt – maybe you are softening now that you have to converse with the locals. But more important still, you appear to be lacking in imagination and failing to appreciate the weaknesses of man. Let me explain my masterstroke.

I had willingly sacrificed that overtrick for a greater goal – nothing ventured nothing gained as they say. By not cashing my ♠A, I lured declarer into a common trap – to imagine that a 6-0 fit headed by the ace is in fact a 6-1 fit. He ruffed the third club, erroneously imagining that they had split 3-3 and that the rest of the suit was now good. He drew trumps and crossed to the ♥K to cash the clubs. When my partner won the fourth club, declarer had to lose another trick and my clever ruse had defeated the contract!

Yours,

Naïve Nephew