



# Talking Bridge

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# When slams get tricky use the last bid principle

AN ESSENTIAL ingredient of good slam bidding is the ability to sniff out danger, writes **Andrew Kambites** in the first of four articles urging the increased use of common sense when bidding beyond game.

So who should be blamed for the fiasco in Hand A? South dealt:

West	East
♠ 3	♠ 9 7 4
♥ A Q J 10 4 3	♥ K 6 5 2
♦ Q 9 8	♦ A K J 10 5
♣ K 7 3	♣ A

South	West	North	East
3♠	4♥	4♠	5♣
Pass	Pass!		

East clearly meant 5♣ as a cue bid agreeing hearts, but West didn't see it that way!

Once his partner had overcalled South's pre-emptive opener, East could rightly see the prospect of a grand slam if West had a void spade, which was quite likely on the bidding. If West could do no more than bid 5♥, East planned to continue with 6♦ thereby almost forcing partner to co-operate with a spade void.

The trouble was that East/West had not discussed this sequence. West felt that if East had already passed, then 5♣ would clearly be a cue bid. But as the 5♣ was East's first bid, West assumed it was natural.

## The Last Bid Principle

Surely East should have spotted the danger of a misunderstanding? A good approach to slam bidding is to try to form a view of a likely resting spot. We call it the 'Last Bid' principle. Imagine that your next bid will end the auction. It will be the last bid. So what would you have bid?

By all means try to investigate more subtly if it is completely safe to do so, but as soon as there's any danger of misunderstanding you should make your

'last bid'. It might sound defeatist, but we have seen too many 'expert' partnerships play in absurd contracts to believe that perfection in bidding is always attainable. In this example East should have sensed danger and made the 'last bid' of 6♥.

A good principle to cover the above situation is that in a contested auction the need to find the correct denomination (for game purposes) takes priority over the need to investigate a slam. In that case East's 5♣ would be natural.

Sometimes the 'last bid' becomes appropriate at an early stage, not because you are entering unfamiliar territory but because you want to make it hard for your opponents to get their act together.

Hand B: East/West vulnerable:

West	East
♠ Q 6	♠ -
♥ K 8 3	♥ A 9
♦ A Q 9 7 5 4	♦ K J 10 3 2
♣ 10 4	♣ A J 7 5 3 2

South	West	North	East
	1♦	Double	6♦

What is the 'correct' East bid when 1♦ is doubled? It isn't going to be easy discovering whether or not there are 'slow' losers in clubs and 6♦ may depend on the lead.

Equally, your non-vulnerable opponents, if given the space, may find a cheap sacrifice. There is no correct bid, but 6♦ was highly successful here, scoring 1370 when North/South would have only lost 300 in 6♠ doubled.

We rather like 6♦. There are limitations to science, and there are advantages in putting your opponents under pressure.

Scientific bidding should be treated as a means to an end, not as an end in itself. Although impressive scientific sequences make you feel good, you end up regretting all the bids you make in the auction except the last one - because they tell opponents how to defend.

# Barbara Dick-Cleland and Buxton Trophies

The Barbara Dick-Cleland and Buxton trophies are pairs events aimed at less experienced players and the Norfolk Contract Bridge Association is hoping that the entries this year will top 2023's seven tables.

Players entering the Barbara Dick-Cleland trophy need a National Grading System valuation of six; those opting for the Buxton should not have a valuation greater than eight.

Both events will be played at the Abbey Hall in Wymondham on October 20 starting at 1.30 pm. The venue is just across from the Abbey, postcode NR18 0PH.

As well as directing Graham Hardman will organise the play at different NGS levels.

The first and second places last year both scored over 60%. Of the fourteen pairs in the competition, six scored over 50%, the others ranged from 49.41% in seventh place down to 39.42%.

While the winners had two tops, on boards two and twenty-six, they had nothing lower than 25%. The second-placed pair were more erratic. They had six tops, but eight boards below 50% including one shared bottom. Three pairs managed to find the slam on board eleven and they all made seven. Here's the full deal:

## Dealer South: No Vulnerability

♠ 10 6	♠ A Q 8 7 2
♥ 9 7 6 4	♥ Q 5 2
♦ K Q 9 2	♦ A
♣ K 6 2	♣ A Q 10 4
♠ K J 5 4	♠ 9 3
♥ A K 3	♥ J 10 8
♦ 10 5	♦ J 8 7 6 4 3
♣ J 8 7 5	♣ 9 3

After South's pass West would probably opt for one no-trump. North isn't strong enough to say anything and East's two hearts transfer to spades would show the nine-card fit.

There was another slam to be found on board twenty-six but only the winners found 6 ♥.

Three pairs stopped in 3 ♥ and one reached game. Two found three no-trumps, one making six, the other four.

Board twenty looks like an easy game for East-West to find, but only three pairs did so. Here's the full deal:

## Dealer West: All Vulnerable

♠ 7	♠ Q J 6 5
♥ Q 10 6 5	♥ K 7
♦ K J 8 6 2	♦ A 10 4 3
♣ 10 6 2	♣ K Q 8
♠ A 9 3	♠ K 10 8 4 2
♥ A 9 4 2	♥ J 8 3
♦ 5	♦ Q 9 7
♣ A 9 7 4 3	♣ J 5

Everything is East-West's way and the analysis suggests they can make twelve tricks in clubs, ten in no-trumps and spades as well as nine tricks in hearts.

It would be best if West opened a heart but with a five-card suit some might have opted for a club.

East's heart king becomes more powerful and with all suits covered there are worse bids than a jump straight to three no-trumps which three pairs found.

One pair stopped in one no-trump, another in two. East played them all, except when West finished in three clubs.

# Failed accountant segues into bridge fanatic

Although face-to-face bridge hasn't fully recovered from the restrictions imposed by Covid, the game is thriving in Norfolk, but its growth and future popularity rely on the foresight and hard work of surprisingly few individuals, writes **Douglas Bence**.

One of these is John Barker and his wife Sarah who many players know as the force behind Great Yarmouth Bridge School.

Amazingly, he manages this without being in the country half the time. When I call him, I regularly get the telltale tones on my mobile which tells me he's overseas; in recent weeks I've found him in France, the Mediterranean and the Norwegian fiords.

## Cruise Ships

In an urban location it may still be possible to make a living running a bridge club, teaching beginners and turning experienced players into better ones, but that's not the case with John & Sarah.

They are driven simply by getting more people to play and enjoy bridge. Most of any money made at the Great Yarmouth Bridge School is re-invested. The bridge holidays and teaching they do on cruise ships simply allows them to travel and see more of the world.

John got to where he is now thanks to a series of accidents. The Barker family are well known in Great Yarmouth and for over a century ran gift and photographic shops.

He was often behind a camera as a boy, played hockey for Norfolk and began studying accountancy. But he failed the exams, the best thing that could have happened, he says.

The family thought he was lazy and wouldn't allow him in the business. He was forced into a desk job at Norwich Union (now Aviva) where his boss, co-incidentally, was the Norfolk bridge player David Gill.

John didn't see Norwich Union as the career opportunity he was looking for and, like many others, he took a train to London and hoped for the best.

'I knew this girl on the train who was joining a cruise ship' he says. 'She knew they were looking for a photographer, so I filled in a form and before I knew what was happening I was sailing round the world.'

'Two years later I joined Crystal which specialised in ski holidays. I worked there for eight years and became a holiday rep, ski guide and area manager.'

Some of us learned bridge as children, others at school or university. Competitive bridge came late to John who had played intermittently for thirty years and enjoyed it.

'But I always came last', he says. 'I didn't know how to bid or play the cards, but aged fifty I sold my business - at the same time Rosa Richardson asked me to play.'

'Within eight weeks we were winning at the Great Yarmouth Bridge Club. I found work with First for Bridge on bridge holidays, mostly as a rep and spare body to make up a four. I was working with Andrew Kambites and suggested we played at Norwich, winning the Norfolk and Norwich Division Three at the first attempt.'

## Teaching Course

'I started teaching in 2012, took a course to be a club bridge teacher, became a tournament director and then a county director. In 2013 I started running the Bridge Holidays at the Palm Court Hotel in Great Yarmouth and was doing so much teaching that I had to extend my house.'

'Life changed again in March 2018 when I met Sarah who learned to play bridge and now also teaches. When the country emerged from Covid in July 2021 we were chosen to both run and host bridge holidays for First for Bridge. Covid also gave me the chance to play with Andrew Kambites four times a week, and that taught me so much.'

'In 2022 Sarah and I then started applying to Cruise Ships to teach and direct. We got our first job in August 2023 and have been working on ships ever since, along with First for Bridge'.

# Getting the most from weak hands with seven losers

Give John Barker a five-card suit, around nine points and a seven-loser hand and it'll be difficult to stop him muddying the bidding waters with an unlikely opener.

'You won't find this in the text books, but I use it because it often works so well,' he says.

The hand below, dealt at the Noverre last month, not only fits the bill but qualifies as a genuine opener under The Rule of 19: the number of cards in the two longest suits plus the high-card points.

♠ -	
♥ 9 8 7 2	
♦ A 8 6 4	
♣ A 9 7 3 2	
♠ K 9 7 6	♠ A 8 5 4 3 2
♥ 6	♥ A J 10 3
♦ Q 9 7 3	♦ 5
♣ K Q 8 6	♣ 10 4
♠ Q J 10	
♥ K Q 5 4	
♦ Q J 10 2	
♣ J 5	

Despite being the vulnerable pair, John opened one spade and south doubled. His partner, Andrew Kambites sitting West, responded with a Jacoby two no-trumps, but the meaning was a little different from the conventional game force and the chance of finding a slam.

## Three or five

'We use the two no-trump bid over a major to suggest a genuine raise to either the three or five level, and three no-trumps over the opening of a major to suggest 13-15 points and four-card support in partner's major,' says John.

'This allows us to pre-empt with lower values, but at a known level of the fit. So if the bidding goes 1H - 3H or 4H I know

partner is very minimal and pre-emptive. After North intervened with their diamonds, I looked again at my seven losers and decided that I'm happy to raise to three, but no more at present.

'But as Andrew is strong, he has no hesitation in raising me to four spades but no further because I have limited my weak hand and suggested seven losers.'

The lead determines the result. Do you lead the king of hearts from king-queen, or the queen of spades from the queen-jack-ten sequence?

'I fortunately had the king of hearts led, and was subsequently able to set up a heart and trump a heart so all my heart losers hand could be ruffed.

'In addition to losing the two minor-suit aces I conceded a trump.

## Spade lead kills contract

'But a spade lead defeats the contract because you don't have enough trumps to ruff your losing hearts.'

John and Andrew were the only pair in four spades which suggests, but doesn't prove, that the other Easts didn't open on the back of the Rule of Nineteen or anything else.

It was a good night for John and his partner. They won with 63.61% in a high scoring night with four other pairs topping 60%.

This board was played sixteen times, all but two of the positive scores going East-West's way.

One of these was five spades going down one on a heart lead, the other was four hearts, bid and made by North for a score of 420.

North-South won the contract eleven times and East-West five.

All the Norths played in hearts, South played either in three clubs or four or five diamonds.

The remaining three opted for no-trumps all of them failing.

# Augusta chokes on six-card pre-emptive threes

WHILE browsing over the summer in one of those house-clearance stores posing as an antique emporium, I came across some old bridge books.

One was jointly authored by Benito Garozzo and Pietro Forquet and was all about the Italian Blue Team which was so successful in the 1950-60s. The other volume featured the Dallas Aces, who knocked the Italians off their pedestal in the 1970s.

We had a visiting husband-and-wife pair during August who took our entire field to the cleaners, finishing the twenty-four boards with over 70%.

During the break he told me in an offhand but arrogant fashion that it was pretty common at congresses these days to open a pre-emptive three with a six-card suit.

Our conversation, plus the lingering effects of the 50p I spent on the two old bridge books, proved a telling influence when, sitting West, I picked up the following hand dealt by South who passed.

♠ J 8 6 5 4 3 2  
♥ 6 5  
♦ A 7  
♣ A 4

♠ A K 7  
♥ 10  
♦ 10 9 6  
♣ Q 10 9 8 7 5

♠ Q  
♥ K Q J 4  
♦ K Q J 4 3  
♣ K J 3

v ♠ 10 9  
♥ A 9 8 7 3 2  
♦ 8 5 2  
♣ 6 2

With six grotty clubs, queen high, I opened three.

North chipped in with three spades and my Great Aunt Augusta, with three clubs including the king and jack, raised me to five.

The contract was doomed, but at one-off not disastrously so. With a five-three split in diamonds we could also have played there, three other pairs did, but again that contract fails.

'You'd have done well to have doubled, Aunt,' I said. 'Then we might have found three no-trumps which is logical. Once the three outstanding aces are gone all the remaining tricks are ours, three plus one and a nice 450 in the bank.'

'I seriously doubt your sanity, sectioned is the word they use nowadays isn't it? You must realise that it's impossible for me to even contemplate bidding no-trumps with a singleton spade?'

'But I've got the king and queen. Anyway, what's wrong with doubling North's spades?'

'The Boy doth protest too much, methinks,' she said misquoting Queen Gertrude in Shakespeare's Hamlet.

'Why are you even thinking of opening three of a suit when you've only got six clubs?'

'You may not think so but in the short time I had, I thought a lot about it.'

'I'm really trying to warn you off looking for a major suit fit. It works well most of the time, opening three of a minor is pretty standard with a six-card suit at congress level these days.'

'North did very to bid three spades with such a poor suit. You, Aunt, should have doubled which is a penalty in the system we're trying to play. Five clubs is suicidal and some partners would have been much weaker than I was.'

One of the other Easts brought home a four diamond contract, but the best score our way was three no-trumps which is where we should have been.

How could we get there? Pass - Pass - Three Spades - Double - Pass - Three No-trumps.

But how one of those who got there made eleven tricks with three missing aces is beyond me. Maybe Garozzo intervened on their side.



# Dates for the Diary

THE Great Yarmouth Bridge School's autumn holiday is from Sunday to Friday, October 20-25, with bridge twice a day for those who want it. Venue is the family-run Palm Court Hotel, breakfast and dinner included. From £430 for the week with no single supplements.

## Cleland & Buxton Trophies

The Barbara Dick-Cleland and Buxton trophies will be played at the Abbey Hall in Wymondham from 2 pm Sunday, October 20. Details on Page 3.

## NCBA annual meeting

The Norfolk Contract Bridge Association annual general meeting will be at 11 am on Sunday, November 17 at Bawburgh Village Hall. After the meeting there will be a free-to-enter inter club team-of-four competition. This is the Smart Trophy open to all clubs, affiliated or non-affiliated.

There will be a lunch break around 1.30 pm. Remember to bring your own lunch.

Traditionally, the NCBA has focused on the competitive aspects of bridge, but efforts are being made to change this. The association is keen to support all local bridge clubs and wants to learn more about what non-affiliated clubs think and how it could help.

## Barclays Bank Trophy

The Barclays Bank Trophy will be played at the Costessey Centre at 11 am on December 1. This is a two-session, qualified pairs event played over a minimum of thirty-six boards.

Those in the top third of the heat qualify for the December final. If some of the qualifiers are ineligible, additional players may qualify provided they achieve 50% of match points in the heat.

Please note: pairs qualify through heats held in clubs, but each club may hold only one heat for which double master points are

issued. A tandem event will be held with Real Bridge for clubs playing online.

## Eastern Counties Cup

This teams-of-four event is at Bawburgh Village Hall on Sunday, January 5 at 11 am.

Although there can be six in a team, only four can play in the qualifying round which will be played over two sessions and scored by imps. The two leading teams will qualify for the final to be played over 36 Boards.

## Swiss Pairs & Teams

On the weekend of March 1 & 2 at the Wensum Valley Hotel at 11.30 am. The hotel is north west of Norwich and directly west of the airport. Postcode: NR8 6HP. Pairs on Saturday, Teams Sunday.

## BRIDGE ONLINE

The Eastern Counties League match against Bedfordshire will be played on Real Bridge on Sunday, October 13 at 1 pm.

October 27 is the date for the Suffolk match. The Cambridgeshire fixture is on January 12 while Northamptonshire is scheduled for March 16.

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The Hudson Cup will be played on Real Bridge over two sessions starting at 11 am on April 27. The first three pairs qualify to play in the EBU's Corwen Trophy played on Real Bridge on May 31 and June 1.

If there are sufficient entries, after the first session the lower half of the field will play for the Hudson Plate.

## OUTSIDE NORFOLK

Suffolk's County Congress will be held between 11 am and 7 pm at the Blackbourne Centre, Elmswell IP30 9UH on October 5-6. Pairs on Saturday, Teams on Sunday, both green pointed. £25 a day, bring your own lunch.

# Wendy Wensum learns that all the world's a stage

SPOUSE WAS puzzled. He was reading a note from his old university friend Travis who tours musical venues as Blue Denim Hank, the Singing Cowboy.

As his usual drummer wasn't available, Travis wanted Spouse to stand in on drums at his next Norwich gig.

At university Spouse was the number one percussionist in a spectacularly unsuccessful undergraduate pop band called Alan Ace and the Five Diamonds. These particular diamonds were not regarded as a girl's best friend, I recall.

'My old drum kit is in the garage somewhere,' Spouse mused.

'You haven't played for years,' I reminded him. 'Anyway, you were very ordinary; it used to bring tears to my ears'.

But his mind was made up and there we were, rummaging under plastic sheets in the garage eventually revealing a motley collection of symbols and drums.

On the evening before Travis' gig the Singing Cowboy joined us for duplicate pairs at the Riverside. Millie and I didn't think this deal was unduly significant.

## Dealer West: E/W Vulnerable

♠ 8 7 5  
♥ Q 2  
♦ 8 5  
♣ K Q J 9 8 2

♠ J 6	♠ K 10 4 3
♥ J 9 7 6	♥ K 8 4
♦ K Q 9 4 3	♦ A J 7 2
♣ 7 6	♣ 10 3

♠ A Q 9 2  
♥ A 10 5 3  
♦ 10 6  
♣ A 5 4

Sitting West with six points, I passed. With six clubs North bid a pre-emptive three clubs showing a seven. Millie passed leaving South, clearly hoping for seven club tricks and his two major suit aces, unable to resist three no trumps.

I led the king of diamonds, Millie overtook with the ace and returned the jack allowing us to take the first five tricks leaving South a trick short.

When Spouse and Travis played the board, they reached the same contract by an alternative route. After three passes Spouse bid a weak no-trump, Travis invited with three clubs which Spouse accepted.

West led the king of diamonds, followed by the queen and nine. East won with the ace and played the jack. As the suit was now blocked East continued with a spade.

Thinking that West had the king, Spouse took the ace and ran the six club tricks finishing in dummy. This inevitably forced East-West into some difficult discards: West was left with ♥ J 9 and East with his major suit kings. North had the ♥ Q 2 and South the ♥ A 10.

So the contract is now safe. Spouse should play the two of hearts to the king, ace and nine leaving him queen for the last trick.

Instead he played queen of hearts first and lost the final trick to West's jack of hearts. One down.

The following day Travis and Spouse rehearsed in our garage and the gig went so well that Travis invited Spouse to drum on his next world tour with me as a roadie, something I reluctantly admit to dabbling with in the past.

What could I say? Obviously I accepted, which brings my partnership with Millie to an end, at least for now, but we may be back. At least the music of Blue Denim Hank is better than their bridge.



# Bridge Quiz: safety plays and stealing tricks

FOUR more examples from the little book 'Bridge Quiz' mentioned in recent editions of Talking Bridge.

All four problems are about declarer play. You're sitting West and in four hearts after an uninterrupted auction.

North leads the king of spades. How do you play?

West	East
♠ 8 5 4	♠ A J 3 2
♥ A 10 9 8 2	♥ K 6 4
♦ Q J 10 9 5	♦ K 8 2
♣ -	♣ A 6 5

Take the opening lead with the spade ace, lead the ace of clubs and discard a spade. Follow with the king and a low heart.

If south plays low on the second trump declarer should finesse the ten - in case South started with four hearts.

Next problem.

North bids one no-trump but in spite of that you're in four hearts again.

The opening lead is the king of clubs followed by the ace. How should you continue?

West	East
♠ K Q 10	♠ 8 7 5
♥ A K J 9 8 6	♥ 7 4 3 2
♦ J 5 4	♦ A Q 10
♣ Q	♣ 10 9 6

Ruff the second club and take the diamond finesse. If this succeeds, ruff Dummy's last club and continue with diamonds.

If North decides not to ruff, lead a trump to throw them in with the queen.

All they can do is lead a spade or give you a ruff and discard.

Singleton kings can be a major irritant. Spot them and you can steal a trick; guess

wrong and you can give a trick away. The next problem is slightly different because you have the singleton king and hope that the defence has not allowed for this possibility

South has bid hearts, but you've stolen the contract with four spades.

The heart queen is led, so how do you play?

West	East
♠ K Q J 10 8 6 3	♠ 7 5
♥ J 4 3	♥ A 8
♦ 9 4	♦ K Q J 6 3
♣ K	♣ 10 7 4 2

Take the queen with Dummy's ace and lead the club ten hoping that South with the ace will duck allowing you to steal a trick with your singleton king.

## Another attempted steal

The play in the next problem shows another way of trying to steal a trick. You're in three no-trumps and North leads the four of hearts.

West	East
♠ A K 5 4	♠ 7 6 2
♥ A 7	♥ 8 6 5
♦ K Q 7 6	♦ 5 4
♣ A 10 4	♣ K Q 9 7 5

When South plays the queen take the ace and lead the ten of clubs to Dummy's king. Follow with a diamond and play dummy's king.

If North holds the ace, they may well duck on the assumption that South holds the club ace, and that the taking of the diamond leaves a line of communication in Dummy. Of course, if North plays the ace you're in trouble.

# Last Word

## Talking Bridge's this and that diary

GIVEN THE dislike many children have for maths, teachers of that subject are rarely a school's most popular.

An exception could be **Andrew Kambites** who was a maths teacher before he saw the financial possibilities of bridge.

When he finished his maths degree, he went on a walking holiday and found he was the only one of the four who didn't play bridge.

He learned, soon got hooked, gave up chess and enthusiastically embraced all aspects of the game.

That included writing as he went on to author a string of books, some of them in collaboration, notably with Ron Klinger, and it is these that have made Andrew famous in a bridge sense.

We owe him a big thank you for putting together some notes for the exclusive use of Talking Bridge which you may have already found on Page 2.

He argues strongly for the use of common sense in slam bidding which sadly, but frequently, disappear once the bidding reaches the dizzy heights.

### Slam Nerves

Indeed, some club players often get so nervous at the six or seven level that many contracts are lost before the opening lead.

Andrew's most successful period as a player was in the mid 1980s, particularly 1984. when he won the Spring Bank Holiday Knockout Teams and the Pachabo, the EBU competition for county teams of four.

These days he also runs bridge holidays and enjoys teaching juniors. Five of his students have represented England at under-20 level.

'I love playing bridge but I will never allow it to dominate my life' he says. 'I try

to keep fit with tennis and table tennis, but however much I talk about my graceful style and lightning reflexes, nobody believes me'.

### Looking for Help

CONUNDRUM time. In my years as a working journalist I've met a few enthusiastic bridge players, but in my time at the bridge table I've yet to meet anyone who admits to practising the trade.

In these days of social media and stories that are untrue, journalism, like so many other things, isn't what it used to be.

If there's anyone out there with an interest in bridge and journalism, please get email me on [db0110665@gmail.com](mailto:db0110665@gmail.com) because Talking Bridge could use some help.

You may not be familiar with the software used, but that's easily fixed. I can either hold your hand through the entire creative process or let you loose to do your own thing.

### Teams of Eight

WHICH CLUB will represent Norfolk in the 2025 Garden Cities Trophy?

The question was answered at the beginning of the month at the Afternoon Bridge Club when thirty-six boards were played by teams of eight from the Norfolk & Norwich, Swaffham and Wymondham clubs who played against each other.

Swaffham, who affiliated to the English Bridge Union earlier this year, were making their first appearance and all their players were made to feel very welcome.

Norfolk and Norwich were the day's winners, with 49 VPs, 9 VPs ahead of second placed Wymondham.

The winning team was effectively the County's A Team so the result was not a surprise.

It was a very good day, enthusiastically played with an excellent overall atmosphere.

*Kibitzer*