



Talking Bridge

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Consider the odds when bidding beyond game

If you bid to game and think a slam is possible, you have to decide whether the chances of making a slam are substantially better than the risks of going off at the five level, writes **Andrew Kambites** in the second of four articles urging the increased use of common sense when bidding beyond game.

Consider the following North hands:

(c)	♠ QJ 7 ♥ A QJ 3 ♦ 2 ♣ 9 8 7 3 2	(d)	♠ QJ 7 ♥ A QJ 3 ♦ 7 ♣ K QJ 8 7
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Imagine that you're North and that your partner opened one heart. West dives in with three spades. What do you bid?

North would bid 4♥, under pressure, with hand (c), so North feels obliged to do more with (d) and bids 5♥. West cashes the ♠A, gives East a spade ruff. East continues with the ♣A and beats the contract.

A freely-bid five-of-a-major going one off is demoralising. We feel that four hearts from North was sufficient with hand (d). Five hearts was not safe, especially with the bad breaks you expect after the pre-empt.

Bidding Small Slams

In theory you should aim to bid a small slam if it has a greater than 50% chance of working, or avoid it if it has a less than 50% chance. The theory that a 50% chance of success is the criterion for bidding a small slam also assumes that your opponents will be in a sensible game or slam.

There is nothing more frustrating than going off in a borderline slam, only to find that your opponents have had a misunderstanding and languished in a part-score.

Playing against strong opponents the 50% 'rule' is as good a guideline as you'll get. Perhaps when playing against a weak team you should look for odds of slightly greater than 50%.

Should you bid a slam if an ace is missing? We're not talking about the beginner who bids Blackwood at the first opportunity, finds an ace is missing, takes fright and signs off at the five level only to find that the partnership has a combined 36 high card points and a surplus of tricks. Look at hand (e):

(e) West	East	W/E
♠ A Q 10 7 6 2	♠ 8 5	1♠ 2♦
♥ K Q J	♥ A 4 3	3♠ 4♣
♦ 9 7	♦ K Q 6 4 3	4♠ ?
♣ K 6	♣ A J 4	

East's 4♣ is a cue bid agreeing spades as trumps and showing interest in a slam. West's 4♠ denies an outside ace. Should West continue?

Another Try

East made another try with 5♥ (showing the ♥A) which became the contract. North had ♠K 9 4 3 which allowed the defence to take two trump tricks and the ♦A.

We feel that East should have passed 4♠. With the ♦A missing everything else needed to work and the trumps had to be solid.

Maybe it would be necessary to drive out the ♦A and set up diamond winners to discard losers in the other side suits, but an inconvenient opening lead would expose a quick loser or inconveniently remove a vital entry from dummy.

The point is that East has only a marginal slam try. If all the aces had been present it still might have depended on one or two finesses and a good trump break: reasonable odds.

Once an ace is missing, if anything else goes wrong the slam is doomed. When considering slams aces are greatly undervalued. In this case the ♦A would have been doubly important because it would have helped declarer set up quick length winners in diamonds.

FOR GRAND SLAMS SEE THE NEXT PAGE

Measuring possible gain against probable loss

At IMPs or aggregate scoring you stand to lose more by bidding a failing grand slam than by missing a good grand slam. Hand (f), which was dealt in a county match with IMP scoring, makes the point: the Grand Slam had no play.

(f) West	East	W/E
♠ A J 7 5	♠ K Q 8 6 2	1♥ 1♠
♥ A 9 8 7	♥ K Q J	3♠ 4♣
♦ A K	♦ 5 2	4♦ 4NT
♣ 7 4 3	♣ A 5 2	5♠ 5NT
		6♦ 7♠

When East heard West raise 1♠ to 3♠ East had a ‘last-bid’ of 6♠ in mind. 4♣ was a cue bid, showing the ♣A or club void, similarly 4♦ showed either the ♦A or diamond void.

4NT was Blackwood and 5♠ showed three aces; 5NT asked for kings and 6♦ showed one king.

East now suffered from a surfeit of imagination. He or she realised that West didn’t need a further high card for the 3♠ raise, but if West had five hearts then East could see 13 tricks.

Demoralising

Of course there was no reason to expect West to have five hearts. What was even more demoralising was that when East/West came to compare scores with their teammates they found that their opponents had settled in 4♠. They had lost 13 IMPs rather than gained 13 IMPs.

If the Grand Slam had succeeded they would have gained 16 IMPs rather than 13. So as a result of failing in a chase for an extra 3 IMPs, they instead lost 26 IMPs.

The reaction was fascinating: ‘How pathetic for them to only bid 4♠ with only 12 top tricks’.

This is true in as far as it goes, but in the real world opponents often miss slams with only 31 high card points. This hand shows

why a grand slam should not be bid on the basis of: ‘If partner has ...’.

We would go as far as saying that to bid a grand slam you should be able to count thirteen tricks, but we would qualify this by saying that if you know a grand slam is at worst relying on a finesse but in all probability is a great deal better, then you should risk it.

Slams and Rubbish Hands

North has hand (g) and South opens 3♥, non vulnerable against vulnerable opponents.

(g) ♠ A K J 10 9 ♥ A K 4 3 ♦ – ♣ A 9 7 5

Excellent

There are plenty of hands with complete rubbish that South might have that will make 7♥ an excellent bid. For example:

(h) ♠ 8 2 ♥ Q J 10 9 8 7 2 ♦ 7 4 ♣ 8 2

(i) ♠ 8 ♥ Q J 10 9 8 7 2 ♦ 7 4 2 ♣ 8 2

(j) ♠ 8 5 2 ♥ Q J 10 9 8 7 2 ♦ 7 4 ♣ 2

With (h) South will need to set up a fifth spade to dispose of the club loser. South needs spades to split 4-2 or 3-3. Even if East has ♠Q x x x x there will be a marked ruffing finesse: All this amounts to excellent odds.

Needs to Ruff

With (i) South needs to ruff three diamonds in dummy: no problem. With (j) South needs the spade finesse, or for East to have the ♠Q singleton.

Of course you are highly unlikely to be able to find out which of these hands South has, or indeed find out if South has a better hand with a useful side card like the ♠Q or the ♣K.

Norfolk team Lord's it in St John's Wood

It's NOT often that where you play bridge is more significant than the event itself. While the details vary, one church hall or community centre is pretty much the same as the next.

But **Graham Hardman** writes that back in October there was an exception when he was joined by Andy Ferenczy, Masuma Knevitt and Graham Ware in a team of four to play in an MCC Bridge Society Mixed Teams event at Lord's Cricket Ground, affectionally known as the home of world cricket.

Our thanks go to Andy's family who years ago proposed him as a member of the MCC which allowed us to enter a team that needed to include a member, a lady and a gentleman.

What made the venue memorable was the tour we had of the ground, the committee room where the England cricket teams are selected, the home and away dressing rooms and the museum where the original Ashes Urn is displayed. The Aussies are the current holders, but are only allowed to take away a plastic replica.

Long Room

It was both pleasing and surprising to see that our guide was wearing a Norwich City badge on his lapel.

The dress code was formal: a jacket and tie for the gentlemen and a dress or skirt for ladies. We played in the iconic Long Room at Lord's which made it easily the most prestigious venue I have ever played bridge in.

There was a healthy entry of 30 teams and we played six seven-board matches. We were moderately successful, winning four matches and losing two which allowed us to finish in the middle of a relatively strong field.

The following hand shows the benefit in team events of stretching certain part scores into 'thin games'.

South dealt and after two passes North

opened a diamond. East bid a spade, South raised his partner's diamonds to two and West passed

North continued with two no-trumps. East passed and South raised to game. Here's the full deal:

♠ K J 9
♥ K 10 9
♦ A K 7 3
♣ A 9 7

♠ Q 10
♥ 7 6 2
♦ J 10 8
♣ K 10 8 5 4

♠ A 8 6 5 4
♥ Q 8 3
♦ Q 6
♣ J 3 2

♠ 7 3 2
♥ A J 5 4
♦ 9 5 4 2
♣ Q 6

A Spade lead makes it relatively easy to gather ten tricks giving N/S +630, which was the score at eleven tables.

At our table, when West got in with his diamond jack, he continued with a club which gave us an extra trick.

Our opposition for this board was one of the nine N/S pairs who stopped in two no-trumps thereby failing to bid the crucial game.

So this board gave us a healthy swing as part of what proved to be a narrow win.

Table Money

The MCC Bridge Society plays both duplicate and rubber bridge all through the year. Duplicate is usually on Tuesdays, but in the member's bar rather than the Long Room. Table money is £10.

We certainly hope to play the event again in 2025.

Counter-intuitive duck brings contract home

Hand 23 at the Noverre club's Real Bridge online Thursday evening session earlier this month was described by **Andrew Kambites** as a 'technical masterpiece, a truly beautiful hand.'

He was playing East/West with **John Barker** when South dealt the following hand and, with nine High Card Points, opened a weak two spades. West passed.

<p>♠ - ♥ Q 9 7 2 ♦ 8 6 ♣ A Q 10 9 8 4 3</p> <p>♠ J 10 7 ♥ J 10 6 ♦ K Q 7 5 2 ♣ 7 5</p>	<p>♠ A 9 5 2 ♥ A K 5 4 2 ♦ A J 3 ♣ 6</p> <p>♠ K Q 8 6 4 3 ♥ 8 ♦ 10 9 4 ♣ K J 2</p>
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North, with no spades and eight HCP, bid three clubs, and with five hearts and sixteen HCP East overcalled with three hearts.

South raised his partner to four clubs which was passed round to East who doubled. South passed and West, with three hearts and seven HCP, raised his partner's hearts to four.

Wins Lead

The defence won the club lead and followed with a second club which East was forced to ruff reducing him to four trumps

With anything but the most extreme distribution Declarer has ten tricks: four hearts, five diamonds and the ace of spades. He can afford to lose a club, a trump and a spade ruff.

The bidding places South with six spades (probably) and at least three clubs, so it's quite likely that North has four hearts.

It's easy to see that the hand is about control and there are two vital considerations.

1. If the hearts divide 4-1, Declarer will lose a trump trick. It's important that he loses it before running the diamonds as the defenders will otherwise ruff at a moment suitable to them and cut Declarer off from the diamonds.

2. If the trumps split 4-1 it's important that Declarer loses a trump trick while he still has a small trump in dummy to deal with another club. Otherwise he'll lose trump control.

Fatal

There's a way round it, but cashing the heart ace is likely to be fatal. Declarer will either lose two trumps or will have to ruff the club continuation in his hand, again losing control.

The right play after ruffing the second club is to lead a low trump towards Dummy. It will normally lose to the queen allowing Declarer to make the contract easily.

But let's suppose that North allows the heart jack to win. Now suppose that Declarer calls for the heart ten and North this time covers with the queen.

If Declarer automatically takes the heart ace he's finished. Equally, if he calls for a low heart from dummy North plays the heart nine and again if Declarer takes the ace he's finished.

He cannot drive out the defenders' winning trump while there's still a trump in dummy to deal with another club. Declarer must force North to win the second trump trick!

All very clever with counter-intuitive ducks from North and East.

So what about making the contract in spite of playing the heart ace at trick three?

This involves blocking the diamonds and if they are divided 4-1 it requires a spade end-play so that Declarer can reach Dummy's diamonds.

Augusta fails to squeeze out the discards

Since the early hours of October 1, after we'd done well in a Midnight Madness team event, my Great Aunt Augusta has been banging about what she's getting me for Christmas.

In recent years she's moved beyond the usual book token or Amazon voucher and is set on buying me a pair of Oakley sunglasses.

I have no idea why, sunshine is at a premier in our foggy little island and I'm more a nocturnal creature than a sun worshipper.

So sunglasses for me is an inexplicable choice, but if she's so determined, why opt for Oakleys, made in California and costing ten times more than I'd pay in Boots?

Wraparound

'I like the wraparound design. The Princess Royal wears them, and that should be good enough for everybody, and so does Tom Cruise while performing all those Mission Impossible stunts,' Augusta said with a knowing smile.

'And not just Tom Cruise, Aunt, don't forget all those nasty Colonial drug dealers, ageing adulterers and the organisers of racist demos trying to avoid facial recognition by the police,' I added.

'Nephew, don't be so cynical. Oakleys are sporty, adored particularly by Olympic cyclists, and I find it endearing that the founder of the company named it after his dog Oakley,' Augusta said.

Only when the next board arrived did she pick up her cards and stop wittering. We were sitting East/West and had the following hands:

♠ QJ 6 5 4
♥ AJ 6 5 4
♦ 6 5
♣ A

♠ A K 7 2
♥ K 7 2
♦ K QJ 2
♣ K 6

As East, I had the more powerful cards and, as soon as Augusta opened a spade, I

realised that with nineteen High Card Points points a slam might be on.

Irrespective of vulnerability, my aunt is wary of slams at all times and invariably leaves it to me to bid beyond game. In this case I stopped at six spades.

North led a club and Augusta looked closely at dummy before taking her ace. She knew that there was no way to avoid losing a trick to the diamond ace, so it was essential that she located the heart queen.

She correctly knocked out the missing trumps in two rounds and led a diamond to Dummy's jack. South took the ace and returned a club. Augusta discarded a heart, won with my king in dummy and cashed my winning diamonds, the king and queen, discarding a second heart on the diamond queen. North dumped a club.

When South played low on Dummy's small heart, Augusta produced the jack and North the queen. Down one. As is so often the case, fury must have been written all over my face.

Failed Finesse

'The finesse was wrong. How was I to know? It could have been either way.'

'Yes, it could have been either way, but if you hadn't been trying to persuade me to wear Oakleys, you might have given yourself a better chance.'

'How would you have played it?'

'Once you've finished the diamonds, play three rounds of trumps to put pressure on their discards. East discards a small heart.'

'Lead a small heart to the king and continue with the last heart. If South plays small, play the ace because if South has the queen he has to play it in order to cash his winning diamond.'

'If South doesn't play the queen, North must have it and it may be the only one he's got left. So your ace will win and your jack will take the last trick. Not guaranteed, but the three rounds of trumps makes it more likely that the queen will drop.'

Dates for the Diary

THREE Eastern Counties dates: the first for the Eastern Counties Cup on Sunday, January 5 at Bawburgh Village Hall from 11 am.

The other two are also for Sundays, online with Real Bridge against Cambridgeshire on January 12, from 1 pm, and against Northamptonshire on March 16, the start time of 1 pm to be confirmed.

Norfolk Pairs & Teams

The Swiss Pairs and Swiss Teams over the weekend of March 1 & 2 are at the Wensum Valley Hotel at 11.30.

The hotel is north west of Norwich and directly west of the airport. Postcode: NR8 6HP.

Pairs on Saturday, Teams Sunday.

Hudson Cup

The Hudson Cup will be played on Real Bridge over two sessions starting at 11 am on April 27.

Note that only the first three pairs qualify for the EBU's Corwen Trophy played on Real Bridge over the weekend of May 31 and June 1.

Great Yarmouth Bridge School

Two bridge holidays are planned for 2025: from Sunday, June 15, to Friday, June 20, and from Sunday, September 14, to Friday, September 19.

Both weeks will be based at the Palm Court Hotel overlooking the beach. From £430 for five nights.

For further details visit the Great Yarmouth Bridge School website or call John or Sarah Barker on 01493 309033 or 07767 864575.

OUTSIDE NORFOLK

Suffolk Contract Bridge Association's popular Bah Humbug competition is on

Sunday, December 29 at the Blackbourne Community Centre, Elmswell IP30 9UH.

Be there at 10.30 for an 11 am start. Although you can start with a festive pastry or glass of wine, remember to bring your own lunch. £10 a head; 30 boards.

The association's Bury Swiss Pairs will be held online from 11 am on Sunday, February 9, and the Club Teams of Four at Elmswell from 11 am on Sunday, March 23 with the Championship Pairs Final on Sunday, April 27, also at Elmswell.

ENGLISH BRIDGE UNION

This Generation Game is a monthly event that brings families together wherever they are in the country.

There's no upper age limit, so whether you're introducing a 'newbie' or teaming up with seasoned pros, everyone is welcome.

The coming sessions are on Sunday, December 15, Sunday, January 19 and Sunday, February 16. They all start at 6.30 pm and will run for 'about an hour.'

Anyone interested in playing should contact Joan Bennett on 07548 782538 or email joan@ebedcio.org.uk to get a link.

Year-end Congress

This is in London, five minutes from South Kensington tube station, from December 27-30 at Marlborough Primary School, the venue used for the Easter Congress earlier this year.

Algarve Congress

A week of bridge with the EBU at Tavira in Portugal from February 3-10 on the south coast. The event will be run at the Vila Gale Tavira hotel.

Tavira is a town and municipality on the Costa do Acantilado, east of the Algarve, 28 kilometres (17 miles) east of Faro and 75 kilometres (47 miles) west of Huelva across the river Guadiana into Spain.

Tip: ‘Always tell partner the length of your major suit’

THE PECULIARITIES of scoring in duplicate bridge mean that it’s important to declare contracts in a major suit when you and your partner have a fit.

Hearts and spades simply give you more points than clubs and diamonds for the same number of tricks, writes **Rob Richardson** with a tip for new Acol players.

Here’s a good example, one where E/W had nothing to say.

Your partner, sitting South, dealt the cards and opened one heart. This is your hand:

♠ K Q 7 5 2
♥ 7
♦ A 5 4
♣ K J 6 2

You have enough High Card Points to open the bidding. So you both have opening hands which means that you need to be in game, three no-trumps, four spades or hearts or five in diamonds or clubs.

But which?

Your first bid is easy: one spade. Note that there is no need to jump to invite game because you’ve introduced a new suit which is forcing partner to bid again.

Partner Repeats Hearts

They do and simply repeat their hearts. This is not a forcing bid. It tells you that partner has a weak opening hand and will pass as soon as possible.

This is unfortunate, and suggests that three no-trumps may be the best contract, but four spades is still a possibility.

You need to tell partner you have five spades as your first bid only promised a minimum of four cards in that suit. But there’s still a risk that your partner will pass before you reach game.

In Acol, in an uncontested auction, that is when the opponents are not bidding, a new suit at the three level is forcing. So if

you bid three clubs your partner will have to bid again.

With three spades in his hand he should support your suit. This is referred to as secondary support.

Your partner is saying: ‘I do not have four of your spade suit as I would have bid them with my second bid, but I was only one card short of being able to do that.’

For example, this hand cropped up recently. South held:

♠ J 6 3
♥ A K 10 6 4 3
♦ 10
♣ A 9 4

It’s easy to see that after a 1H-1S, 2H-3NT auction, a diamond lead will be almost inevitable and will certainly defeat your contract. But if they split three-two, four spades ought to make.

Spotting a forcing bid

Beginners and inexperienced players get confused about which bids are forcing and which are not. Even more experienced players get it wrong sometimes.

Forcing bids are by agreement. Under the laws of bridge a player may pass whenever it’s his turn. But if you wish to achieve good results, it’s important always to respond when your partner makes a forcing bid.

To play in a suit contract you and your partner need to have at least eight cards in that suit. You may have four each, you may have five and your partner three or, as in the case above, you have six so your partner only needs two to bid a heart contract. Until you repeat your suit, showing five, your partner cannot offer secondary support.

The danger is that, as in the hand here, you’ll stumble into a no-trump contract which E/W will defeat.

TIP: If you remember only one thing make it this: let your partner know when you have length in a major suit.

Bridge Quiz: safety plays and dealing with odds

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

As with the last issue all the problems are about declarer play.

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

Sitting West you're in three no-trumps and North leads a heart. With only seven top tricks how do you play the hand?

Duck the first two hearts and after you win the ace lead the nine of spades to Dummy's ten - not the seven.

South wins and follows with a club hoping that North has the ace, but you have the ace and follow with the eight of spades.

This assumes that North has four spades to an honour.

Problem two.:

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

This time North opens a club, South raises to two. You bid your spades and finish in four. North leads the diamond three. What next?

It's odds on that North has led from a short suit so you need to take the ace before it gets ruffed.

Follow with a low spade to the ace and follow with the queen of spades. If both your opponents follow, all is well.

But if North has three spades to the king and now leads a heart, you must play Dummy's ace and follow with the jack of spades and nine of diamonds, taking the finesse when south plays low.

Problem three. This time you're in six spades and North leads the king of hearts which you take with your ace.

West	East
♠ A K Q 6 5 4	♠ J 3 2
♥ A	♥ J 3 2
♦ 6 5 4	♦ A K Q 2
♣ A Q 6	♣ 4 3 2

You draw trumps in two rounds, but how do you continue?

Win a diamond and follow with a heart which you ruff. If the diamonds split three-three your contract is safe.

But if North has four diamonds, Dummy should lead the last diamond on which you play the club six. North now has to concede the remaining tricks.

If South has the fourth diamond, Dummy must lead a club on which West plays the six hoping that North will win. But if South plays a high club you need to take the finesse.

Problem four:

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

Still sitting West you're in four spades. North rattles off the three top clubs and follows with a diamond.

You take the ace. Luckily, the missing five trumps split three and two. How do you continue?

Take the top two spades and the ace of hearts, follow with a low heart from dummy and ruff it with the spade queen. Get back to dummy with the jack of spades and take the last two hearts on which you dump two losing diamonds. This guards against a four-two split in hearts.

Last Word

Talking Bridge's this and that diary

WITH AN area of 2,074 square miles, or if you feel metric 5,370 square kilometres, Norfolk is only England's fifth largest county, but according to Google maps, it still takes an hour and 20 minutes to drive 65 miles west from Great Yarmouth in the east to King's Lynn in the west.

No wonder there isn't much contact between bridge clubs, whether or not they are affiliated to the English Bridge Union, and this doesn't help the game keep its head above water by attracting new players among the 859,000 population

Future Development

Recently-retired Norfolk Contract Bridge Association trustee **Robert Smith** said the future of the game would be helped if we split the county into three, East, Centre and West, and encouraged the clubs in each area to communicate with each other, share resources and develop inter-club leagues and competitions.

He put the idea to the trustees who accepted it and a way forward is beginning to emerge.

At the Norfolk Contract Bridge Association annual meeting last month, for example, chairman **Neil Tracey** said there were broadly five localities: North, East, South and West plus Norwich and its surrounds.

He wants to spend some of the funds NCBA has available to support bridge teachers in these localities rather than clubs.

Funds Available

'Funds are also available for Tournament Director training if necessary,' Neil added.

Separate pairs events could be held in each of the designated areas, open to all clubs, both those affiliated to the EBU and non-affiliated.

The regional competitions, perhaps

two or three a year, could be Duplicate Pairs events restricted to clubs in each of the regions.

'I don't think non-affiliated clubs have much to do with team events, but they can be great fun. Splitting the county up would enable one non-affiliated club to send a team or teams to play with their nearest neighbouring club', adds Robert.

There could be inter-area teams events comprising teams of eight with, say, one pair from each of four clubs in each region.

'Longer term this could lead to the formation of leagues solely for teams events,' he says. 'I don't think that a greater number of smaller competitions would in any way damage the county competitions as they are run now.'

'If any of the above takes off it will make all clubs more aware of what's happening in their area and even lead to sharing resources.'

'Obviously it needs individuals in each area to drive it, but we have to start somewhere.'

Imogen and the EBU

Players who attended the NCBA annual meeting also heard what the EBU had to say about that remarkable young local player **Imogen La Chapelle**.

'She made the quarter-finals of World Championships with the U26W team and won a bronze medal with her partner Charlotte Bedford in the European Youth Pairs Championship' said the EBU. 'In Poland, at the adult World transnationals 2022, Imogen made the last 32 of the mixed teams and the A semi-final of the mixed pairs.'

'She also achieved a number of impressive results in open mixed events, but just missed out on a Lady Milne selection finishing a very close fourth place in the trials.'

What the EBU failed to say is that busy Imogen is also a third year medical student at UEA and plays league netball twice a week. That makes her achievements at the bridge table even more amazing.

Kibitzer