

Steel City Bridge

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EDITED BY CRAIG BIDDLE

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NEW ONLINE BRIDGE PLATFORMS

There are some new online bridge platforms that you all may want to investigate. A site called realbridge incorporates real-time video and also allows you to review deals played there. To play, go to play.realbridge.online and to review hands (or kibitz, sometimes live and sometimes on a 15 minute delay) go to kibitz.realbridge.online. Most people use their real names as their handles there, but it's not required.

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And the deals played in some events are also simulcast on a time delay with commentary. To find them, go to twitch.tv and search for bridge. Some top players, like the Grossacks, regularly post videos there because they get paid via the advertising or by the viewers.

There is also a new site www.bridgezone.org that is experimenting with different sorts of events. I don't know much about it, but you might find something you like there.

And, finally, there is a site www.lovebridge.com where the current USBF team trials are archived. (The Senior teams is still playing, you can kibitz for free I think.) Or you can go to their vugraph archive and see the complete bidding and play record for every board played in four different 8 team double KO's. You can even see the board where one team lost its match because two of their pairs played 4-0 fits above the 4-level in the same 30 board session. (USA2 final, board 6 from session 5 and board 22 from session 6.)

PITTSBURGHERS IN ACTION

In the District 5 online competition for the Grand National Pairs, several Pittsburghers did well.

Bernie Fudor qualified 2nd in Flight A, playing with Jay Levy from Buffalo.

James Liacos and Karl Sokalski finished 4th in Flight B; I don't believe that that qualifies them to play on but it was a good result for them anyway.

Richard Laird and Pat Rambasek qualified 1st overall in Flight C.

Congratulations to all.

IMPROVING YOUR COUNTING

We all can improve simply by counting and watching the cards more carefully. When I was younger, this all came to me without effort, but now I have to pay careful attention, too. Here are some tips.

The first tip is a habit you need to develop. As soon as possible, you need to start thinking about what the bidding has told you about the other players' shapes. And you need to try to understand all you can about declarer's and dummy's shapes before you make the opening lead.

And after dummy tables, all three active participants should be considering what dummy's actual hand tells them about the hidden hands. If you can see 8 cards in a suit between your hand and dummy, you know the other cards are distributed 5-0, 4-1, or 3-2. If one player has shown a balanced hand, you can (usually) rule out that hand having a void or singleton. Often as a defender you will have a good idea of opener's shape from the bidding. You may know that he has 5 spades without 4 hearts, for example. And many players use bids like the unusual notrump or the Michaels cue-bid to advertise 5-5 hands – you're encouraged to use that information in the play!

The advantage of estimating shapes around the table (when you have sufficient information to do so) is that when someone unexpectedly shows out in a suit where you were expecting them to hold more cards, you can take a few seconds to figure out where else he might hold an extra card.

On defense, when declarer or dummy leads a suit, second hand should give count unless trying to win the trick. A high spot shows an even number and a low spot an odd number. Often, just one count card from partner will let you figure out the whole hand. Phil and I used to have a game we played, where at the end of each deal where we defended, we wrote down (on our private score) which trick it was where we figured out declarer's shape. No, you can't do this in the middle of the hand. 😊 That would give partner unauthorized information.

Finally, you always need to watch the spots and intermediates. You don't have to watch ALL the spots, but you need to look at each suit to decide if there are any cards you need to play special attention to. For instance, if you are defending with dummy on your right, and dummy has K1073 of a suit, while you have A984, you are going to be watching for the Queen and Jack. If the suit is instead KQ74 in dummy and you have A862, you're keeping on the alert for the 10 and 9. Once you start doing that, you'll KNOW at the end of the hand whether your 6 is a winner or not. No more apologizing to partner when you don't cash a late winner!

The "irrelevant" spots aren't really irrelevant either – as a defender you'll watch them to see what partner has signaled. And as declarer, you will watch both defenders' signals. Sometimes they will both show an odd number, but you will be missing 7 cards in the suit so one defender has to have an even number. If this happens, you will need to decide whether this is an attempt to fool you or just inattention. Note that when you're defending with a really bad hand, you need to give partner as much information as possible while if you know or suspect partner is broke or has figured out the hand, you can lie to your heart's content.

MAKING SENSE OF THE BIDDING

WHAT'S FORCING?

In order to bid effectively, you and your partner need to be on the same wavelength about whether a bid is forcing or not. Let's start with uncontested auctions where the opponents, bless them, have done nothing but pass. Not everyone agrees on these, but there are some general principles that cover most things. All of these, of course, assume that the bidder has not previously passed.

- New suits by responder are forcing.
- New suits by either partner after suit agreement are forcing. If the agreed suit is a major suit, they are game tries of whatever flavor you choose. If it is a minor suit that has been agreed, new suits below 3NT are often stopper showing for notrump.
- New suits by responder in an auction that has begun with a notrump opening and transfer to a major are forcing. There will be more about transfer auctions in a few months. The idea is that responder is describing his shape so partner can choose the best game (or slam). This is far more important than stopping on a dime in

- New suits after partner has invited a game by bidding a new suit after suit agreement are forcing but need not be game acceptances. Example: 1♠-2♠, 3♣ (I need help in clubs) -3♥ (not much help in clubs but I have help in hearts). This auction could logically end in 3♠.
- New suits after either partner has made a limited rebid in notrump are forcing and need not be natural. This includes that old standby, New Minor Forcing, which I will discuss next month. This also provides definition for other auctions, like 1♦-1♥, 1♠-2NT (invitational), 3♣ as a general game force, allowing opener to sign off in any other bid suit.
- If opener wishes to force after hearing only one response, it's necessary to jump in a new suit. These jumps should be used with caution when no suit is agreed. Hands like ♠x ♥KQ109xx ♦AQJxx ♣x are "four loser" hands, but they will play very badly if partner has ♠KJxxx ♥x ♦xx ♣QJ10xx.

Once both sides are bidding, the rules change.

- Generally, almost everything in a competitive auction is nonforcing except for a cue-bid of an enemy suit.
- A strength showing redouble [1♥-(X)-XX] creates a force to 2NT if the redouble shows 10+ points and the redouble is not a passed hand. But this force is on the partner of the redouble only. This logically means that 1♥-(X)-XX-Pass), any non-jump by opener shows shape and a very minimum hand and responder may pass if it seems best.
- Exceptions are:
 - If we have forced to game, all calls below game are forcing.
 - If we have invited game and suit agreement exists, all calls below the cheapest level in the agreed suit are forcing. This applies to auctions like 1♠-2♠, 3♣-(3♦) where the call in parentheses is by the opponents. Basically, opener's 3♣ call forced to 3♠ and the fact that the opponents bid cancel the force.
- Auctions that start with a strong artificial 2♣ opening are forcing until both partners have done something other than pass or double. In practice, this means that 2♣-(2♥)-Pass is effectively a takeout double and shows values and a double is a substitute for a double negative. Bids by responder here also show values, but this rule means that you don't have to think about what to do with ♠Kxxx ♥xx ♦Qxx ♣QJxx, just pass and let partner tell you what their hand is about.
- A 2NT opening does not create a force.

YOU BID WHAT???

COMMENTARY, SCORING AND ABUSE BY RICHARD FINBERG
 (doublemenot@gmail.com)

Once again, we have a hand with a solid 8-card ♣ suit and a ♦ void. We also have weak 4-card support for opener's ♠ suit and 4=1=0=8 distribution. Such freak hands are difficult to bid, but as you learn how to best think about such hands, your more routine hands will be easier.

This article is much longer than I intended, but do not be intimidated by its length. For one thing, I put the more detailed (and some would say, “tedious”) material in a Comments section at the end, so you need not read it. Some good bridge advice is strewn everywhere, as is sarcasm and offbeat humor. But there are some insights that might help you bid difficult hands better, for example, when is a solid minor better as trumps than a semi-solid major; what hand types are better for a 2/1 auction rather than Jacoby 2NT; a weakness in Jacoby 2NT that may favor a splinter bid; and how you can sometimes use RKC effectively, despite having a void.

Next month, I will use a different format that allows us to see several different problems in the same issue. The problems will be easier because each will be a narrow bidding decision that has at most 2 or 3 plausible answers.

Here is this today's problem:

Matchpoints. Both sides Vul.

The auction: W N E S
 P 1♠ P ?

South holds: ♠ 8763
 ♥ J
 ♦ ---
 ♣ AKQ97632

Your partner, North, opens 1♠, and your RHO passes. What do you bid as South, and how do you plan to continue (the opponents pass throughout)?

For maximum benefit, make your bidding plan before reading on. The panel is using 2/1 game force and RKC Blackwood, but you can use your own methods for practice if you wish.

[Caution: Our panel's bidding begins here].



A narrow majority of panel members start by responding 2♣ to North's 1♠ opening, followed by a minimum ♠ raise (game forcing). All other panelists made game forcing ♠ raises, through a variety of means: Jacoby 2NT; 4♦ splinter bids (some guaranteeing a void, others showing 0 or 1 diamonds); 5♦ (Exclusion Blackwood); and 5♠ (asking for good trumps). There were both excellent and not so great auctions in both groups. In my opinion, I thought one general approach had an advantage over the other. Who do you go with: the 2♣ bidders or the immediate forcing ♠ raisers? Vote NOW before reading on!



We will start with the 2♣ bidders:

Ernie Retetagos: 2♣ followed by spade support seems like a normal way to start this auction.

Bernie Fudor: 2♣. Take it easy and just bid 2♣ and see what the ongoing auction sounds like. It will probably take us to at least a small slam. Hope my partner didn't open with ♠QJxxx(x).

RF: You will likely need to take charge of the auction later, but for now, "see[ing] what the auction sounds like" seems reasonable. Unfortunately, bridge auctions went silent in the mid-Twentieth Century when invasive bidding boxes crowded out the ashtrays (who would have thought good health starts with bidding boxes?). BBO has tried to preserve the sound of bidding, but to be honest, I cannot tell one high-pitched bleep from another.

Richard Katz: A simple 2♣.

RF: Yet another reason to bid 2♣: Bid what you think you can make. An 8-card suit headed by the AKQ will produce 8 tricks about 93% of the time. It is too bad 2♣ is forcing.

Trudy Cohn: I will respond 2♣ setting a game force so that we can explore a slam in ♠. At some point, I will show the void and see what partner has to say.

Asim Ulke: I bid 2♣. Try to play 6♣ or 6♠.

RF: Our bidding tips so far are impeccable. Let's see. Start in a normal way, show our support, take it easy, see what the auction sounds like, bid our simple suit, set our suit to search for slam, see what partner says, and try to bid a slam.

Got it!

And I think I can help on the last point. Bidding slam is easy, Asim. Just grasp the correct card from the bidding box between your thumb and forefinger and place it face-up on the table (*silently*, in case Bernie is seeing what the auction sounds like).



So far, we have a general plan and some good alliteration, but we are short on details. But Steve has stepped forward to help:

Steve Nolan: 2♣. Make the game force this round and support ♠ the next time around. If partner tries to sign off in 4♠, I will make one slam try with 5♦.

RF: To be clear, Steve proposes to try for slam with a 5♦ cue bid after the following auctions or their equivalent:

1 ♠-2 ♣;	1 ♠-2 ♣;
2 ♠-3 ♠;	2 ♦- 2 ♠;
4 ♠ - __.	4 ♠ ____.

Steve obviously thinks his running 8-card suit, 4-card trump support, ♥ singleton and ♦ void together justify one more slam try. Stated like that, who doesn't? But Steve is long in short suits and ♣ tricks but is short of ♠ honors and ♥ Aces. The real thing Steve needs are some answers: does North have ♠AKQxx and the ♥A? With all of those, 7♠ is cold. If one top of those honor cards is missing, 6♠ will usually make. If North 2 of the keycards are missing, slam cannot make. But since Steve has only 10 HCP, there are plenty of "garbage hands" North can have, like ♠Q9xxx ♥KQx ♦AQx ♣Jx, where even 5♠ could be too high.

But we have two problems to address before looking for the magic winning hands. First, RKC looks to be ineffective here because South has not shown his void, so North will count the ♦A as a keycard and South will not know how many of the keycards are the ones he needs. **Gail Carnes** and **Stanley Ruskin** have a workaround for this problem which we will show you shortly.

The second issue is: can we afford to bid above 4 ♠? The answer appears to be a firm "No" (and I cannot presently think of a reason for an exception). The combinations of reasons we cannot safely bid on are varied and not easily summarized but are further discussed below.

For now, let us discuss see why 5♦ does not work. First, 5♦ implies you lack controls in the ♥ suit with a hand like ♠KJxx ♥xx ♦Ax ♣AKQJx. North knows that if South has a ♥ control, he normally can simply ask for keycards (North is unaware of, and has no reason to suspect, South is void in ♦). So, a disciplined North will dutifully sign off in 5♠ whenever he lacks a ♥ control – even with the magic ♠AKQxx ♥Qx ♦Jxx ♣xx.

Second, the information South needs is whether North has the ♥A and how many losers North-South have in ♠. The cue bid will not help you find out the quality of North's ♠ suit. On some hands, North can jump to slam himself, but with hands like ♠KQJ10x ♥KQx ♦Kxx ♣xx, there is a danger North might (reasonably) place South with the ♠A for his slam try over North's 4♠ signoff. North has no reason to expect that South has only 10 HCP and such weak (spelled c-r-a-p-p-y) trump support.

But Stanley and Gail can help us:

Stanley Ruskin: Stanley starts with 2♣, then makes a minimum raise in ♠. Partner is then “obligated to cue bid at this point. We have agreed on ♠ and that we have to be in game. If he cue bids ♦, I will probably sign off in 4♠. If he bids ♥ to show the Ace, I would bid RKC Blackwood and sign off in 5♠ or bid 6♠, depending on the number of keycards.”

Gail Carns: 2♣, game forcing, then establish the ♠ fit and force partner to cue bid. Then, I bid [RKC] Blackwood knowing whether partner has the ♦A and adjust the RKC response when appropriate. (Gail also suggests another way to manage this hand, which we will address later).

RF: Like Stanley, Gail “forces” partner to cue bid, then uses RKC. Stanley will continue with RKC if North shows the ♥A, but “probably” give up on slam if the cue bid is in ♦. But Gail perseveres with RKC on either auction, knowing he can disregard the ♦A if need be. I agree with Gail. North's hand is not limited in this auction (unlike in Steve's auction where North already signed off in 4♠). North only needs ♠AKQxx for an easy small slam, even if he does not have the ♦A.

Gail and Stanley do not expressly say what they would do if North shows neither red Ace.

This is the same bidding approach Gail taught us last month, and it seems like an excellent way to bid this hand. **But there is one important warning:**

Your partner might not agree (or know) he must only cue bid an Ace here, not *any* first or second round control. But Gail's method can only work if North's cue bid is an Ace. That is what allows him to use RKC to work opposite a void – Gail can subtract one keycard only if he knows the cue bid specifically shows an Ace opposite the void.

Note that while Stanley and Gail do not get to this point, their bidding structure leaves 3NT (and sometimes 3 of the major) available. So 3NT to show 'something' positive even when North has no Ace to cue bid. Why not include among the possible 'somethings' the magic ♠AKQxx, even if opener's hand is otherwise hopeless?

Applying this logic to Steve's hand (which remarkably is identical to Stanley's and Gail's hands): Steve's partner *could have* cue bid the ♥A if he had it, or rebid 3NT with the magic ♠AKQxx, if he had either of these features. Bear in mind that neither Steve nor his (imaginary) partner could not know how Stanley and Gail now think the hand should have been bid, long after the fact. But Steve does know that his partner never cue bid anything, nor bid 3NT, prior to signing off. Even if Steve has no bidding agreements with North, after the 2/1 suit bid and game forcing spade support, it is just "good bridge" to show an Ace or do something positive. My goodness! We have found Sherlock's lost dog! You know, the one that did not bark in the night.

North did nothing to encourage a slam. No cue bid. Nothing. Boy, does North hate his hand! I hope Steve does not hurt himself diving for bidding box bring out the Green Card, or maybe all the Green cards.

We are done with Steve's answer, but not with Gail and Stanley. I am not complaining, Gail and Stanley do not mention another huge advantage from their mandatory Ace showing cue bid:

When opener denies a side Ace, any keycards shown in response to RKC must be the Ace or King of the major.

In fact, whenever responder can account for all the side Aces (with the help of opener's Ace showing cue bid), responder will know whether any missing keycard is a side Ace or a top trump honor.

The above point may seem obvious and no big deal. But knowing if you have a fast trump loser is important in slam contracts. A trump loser increases the risk of an adverse ruff (when you lose the lead to the trump Ace or King). And on some hands, defender's trump entry can prevent declarer from pitching enough side suit losers before the rogue trump interferes.

But playing in clubs, where you can draw all the trumps without interruption 93% of the time, solves that problem. Also, sometimes a slow ♠ loser can be evaded altogether by playing in clubs. This can sometimes be done by pitching South's ♠ losers on North's red suit winners, which may be ready to cash or set up with a ruffing finesse or loser on loser play.

Big Hint: The above factors are my reasons why an initial 2♣ response is superior to an immediate forcing ♠ raise. The ♠ raisers can never place the final contract in ♣ once they suppress the 8-card suit to immediately raise spades.

Herb Sachs also starts with 2♣: I bid 2♣ and will double jump to 5♦ (exclusion Blackwood) if there is room, which will of course depend upon partner's next call. If not, I simply bid spades below game, hoping to bid Keycard Blackwood.

RF: It is not clear if Herb intends the response to his 5♦ Exclusion bid to be an old-fashioned Blackwood response or RKC. But since "regular" Blackwood cannot tell us how good partner's spade suit is, we will assume Herb wants to use RKC responses.

By the way, we have at least one panelist who still insists on using "regular" (old fashioned) Blackwood responses. He probably gave up the Culbertson Four-Five Notrump only recently. Fortunately for that unidentified panelist (whose name rhymes with "Chaplin"), his position on the panel is secure. We need someone to mock when regular Blackwood proves inadequate.

It turns out that 5♦ is the Bermuda Triangle of this month's bidding problem. Several panelists try 5♦ as Exclusion somewhere during the auction. They eventually show up in 5♠ or 6♠ without knowing until they see the dummy whether the final contract is terrific or a disaster.

Should anyone be surprised to learn that 5♦ is not a good place to start looking for help for your pathetic, lousy, needy, pitiful, moth-eaten spade suit (I already used "crappy" and needed a synonym)? After much work, the bottom-line conclusion is that 5♦ Exclusion with RKC responses is not workable. And trying to substitute a simpler response structure than RKC turns out to be a "fool's errand" (look it up). There simply is not enough bidding room to learn what you need to know when you are already at 5♦, you have a void, and your trump support is ♠8763.

See the end Comments for almost laughable examples of why 5♦ with RKC responses does not work. Exclusion is at its best with decent trump support such as KQ9x, which only needs one keycard to run. While many may think the Comments

are tedious, I recommend it because it may help you avoid some bad slams, you may learn some important percentage facts, some people think sarcasm is entertaining, and since I went to a lot of trouble, you may as well suffer too.



We now turn to auctions from the game forcing ♠ raisers, who do not deign to mention their running 8-card ♣ suit. I explain why club slams may be superior above but are impossible to bid after your initial game forcing ♠ raise. I thought I was joking when I facetiously argued that most ACBL members cannot play ♣ contracts because ♣ bids may be conventional, so they and never in clubs. *See, ACBL Bulletin* (July 2021, p. 24). Seriously.

We will start with the splinter bids and so-called “Void Splinter” bids. Despite my griping, at least splinter bids are an excellent way to start:

Bill Holt: 4♦. Splinter raise of ♠. With my most frequent partner, we play this as a “Void Splinter,” but that isn’t common. Hoping to hear 4♥ from partner. I won’t stop in 4♠, next I will bid 5♠ (how good are your Spades?).

RF: The “Void Splinter” is great, and I have much to say about splinter bids below and in the Comments. But first, I must land a punch squarely on Bill’s chin to bring him back to his senses. The problem is that Bill did not stop at a stop sign. Instead, he yelled with what someone called “irrational exuberance” that “I won’t stop in 4♠.”

Bill, I am an equal opportunity panelist abuser. I cannot show favoritism, let alone mercy. Remember, “This hurts me more than it hurts you.” Yeah. Right. But I am just trying to live up to the “abuse by” byline you yourself added to this column.

When partner refuses to cue bid 4♥ when stopping in 4♠, he does not have the ♥A and his ♠ suit should certainly not be ♠AKQJx or ♠AK9xxx. If North does have the ♥A but intentionally suppressed it, his ♠ suit must be frightfully (Halloween) bad.

Doesn’t this signoff auction sound like your “Void Splinter” bid performed its job perfectly by exposing wasted values in the ♦ suit?

To be fair, let’s get an unbiased third opinion. I cannot actually find one, but we can play “Phone-a-Friend.” I will randomly choose our resident panelist, psychic and pseudo-audiologist, Bernie Fudor. I expect the conversation to go something like this:

“Bernie! This is Bill, and I am on “You Bid What????” I am calling for help and only have 30 seconds to bid. I don’t want to stop in 4♠. Does the auction, ‘1♠-4♦; 4♠’ sound like ♠QJ952 ♥K64 ♦AK8 ♣Jx?”

Okay, I made that up. We can just find out the hard way by bidding 5♠ to ask partner “How good are your Spades?” I in fact asked Bill’s partner, and he explained, “I already told him with my 4♠ bid. I have Swiss cheese in Spades.”

Okay, I made that up too.

If, instead of signing off, North cooperated by cue bidding 4♥, you must help him by cue bidding 5♣ (showing 1st through 8th round controls in ♣). If North now cue bids 5♦, cue him back with 5♥ (he showed the ♥Ace, you show the second round ♥ control). Whatever you do, do not jump to 6♠. Your message will be clear, “I have all the side suits covered. Can you bid 6♠? I just can’t do it, can you?” If partner now signs off in 5♠, just Pass and hope you are not already too high because you ran the STOP light – but its good! You have already learned better. And of course, never, ever jump to 6♠ yourself with your barren ♠ suit and 10 HCP. Your partner knows what he has. On this auction, you do not.

The funny thing is that Void Splinter users and abusers can easily find out about the trump honors without going through all those troublesome little cue bids. This long cue bid explanation is for panelists and readers who do not play void showing splinter bids, but only play “regular” splinter bids. They are not allowed to use Void Splinters unless and until they learn how to show their ♦ void. But you the lucky few who play

“Void Splinters”

win a free game of

“(♪♪♪♪) **Exclusion for Diamonds Time.**”

Since you showed a void, 4NT bid is now Exclusion RKC. Partner will now whisper (Okay, he will Blab out to everyone) how many keycards he has, not counting the ♦A! And he will even tell you about his “l-o-v-e-r-l-y” ♠Q, if you ask really, really nicely. To sum up:

When North cue bids 4♥,

just bid 4NT (RKC for ♠, excluding ♦).

You can't go wrong!

Let's say you do as I say and say 4NT, and North says 5♠ (two keycard plus the ♠Q). Of course, you specifically know from partner's prior 4♥ cue bid that one keycard is the ♥Ace, and since ♦ are excluded and you have the ♣A, the other keycard must be the ♠Ace or ♠King (the other being the ♥A). You bid 6♠. If partner shows all 3 keycards, check for the ♠Q and bid 6♠ or 7♠ accordingly.

Of course, the above is after partner cue bids 4♥. If North had signed off in 4♠ without bidding 4♥, you have to make a boring, but highly sophisticated and disciplined, Pass, for the reasons explained above.

But at least you had some nice music and graphics and could dream about playing **Exclusion for Diamonds Time.**

If we can change your hand to give you a second keycard (say, change a small ♠ to the ♠K), you could now risk bidding 4NT (Exclusion RKC) despite partner's signoff in 4♠ and implied wasted values in ♦.

Q.E.D.

Gail Carns (who apparently thinks he is entitled to give two different auctions, just because he has not one, but two, distinct ideas and got the "Best Bid Yet" award last month): "... I would like to splinter in ♦ and then bid [RKC] Blackwood, which excludes ♦, but many people don't play that."

RF: Gail's second (first?) plan is also good one. Gail's method appears to differ from Bill's in that Bill shows a void at once with the "Void Splinter." I may be wrong, but as I understand Gail's methods, his splinter bid becomes a void only when followed by 4NT. Either way, on this hand, Gail will bid the hand exactly the same way as Bill when he wants to continue to ask for keycards over North's response.

Jane Marshall: 4♦ (void splinter). If partner bids 4♥, I bid 6♠. If partner bids 4♠, I pass.

Jan Assini: 4♦ (splinter). If partner bids 4♥, I bid 5♣. If he bids 4♠, I bid 5♣ as well.

RF: You are not alone, Bill. Now I have to criticize Jan for running the same STOP sign. Jan is using "regular" splinter bids, showing either a singleton or a void, but both auctions the same as described above. To review, the 4♠ signoff "sounds" like: wasted ♦ values, no ♥A, and a nonrunning ♠ suit. Jan is long in ♣ tricks, but

short in ♠ honors and ♥ Aces. She has no help in Spades and even 4 ♠ could be in jeopardy. Jan must also obey the STOP sign and pass. Any bid she makes risks going down in 5 ♠ or that North might reasonably, but mistakenly, place South with a top ♠ and jump to a hopeless slam.

If North instead bids 4 ♥, everything is rosy, and Jan will of course wish to continue onward and upward. Since she is not playing Void Splinters like Bill, she must use a cue bidding sequence, such as the one I suggest above. After North's 4 ♥ cue bid, the partnership has known first and second round controls in three suits, and the sole issue is how many ♠ losers do North/South have. Only partner knows, and we must encourage him, while back-peddling in ♠.

Reanette Frobock: I would bid an immediate 5 ♦ (Exclusion). I play 0 or 4, 1, 2, 3, so there is no danger of getting too high.

RF: What can I say after panning Herb's leap to 5 ♦ (Exclusion) after first bidding 2 ♣ bid? I prefer Herb's 2 ♣ bid, but Reanette's response structure, especially if the "4" in "0 or 4" means the ♠K is counted as a keycard. But as explained in the Comments, Exclusion Blackwood simply does not work with flimsy 8763 trump support. If you have a "chunky" spade holding like KQ93, Exclusion should work well.

Frank Cymerman: 5 ♠. How good are your trumps? Would love to hear 6 ♥ to show good trumps and the ♥A.

RF: Frank has clearly focused on right problem: You desperately need to know if partner has the ♥A and how many losers there are in the trump suit. Frank asks for good trumps, but how good is good enough? But does this ask for 2 of the top 3 honors, 3 of the top 5, or something? Frank is of course delighted to hear 6 ♥, but that is merely for Frank's comfort. How can ever bid 7 ♠ with his 8-high support?

But Frank's leap to 5 ♠ is a blind leap of faith. If North lacks the ♥A, you can afford no ♠ spade losers. Opposite your 10 HCP, it is easy to construct hands for North which have *no* Aces. But North does not even know his ♥A is critical to success. North would be equally delighted to have the ♦A instead, not knowing that one Ace is the Ace of Feast and the other is the Ace of Famine. So even if North somehow knew he had the right red Ace, should he think ♠AQ962 or ♠AK762 is a good enough suit? Would North be justified in thinking South must have one top trump honor for his power auction?

Without the ♥A, you need a 2-2 trump break with the ♠AK which is about 41% , With only the ♠AQ, you have only a 20% chance, needing a 2-2 break with the King onside). But when North does have the ♥Ace, you can even afford a safety play with trump holdings like ♠AQ962 (cash the ♠A, then lead up to the Queen, for a healthy 72% overall chance, making whenever West has any 2 or 3 spades).

Finally, the Jacoby 2NT bidders:

Connie Hoechsetter: 2NT. After any response other than 4♠, I cue bid. The other choice is to jump to 4♦, but I have a void, not a singleton.

RF: Absent a special agreement, splinters do double-duty, showing “one or none” in the splinter suit. Singletons are roughly 6¼ times more likely than voids. Had Connie splintered, her auction should continue the same as Jan’s auction.

In my opinion, the auctions starting with splinter bids work very well by making your splinter bid then cue bidding. This is especially true for partnerships that can specifically show voids, such as Bill’s “Void Splinters.” This is because after your void showing splinter bid, you can then bid Exclusion RKC by bidding 4NT (rather than having to start at 5♦ with (regular) Exclusion Blackwood).

If you do not have the choice of making a void showing splinter bid, but you have a void, you will just have to start with your splinter bid, then keep cue bidding (or sign off, if you must). There are still other good things that can happen: (1) Partner might decide to take over the auction and bid RKC himself (you can show voids in your responses to RKC – we can tell you how next month or you can look it up on the ACBL site or other places). (2) you might be able to use Gail Carn’s method by inducing your partner to cue bid in your void suit, and then use RKC and mentally adjust partner’s response).

Craig Biddle, who also bids Jacoby 2NT on this hand (at matchpoints) has made a complete schedule of what he will bid after partner’s responses to his Jacoby 2NT. I put it in at the very end of the Comment section so you can easily find it.

Also, as discussed in the Comments, there are times when 6♣ can make while 6♠ cannot – a simple case being when North has the ♠Axxxx ♥AKQ and whatever. But, of course, the club suit has already been irretrievably abandoned. South will be lucky just to get to any makable slam, or to avoid a slam when none can be made. 6NT could be made on a similar hand with 3 Aces and any King, but there is no obvious path to any reasonable contract, other than a guess.

When North responds 4♠ to Connie's 2NT, she will have to stop there. In the Comments, I discuss some reasons plausible hands for this sequence and why you cannot safely continue bidding.

Gus Costanzo: 2NT. The hand is [clearly] worthy of a game force in spades, and I use the Jacoby 2NT. 2♣ raises the problem that I'll never convince partner that I have 4-card ♠ support. It matters because slam is possible. Partner's most likely bid over 2NT is 3♣. Anything other than 3♣ by opener raises the specter of club ruffs if spades are trump. Time to consider whether 6♣ is safer than 6♠. If I like the rebid after 2NT, I will try for slam with control showing bids. There are contrived layouts where everyone has their bid but neither slam has any chance of making.

RF: See my end Comments and comments re Connie's 2NT auction.

We must pass a 4♠ rebid. 5♠ is precarious at best. North may have much waste in the red suits opposite our 1 red card. Partner should stretch to be 3NT with ♠AKQxx and any excuse. Defenders have 17 to 19 HCP. The time to consider if 6♣ is safer than 6♠ was before bidding 2NT, we can't stop there now.

Craig Biddle: 2NT at MP; 2♣ at IMPS.

RF: Craig notes that Jacoby 2NT is usually best with more relatively balanced hands, but he uses it primarily to learn more about opener's hand. At IMPs, he starts with 2♣, so the final contract can be in the safest suit to any avoid large adverse swings.

As I noted above, Craig has created a list of what he will do after his partner responds to his Jacoby 2NT bid. His list is at the very end of the comment section.

Paul Caplan, Bob Zimmermann and Webb (Jack) Hawthorne abstained because they played the hand and knew North's actual hand. We will hear from them again, next month.



So, who did best, the 2♣ bidders, or the forcing ♠ raisers?

Players who used the 4♦ void showing splinter bids (and close behind them, the regular splinter bidders) positioned themselves to bid they hand successfully, although they did not necessarily do so. But, in my opinion, it is usually best to

make the natural 2/1 bid, then show the support for the major. Although this comment does not specifically apply to today's hand, by showing your long suit, partner will know to give added value honor cards in your suit. If you find a double fit with two strong 5-card suits, slam is just around the corner if you have adequate controls in the other suits.

More relevant here, 6♣ can be made on some hands that go down in 6♠ when the suit does not break 2-2. A simple example is if North has the ♠AK but not the Q, but North also has the ♦AK, South can make 12 top tricks in 6♣ by pitching his spade losers on the ♦AK. But when you bid Jacoby 2NT, partner will never pass your 6♣ bid.

COMMENTS

A. Now A Word From Our Sponsor, Mr. Void Splinter:

The Frequency Of Singletons And Voids

In standard bidding, a splinter bid shows either a singleton or void with good support for partner's suit (almost always, 4 or more card support). Void showing splinters are very useful if your system permits them, but most players do not use them. I assume 4NT bid after the Void Splinter asks for Aces, excluding the Ace of the splinter suit. This saves bidding room.

But make sure you still have a fast and efficient way to show singletons. They are more than six times more likely than a void. A void in a specific suit occurs 1.279% of the time (or about 5% of all hands, considering all four suits together). Singletons appear about 8% of the time in any specific suit, or about 32% of all your hands considering all four suits together. Stated otherwise, nearly 1 in 3 hands you pick up will have a singleton in some suit, and only about 1 of every 20 hands you pick up will have a void. If you make a regular splinter bid that does not promise a void, be sure to show the Ace of the splinter suit when responding to Blackwood or RKC (this is standard).

B. Why You Cannot Bid after a 4♠ signoff, after 1♠ - 2NT; 4♠.

Jacoby 2NT, in its original and commonly used form, requires opener to sign off with all minimum hands that have no singleton or void. So, 4♠ signoff hands include, for example:

- | | | |
|-----|-----------------------|------------------------|
| (a) | ♠AKQxx ♥Qxx ♦Jxx ♣xx. | 6♠ is laydown |
| (b) | ♠Q9xxx ♥Axx ♦AQJ ♣Jx. | 4♠ is doubtful |
| (c) | ♠AKxxx ♥KQx ♦Jxx ♣xx. | 6♣ is 90%+; 6♠ is 41%. |

Cue bids will not work well for various reasons, but that is a separate subject. After a 4♠ response to Jacoby 2NT, suppose you greedily try 4NT, despite your void, just because you can't stand passing with 8 undisclosed tricks, and are "on tilt," as Poker players would say. When partner responds 5♠, showing 2 keycards and the ♠Q, you must guess what to do. You can make a laydown slam with hand (a), you are already too high in hand (b) or have only a 41% chance in hand (c) if playing in Spades, or more than 90% if playing in 6♣. There is no way know tell. So much for suppressing your running 8-card ♣ suit to set make your small spades trump. A splinter or a 2♣ bid would have given you a chance.

If you got a 5♥ response instead (2 keycards and no trump Q), it could be hand (c). You know the spade suit lacks the Queen, but do not even know if the keycards are the red Aces, instead of the ♠AK. It matters. 6♠ is about 41%. 6♣ is about 93% with the help of your ♥J. Even if some auction could specifically show this hand, you can never play in 6♣ after your Jacoby 2NT, since partner will never believe you running clubs. The use of Jacoby 2NT is entirely underwhelming. In general, it is of greater value with flatter hands. When you have a good long side suit, bid the other suit, then raise partner's major.

C. Analysis of RKC Slam Bidding After a 5♦ Exclusion Bid

In the main text, one panelists suggested jumping to 5♦ as Exclusion Blackwood for ♠, after first raising bidding 2♣ and showing ♠ support. I concluded that 5♦ Exclusion with RKC is not workable and substituting a simpler response structure was a "fool's errand." Below is my main reasoning for those conclusions.

Of course, we will find 7♠ when partner has ♠AKQxx and the ♥A, which with 8 running ♣ club tricks and some practice ♦ ruffs in the South gives us at least 15 tricks. We will get to 7♠, won't we? But let's look at the more likely mundane hands to see how 5♦ Exclusion more typically works.

Suppose that, in response to 5♦, North responds 5NT, which denies the ♠Q and shows two keycards which cannot be the ♦A. If one of the keycards is the ♥A, we are missing the ♠A or ♠K, as well as the ♠Q. So, our ♠ suit may be as weak as:

- ♠Kxxxx (a bleak 20% chance to make 6♠);
- ♠KJxxx (a mediocre 33% chance);
- ♠Axxxx (a dreary 41% chance);
- ♠KJTxx (at best a 50% coin flip); or finally
- ♠AJT9x (a delightful 74% chance).

These percentages are optimistic. They ignore possible entry problems, potential ruffs by the defense, and a small chance the ♣ suit will not run.

If North's two keycards are both the ♠A and K (giving defenders the cashing ♥A), thing may be slightly better. We still need a 2-2 ♠ break (41%), but (full disclosure) could be up to 58% if one of North's small ♠ is the Jack or 46% if it is the ♠10, assuming declarer knows the right way to play trump (find out how at my next free Zoom lesson – email me at doublemenot@gmail.com) to find out how to log in).

Seeing these odds of making 6 ♠, in most cases ranging from 20% to 50% or less (except for two outliers) are you sure you want to be in a clam much of the field might not even bid? Well, since you are already at 5NT, here is tip: Stop in 6 ♣, not 6 ♠. Things are still not good, but now and again can discard ♠ discard South's losing ♠ losers on red suit winners in the North hand (entries permitting, etc.). See the Sample Hands section in the Comments.

Is it possible that trying to get to 6 ♠ via a 5♦ Exclusion bid with your moth eaten ♠8763 is what they call a “fool's errand”? Or does it just prove my theory that most ACBL members are so afraid of playing in clubs, they prefer ♠8763 to ♣AKQ97632? So, what do you need to bid 6 ♣? 12 running clubs and a Golden Ticket to the Willy Wonka Chocolate Factory?

If you are not convinced by my example where North responds 5NT to 5♦ Exclusion, responses of 4♥ and 4♠ are much worse. In fact, when the trump suit ♥ instead of ♠, all responses below 5NT are best described as “toxic.” Using “standard” RKC responses, with ♥ being trump, suppose North responds 5♥, showing either 0 or 3 keycards excluding the ♦A. Opposite your 10 HCP hand with only 1 keycard, 0 or 3 are both possible. Should you pass and risk missing an easy slam when North has 3 keycards, or do you prefer to bid onward and upward and risk getting doubled for a large loss? I know. Switch to 1430 responses. But of course, when ♠ are trump and North responds 4♠, you are in the same insoluble dilemma.

When ♥ are trump, the 5♠ response shows only one keycard (4 are impossible), so you are committed to the 6-level missing *at least* two keycards (the ♦ Ace is not accounted for) and possibly additional ♥ honors as well (I suppose you could stop in 5NT with your ♦ void and a ♥ fit that might be Q high or less.

We could try to fix the Exclusion responses by substituting Reanette Frobouck's favored “0 or 4, 1, 2, 3” responses, but we need to know more than “how many Aces?” The most useful information we need to find out is (1) how many losers do we have in the ♠ suit; and (2) does North have the ♥? If there are no ♠

losers, the ♥ is not needed for slam. If we have one ♠ loser, we need the ♥A. With a solid ♠ suit and the ♥A, we have an easy Grand Slam.

We could probably modify Reanette's response structure to count the ♠A as a key card, which will help on some hands (but not here, where the trump Queen is also critical). But starting at such a high level, trying to show, or ask for, the trump Queen or side Kings will ultimately prove impractical in most situations.

Are you beginning to think Exclusion Blackwood, whatever its response structure, works best when you have a decent suit (like KQxx) and only need to fill in a few keycards?

Me too.

D. Rebidding after Opener Responds to your Jacoby 2NT Bid

By Craig Biddle (lightly edited by RF)

North opened 1 ♠, Craig responds 2NT Jacoby, and North makes the various rebids on the left. This is how Craig would continue at his second bid:

- After 4 ♠ (minimum, no void or singleton): **Just Pass.**
- After 3NT/3 ♠ (stronger hands, no void or singleton):

Start cue bidding with 4 ♣. If partner has the ♦A, he will bid 4 ♦, and you can bid 4NT knowing you have to subtract a key card mentally [RF: This adopts Gail Carns's approach. See the discussion regarding his bid in this issue]. So, on this hand, you will need partner to show 3 keycards, and later the Queen, for slam to be playable. This will also let you bid 6NT with confidence if partner shows you 4 keycards. And if partner does not cue-bid 4 ♦, you can still ask for keycards, knowing that 6NT is off the table, for you will be declarer and the lead will be coming through partner's diamond holding. But you will know that 3 keys and the trump Queen will be sufficient for a grand slam.

- If partner shows a red singleton or void:

After you get up off the floor, you will again bid 4 ♣ to start a cue-bidding auction, with RKC to follow as above.

- If partner shows a ♣ singleton or void:

You will bid 3♠, asking partner to cue-bid. If he bids 4♣, that will show a void and you will sign off in game. Don't worry, if partner has ♠AKQxx ♥Axxx ♦Axxx ♣---, he is allowed to bid again since you have made a slam try holding at most one key card. If partner doesn't bid 4♣, he will either cue-bid 4♦ with the ♦A, or 4♥ with the ♥A and no ♦A. In either case you will ask for keycards. Finally, partner will often sign off in 4♠. As with the direct 4♠, you definitely want to pass if partner denies any side cue-bid.

FIRST AT THE POST

CHRIS WANG

Big games:

Ron Sain & Pat Cunkelman 78.65 Greensburg Fri

6 in a row:

John Doyal Lebo Fri

3 in a row:

Jim Gump Lebo Fri

Patricia Cunkelman Greensburg Fri

Kenneth Eichler Export Mon

Linda Evans Greensburg Wed

2 in a row:

Janice Phillips O'Hara Tues

Marcella Retetagos O'Hara Tues

Constance Hoechstetter Edgeworth Wed

William Holt Edgeworth Wed

Susan Dillon Greensburg Fri

Arlene Port Rodef Mon

Peggy Shivetts Greensburg Wed

Doug Sterrett Greensburg Wed

CALENDAR

LORRAINE HANNA

Bridge Class: Bridge Basics 1, Introduction to Bridge:

Please pass this information on to someone you know who might be interested in learning to play. Class dates all on Tuesdays 11/2, 11/9, 11/30 and 12/7 from 9:30-11:30am. This four week course will cover Opening the Bidding, Responses, Play and Defense. Taught by Lorraine Hanna, Accredited Bridge Instructor. Treesdale Community Center, 1 Treesdale Commons, Gibsonsia 15044. Cost \$50; Book "Audrey Grant's Bridge Basics 1" if desired \$15. Sign up on our website under Classes and Lessons.

<http://www.pittsburghbridge.org/classes.htm>

You can also find Richard Finberg's free Zoom class for experienced players on Mondays new time 4:20. Email him at doublemenot@gmail.com if you're interested in his advanced lessons.

Face to Face Bridge

Calling all Bridge players to the tables! We need YOU to come back to our open games to save bridge in the Burgh and support our Directors who work hard in providing us a place to play and socialize with our friends.

Saturday Morning game at Glenshaw is now the PBA Unit game. Extra points will be awarded each Saturday..if we get the table count up.

Last Minute Game Cancellations

Text GAMEOFF to 84483 to be added to the list of players who will be notified of last minute game cancellations. Our website is current as to game openings and cancellations, but there are times where, at the last minute, a game might be cancelled. Know before you go out the door.

<http://www.pittsburghbridge.org/clubresults.htm>

SNOWBIRDS If you're leaving the Burg for the winter and changing your address on ACBL, please advise the ACBL this is a temporary move and your home base is Pittsburgh. Our Unit receives money from the ACBL based on the number of people we have in our Membership. The Unit runs our Sectionals, ProAm, and some special events, so it's important to keep our money coming in.

MENTORING

Now that we are coming back to the tables, have you thought about Mentoring? Our Mentoring Program is still active. Obviously, the time factor will not be an issue until we're back to "normal". Here's the link for more info

<http://www.pittsburghbridge.org/mentor/>

FACEBOOK Sign up for our Facebook page. Martin Greenberg maintains this page and does a great job in news of our Unit. Here's the link to sign up..scroll to bottom of page:

<http://www.pittsburghbridge.org/clubresults.htm>

ACBL MEMBERSHIP

Guest Membership is Free for 120 days. Check the links below for more information. Pass this info on to friends who might be interested in joining the ACBL. Now's the time!

https://acbl.site-ym.com/general/pick_username.asp

<https://www.acbl.org/membership/>

Congratulations to Marc Sylvester for achieving the status of Diamond Life Master, Judy Ludwig on becoming a Gold Life Master and Karen McIlwain, Life Master.

NAP Final Congratulations to Richard Laird and Pat Rambasek for winning District 5 NAP Flight C

Larry Cohen's Bridge Quiz

Here's Larry Cohen's take on what Opener's Rebid should be with 4 Spades after responder bids 1 diamond or 1 heart. When does opener jump to 2 spades; when does opener bypass 4 spades to bid 2notrump. A quiz follows.

<https://www.larryco.com/bridge-quiz/detail/52>

Precision

Most of the players in the Burgh play 2/1 or Standard. Precision is played by a few in our area and you'll come across some on line. Many experts play this system. 1 Club opening shows 16 or 17+ pts; 1nt 14-16 balanced. All other 1 level bids 11-15 and natural. Since I'm not an expert, I play and like 2/1. Larry Cohen likes Precision and explains why in this article.

<https://www.larryco.com/bridge-articles/precision>

How do you defend against Precision?

Here's a suggestion:

Double over 1C shows the Majors

1 nt over 1C shows minors

1 level bid natural

2 Clubs shows Black suits

2 diamonds shows Red suits

2 hearts shows hearts and spades

2 spades shows diamonds and spades.

NEWS

PHYLLIS GEINZER

A very reliable little birdie has told this reporter that Saturday, November 13 will be a very special day for Nancy Chak and Estill Duggins. Congratulations on your upcoming marriage!

Hugo Churchill passed away on November 2nd. Aa celebration of his life takes place Friday, November 5 from 2-4 PM at Wildwood Country Club.

Phillip Miller passed away in late September following a lengthy illness. He was a Life Master. His wife Margaret (Bunny) and he played for many years at the Export game.

The Pittsburgh bridge community extends its condolences to Dianne Frangione at the passing of her husband. Dianne plays in the South Hills games.