

# Why You Still **LOSE** AT BRIDGE



Julian Potage

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# Introduction

I suspect that some 65 years ago when S.J. ('Skid') Simon wrote *Why You Lose at Bridge* and *Cut for Partners*, he had no idea people would still be enjoying his books today. His advice about playing the people rather than just the cards has stood the test of time very well indeed.

What has changed since Simon's day? For one thing, the standard of bidding has improved a great deal. Many tournament players today can bid as well as the world champions of the postwar years. For another, most bridge buffs these days play more duplicate bridge than rubber. If you do play rubber, you probably play Chicago, the four-deal kind. This can save you a great deal of time and expense if you should happen to cut Mrs. Guggenheim or Futile Willie!

Yes, by popular request, the 'Famous Four' make their long awaited return. I have reserved the second half of the book for you to enjoy and perhaps learn from their antics.

In the first half, I deal with the issues that Skid Simon might have discussed if he were around today — notably those that arise from the changes referred to above. To avoid boring you I have not gone over old ground or sought to include material well covered elsewhere. Instead, I have tried to talk about the losing bids and plays that still occur despite, or in some cases because of, what others have said or written.

I have taken the liberty of assuming that you are more likely to have picked up this book as a fan of Skid Simon rather than of me. You may thus notice a few departures from my usual style to match better with his. I would like to thank all those who have helped to make this a fitting tribute to his memory. These include Ron Garber, Nick Smith, Roy Hughes and Graham Allan, as well as Peter Burrows and Maureen Dennison, who have as usual studied the manuscript with their fine-toothed combs.

Julian Pottage, Porthcawl, Wales, 2014

## THE FAMOUS FOUR

Just in case you have not come across them before, let me tell you about the four stereotypical players you will meet in this book.

Following tradition and taking the lady first, we begin with Mrs. Guggenheim. She is a generously-proportioned woman, well turned out, with a smart coat, rings on her fingers and a bulging handbag. She tries hard to be good at the game. She never goes anywhere without a set of the bridge *Pocket Guides*. She has been attending lessons for as long as anyone can remember. Despite this, she remains a hopeless dummy player and is prone to forgetting basic things about the game. Her saving grace is that, unlike the other protagonists, she is well aware of her limitations, being only too happy to let her partners take control.

Mr. Smug is an authoritarian man, used to getting his own way both in business and at the bridge table. Over the years he has lost most of his hair and gained a gaunt look. He does not like to use many conventions. If he bids 3NT, he does not expect you to take him out. He rarely gives signals as a defender or watches for what signals you might give. Making a plan as declarer also seems to be beyond him.

Futile Willie has a gentler look, with a rounded face and still a decent head of hair. He is a great scientist and likes to adopt all of the popular conventions — whether his partner wishes to or not. His main failing as a bridge player is a lack of judgment. This causes him to lose almost as much as Mrs. Guggenheim.

The Unlucky Expert wears a smart suit and rests his glasses half-way down his long nose. Although his bidding and play are impeccable, he never seems to win. The problem is that he never makes the slightest allowance for the other players. He sees suit-preference signals and cuebids that his partners never intended to make. Likewise, he watches the actions of his opponents and assumes that they would bid and play as he does — when of course they don't.

PART 1

# HOW NOT TO PLAY BRIDGE

*The mistakes are all there, waiting to be made.*

Savielly Tartakower, chessmaster.





# Showing Shape You Don't Have

Playing a strong notrump, what do you open with this hand?

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

I suspect you say 1NT. Despite the two doubletons, this seems the best bid on the hand. It describes the strength of the hand, it protects various tenaces and it more or less describes the shape. If you open 1♦, you have no sensible rebid over a 1♠ response. 2♦ is an underbid and 2♥ an overbid; 1NT is an underbid and 2NT a serious overbid.

What's the relevance of this to the topic of 'showing shape you don't have'? Consider this hand:

♠ Q 9 7 3   ♥ Q 9 8   ♦ K 10 9   ♣ A Q 8

Playing five-card majors and a strong notrump, you open 1♣. What do you rebid if partner responds 1♦ or 1♥? I hope you say 1NT, which is the correct bid. Would you believe that some people would rebid 1♠ on this hand and yet open 1NT on the previous hand? The idea that bidding 1NT is a good idea, because it shows the shape and strength of your hand and simplifies the late auction, has suddenly gone out the window. Players are too paranoid about missing a 4-4 spade fit. Why weren't they worried about missing a heart fit on the first deal? Surely, a fit is more worth finding when you have a couple of doubletons and the partnership figures to have game on if such a fit exists.

On this second hand (as on the first), 1NT need not end the auction. If partner has enough to look for game, he can check for a spade

fit on the way. There are various conventions in common use to help you do this. In any event, if you do miss a 4-4 spade fit from time to time, does it really matter? Whether the choice of contract lies between 1NT and 2♠ or between 3NT and 4♠, you will be a level higher if you play in spades. Since you have no ruffing value, you will often find that you can make the same number of tricks in a notrump contract.

Playing with the Futile Willies of this world who open 1♣ and rebid 1♠, what does responder do with, say, 8 points and five hearts? Facing a black two-suiter — with which a 1♣ opening and 1♠ rebid are consistent — he will probably want to give preference in the black suits; rebidding the five-bagger in hearts is unlikely to work. However, if opener might turn up with this type of hand, he will want to rebid 1NT or 2♥.

Suppose Futile Willie does get a preference to 2♣. Does the idea of playing in a 4-3 or even 3-3 club fit worry him? No, it's not his problem. He goes back to hearts. He has now bid three different suits, first clubs then spades and now hearts. He has given a perfect picture of his hand — five clubs, four spades, three hearts and an above minimum opening. Alas, this isn't what he holds!

If Futile Willie were the only one to bid this way, I might not have written this chapter. Sadly, even players who think of themselves as experts bid in this way. I can think of one former World champion who suggested the 1♠ rebid in his column. I can also recall a book in which the author thought a number of bids as awful as this were quite normal. Apart from the 1♣ opening and 1♠ rebid, he featured another hand on which the opener bid hearts three times without any support. It didn't occur to him that this sequence might suggest a seven-card heart suit.

Unless fate deals you an awkward 4-4-4-1 type, the normal message of opening in one suit and rebidding in some other suit is this: 'I hold at least five cards in the first suit and at least four cards in my second.' With a flatter shape than this, you should either open or rebid 1NT or 2NT depending upon the strength of the hand. A very important message to convey to your partner is whether you are balanced or not.

You only make an exception to this on two hand types. If your values are nearly all in two four-card suits, you can show your second suit. If you have a good three-card fragment in partner's major, you

can raise him. Now we look at the position from responder's point of view:

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

**OPENER**

1♠

2♦

**YOU**

1NT

?

I have seen players here bid 2♥ on the off-chance that their partner has three hearts. While I admit that partner might have three hearts, the odds are somewhat against it. When he bids two suits, he implies a minimum of nine cards between the two suits. If he has exactly nine cards in those suits and his short suits are equal in length, he will hold two hearts. More likely, his short suits divide 3-1 in one way or the other or he has more than nine cards in the long suits. In this case, where do you expect his singleton to lie? Correct – in your longest suit. You don't fancy playing in 2♥ on a 5-1 fit, do you?

By the way, if you do bid 2♥ then you expect your partner to pass if he is 5=1=4=3. He has already bid his shape. Bidding 2♠ because he doesn't fancy playing in 2♥ would overstate his shape.

A good rule of thumb is this: when partner shows two suits you may try to play in your suit at the two-level if you have six cards in it and you may try to play in it at the three-level with seven cards in it. You should manage to remember the six and seven limits because they tie in with the length expected for weak twos and three-level preempts.

Talking about preempts, consider this hand:

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

Suppose partner opens 3♣. What do you respond? I hope you say 'Pass'. This is the correct call. For 3NT to be on you would need to find partner with ♣AKJxxxx and hope for one or two cards to sit right. Thankfully, I don't know anyone who would bid 3NT. However, I can think of one or two who would bid 3♥. They argue that partner might hold three (or these days even four) hearts. In this case, they would rather play in 4♥ than watch their partner declare 3♣.

If partner opens at the three-level, he tends to have a 7-3-2-1 shape. In which suit is his singleton likely to lie? You are right – in your longest suit. If a singleton is the expected length in responder's

longest suit, opener can regard a doubleton as a good holding, one worth a raise. It follows that responder needs a fair six-card suit — one playable facing a low doubleton — for it to be worth a mention. If you start bidding five-card suits, you are lying about your shape and asking for trouble.

The risks of looking for but failing to find a heart fit are twofold. For one, you are likely to end up in 4♣ instead of 3♣ and so be much more likely to get a minus score. For another, you warn the opponents to stay out of the auction. With the misfit, you would love to hear the opponents come in over 3♣ and hang themselves somewhere.

My next example I also regard as a case of showing shape you don't have. If you just want to consider it as being chicken, I couldn't object to that. You hold this rockcrusher:

♠ 10 3 2   ♥ 8 7 6 3   ♦ 10 3 2   ♣ 8 4 3

LHO opens 1NT, partner doubles for penalties and the next hand passes. What should you do?

I admit it. The problem isn't fair. You want to know the range of the 1NT and who is vulnerable. I don't think the range of the 1NT is relevant. Let's say for the sake of argument that it's weak, 12-14. Who is vulnerable has a bit more bearing. Let us say that only your side is.

In this case, any call other than pass is highly suspect. If you do bid, partner will place you with five cards or more in the suit you bid. If someone doubles, he's not going to rescue you. You could try an SOS redouble but won't know whether this will improve the contract. I have seen players bid 2♥ on this kind of hand on the basis that the opponents will be reluctant to double you into game. I have also seen players bid 2♣ in the hope that their partner will have a long suit and can bid it. While either strategy *might* work, the odds are strongly against it.

As explained at the start of the chapter, you are heading for trouble if you describe a balanced hand as shapely. Here, there's no need to do any describing. Partner's penalty double doesn't ask you to bid. If he is minimum and balanced, you are in trouble anyway. While 1NT doubled will make, any rescue attempt may well cost 300 or so, even undoubled. If he is shapely or has extras, maybe he can lead his long suit and defeat 1NT without any help from you. If you lose 180 or 380, it isn't the end of the world. It isn't even game. Here's the full deal:

In the examples so far, partner has not promised a fit. You must still take care not to overstate your shape when he does. Unless he has jumped, he may have expressed support with an imperfect holding.

YOU	PARTNER
1♥	1♠
3♦	3♥

Partner may have given false preference with a doubleton heart. If you go on to 4♥, you should have a six-card heart suit. With only five hearts, you should look for another bid: 3♠ if you have three-card spade support, 3NT if you have clubs stopped or 4♦ if you hold five diamonds.

YOU	PARTNER
1♠	1♣
	2♠

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but a losing doubleton in one of the red suits, again the three-card raise may well describe his hand better than a 1NT rebid. If you rebid 3♠ or 4♠, you imply a five-card or longer spade suit. With four spades and the values to go on, you should look for another bid: 2NT or 3NT if you have the red suits stopped or some number of clubs if you have club support.

Remember the main object of bidding: you and your partner want to tell each other about your hands so you can reach the best contract. Beware of telling the same story twice. If your previous bidding promises a set number of cards in some suit, beware of bidding the suit again unless you have extra length or are certain that your side has a fit.

# Blue Moon Bidding

When Sandra Landy, twice a winner of the Venice Cup, spoke at the opening of new premises for the Chichester Bridge club in Sussex, England, she gave a great example of a 'blue moon bid'. In fact, she used a slightly different term. That doesn't matter. Her name for the bid is not widely known outside the UK but the meaning is similar.

'Have you all heard of a jump cuebid of the opener's suit to show a running suit somewhere and asking partner to bid 3NT with a stopper in the suit? For example, RHO opens 1♠ and you bid 3♣?' The audience nodded. 'Have you also heard of the "blue moon" 3♣ bid?'

'What's that?' everyone wondered.

'The "blue moon" 3♣ bid is similar. It says that you have a spade stopper and asks partner to bid 3NT with eight or nine tricks in the other suits.' The audience burst into laughter.

Now I'm not suggesting that you might be playing the 'blue moon' 3♣ bid. However, it defines the concept so well that I can't resist using it. A 'blue moon' bid is a bid that caters perfectly to a special type of hand that partner will hold on extremely rare occasions but will backfire more often when partner produces a normal hand.

What 'blue moon' bids entrap players today? A common example involves a double that follows two passes. I suppose I really ought to use the term 'blue moon' call... you know what I mean.



♠ K Q J 9 8 4   ♥ —   ♦ K J 4   ♣ Q 8 6 5

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
2♥	pass	pass	1♠ ?

You may assume that partner couldn't double 2♥ for business: these days, double is normally for takeout, at least in duplicate.

What do you bid (or call!) now? Some schools suggest that you should reopen with a double whenever you are short in the opponent's suit. While partner might have 10 points and six hearts and be longing to hear you reopen with a double, the odds are very much against it. More likely partner has passed due to a lack of values rather than a heart stack. Even if you give partner something like 7 points and five hearts, you often won't defeat 2♥. Now give partner four hearts and too little overall strength to risk defending 2♥ doubled. In this case, if you double, you might end up playing in a delicate fit in three of a minor. Wouldn't you rather play in 2♣?

One simple way to arrive at the correct call is to ask yourself what you would have done in the olden days if partner had doubled 2♥ for penalties. You would have removed the double to 2♠. Your lack of aces, your sixth spade and your inability to lead trumps at any stage make your hand far worse against 2♥ than a typical 1♠ opening. Yes, you should reopen... but not with a double. You should bid 2♠.

As I mentioned above, some say that you should reopen on any hand if you are short in the opponent's suit. I dispute the wisdom of this. What is more, quite a few leading experts are on record as saying that they regard it as unsound to reopen on a bare minimum. Alas, the people with the strongest opinions often shout with the loudest voices and drown out the mainstream. Many players think that all experts believe in keeping the bidding alive no matter what. In truth, most real experts exercise judgment and would not fall slaves to such rhetoric.

♠ K J 9 8 4   ♥ 6   ♦ K J 4   ♣ Q J 6 5

The bidding starts the same way as before: you open 1♠, LHO overcalls 2♥ and two passes follow. This time you should pass. Why is this?

While partner *might* have a hand on which he very much wanted to double 2♥ for penalties, can you think of a far more likely reason for

his silence? He simply has nothing to say with a weak hand. In other words, your side is outgunned.

A double here has -470 or -670 written all over it. Just pass and hope that the opponents have missed 4♥ or 3NT. This hand, with only one defensive trick, probably wouldn't have counted as an opening bid in Simon's time. Indeed, vulnerable it isn't really one even now.

Contrast that pile of garbage with this hand:

♠ A Q 9 8 4   ♥ 6   ♦ A 8 4   ♣ A 9 6 5

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
			1♠
2♥	pass	pass	?

You have only 3 points more but this hand is vastly better. If your partner passes your double, you can expect a sizeable penalty. Think of it this way. If partner has no picture cards at all – just five hearts to the ten and a bust – you might yet defeat 2♥. You might make two spades, a ruff, two aces and a trump promotion to turn his ♥10 into a winner. What is more, you don't really mind what partner does over the double. You are happy for him to put you back in 2♠. If partner doesn't have the spades to do that and doesn't have the hearts to pass 2♥ doubled then he must hold length in the minors. In this case, you will have a suitable dummy for him. You must remember the main reason you often reopen with a double: to compete for a partscore. You should regard catching the opponents as a lesser factor.

As far as I know, nobody has attempted to quantify how much better than a minimum opening your hand needs to be to make it sound to reopen. At the risk of sticking my neck out, I'm going to propose a rule.

If you are a king better than a minimum opening and short in the opposing suit, you should reopen, normally with a double. This means you need about 14 HCP if you have a singleton in their suit and 15 HCP if you have a doubleton. The 15 HCP with a doubleton certainly seems to make sense. If you have a 5-3-3-2 hand in the 12-14 range, you have a weak notrump type hand, which surely doesn't justify two bids. You can make a slight adjustment to the extra king rule on a hand rich in controls or with lots of tens and nines.

Of course, I'm not saying never to reopen with a minimum. When you do, though, you do so mainly to push the opponents up a level.

♠ K Q J 9 8 4   ♥ 6   ♦ K Q 4   ♣ 10 6 5

After the same auction, I would bid 2♠ with this hand. I know, or at any rate expect, that we are outgunned but hardly expect to come to any harm in 2♠. With any luck, one of the opponents will bid again and we can defend 3♥ instead of 2♥. True, I run the slight risk that both opponents were top of the range and will now bid game. I don't mind taking that risk. For one thing, it's unlikely that they both have a maximum. For another, the uneven heart split may well make the play difficult for them.

♠ K Q 9 8 4 2   ♥ K 6   ♦ K 10 4   ♣ K 5

Just as a minimum takeout double of an opening bid should have support or at least tolerance for all the unbid suits, minimum doubles here should be shape-suitable. On the same auction as before, you should reopen with 2♠ rather than with a double on this hand. If you try doubling, you are all too likely to end up in three of a minor when you belong in 2♠.

♠ K Q 9 8 4 2   ♥ K 6   ♦ A K 4   ♣ K 5

Make the hand an ace stronger, like this, and the double becomes correct. Now you are strong enough to continue with 3♠ over partner's bid. What's more, no spade bid at this point does the hand justice. 2♠ is too wishy-washy while 3♠ would all but guarantee a seven-card suit.

More or less the converse applies when an opponent opens the bidding and two passes follow. The rule, devised by others before me, is that you now mentally add a king to your hand. You make the bid you would have made in second seat, straight after the opener. For example, if a 1NT overcall would show 15-17 in second seat, it shows 12-14 in fourth. Of course, partner will take this into account and bid with a degree of caution. Despite the widespread acceptance of the rule, some look for any excuse to keep the bidding open regardless.

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

After LHO opens 1♠ and two passes follow, I have heard people say that you 'must' double because partner 'must have' a trap pass. By a

trap pass, I mean a hand with the values for a strong notrump overcall but so many spades that it looks better to play for penalties. While partner might hold that hand, the odds are against it. When your hand is this weak, the deal almost certainly belongs to the other side. Most likely, for every time a double on a hand like this gains a useful penalty, there will be two occasions where the other side will bid and make 4♠ (because opener is strong and bids again) and four or five times when they will make 1♠ doubled, often with overtricks. The other danger is that when partner has a good hand you will get too high, and again you get a minus score!

I hope you get the message. Bid just one of partner's kings and both of you will know where you stand.

Having spent a fair bit of time on discussing how to compete for the partscore, I would now like to touch on the other end of the scale.

I might have said what I am about to say in the section on slam bidding. It would fit just as well there. When should you make a slam try and when should you settle for game? Culbertson had a simple rule and I cannot improve on it. If a perfect minimum hand from partner makes a slam laydown, you should try for it. Note two key words here: 'minimum' and 'laydown'. If you need a perfect maximum, skip it. If even perfect cards will merely give the slam fair play, skip it again. Looking for the perfect maximum is blue moon bidding at its worst. For every good slam, you will reach two or three poor ones. What's more, on more than one occasion you will end up going down at the five-level. Bidding freely to 5♥ or 5♠ is bad bridge. I admit this doesn't happen so often any more – agreeing a suit and creating a game force, allowing you to explore slam options below game, is easier than it used to be – but five-level forays do still happen.

On this last point, I cite a deal from a recent event held in China.

♠ 10 6 5 4 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;"> <i>N</i>  <i>W</i>     <i>E</i>  <i>S</i> </div>	♠ A Q 8 7
♥ 2		♥ K J 8 5 4
♦ A 8 7 5		♦ K Q 9
♣ A J 5		♣ 3

An English pair bid to 5♠ with these hands (I'll spare you the grisly sequence). Apart from the hole in the trump suit, they were missing the ♥A and had work to do in the minors. Indeed, they had only 24 HCP between them. Once they found out about their spade fit, each

member of the partnership kept bidding on in case the other had extras. It took a 4NT inquiry to reveal that nobody did.

I hope you get the message. Assume your bidding partner has a normal hand. Only allow for special hands when you can do so without getting yourself into trouble facing a normal hand.

# Rating Your Hand Too Highly

Once upon a time, most players just counted 4 points for an ace, 3 for a king and so on. They floundered on adjusting for shape and for whether their high cards were working. Jeff Rubens' *The Secrets of Winning Bridge* (happily now back in print after some years absence) gave groundbreaking advice in the early 1970s about how much it matters where your high cards lie. Mike Lawrence's *The Complete Book on Hand Evaluation* came out in the early 1980s with similar advice. In recent years, we have seen Ron Klinger's *The Modern Losing Trick Count*. Klinger has also invented a new way to value your hand, to which I shall return shortly. Let's start with a recap on why some hands are worth more than other hands. Do you regard this as an average hand?

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

It contains an ace, a king, a queen, a jack and so on. What could be more average a hand than that? Do I need to tell you? Two things make this hand worse than average. The first is the shape. 4-3-3-3 is not an average amount of shape. It's as flat as you can get. The second is the way the high cards are all over the place. They would pull more weight if they supported each other. I can see just one positive feature about the hand: the longest suit is spades. If both sides compete, whichever side has a spade fit enjoys a definite edge.

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

This is more like an average hand. The ♠10 should now prove much more useful when supporting the jack and queen. The hand also contains a bit of shape, though not very much.

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

Could I have made my first example hand any worse? Try this. The ♠Q and ♠J are now unguarded. This makes them of dubious value. Could even this hand improve as the bidding develops? It sure could. If partner holds a major two-suiter, or even a single-suited spade hand, the ♠Q and ♠J will rise hugely in value.

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

Whether you would rather have the first or the second of these two hands depends on how the bidding goes. If partner bids hearts, the first hand is better. Your ♥Q fills in gaps in the trump suit and, unless partner is void in spades, your ♠A carries full weight. It's the other way round if partner's main suit is spades. The ♥Q becomes an uncertain value. Partner may be short in hearts.

It's the same story if partner has mainly diamonds with a major on the side. Facing a second suit of hearts, you would rather have the first hand than the second – and vice versa if partner's other suit is spades.

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

Playing in a spade contract, you would normally prefer the second of these hands to the first. While the ♥Q may prove useful if partner happens to have ♥Kx or ♥AJx, it may count for nothing in a spade contract. By contrast, the ♠Q will help solidify the trump suit. Why do I use the word 'normally'? If your side has a ten-card or longer spade fit, you would expect the queen of trumps, if a defender held it, to fall under the ace and king. In this case, you might prefer to hold a side-suit queen instead of the trump queen. You begin to see how complex life is! I can't say for sure that you would rather hold a side-suit queen

even with a ten-card fit. If a crossruff or trump promotion is in the offing, you may yet prefer to hold the trump queen.

Which of those hands would you like to hold if the opponents play in hearts? In this case, you prefer the first hand. If partner has ♥Jxx, your combined holding will come to a trump trick. If partner has two or three low hearts, declarer will need to guess right to avoid losing a trick to your queen. The ♠Q is less likely to build a defensive trick.

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

Can you see the difference between these hands? The first contains several soft values — high cards that may or not help you win any tricks. The second contains prime or pure values, with no wastage. As dealer, many people would pass the first hand. Few would pass on the second.

This brings us to the new way to value your hand that I referred to at the start. You will have noticed that control cards, aces most of all, tend to prove useful wherever you hold them. Conversely, queens, jacks and high spot cards work mainly if they support each other or combine with higher cards. Culbertson worked this out and his Honor Tricks way of valuing hands took account of this. As you will have gathered from my words at the outset, I'm not suggesting that we go back to Honor Tricks. Instead, I refer to a method devised by Ron Klinger.

In Klinger's HLQT or Hi-Lo-Cute method, you take account of three things: (i) your high-card points (ii) the length of your two longest suits and (iii) your quick (or defensive) tricks.

You count quick tricks as follows: A or KQ is one; AQ is one and a half; AK is two; K is a half.

So what is the HLQT score for these hands? Both have 12 points in high cards. Both have a measly seven cards in their two longest suits. The quick tricks set the two hands apart. The first has one and a half; the second has two and a half. This gives the first an HLQT score of 20.5 and the second an HLQT score of 21.5.

Klinger suggests that you should open when vulnerable with an HLQT score of 22 or more and non-vulnerable with an HLQT score of 21 or more. Why might you open a fraction lighter when non-vulnerable? For one thing, if you buy the contract and go down, you do so in fifties rather than in hundreds. For another, at teams or rub-



ber scoring, partner is less likely to press for game when the game bonus is lower.

As far as I am aware, nobody has yet set the HLQT limit for other types of bid. I feel sure somebody will. Any type of call for which flexible values (i.e. those useful whatever the trump suit) are helpful might have an HLQT limit. A takeout double seems an obvious example. I am sure you can think of others. Indeed, apart from preemptive bids, you want some such values for almost any action. Over time, the HLQT rule of 22 will surely displace Bergen's Rule of 20.

Bridge players today have a far wider range of methods to value their hands. Why do people still underbid bad hands and overbid good hands as they did in Simon's day? In truth, most of the players I know or read about rarely underbid. People seem to find any excuse to go for the aggressive action whenever they can choose between a slight underbid and a slight overbid. The only hands they underbid are the slam hands. When I look at the frequencies from pairs events, I notice how many more failing contracts occur than the cards alone seem to justify. I also read a few bridge magazines that feature tournament reports, as I know many players do. If all the experts bid the spots off their cards, is it any wonder that normal players copy what they do?

	♠ 10 7 4	
	♥ A J 9 6 4	
	♦ 10 4	
	♣ Q 10 6	
♠ Q 8		♠ 5 2
♥ 10 8 2		♥ Q 7
♦ A J 5		♦ K Q 7 6 2
♣ A K 9 4 2		♣ J 8 5 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> <span>N</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> <span>W</span> <span>E</span> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 10px;">S</div> </div>	
	♠ A K J 9 6 3	
	♥ K 5 3	
	♦ 9 8 3	
	♣ 7	

I found this deal in a recent magazine. I didn't note the exact cards but I am sure my diagram comes close enough. It occurred in a teams event and West dealt. In theory, the players were all expert. At more than one table, West-East bid 1NT-3NT! All the books say you need 25 points for game. Computer tests confirm the need for 25 points. East-West possess just 22! How did West rate his hand as worth a

strong notrump opening? How did East reckon that his hand was enough for a raise all the way to game? I might explain but not excuse their actions.

One presumes that West added on a point for the five-card suit but failed to deduct one for the unguarded queen. I find it harder to justify how East valued his hand at 10 points. Surely East must have added a point for the five-card suit and made no downward adjustments. Where the tenth point came from, he alone knew. Maybe he added on a point for his partner's play! In any case, East should adjust downwards for several things: poor spot cards, an unguarded queen and poor controls. By my reckoning, the hand is closer to a pass over 1NT than to inviting game with 2NT. The 'bold' raise to 3NT grossly insults the defensive skill of the North-South players. I was very pleased that the layout meant that those who overbid paid a hefty price. If this happened more often, the 'experts' might stop valuing their hands with rose-tinted spectacles.

Do you want the details? At one table, 3NT undoubled went seven down, losing 700. At two others, South doubled to ask for an unusual lead, most likely partner's shorter major. If this ended the auction, the penalty came to 2000 or so. At least one East-West pair sensibly ran from 3NT doubled and went quietly two down in 4♣ or 4♦ to lose 200.

Okay, these people sometimes have their bid. Then there are fewer swings — but flat boards don't make it into magazine articles. Whether the blame lies with the players or those who write up their crazy exploits, the fact is that your peers may come to regard this upwards-only style of adjustments as normal. I don't. I don't want you to either.

Another use of those rose-tinted glasses is valuing the hand on the losing trick count and point count, using whichever result provides more excuse for an aggressive action. You don't do this, do you?

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

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
	1♥/♠	pass	?

In the old version of the losing trick count, you didn't need to count Qxx as three losers if an ace elsewhere 'balanced' the queen. In other words, if your hand contained as many aces as queens, a Qxx suit counted as only two losers. Modern thinking rightly regards this as

overly hopeful. Unless your partner has bid the suit or you hold the jack with the queen, count Qxx as three losers. In this case, if partner has opened 1♠, you have nine losers or at least eight and a half.

If partner has opened 1♥, it would be unfair to count this heart suit as three losers. So, with eight losers, is the hand worth a limit raise of 1♥ to 3♥? Common sense tells you no. Try counting points rather than losers. Even if you count a full 3 points for the singleton, the hand has 9 points. This is surely too little for inviting game by any sane standards. Does the losing trick count lie? I'm not sure it does. Without adjustment, the losing trick count tends to overvalue 4-4-4-1 hands. If you know this and add half a loser on a 4-4-4-1 hand, you won't go far wrong.

# Confusion in The Bidding

It amazes me — I know it shouldn't — how people who have been playing together for years and years wrongly interpret each other's bids. The days of cut-in rubber bridge gave little scope for mix-ups. All the players used a simple system with few or no conventions. The world of duplicate with its plethora of conventions has changed all this. The risk that you might forget or disagree about what a bid means is a daily hazard.

To simplify the discussion I shall concentrate on the most common problem areas: 4NT bids, forcing and non-forcing bids, doubles, bids in a suit bid by the other side, and finally, 2NT bids.

A bid of 4NT could mean any of half a dozen things. You might manage to think of more. My list includes asking for aces, a natural raise, a sign-off, a stronger bid than bidding five of the agreed minor, or a waiting bid after a few cuebids. When your side has agreed a suit and 4NT is a jump, it clearly asks for aces (or keycards). Confusion tends to arise when 4NT is not a jump or you have no suit agreed; the risk of error is highest after an earlier bid of 1NT, 2NT or 3NT.

You might find it helpful, since you normally lack the time to discuss every possible sequence, to agree with your partner a blanket rule for any non-discussed 4NT bids. My longest-lasting regular partner and I had the agreement that any seemingly unclear 4NT bid always asked for aces. Moreover, if we had not directly agreed a suit, the last suit bid would count as the trump suit. Although this may not have been the most efficient method, it no doubt saved us from misreading each

other's bids many times. The one time I regretted this arrangement came in a Gold Cup match. I held a hand something like this:

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

The hand on my right opened 1♠ and I came in with 2♣. The hand on my left jumped to 3♥, a fit-showing jump showing spade support and a heart suit. My partner bid 4♣ and the original opener bid 4♠. I now wanted to bid 4NT to say that I was happy about bidding 5♣. (A direct 5♣ bid might sound like a sacrifice and lead partner to think that this was not our deal.) However, I knew partner wouldn't take 4NT that way. I settled for a simple 5♣ and they bid on. The upshot was that we picked up a small penalty. Why was this bad? My partner held a singleton heart facing my doubleton and we could have made 6♣. It probably wouldn't have made much difference if we had bid 6♣ because the opponents, knowing of their two-suit fit, would have taken out insurance and bid 6♠. Then again, as our teammates misjudged and doubled 6♣, maybe they wouldn't. Since we lost the match by a wide margin in any event, I guess it wouldn't have made much difference either way. Why does the hand stick in my mind? It was the only time in twenty years with Graham that playing 4NT as always ace-asking gave me a major problem.

With a regular partner, it makes sense to define 4NT as natural in some sequences. A prime example is after one of you has opened 1NT. If you play transfers, 2♦ for hearts and 2♥ for spades, you probably want to play 1NT-2♦-2♥-4NT and 1NT-2♥-2♠-4NT as natural. Partner might pass, bid a slam in your suit or bid 6NT. If you want to ask for aces or keycards, you start with a jump to three of your suit (if forcing) or, if you play four-level transfers, with one of those. Whichever style you agree is almost certainly better than having no agreement.

By the way, sitting down with a new partner and agreeing to play Stayman, Blackwood and red-suit transfers may sound simple, a recipe to avoid all confusion. I'm not sure. If you play 2♦ and 2♥ as transfers, this begs the question of what 1NT-2♠ means. Amongst my circle, 2♠ shows either about 11 points (8 points facing a strong notrump) or a slam try with no long suit. Opener rebids 2NT if minimum, but the question is what opener should do if non-minimum. Some say always to bid 3♣, which gives nothing away to the defending side if responder holds the weaker hand type. Others say that opener should bid four-card suits upwards and thus 3♣ shows four clubs.

The above is just an example. The point is that whenever you take on something new, you must consider factors beyond the obvious.

The next major problem area is whether an unclear bid – perhaps in a suit not already bid by your side or a bid other than in the agreed suit – is an attempt to play there. In other words, is a non-discussed bid forcing or not? You can play it either way. Since bridge is a game of contracts, one can argue that you should treat any unclear bid as an attempt to name the final contract. However, one could equally argue that reaching the right contract requires you to describe your hand and that fear of finding yourself left to play in a silly spot shouldn't deter you from exploring further. It doesn't matter a great deal which way round you and your partner play it – so long as you agree. With the regular partner referred to above, our agreement was that if in doubt we treated a bid as forcing. At worst we could get one level too high; we would avoid doing anything disastrous like playing with only five or six trumps between us. Modern bidding seems to treat more and more sequences as forcing. Nobody ever seems to have weak or minimum hands these days!

Sometimes you can avoid the issue. You make a less descriptive bid but one that you know your partner will understand. Recently I held a hand with eight good spades and a card on the side after the sequence: (1♦)–1♥–(pass). I briefly thought about bidding 4♣. Then I recalled that we were playing Exclusion Blackwood (you bid a suit in which you are void at a high level and partner ignores the ace of this suit when giving a response). Since in our methods 2♠ would be a fit-showing jump (hearts and spades) and 3♠ would be a splinter (heart fit with a singleton spade), I could see an element of logic in treating 4♣ as Exclusion Blackwood. I avoided the problem by starting with 1♠. My slow approach carried the risk that it would let the opponents find a sacrifice in 5♦. This seemed a much lesser risk than having partner think that I had eight fewer spades than I did!

By the way, if you wonder whether I was taking the risk of playing in 1♠, I knew I was not. In line with many players, good and not so good, I long ago gave up playing a change of suit in answer to an overcall as non-forcing. It is rare to have a hand that justifies dictating the contract.

The huge advantage of playing the change of suit as forcing is that a cuebid of opener's suit guarantees support for partner (or, rarely, just tolerance with a big balanced hand). If you really want to be able to

stop low in your own suit, you would do best to take up the transfer methods that Jeff Rubens, editor of *The Bridge World*, devised.

Reverting to my main theme, perhaps you and your partner always know whether a particular bid is forcing. But do you also know how far it is forcing? This can be a great source of confusion. Suppose you have agreed to play mini-splinters. In other words, 1♣-1♠-3♥ shows four-card spade support and a singleton heart (you don't need 3♥ to show hearts as a reverse into 2♥ is forcing for one round). If 3♥ creates a game force, responder can bid 3♠ as a waiting bid. If it doesn't, responder can afford to bid 3♠ only on a minimum hand as he might be left to play there. What does it mean if responder rebids 4♣ or 4♦? Is this a serious slam try or is it just a courtesy cuebid in case opener has extras?

A similar issue can arise if you play that a transfer response to 1NT followed by a new suit is forcing for only one round.

YOU	PARTNER
1NT	2♥ (transfer)
2♠	3♥ (forcing but not to game)
4♣	

Does 4♣ agree hearts or spades? Could you bid it on any hand with slam interest and a club control? Suppose responder next bids 4♥. Is that a cuebid or a sign off? You get a feel for the issues involved. You avoid these problems if you play that a transfer followed by a new suit creates a game force. In this case, opener can bid responder's first suit to set that as trumps. Other bids (except those clearly probing for the best game) set the second suit as trumps.

Of course, I can't mention the game-forcing versus forcing for one round issue without mentioning the minefield in Standard American if responder changes the suit at the two-level. Many auctions in which nobody appears to have shown anything extra are forcing.

YOU	PARTNER	YOU	PARTNER
1♠	2♦	1♠	2♣
2NT		3♣	
YOU	PARTNER	YOU	PARTNER
1♥	2♣	1♠	2♣
3♣	3♥	2♥	3♥

In all these sequences, opener has done nothing special. It is the responder, by bidding a new suit at the two-level, who has promised to make another bid. This has the effect of making almost any opener's rebid forcing. You might more easily understand why the third sequence creates a force. A two-suit fit surely counts for something extra.

Why do most Standard American users play the above sequences as forcing? Doing so makes it easier for you to find the best game and allows the beginning of a slam hunt at a low level. Unless both players have a minimum for their initial bids, this treatment proves helpful. If they are both minimum, the arrangement does not work quite so well.

Although a desire to avoid sources of confusion may not be the sole reason, I am sure it must be a big factor in the modern popularity of playing a two-over-one response as creating a game force. This makes it clear exactly which bids the players can or, in most cases, cannot pass. You hardly ever have to guess whether a bid is forcing. The big downside with the two-over-one game force is that responder has to bid 1NT over the opening bid on very many hands. I rather suspect that it would be more efficient to give responder one game-forcing relay bid and play most other responses as denying the values to make game facing a minimum opener. However, not enough people play this way for me to express a definite view.

The next area I would like to address is the low-level double. Is it for takeout or is it for business? Doubling the opponents into game will cost you dearly at any form of scoring. So will turning down a juicy penalty. In *Contract Bridge Complete*, Culbertson set out clear and concise rules for when double asks for takeout and when it is for business.

Others have done the same as Culbertson. I know I have myself. In the modern world of duplicate, players use many more non-penalty doubles than in Culbertson's day. Off the top of my head I can think of negative doubles, responsive doubles, support doubles, competitive doubles and game-try (maximal) doubles. If you play duplicate yourself, you can probably think of a few more. Indeed, there are now so many ways to double for takeout that some pairs play all doubles of suit contracts at the one- and two-level for takeout. It may not be quite the most efficient method but it certainly avoids doubling the opponents into game.



The lawmakers are taking note. Since August 2006 in England and Wales, if you do not alert a double of a natural bid, it is for takeout. (In North America, a double does not require an alert unless it has an unusual meaning, a piece of legal sophistry that places the burden of deciding not only what the double means, but whether the opponents can be expected to know also, on the shoulders of the doubler’s partner.)

Whatever agreement you and your partner come to about which doubles ask for takeout and which are for penalties, you will surely do better than with no agreement. A few weeks back my opponents had a mix-up. They knew they played 1NT-dbl-2♣-dbl for takeout. On what did they differ? The actual start to the auction was this:

LHO	Partner	RHO	Me
			1NT
dbl	3♣		

RHO was unsure whether a double would still ask for takeout after responder jumped. Rather than risk doubling us into game if LHO was on a different wavelength, he passed. We went a few off undoubled and gained a sizeable swing when our teammates bid and made 4♥.

Next, I would like to consider bids in a suit that an opponent has bid. When are they artificial and when are they natural? Most people play that if you pass on the first round and then bid a suit on the second round it is natural, for instance, 1♣-pass-1♥-pass-1NT-2♣. Many play that sequences like 1♣-pass-1♥-2♥ are also natural. You have double and 2NT to show the other two suits. Why do you need a third way of showing the same thing? It cannot be efficient to devote too many bids to showing the same hand type (hence, if you will excuse an aside, my disdain for things like playing 1♥/♠-3♣/♦ as raises of opener’s suit).

With the regular partner I referred to earlier, I played Michaels cuebids and value raises (unassuming cuebids) as normal. However, other bids of a suit shown by the player on your right were natural. This might be imperfect in theory but it saved us many headaches and mix-ups.

Another issue to address is what happens if you open or overcall 1NT and the next hand doubles? Do transfers, if you normally play them, still apply? Is 2♣ still Stayman? What does redouble mean?

Opinions vary and you should discuss all these issues with your partner.

Keeping all bids the same (sometimes referred to as ‘system on’) has the merit of being simple. Even then, you need to discuss whether a redouble is to play or an attempt to escape, perhaps to two of a minor. The key thing is that you and your partner agree what you are doing. I can recall once collecting a big penalty when one opponent regarded a retreat to 2♣ as Stayman and the other didn’t. Although they were in trouble anyway, 2♠ doubled on their 4–2 ‘fit’ was clearly sub-optimal.

From doubles, we move to redoubles. It’s another area fraught with danger. If the bidding starts 1♠–dbl–redbl, most play that a pass by the next hand means ‘nothing much to say’ rather than showing a desire to defend 1♠ redoubled. Where, though, do you draw the line? If you play all such passes as neutral, the opponents can psyche you: they redouble every time they fear that you are going to leave in a takeout double for penalties. You could have a simple rule that pass is a penalty pass when the person who made the bid redoubles but not when his partner does. In this case, your second pass in both the sequences below becomes a penalty pass.

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		1♠	pass
pass	dbl	redbl	pass

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
	1♠	2♦	pass
pass	dbl	redbl	pass

My final theme concerns 2NT bids. If you are competing, 2NT tends to mean one of three things. The first is natural: you want to play in 2NT or invite game. The second is showing weakness (Lebensohl and the good/bad 2NT). The third is to show two places to play.

For most, showing weakness applies only in prescribed sequences. In general, these are if partner opens 1NT and the next hand overcalls or if an opponent opens a weak two and partner doubles. If you play the good/bad 2NT, it also applies in sequences like the third one following.

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
	1NT	2♥	2NT

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
2♥	dbl	pass	2NT

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
pass	1♠	2♥	1♦ 2NT

In all sequences with this method, going via 2NT shows a weaker hand than a direct bid. Partner normally bids 3♣, after which you pass if you want to play in 3♣ and otherwise convert to where you do want to play. Since Lebensohl and the good/bad 2NT are conventions, you would not use these 2NT bids at the table without prior discussion.

Unless 2NT is a jump or I have not already passed, I like the ‘two places to play’ idea. This applies even if my partner or I bid 1NT earlier.

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
	1♠	pass	1NT
2♥	pass	pass	2NT

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
	1NT	pass	pass
2♥	pass	pass	2NT

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♠	pass	2♠	pass
pass	dbl	pass	2NT

In the first two sequences, if you have a balanced hand and a maximum for your previous bidding, you can either double or pass. On the third sequence, it’s most unlikely that you hold the values to bid 2NT in a natural sense. On the first two sequences, my two places to play will be the minors. On the third, hearts remain in the picture.

It doesn’t matter if you disagree with me on this or other points of detail. You and your partner are the people who need to agree.

# Bidding The Wrong Slams

Ask a group of players about the tools they use in reaching a slam and most will say ‘Blackwood’. A few old timers will say ‘Gerber’ and, if you are lucky, some will mention control bids (or, to use the traditional term, cuebids). This suggests that holding at least three of the four aces or having first- or second-round control in every suit are the key issues in slam bidding. Let’s see how true that is.

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



♠ 9 8 4  
♥ J 3 2  
♦ A 8 7 3  
♣ 9 7 2

Even though I have kindly given the partnership all four aces, these hands are nowhere near enough to put you in the slam zone. In fact, you would struggle to make a contract of any sort.

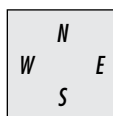
♠ A 6 5 3  
♥ A 7 4  
♦ 9 5 2  
♣ A K 3



♠ K 8 4  
♥ K 3 2  
♦ A K 7 3  
♣ 9 7 2

Again, I have been overly generous, giving you first- and second-round control in all four suits. A slam remains a very distant prospect. Indeed, you need something good to happen just to make game.

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



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

This time the partnership has only two aces and lacks both first- and second-round control in hearts. Even so, if I had to play in a slam (here 6♦) on one of these pairs of hands, I would choose this one. Someone might lead a singleton club. Someone might lead a ‘safe’ trump. Maybe they lead a spade but the hand without the ♥A wins the first trick. In this case, another spade at Trick 2 could let the slam make.

I hope you get the message. The most crucial element for a slam is the playing strength to develop twelve tricks. You will sometimes make a slam with two aces missing – as Simon himself said. You will sometimes make a slam with two fast losers in one suit – it can happen quite easily if the opponents lead one of the other three suits. You will very rarely make a slam if you lack the firepower to come to twelve tricks. I have it from a good source that in one major event the British team would have scored better if they had bid no slams at all. Given that a few laydown slams must have come their way, they must have bid an awful lot of poor ones. Although this happened a few years back, it goes to show that poor judgment in the slam zone is widespread.

Making a slam tends to depend in part on having a trump suit. To make twelve tricks without a fit you need 33–34 points in high cards. This just doesn’t happen very often. As I don’t have the table of odds for this to hand, I just ran a quick test on the computer. I asked for deals on which North-South held at least 33 HCP between them. The machine tried just over 15,000 deals before finding 50 to match this requirement. In other words, your side holds 33+ HCP on about one deal in 300. I’m sure you already know that slams occur a bit more often than this.

Counting points, including those for distribution, gives you a general idea of whether your side is in the slam zone. Remember to include points either for short suits or for length. Just don’t do both. That’s double counting. A sensible method when the partnership has at least nine trumps is to count five for a void, three for a singleton and one for a doubleton. Goren proposed this in *Point Count Bidding*. In recent years, Truscott and Seagram have said much the same thing.

Without the benefit of a nine-card trump fit, you should use the more cautious and better-known structure of three for a void, two for a singleton and one for a doubleton.

The Losing Trick Count offers another good way to work out whether you might be in the slam zone. Harrison-Gray is famous for promoting the Losing Trick Count, though the method has been around since about 1934. These days, Klinger's *The Modern Losing Trick Count* provides the reference point. If you have a seven-loser hand facing a five-loser hand or a pair of six-loser hands together or any other set up that gives the partnership 12 losers, you should consider yourself in the slam zone. As a rough guide, a minimum opening bid contains seven losers, an above minimum opener has six losers and a strong one-level opener (a hand on which you would insist on game if partner responds) has five.

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



If East deals, the bidding might start 1♣-1♥-3♥. West places East with a six-loser hand (this is what the jump raise shows; 2♥ suggests seven losers and stronger actions five losers or fewer). West also has a six-loser hand and so pictures a slam. Point count tells you the same thing. The jump raise shows around 17 points. West, with 16 points (counting three for the singleton), puts the partnership total around 33.

The hands fit well and having the playing strength for twelve tricks translates into making a slam. Indeed, without a spade lead, you stand a great chance of making all thirteen tricks.

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



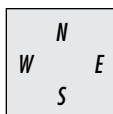
Of course, the hands don't always fit so well. This layout gives the same number of losers and points but you don't want to get to a slam. The opponents have two aces to take. How do you stop at a safe level?

Any ace-asking inquiry will keep you out of a slam. With the right methods, you might stop at the four-level. Since it's only once in a blue moon that you want to play in 3NT when your partner has jump-raised your major, it makes sense that a bid of 3NT shouldn't be to play. In this case, you might take up Klinger's suggestion to play 3NT as Roman Keycard Blackwood (or any Blackwood version you prefer) a level lower than usual.

This brings us to another vital point about slam bidding. You need good trumps. If you have a hole in a side suit, you might survive if the opponents fail to attack it with the opening lead. You cannot so easily get round a problem with the trump suit. In a slam auction, the quality of your trump suit should guide you on any marginal decisions. For very many duplicate players, Roman Keycard Blackwood, which allows you to show the king and queen of trumps as well as aces, has replaced the four-ace form of Blackwood. People understand the importance of a good trump suit. If you find RKCB a little too complex, you might still make your slam bidding more accurate just by treating the king of trumps as a fifth ace. You use the same responses as you do already except that the 'one' response becomes 'one or five'. You should never have any problem in working out which is which! The prominent UK teacher and cruise host Bernard Magee calls this variant Keycard Blackwood and recommends it to his students.

Sadly, even cuebids, RKCB and so on might not tell you all you want to know. Sometimes you can't find out and must decide what to do from limited data. In this case, a good rule of thumb is to bid a small slam if you think it will depend at worst on a finesse.

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



With this pair of hands, you want to play in 6♠. On any lead except a diamond, the contract is more or less laydown. On a diamond lead, you expect to succeed if the club finesse works.

Playing in the Lederer, a prestige event for invited teams, Colin Simpson and David Price bid this pair of hands to 6♠ without revealing the diamond weakness (3♠–5♠–6♠). They won the prize for the best bid hand. As it happened, the player on lead had an obvious diamond

lead. Happily, this made no difference to the slam's success because the club finesse worked.

Beware of bidding slams that you think will need at least a finesse. Often such contracts need something else besides – for instance, an even trump break and no freak breaks.

Should you ever bid a grand slam that might need a finesse? Maybe you should. Suppose you have managed to find out that the rest of the hand is solid and the only danger of a loser is in diamonds, in which you hold AKJ10. In this case, there are three or four chances to avoid losing a diamond. Firstly, partner could hold the queen. Second, partner could have a doubleton. Thirdly, RHO could hold the queen. There may also be the chance that partner turns up with extra winners in another suit, on which you can discard two diamonds.

What would I rate as the most useful but least used tool for slam bidding? It is the splinter bid. Splinters occur in various guises but the basic message is pretty much the same: 'We have the values for game in our long suit and I am short in the suit I am now bidding.' How does it help to know where partner is short?

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

Suppose I say that partner has four-card spade support, the values for game facing even a minimum opening and a singleton somewhere. How do you rate your slam chances? You will need partner's values to consist mainly of aces for a slam to stand a chance. We can leave that until later. For the hands to fit well, you want partner to be short in diamonds.

♠ K 5 3 2   ♥ A 9 5 3   ♦ 6   ♣ A 8 5 2  
♠ K 5 3 2   ♥ A 9 5 3   ♦ A 8 6 4   ♣ 6

Facing the first hand, 6♠ is almost laydown. Facing the second, even 5♠ is in jeopardy. Unless you can arrange for a defender to give you a ruff and discard, you will lose two diamonds and a club. With the first hand, partner responds 4♦ to 1♠ and you know the hands fit well. You can then check on keycards with 4NT (you have given up four-ace Blackwood I hope) and bid the slam. With the second hand, partner bids 4♣ and you know that the hands are fitting badly. You can hardly have a worse holding than KQ doubleton opposite a known singleton.



Opener can use splinters as well.

♠ 5   ♥ K J 9 3   ♦ A K Q 9 6   ♣ A 5 2  
♠ A 5 2   ♥ K J 9 3   ♦ A K Q 9 6   ♣ 5

Holding either of these hands you open 1♦ and will want to insist on game if partner responds 1♥. With the first hand, you rebid 3♣. With the second, you rebid 4♣. There's no danger that partner can take these bids as natural. A non-jump rebid of 1♠ or 2♣ would be natural and non-forcing. A jump to 2♠ or 3♣ would be natural and forcing. You don't need a double jump to 3♠ or 4♣ as a natural bid. Just as with the big jump when you were responder, the message is this: 'We have the values for game in our suit and I am short in the suit I am now bidding.'

Suppose partner holds this hand:

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

If you jump to 3♣, showing the spade singleton, partner likes the look of his hand. The ♣K will prove a useful card and his three losing spades are no longer such a concern. He will probably continue with 4NT. By contrast, if you bid 4♣, he will downgrade his ♣K and sign off in game.

You will struggle to find an expert player anywhere in the world who doesn't play splinters in some sequences. When the best players the world over play the same thing, you know it's a good idea.

Once you become used to playing splinters, you will find all sorts of auctions in which to use them. Here are some dramatic examples:

YOU	PARTNER
1♥	2♣
3♦	
YOU	PARTNER
	1NT
2♥ (transfer)	2♣
4♥	

For the time being, don't spring sequences like these on your partner and expect him to read them as showing a short suit! If you want to

find out more about splinters and modern slam bidding in general, you might like to get hold of the CD-ROM *Practice Your Slam Bidding* by Barbara Seagram, Linda Lee and Andy Stark, published by Master Point Press.

I mentioned earlier the need for 33-34 HCP to make a slam with two balanced hands. Even this may not be enough:

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



Prospects here are poor. You need a third trick in each black suit to make twelve tricks. Even if the ♠Q drops doubleton, you will still need some luck in clubs. If it doesn't, you will need a lot of luck. The lack of playing strength of the 4-3-3-3 shape hits you hard. You need to allow for this in the bidding.

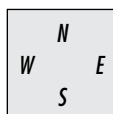
I could have made your chances even worse. Give West three low spades and ♦KJx and you have almost no play.

Although average players bid too few slams overall, they tend to bid too many with balanced hands. If partner opens the bidding and they have anywhere near 20 points, they routinely assume they can make a slam. As my simple example has shown, this is not the case. You won't make this mistake again, will you?

Luckily, a pair of 4-3-3-3 hands facing each other occurs rarely. One or other player tends to have a doubleton. Being able to take a ruff might well make the difference between eleven tricks and twelve. With this in mind, I would like to offer a simple tip. If ever partner bids a natural 4NT and you decide to go on, bid out your shape. Most players, assuming they have gone beyond regarding the only options as pass and 6NT, like to show aces if they are bidding on. This is not efficient. When your side has well over 30 HCP, the chance of being off two aces is very slim. However, the chance that you can make twelve tricks in a 4-4 or strong 4-3 fit when you cannot make 6NT is quite high.

If neither of you have bid a suit, as for instance in an auction like 2NT-4NT, you bid four-card suits up the line. If you jump to a slam in a suit, that shows a five-card or longer suit. Yes, you would prefer to find a fit at a lower level. In practice, you may lack the methods to do this.

♠ K 10 8  
♥ A 8  
♦ A Q J 5  
♣ A K 7 2



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

# **YOU**

2NT

5♣

6♦

# **PARTNER**

4NT

5♦

In 6NT, you will normally need a 3-3 club break to make twelve tricks.  
In 6♦, a heart ruff provides a much surer route to making your slam.

# Losing Systems

In the early days of contract bridge, people often had no more than the vaguest idea of how to bid. You bid high with a good hand, low with a weak hand. You bid suits in which you had length. You bid suits in which you had a lot of length more than once. It soon became clear that this structure was too imprecise for it to get you to the best contract on a regular basis. Culbertson, Goren and the Acol system's inventors put bidding into a language that people could understand and apply in a practical and consistent fashion. This was all very good for the game. Now it seems as if the pendulum has swung the other way.

In my experience, given the much reduced interest in some well-conceived strong club systems, the bridge world broadly divides into two camps: those who play five-card majors and a strong notrump in the one and those who play four-card majors and a weak notrump in the other. If you and all those in your circle of partners belong to one camp, it makes sense to stay in that camp. For one thing, if you do something else, it will make it harder for you to find a partner. For another, it saves you time and strain on the memory if you can play much the same thing with all your partners. If you do switch camps, it will take you a while to get to know the subtle nuances of the new system. If one method were vastly better than the other method, everyone would play it. The presence of large numbers of players in each camp suggests that neither method offers a very great advantage over the other.

I can offer one reason for the widespread use of five-card majors. The idea is simple to teach and apply. If you can't count to five, you won't get very far as a bridge player anyway. Why are four-card majors less popular? For one thing, they require you to use your judgment. If you hold a four-card major, you must decide whether to bid the suit. For another, some people abuse playing four-card majors. They open on suits that not even Culbertson would have thought of as biddable.

To my mind, and I suspect to many other people who have thought about the matter, it cannot be right to decide on whether you should bid a suit solely on your length in the suit. The strength of the suit should play a part, albeit a lesser part. If I say to you that partner holds three spades to the ten, which holding would you rather have in your hand in a contract of 6♠: 65432 or AKQJ? If I tell you that partner will wind up on lead, which suit would you like to have led — your 65432 suit or your AKQJ suit? Suppose I tell you that your partner holds a singleton spade and that you will end up playing with some other suit as trumps. Which is more likely to help partner judge the degree of fit — if you open on 65432 or if you open on AKQJ?

If you play four-card majors and open a four-card major whenever you can, now is the time to stop laughing. I reserve my harshest words for you — I daren't say 'your teacher' because teachers are nice people and we need them for the game to survive! Saying that you must always open a four-card major, rather than never doing so, just replaces one severe constraint with another — only this one smells worse. If you open on a poor four-card major, partner can never raise you without four-card support. You will thus miss many good 5-3 fits. If you open on a poor four-card major, how can partner know whether to lead the suit? If you open with a weak four-card major, how can partner judge what holdings in the suit will fit well and which will fit badly? If somebody put a gun to my head and forced me to choose between never opening a four-card major and opening one whenever I held one, I would chose the former.

In many bidding decisions, the quality of your suit as well as its length dictates the correct course of action.

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

Suppose RHO opens 1♠. What do you call? On the first hand, I bet you overcall 2♥. On the second, I bet you double.

Why have I switched from opening bids to overcalls? There's a good reason. Even if you reserve opening bids of one of a major for five-card suits, you might overcall on a four-card suit. You don't? Have you never read or heard of Mike Lawrence's [Complete Book on Overcalls](#)\*? He covers the subject of overcalls on a four-card suit in Chapter 2. That's how vital he regards the matter. Please read what he says:

*Every now and then, you are going to find yourself with some sort of goodish hand and your RHO will open the bidding. Feeling like you should take some sort of action but, finding nothing convenient, you pass and later discover you had a game or partial on a hand where neither you nor partner had been able to enter the auction. Certainly, there are hands with which you would open the bidding but with which you can't compete after an opening bid. Some of these hands, however, can be handled through the tactic of overcalling on a four-card suit.*

He quotes these two (and other) example hands:

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

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		1♦	?

*Bid 1♠. One of the few generalities I can give is that overcalling on a four-card suit requires a very good suit. Partner is going to raise you whenever possible and three small should be quite adequate support if his hand is otherwise suited. Responder should not have to worry about the quality of your overcalls.*

I might add another reason why you need a good suit. Partner will often end up on lead and you don't want to put him off leading the suits in which you overcall.

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\* 2nd edition, Master Point Press, 2009.

♠ 8 2 ♥ A Q 10 7 ♦ 10 7 6 5 4 ♣ A Q

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
		1♦	?

*1♥. If the possession of five cards in the suit opened bothers you, forget it. Your length in diamonds plus opener's length assures you that there are not a lot of diamonds for your partner and LHO. This means your partner is likely to have heart support. The length in diamonds therefore is not a minus but, rather, an asset.'*

Lawrence does not say what 'a very good suit' means. I can tell you that in all of his examples of when an overcall is clear-cut the four-card suit is KQ10x. One might thus say you need at least three out of the top five cards in the suit, one of which must be the ace or king. This permits KJ10x, which seems okay. You can see from the hands that you have the right strength for a takeout double but the wrong shape. A doubleton in an unbid major is a no-no for a minimum take-out double.

If I — with a little help from a many times World Champion — have sold you the idea of an overcall on a four-card suit at the right time, can we return to the more vexing subject of opening bids? Even if your basic system is five-card majors, might I yet persuade you to open on a four-card suit in two specific positions? The first is when you are in third seat and have a balanced 12-13 with a strong four-card major — the same sort of quality as you might need for a four-card suit overcall.

♠ K Q 10 9 ♥ 8 4 2 ♦ A Q 6 ♣ K 5 4

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
	pass	pass	?

Playing a strong notrump, if you don't open 1♠, you presumably open 1♣. This does little to tell partner what to lead if LHO plays the hand. Neither does it make life difficult for LHO. You have taken away a 1♣ opening but given him a takeout double — the net opposing bidding space consumed is zero. In first or second seat, opening 1♣ helps to give you an easy rebid. In third seat, you don't need to worry about a rebid. You can open 1♠ intending to pass the response. You surely

won't make game with this hand facing a passed partner unless he has a big spade fit. In this case, you will hear about it over 1♠.

The other type of hand very well suited for opening on a four-card major is when you are too strong for a strong notrump and your major is clearly your best suit.

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

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
			?

With a hand this good, the lead-directing benefit if partner is on lead is small: LHO won't often get to play the hand. The point now is that by opening 1♥ you will get to be on play in any heart contract. This will protect your tenaces in the black suits. The strength of your hand also increases the chance of a slam. On slam hands, you want to bid good suits and avoid bidding bad suits.

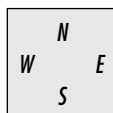
The stronger your hand is, the greater the prospect that opening 1♥ will mean you play the contract from the right side. With this hand, the most likely games are 3NT and 4♥. Who will get to play in 3NT? If you open 1♦, you will play if partner holds a four- or five-card spade suit (when he responds 1♠) but rarely if not (as he may well respond 1NT). If you open 1♥, you increase your options. You can rebid 2NT and get to play the hand if partner responds either 1♠ or 2♥. If you belong in 4♥, you take away all risk of ending up as dummy by opening 1♥. You remove the option of a wrong-siding 1♥ response.

The strength of the hand provides an added safety factor. If partner raises to 2♥, you can rebid 2NT and can play in 3NT if partner has the right hand for that. Finally, with hearts this good, you figure to come to little harm if you do play in a 4-3 fit. Indeed, I could easily construct hands for partner on which you can only make game if you play in 4♥ on a 4-3 fit or only make a slam if you play in 6♥ on a 4-3 fit.



**YOU**

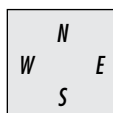
♠ K 9  
 ♥ K Q J 9  
 ♦ A 6 3 2  
 ♣ A Q 4

**PARTNER**

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

**YOU**

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

**PARTNER**

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

Consider these two possible hands for partner. If you open 1♦, the bidding figures to start the same way: 1♦-1♥-4♥. Will partner bid again? On the first hand, with poor controls in the unbid suit and a misfit with your supposed diamond suit, he will surely pass. Even if he does bid on, a spade lead through your king could spell disaster in 6♥. On the second hand, he will feel reluctant to give up in 4♥ with these values and a diamond fit. If the lack of first- or second-round control in the black suits doesn't put him off, he might try a cuebid of 5♦. Maybe you will bid 6♥ over this. Maybe you won't. In any case, 6♥ on a club lead through the ace-queen offers just a 50-50 bet.

Now compare the above results with what happens if you open 1♥. On the first hand partner responds 4♦, a splinter bid showing a raise to 4♥ with a singleton (or possibly a void) in diamonds. You will cruise into 6♥ this way and play it from the right side. On the second hand partner is good enough (just) for a game-forcing raise. Again, your grandmother would bid the slam and play it the right way up.

While the argument that suit quality as well as quantity should have a bearing on your bidding is beyond dispute, I concede that the case for playing one particular notrump range rather than another is harder to prove. It would take a lengthy computer trial or the study of hundreds of hands from major events to prove anything. I firmly believe that at both matchpoint and IMP scoring the weak notrump works out better than the strong when you are not vulnerable. However, the strong notrump may offer a slight edge when your side is vulnerable.

I suspect that the one time when the strong notrump gives you a clear edge is vulnerable at aggregate (rubber) scoring. In this case, you need to make many small gains to make up for the odd large

penalty lost. The flattening effect of the IMP scale means that losing the odd 1100 is less costly at teams. You need just a few small swings to make up for this. Once upon a time, it was popular in some countries to play a weak notrump non-vulnerable and a strong notrump vulnerable. The move away from rubber scoring has been one factor why this is no longer the case. Another is that people don't want to learn or have to remember doing different things according to who is vulnerable.

Danny Kleinman, author of *The Notrump Zone*<sup>†</sup>, tells me that he gave up the weak notrump for the strong because he got fed up with playing in 1NT when the field had found a 4-4 fit in a major. He didn't want to play the hand well for +90 and find that everyone else had scored +110. I guess his field enjoyed auctions like 1♣-pass-1♥-pass-2♥-all pass. I must confess that I find my opponents less helpful. On those rare times when I am playing a strong notrump, my auction on such deals seems to go more like 1♣-1♠-dbl-2♠. In any case, at IMP or similar scoring, it matters little whether you score +90 or +110.

I know how much I hate it if my teammates are playing a strong notrump and an opponent opens 1NT (weak). I know that if my partner and I want to come into the auction we will need to do so at the two-level while those with our cards at the other table will have an easy entry at the one-level over some minor-suit opening. I guess this goes back to what I said at the start about staying with the devil you know. If you go against the field, you will create swings. Human nature being as it is, the bad results will tend to stick in your mind longer than the good ones.

Without doubt, the biggest snag with playing a strong notrump is that you open many hands 1♣ or 1♦. This allows the other side an easy chance to get into the auction and makes it hard for partner to compete. He doesn't know whether you possess length in the suit you opened or whether you hold a flat hand. In the modern parlance, this is a double whammy. Contrast this with what happens if you play a weak notrump. While the opponents might still compete when you open a 15-17 point hand with one of a suit, they come in less often when you are stronger. In any event, responder enjoys the comfort of knowing that opener has either extra shape or extra values.

You might have guessed how hard it is to compete against a 1NT opening from the number of conventions around: Aspro, Asptro,

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† Master Point Press, 2004.

Astro, DONT, Landy, Multi Landy, Pottage/Hamilton/Cappelletti, Brozel, Pinpoint Astro, Hello, Ripstra. The fact that people play all these things against 1NT (and my list is far from exhaustive) tells you one thing: all methods have their flaws. You just can't compete as easily when you must do so at the two-level as you can when the opponents let you in at the one-level.

In broad terms, you do better playing a weak notrump when you have a 12-14 point hand and do better playing a strong notrump when you are 15-17. Since 12-14 hands come up more than 15-17 hands, this suggests the weak notrump has the edge. True, you will concede the odd big penalty when opening a weak notrump but it may surprise you (if you don't play a weak notrump) to learn just how rarely this happens.

In twenty-five years or so, I can't recall ever losing a match on a big penalty. I don't think it's because I've forgotten. I can recall losing a match over twenty years ago by playing for a trump coup instead of a defensive error. I can recall losing another Gold Cup match by failing to lead from Kx into declarer's side suit. Large penalties simply don't seem to occur. I think I know why. For you to lose one, five things normally need to happen:

- (i) partner must hold far less than his fair share of strength;
- (ii) the opposing strength must be so divided that someone has enough to double;
- (iii) partner must not have an escape suit or suits;
- (iv) the doubler's partner must leave in the double;
- (v) the opponents must defend well.

When you add in the fact that I sometimes pass a poor 12-count when vulnerable or open one of a suit in third seat, you can see why the big sets occur so rarely. Since I do not really expect to get you to change your notrump range — merely to dissuade you from changing from weak to strong — I think I've said enough on the subject.

I referred earlier to the idea of playing a weak notrump only when non-vulnerable and the decline of such a practice. A greater awareness of how system relates to who is vulnerable may in part account for the decline in strong club systems. When your side alone is vulnerable, the opponents take all sorts of liberties over your strong club opening. A number of the pairs who continue using a strong club system switch to something else when they are vulnerable and the

other side is not. If you have a good memory and play a lot with one partner, there is much merit in this. For most people, however, it's a non-starter.

Of course, strong club systems do not rely solely on the big club opening. Whenever you open something else, you limit your hand to at most around 16 points. This makes it far easier to rebid and respond than if you play a more natural system in which the only strong opening is a game-forcing 2♣. Indeed, if you play only one strong bid and that bid creates a game force, the range for a one-level opening extends too wide. The trend to open light, as many like to these days, further adds to the problem. What do you do with strong hands like these?

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

These contain more playing strength than partner will expect with a one-level opening but too few defensive tricks and overall strength for a game-forcing opening. Even if you get past the first round of bidding, how can you ever get your hand across? Either you'll need to make a forcing bid in a suit you don't have (hard to do with the second hand) or take some sort of view. You will be pleased to hear that I'm not going to suggest that you play strong but not game-forcing two-bids. As even big fans of the Acol system might now concede, this type of hand comes up too rarely to justify devoting three different openings to it.

You could play 2♣-2♦-3♥ and 2♣-2♦-3♠ as weaker than a simple rebid and hence non-forcing. It's one idea. The trouble is that this covers just some of the issues and, if you play 2♥ as the weakest response to 2♣, you can't jump to 3♥. Albert Benjamin came up with a better idea, one that has become the basis for the standard method in France. Play 2♣ to show either a balanced hand just too good for a 2NT opening or a strong (but not game-forcing) single-suited hand. 2♦ then becomes the game force with a 2♥ negative. Some play it the other way around, using 2♣ as the game force and 2♦ as the slightly weaker bid. I have no strong view either way. For the sake of argument, let's stick with the standard way.

The one way we might improve on Benjamin's system is with the notrump ranges. He suggested that you lower the range of your 2NT opening to 19-20 and use 2♣-2♦-2NT for 21-22. Like the French,

I think it's better to leave your 2NT range as you play it at the moment, 20-21 (or 20-22) and play 2♣-2♦-2NT as the next step up. This means that 2♦-2♥-2NT becomes forcing, thus avoiding the awkward sequence in standard methods of 2♣-2♦-3NT, a sequence that makes it hard for responder to look for a fit or start on a slam hunt. In summary, the plus points of the Benjamin 2♣/2♦ system go as follows:

- (a) you can show a strong single-suited hand in any of the four suits;
- (b) you gain an extra way of showing a strong balanced hand below game;
- (c) your game-forcing opening can go back to promising five defensive tricks;
- (d) sequences like 1♥-1♠-3♣ can go back to promising that the second suit is real.

What do you lose? If you now play weak twos in three suits, you lose the option to open a weak two in diamonds. How great a loss is this? Is it much greater a loss than losing your raincoat in Death Valley? Reese was scathing about many weak shape-showing bids. In the case of the weak two in diamonds, he has a point. The weak two in diamonds is a great bid — but for which side? What does it achieve?

- (i) It tells the opponents that they ought to have a fit in one of the majors;
- (ii) It tells them that they ought to hold the balance of power;
- (iii) It leaves them space at the two-level to find their fit;
- (iv) If they end up playing the hand, as often happens when they hold the balance of power and/or length in the majors, it tells them how the defenders' cards lie.

Have you ever wondered why the inventors of the Italian Blue team club didn't include a weak two in diamonds? Have you ever wondered why those who devised Precision didn't include a weak two in diamonds either? The answer is simple. They all had better uses for a 2♦ opening. Yes, a weak 2♦ is simple to play and yes, it can prove an effective preemptive weapon *if* the player in second seat doesn't have enough to come in *and* responder is able to raise. All the same, these small benefits nowhere near cover the downsides or the costs of wasting a bid. Just as Richard Pavlicek says he pays his opponents

to make help-suit game tries, I pay mine to open a weak two in diamonds.

I wonder whether the reason so few people understand the futility of the weak 2♦ is that they only consider Flannery as the alternative use for the bid. I don't know enough about a Flannery opening — other than it shows five hearts and four spades in a hand too weak to reverse — to weigh up its pros and cons. I can tell, though, you that a number of my American friends pour scorn on it. I can also tell you that once when I was trying to set up a play problem the only way I could give declarer enough of a clue to find the winning play was to have a defender open a Flannery 2♦. You can make what you like from this!

You might wonder why, if a weak two in diamonds is such a poor idea, weak twos in the majors are much better. You will be relieved to hear that three key factors change matters:

- (i) when you open a major, you stand a better chance of buying the contract;
- (ii) when you have length in a major, you stand a better chance of having the values to make game;
- (iii) when you open two of a major, the opponents normally can't find whatever fit they have at the two-level.

All this gives weak twos in the majors far more bite than a weak two in diamonds and less of a downside.

Do I pay my opponents to play anything else? Yes, it's the version of Stayman in which responder might have no interest in the majors. How does this come about? You might play 2NT in response to 1NT as conventional, say as a minor-suit transfer. In this case, you must find another way to invite 3NT with no interest in the majors. Why is using Stayman so bad? Opener's rebid tells the opponents about the declaring hand while helping responder not one little bit. They find out whether or not opener has a four-card major and, if he does, which suit it is. This knowledge will help the defenders with the opening lead and in the later play. This often results in a vital extra trick for them.

If you have no other use for a 2♠ response to 1NT, you can use that as a range inquiry. Opener normally bids 2NT if minimum and 3♣ if maximum. Responder then passes 2NT or converts 3♣ to 3NT. With this method, you can also use 2♠ if you have a big hand looking for a

4-4 fit for slam purposes. You then bid four-card suits upwards after opener's 2NT or 3♣ rebid.

If you play four-suit transfers (2♠ shows clubs and 2NT diamonds), you need another way to raise to 2NT. Consider these sequences:

YOU	PARTNER
	1NT
2♦	2♥
2♠	

YOU	PARTNER
	1NT
2♣	2♦
2♥	

You use the first sequence to show the balanced raise. The 2♠ bid tells partner 'I don't have hearts after all. I have either a raise to 2NT with no four-card majors or a big balanced hand and hopes of a 4-4 fit somewhere, perhaps in a minor.' Opener can then continue as after the range inquiry of 2♠ that I described two paragraphs above.

If the first sequence shows a flat hand, how do you look for game with five hearts and four spades? You can use the second sequence, playing that responder's rebid of 2♥ after Stayman is forcing. Opener without three hearts can next bid 2NT if minimum or 3NT if maximum. With heart support, opener can raise to 3♥ if minimum and bid anything else if maximum. You can't stop in 2♥ but this is a small price to pay.

Some play that responder can bid 2♣ and then 2♠ with 4-5 in the majors to make opener declarer. This, part of Smolen, sounds fine too.

# Pairsitis

A few months back I had occasion to sit facing someone I normally just play with in a team. He asked me, ‘What’s your style for pairs?’ I wasn’t quite sure what to say. By the end of the evening, I knew what I should have said: ‘Play down the middle and let the opponents make the mistakes.’ One deal really sticks in my mind.

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

I opened 1♦ and the lady on my left jumped to 3♣. RHO alerted this and explained it as showing both black suits. My partner bid 3♥ and RHO doubled. This came as a major surprise. As you can guess, I was just about to put him to 4♥. ‘I like this,’ I remember thinking, ‘It’s about time the opponents did something kind like doubling us into game.’

I passed, as did LHO. Partner then went into a trance, in the end emerging with 3NT. ‘Okay,’ I thought. ‘So long as he has a diamond and can get to my hand, this should play well. I have help for him in both black suits. Even if we have only a single trick in each of those suits, he just needs to find one more trick.’ After passes from RHO and from me, LHO doubled. 3NT doubled became the final contract. Sadly, the play did not go quite as I had foreseen. Partner’s spade ‘stopper’ was three to the ten. The opponents cashed five spade tricks and the ♣A before pausing for breath. They had another winner at this point – the ♥A – but couldn’t get to it. We thus ‘escaped’ for two off.

Nobody likes to get a bad score. What I find most galling is to score a bottom when an opponent has done something daft. Can you think of anything much more idiotic than making a penalty double of a natural forcing bid, as RHO did when he doubled 3♥?

For the record, partner held a flat 8-count with ♥KQxxx and the ♣K on the side.



Sally Brock recently stated that on 70% of deals you should do the same at pairs as you would at teams or rubber. I agree with her. If you bid and play (or defend) 70% of deals in normal fashion, this suggests that you change tactics on 30% of deals, with the difference equally likely to occur in the bidding or the play. If so, you should bid 85% of deals normally and you should play or defend 85% of deals normally. In fact, this isn't quite right because on rare occasions you will vary your tactics in both the bidding and the play on the same deal. For practical purposes, let's say that on five deals out of six you bid just as at teams or rubber and that on five out of six deals you play or defend just as at teams or rubber. Most books on pairs tactics focus on the one deal in six on which you change how you bid and on the one deal in six on which you change how you play or defend. You can guess the result. Too many players go out of their way to 'make something happen'.

The message is clear. On most deals, you don't rush into doubling the opponents just in case you might have made something your way. You don't play in a risky 4-3 spade fit instead of a 5-4 diamond fit. You don't risk your contract for the sake of overtricks. You don't risk letting an opposing contract make in the quest for beating it by an extra trick.

♠ A K 3 2  
♥ A K 6  
♦ A 8 7 6  
♣ 8 5



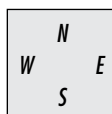
♠ 8 6 4  
♥ 10 3 2  
♦ 9 2  
♣ A K Q 6 4

Suppose you get a spade lead in 3NT. A 3-3 spade split is unlikely given the lead and you must play on clubs. Some people would play clubs from the top. They argue that overtricks are crucial at matchpoints and that this is the best way to make an overtrick. Can you see the fallacy in this? Clubs will break 4-2 48% of the time and 3-3 36% of the time. Playing for five club tricks will result in your going down four times for every three times that you make an overtrick.

The above odds do not sound good. You must also bear in mind that you will have already earned a few matchpoints merely by bidding to a sensible contract. You put those at risk if you go down. You should duck the first round of clubs, just as you would at IMPs or aggregate scoring. You expect this to give you an average plus.

Now let's change the East hand slightly.

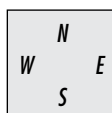
♠ A K 3 2  
♥ A K 6  
♦ A 8 7 6  
♣ 8 5



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

Again, you play in 3NT and receive a spade lead. This time the right play at matchpoints is to finesse the ♣10. If clubs break no worse than 4-2 and North holds the jack, this will give you five club tricks for an overtrick. It will also give you four tricks either if clubs split 5-1 but North has the jack or if clubs are no worse than 4-2 but South has the jack. It's the best play for four tricks and close to the best play for five. Finessing the ten gains over playing for the drop if North has Jxxx, Jxxxx or xx (25 holdings). It only loses if South has Jxx or Jx or a singleton jack (16 holdings). This means that, even if the entire field plays in 3NT, you will gain more often than you lose by finessing.

♠ A K 3 2  
♥ A K 6  
♦ A 8 7 6  
♣ 8 5

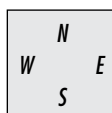


♠ 8  
♥ 10 3 2  
♦ 9 3 2  
♣ A K Q 6 4 2

Again, you play in 3NT and receive a spade lead. This time you do change your play at matchpoints. Since the contract and lead appear normal and the chance of a 3-2 club break far exceeds that of a 4-1 break, you should risk the contract. Play clubs from the top.

Would you ever duck the first round of a club suit like this at pairs? You would if you think you have found a better contract than the field.

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



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

Suppose you play these hands in 6NT. North kindly leads a diamond. Given East's freak shape and the partnership's 5-4 heart fit, you can bet that many pairs will play in hearts. No matter how hearts break, you will beat all the pairs in 6♥, all the pairs in 6♣ and all the pairs in game if you make twelve tricks in 6NT. You should settle for 85-90% of the matchpoints by ducking a club. You should not put such a good score in jeopardy by trying for an overtrick. In any event, you

don't really want clubs to break 3-2. If they do, someone may have bid and made 7♣ or 7NT. In this case, 6NT plus one will not give you a top anyway.

When in doubt go for the plus score. This applies to both the bidding and the play. It means you don't go for thin games or thin slams. If the play involves anything at all difficult, you will often get a good score just by scoring the maximum number of tricks. Simply playing in the correct strain is also usually worth a good number of matchpoints. I remember holding a hand once with 6 points and a nice six-card spade suit. We were playing a weak notrump and our bidding went 1♦-1♠-1NT-2♠. When dummy appeared, it was clear that partner had miscounted because she put down 19 points. Without straining myself, I made ten tricks for 170. This turned out to give us very nearly average. Many of the pairs who had bid game had missed the spade fit and gone down in a poor 3NT contract.

You need to focus on your real opponents – those playing your cards at other tables – when you decide whether to sacrifice. Suppose your opponents bid 4♠ and you think a save in 5♦ will go for 300 (two down doubled non-vulnerable). Is it right to bid 5♦? It depends on how many other pairs will bid and make 4♠. If the field is playing in 3♠ and scoring 170, -300 will earn you the same bottom as -620. You might as well take your chances on beating 4♠. If the field, or at any rate a fair proportion of it, is going down in 4♠, again you want to defend. If others are going down in 4♠, maybe your opponents will go down too.

Of course, I don't want to say that you should never sacrifice. It's a bit like when you are defending and decide to cut down on overtricks rather than attempting to beat the contract. If you sacrifice, you take a sure minus. You need to think twice before doing so.

In fact, the position is not quite the same. If you can see dummy, you may know that the opponents have reached an abnormal contract, one that will outscore the field if it makes. In this case, you should try very hard to beat the contract, just as you would at rubber or teams.

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♥	2♦	2♥	pass
pass	3♦	pass	pass
3♥	pass	4♥	?

You don't need to see your hand. The field will not reach 4♥. You will surely need to beat 4♥ to avoid a dreadful score. You would only bid 5♦ if you are non-vulnerable and feel confident of going just one down. Your previous bidding (or rather lack of it) makes this highly unlikely. Have you worked out why you need to expect to get out for one down non-vulnerable? If you escape for -100, you beat any pairs who get -170. Losing 200 or 300 is bound to give you a poor score. In summary, if the opposing bidding sounds dodgy, you only save against a game if you expect to get out for less than the value of a partscore.

The principle extends to saving against slams. Since the field rarely bids slams well, you only consider a sacrifice against a small slam if you expect to get out for less than the value of game. Likewise, you very rarely save against a grand slam unless you expect the penalty to be cheaper than a small slam.

Often the best time to sacrifice is before your opponents have got to their final contract. This is it because it puts pressure on an opponent who hasn't finished describing his hand by forcing him to do so at the higher level. After all, driving the opponents a level higher (though maybe not from five of a minor to six of minor) is a frequent aim when you sacrifice.

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

You	LHO	Partner	RHO
	1♠	2♦	2♥
?			

Given your doubletons in the majors, the opponents surely possess a fit in spades or hearts or both. Bidding 5♦ puts huge pressure on the opponents. LHO won't want to double if he has heart support, which of course he has yet to show. Even if LHO does double, RHO won't like leaving in the double if he has concealed spade support. A direct bid of 5♦ makes it quite likely that you will end up defending 5♥ or 5♠.

Five of a major is a great contract – for the side not in it. If they make eleven tricks, they are no better off than if they played a level lower. If they don't make exactly eleven tricks, they are probably in the wrong spot. By the way, you never double (unless you are certain that they are going down) if your sacrifice pushes the opponents up to five of a major. If they go down, you are likely to be on to a good thing anyway.

My next point in this chapter is not about pairs. As, however, it does concern duplicate, here seems a good place for it. What should you do in a match if you find yourself down at half time, or at least you think that you are behind? Should you play normally in the hope that any bad luck in the first half evens itself out in the second half? Should you play for swings, making bids or plays that seem slightly against the odds? Either tactic could work – it depends on how the position came about. If the cards really have been tough to handle, those playing your cards at the other table may have found them just as difficult. You might think you are losing when you aren't. Many has been the time when either my partner and I or our teammates have begun scoring up with an apology for poor results only to meet broad smiles and words of assurance. If you are sure you are behind, it may pay to go slightly against the odds. I must stress the word slightly. I must also stress that going against the odds in the bidding can mean you underbid. Most people only overbid!

I can recall two matches in which my partner and I (Graham Allan on both occasions) took positive steps to recover a sizeable deficit. The first was in the final of a county knockout event. With 8 boards to go, we were 23 IMPs down. Although we were up against a good team – a team that fancied their chances of beating us – we hadn't played badly. I can only recollect one board where we 'swung' and, even then, the details are hazy. One of us opened 2NT and, after we both stretched slightly, we reached a very dicey contract of 6♥. My partner played the hand well to escape for down one. When we came to score up and announced (or should I say owned up to) our score of -50, teammates gave a one-word reply: 'flat.' They had defeated 4♥! All we needed to do was to stop in game to pick up a useful swing. As it happens, the story ended happily for us. We gained just enough on the other boards to win by 1 IMP.

The other, less successful, occasion was in the 1994 Gold Cup final. We found ourselves in a similar position with time running out to make good the deficit. I can't remember my exact hand but it was a good one – I was planning to open 2NT if nobody bid before me. Partner opened 3♥. We were playing a version of Multi that included the option of a weak two. This made it likely that he would have a seven-card heart suit. I had six tricks in the black suits and decided that I would bid 7♥ if the ♦A was the only keycard missing. After all, the opponent with the ace would have only a 50-50 chance of being on lead. Partner's reply to my 4NT inquiry revealed that another

keycard as well as the ♦A was missing. I duly signed off in 5♥. The opponents scored three diamonds, or it may have been two diamonds and another trick, to beat 5♥ by one. Partner had also taken a view and opened 3♥ on something like ♥QJ10xxx and a bust.

Our other failed effort in the Gold Cup final – this time it was a solo shot by me – perhaps deserved better. My vulnerable RHO opened a 12-14 1NT. I had a nice 13 count with ♥QJ10xx. I wouldn't double normally but it seemed a great chance to pull 500 out of thin air. Alas, LHO had a rather better hand than my partner did. 1NT doubled made with an overtrick.

In case you think that bidding a slam off too many fast losers stands too little chance of success to be worth the bother, I have an admission to make. In a Crockfords match, my team enjoyed a good lead at half time; then an opponent I had known since my Cambridge days brought off just such a coup. His hand was something like this:

♠ A Q J 8 6 5 4   ♥ 6   ♦ K 4   ♣ K 8 5

After his partner opened 1♦, he responded 2♠ and caught a raise to 3♠. He jumped to 4NT and saw (we were using bidding boxes) a reply of 5♥. This showed either two aces or one ace and the ♠K – standard Roman Keycard Blackwood. He now jumped to 6♠. He said afterwards that he was hoping his partner held two real aces and that the spade finesse would work. In fact, his partner, as was likely to be the case, had the ♠K amongst his assets. This meant we had two aces to take. His luck was in. I had one ace and my partner the other. Neither of us dreamt that the other could have an ace and the slam made.

I guess that most shooting occurs in the bidding because chances in the play occur less often. All the same, when a chance comes along in the play, it often gives you an attractive option. This is because you can more easily judge just how much your tactics are bucking the odds. For instance, suppose you play in 4♠ with no clues from the bidding and all depends on playing the trump suit of AJ10xx in hand facing Kxxx in dummy. You would normally cash the king followed by the ace. This succeeds when the queen is doubleton or singleton or when LHO is void. If you need a swing, you should finesse one or other opponent for the queen. The odds are just slightly against you and you can feel confident of a swing if you play like this. Let's hope it's in the right direction!



# Losing Leads

People have written entire books on opening leads. I have, as have Mike Lawrence, Robert B. Ewen, Sally Brock and David Bird/Taf Anthias. Others surely have as well. I do not wish to repeat what you can find well-covered elsewhere. Instead, I want to give you a few examples of losing leads made to my recent knowledge and answer some of the questions that my students ask.

Everyone agrees that a lead from or of an unsupported ace is a poor idea. It involves a high degree of risk and often confuses partner. As bad, if not sometimes even worse, is a lead from Jxx. Certainly, the last few times my partner has led from Jxx it has backfired badly. On one occasion, her lead ran into a layout of A109x with declarer and K8x in dummy. Declarer made four heart tricks instead of two (he didn't have time to give up the lead) and we scored a bottom. A different partner led from Jxx and found me with a losing doubleton. While this didn't cost a trick directly, it cost a tempo and misled me (if you'll excuse the pun) as naturally I assumed he had led from a four-card suit.

The problems with a lead from Jxx are threefold: (a) it is not very attacking — you need to catch partner with a very good holding for it to achieve anything, (b) it is far from safe — any time partner holds only one of the ace, king or queen it may well cost a trick, and (c) it may well confuse partner because your lowest card will tend to look like a fourth highest lead.



Another thing I don't like is when my partner has an obvious lead but chooses to lead something else. One evening my partner had a spade holding of KQ10x on one deal and a heart holding of KQ9x on another, in both cases the suits being unbid by the opposition. In both cases, he led something other than the king of the suit. On both occasions, his lead cost a trick if not two. Both times the lead of his king would have set the contract, in the first case because it would have knocked out a vital entry, in the second because it would have set up an extra defensive winner. What is more, on both deals I placed partner with values elsewhere because he hadn't led these suits.

Yes, we all like to have KQJx for a king lead but life is often imperfect. You need to make do with the cards dealt to you. I trust that you wouldn't do any of the things I have described. At any rate, you won't *keep* doing them, will you?

Let me tell you about another offbeat lead. My partner led a club against 4♥ and I could tell that he held four clubs to the queen. Later he discarded the ♠J. I could see the ♠Q in dummy and the king was in my hand. Since my partner hadn't led a spade initially, the obvious inference was that he had thrown the jack from AJ10xx rather than J109xx. As it happened, I could judge from the opposing bidding that he couldn't hold the ♠A. It's a sorry state of affairs when you must trust the opponents rather than your partner.

In all these tales of losing leads, you may have noticed that one word is conspicuous in its absence — the word 'regular' before 'partner'. Why do I regard the ability to find good opening leads as an important attribute in a partner? For one thing, you probably defend with your partner as often as you bid with them; to defend well you need close partnership cooperation. It's vital that you both understand what the other is doing and that you begin your attempt to defeat an opposing contract in the best or at least an understandable way.

If you and your partner can rely on each other not to lead from a broken or weak suit when holding a sequence, it helps later in the play:

♦ 10 6 4			
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>		♦ A 8 5 3 2	

In this position, holding the East cards defending a suit contract, you should be confident that declarer can't hold a singleton king and that you can safely underlead or duck the ace. Why is this? If declarer

had a singleton king, partner would hold QJ9x and would have led the suit at Trick 1.

I can't conclude this section without touching on another weird lead. Defending a contract of 4♥, my partner led a diamond and later shifted to the ♣A. I had ♣QJx but thought I couldn't spare the queen because declarer could hold K10x. You can guess the rest — partner held the ♣K as well as the ace. We could have cashed three or four club tricks (dummy had run out of trumps). Why he didn't lead a club at Trick 1, I don't know. We could have recovered if he had switched to the king. After the first trick, a lead of the ace denies the king and asks partner to encourage if he holds the king. If you shift to the ace when you hold the king, you'll never get a useful signal. Partner will never hold the king and so will always discourage. Note that the rule about the king switch from ace-king applies as much, if not more, to the opening leader's partner as to the opening leader.

Let's move on. People often ask me what I lead from a hand like the following after the opponents bid something like 1♠-3♠-4♠:

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

I don't like a singleton trump lead. It often picks up partner's holding. From which of the king, queen or jack do I lead? Other things being equal, I lead from the queen. For one thing, it saves me from a decision each time. For another, I think it has technical merit. If partner holds rubbish or is jack high, it's unlikely to blow a trick as declarer or dummy often turns up with a doubleton or singleton. If it catches partner with the king, it is nearly always a good lead. True, if he holds the ace but not the king, it may save declarer a guess. Still, you can't have everything.

In many cases, I consider the suit lengths. I tend to lead a longer suit rather than a shorter suit. This is an extension of the theme that a lead is usually safer if one of the opponents is short in it; any potential winner you have blown would have been ruffed anyway. Another factor is the spot cards, most of all how close they are to touching the highest card in the suit. Here there is a gap of two full cards in each suit. The bidding, as always, can provide a vital clue. If you expect a source of tricks to come down in dummy, you attack. This means leading from a short strong suit rather than a long weak suit. Is there anything else?

The overall strength of your hand also has a bearing because it affects what partner might hold. I hope you know not to lead a singleton against a slam when you hold an ace on the side. If partner can get in, the slam is surely down anyway. Consider this extension of the theme:

(1) ♠ 9 7 3   ♥ 9 8 3   ♦ K J 8 4   ♣ 10 8 2

(2) ♠ A Q 3   ♥ 9 8 3   ♦ K J 8 4   ♣ K 10 2

On both hands, the opponents bid 1♥-2♥-4♥. Why might you lead the ♦4 on the first hand but a trump on the second? The holdings in the red suits are the same. The answer lies in what you expect partner to hold. If you have 4 points and both opponents are limited, partner may have close to an opening bid. He's going to need a good hand if you are to beat the contract. If partner has 12 points, they could easily include the ♦Q or ♦A. By contrast, if you hold an opening bid yourself and the opponents have bid game, partner has a near bust. This would make it rash to place him with the ♦Q and rasher still to place him with the ace. Don't you agree?

Does your own action or inaction ever get your partner to make a losing lead? If you overcall on a bad hand with a weak suit, this is one way that can happen. Making a lead-directing double at the wrong time is another.

♠ 7   ♥ K 10 4 2   ♦ K 10 4 2   ♣ J 8 4 2

LHO	Partner	RHO	You
1♠	pass	1♣	pass
4NT	pass	4♣	pass
		5♥	?

I have seen people double 5♥ on a hand like this. They argue that they are happy to have partner lead a heart. Can you see the flaw in this argument? What is partner likely to lead to 6♠ after an auction like this? It will surely be a red suit. You are equally happy with a diamond lead!

Perhaps I should say something about lead methods in general. For the most part the standard leads from the days of whist and auction bridge — top of a sequence and fourth highest from suits without

a sequence — have withstood the test of time. Two things really have changed. The first is the lead from AKx(x)(x). Once upon a time players led the king from such a holding so that they could lead an unsupported ace on other deals without confusing partner about the location of the king. Since then the game's authorities have agreed that an unsupported ace lead is usually such a bad idea that there is no need to save the ace lead for denying the king. The ambiguous king lead creates problems like this:

♦ 10 6  
 ♦ 8 5 3 2

In a notrump contract, it seems natural to encourage if partner leads the king. However, if the lead might be from AKJx, you had better not.

♦ 9 6 3  
 ♦ 8 2

Normally you want to discourage on the king lead lest partner play a second round into South's possible AJx. Sadly, you have a problem in a suit contract if the lead might be from AKxx. Then you want partner to continue the suit and give you a ruff. You avoid all this by playing the lead of an ace to imply the king and the king lead to deny the ace.

When *should* you lead the king from ace-king? Against a slam, you should lead the king from ace-king. This allows you to lead an ace when you do not hold ace-king. In an unbid suit, an ace can be a good lead against a slam. If the opponents have erred, partner might hold the king. Even if not, the ace might run away if you do not cash it at once. This could prove expensive if you or your partner has a winner in one of their long suits. It is vital that partner knows your holding. If you have the ace-king, he must signal to tell you whether a second round will stand up. If you have just the ace, he must tell you whether he holds the king.

Some experts play that you also swap to king from ace-king against five-level contracts. If the opponents arrive in five of a minor, they will quite often be wide open in one suit (or they would be in 3NT). This means you might want to bash out an ace.

Some people play that whatever the level of the contract, the ace lead asks for an attitude signal and the king for a count signal. The idea is that with a long suit you want to know whether a second

round will stand up and therefore lead the king. Conversely, with AKx or possibly AKxx, it can matter whether partner holds the queen, in which case you lead the ace. This method works fine if you hold the ace-king. The snag is that if you have a king-queen holding you will not necessarily want a count signal. I do play ace for attitude, king for count if my partner wants to, but would not suggest the method myself.

The other thing that has changed since the early days of contract is the lead from small cards. The main problem with a top of nothing lead is that your partner never knows whether you hold a doubleton. Some experts in the U.S. lead low from low cards. This solves one problem but creates another: partner can no longer tell when you lead a low card whether you possess any strength in the suit. In most of the world, the standard lead from a collection of small cards is the second highest. This way the lead of a high spot card implies a doubleton, a middle card suggests a long but weak suit and a low card shows both length and strength.

Are you not convinced? Let's start with when you hold four (or more) low cards. Why is it better to lead second highest than your top card? For one thing, you sometimes cannot afford the top card. If declarer or dummy has four cards as well, your top card might be due to win the fourth round of the suit. Moreover, it gives you more flexibility on what to do on the second round if you start with the second highest. Usually you play your third highest next. However, you have the option of playing either your lowest or your highest card as a suit-preference signal. Partner can usually tell from the bidding whether you have four cards or two and the question of his trying to give you a ruff does not arise. If not, by starting with the second highest you have the option of following with a higher card to convince him that no ruff is possible.



Partner rarely has difficulty in reading the lead. Even though South has a strong holding, partner can tell that the seven is second highest. You would not lead the seven from Q1097 or similar holdings. If declarer is weaker, it is even easier to spot a second-highest lead. Partner tries to apply the Rule of Eleven and, upon finding that he can

see too many cards higher than yours, concludes that the lead is not fourth best.

Now I would like to turn to what many Americans (including Ron Garber!) regard as the thornier area of the lead from three low cards. Since I am on record as saying that *Partnership Defense* is a fantastic book, I hope that Kit Woolsey will not mind if I quote a section in which I (and many others) believe he is (or least then was) mistaken.

*One other lead convention with some popularity is the lead of the middle card from three small, often called MUD for middle-up-down. The advantage of this convention is that you can play either the higher card or the lower on the second round of the suit.*

Normally you play upwards to tell partner that you have a third card. However, if you want to fool declarer (and partner) into thinking you have a doubleton, you play your lowest card next. The example he quotes is along those lines. This is how he ends:

*However, the disadvantages of MUD are very great. As its abbreviation implies, the waters are often quite muddy for the partner of the opening leader if he doesn't have a clear-cut course of action at Trick 2. When you lead the same card from such diverse holdings as Q85, 852 and 52, partner is often faced with quite a problem.*

People say there are lies, damned lies and statistics. They mean that statisticians choose a sample that gives the result they want. Woolsey has done just this. If I were to quote only three holdings, mine might be Q82, 82 and 852 or Q52, 85 and 852. The clarity of MUD would then be apparent. You lead the 2 from Qx2, the 8 from 8x and the 5 from x5x: three different leads for three different types of holding.

Simple logic dictates that a lead method in which you use the full range of spot cards is going to be clearer than one in which you always lead high or always lead low. You are wasting the message that you could be giving with a middle card if you only lead high or low. If I may use a motoring analogy again, refusing to lead the middle card is like switching off the middle color on a traffic light. The fact that traffic lights around the world use amber (or yellow or orange, whatever you call it) as well as red and green tells you that a middle message can be useful. The existence of a third signal adds clarity to the other two signals.

Consider the problems it creates if you know that partner might lead a high spot card, or play high-low even without a doubleton:

♦ 8 2	♦ K J 9 5 [ ] ♦ 10 6 3	♦ A Q 7 4
-------	------------------------------	-----------

In a suit contract after West leads the eight, East will want to win with the queen, cash the ace and give West a ruff. This kills a winner in dummy and may well let West make a trick with a low trump. However, if South turns out to be the one with the doubleton – possible with top-of-nothing leads – you have killed no winner and given up the lead.

♦ 8 2	♦ K Q 9 [ ] ♦ A 6 5 3	♦ J 10 7 4
-------	-----------------------------	------------

As East, after seeing the eight led, you want to keep hold of all your diamonds to stop South from scoring a long card. You will not like it if you discard winners in some other suit and later find that actually West and South started with three diamonds each.

♦ 8 2	♦ K Q 9 [ ] ♦ J 6 5	♦ A 10 7 4 3
-------	---------------------------	--------------

This time, while you might not manage to give partner a ruff, it could still prove important to know who has the doubleton. If declarer has three diamonds in each hand, you might defend passively, knowing that there is no discard coming on the third round of diamonds. If, in fact, it transpires that West is the one with the three-card holding, declarer does have a discard coming. If you use top-of-nothing leads, you will face many dilemmas like these. You can't expect to get them all right.

If I have yet to convince you, I guess we need to consider all the possible two- and three-card holdings with the queen, eight, five and two. We can then assess the clarity of the lead methods.

	<b>Top of nothing</b>	<b>MUD</b>	<b>Low</b>
Lead 8	85 82 852	85 82	85 82
Lead 5	Q85 52	Q85 852 52	Q85 52
Lead 2	Q82 Q52	Q82 Q52	Q82 Q52 852

You will see from this table that with all three lead methods it is ambiguous whether the five comes from 52 or Q85. We can therefore ignore this in deciding which method is the clearest. With TON the two lead is as clear as it is with MUD. The eight lead is where the ambiguity arises. Moreover, since having led the eight you must play a lower card on the next round, the ambiguity between the three-card and doubleton holdings persists on the next round. This is not the case with the MUD lead of the five from 852 because you can follow upwards with the three-card holding. If you lead low from small cards, no problem arises with the eight lead. The problem shifts to the two lead. To my mind, this is worse. Through not knowing whether you have any strength in the suit, partner may go wrong at Trick 2 and/or make a futile return.

In summary, no matter what you lead from 852, you must contend with an element of ambiguity. However, you reduce this ambiguity with MUD because (a) the lead of a middle card such as a five, six or seven suggests a MUD lead and (b) you can play upwards on the second round to distinguish between the two- and three-card holdings. In truth, those who say they don't like MUD leads really don't like leading from three low cards at all. With this, I am in sympathy. I usually prefer to lead from four low cards than from three, and that is only if the auction dictates a passive lead or I cannot find a sensible attacking option.

There is, I must add, one situation in which leading top of nothing works well. If your partner has bid a suit and you have supported it, you cannot hold a doubleton. In this scenario, you can make your lack of strength clear at once by leading the top card.



Some pairs go a step further and swap to third and fifth leads in a suit partner has bid. Why do this? As discussed earlier, a lead from Jxx or similar is usually a poor lead. This changes when partner has bid the suit. In this case, you will often lead from Jxx, Qxx or Kxx. If you lead bottom from three cards and third highest from four, partner can more easily tell whether you hold three cards or four.

Whatever your lead methods, you can depart from them if you think that doing so will help your partner. For instance, you might lead the eight from ♠J87x if you are keen for partner not to return the suit, say if you also have ♥AQJx.

The king from ace-king against a slam you can regard as standard, but the other exceptions are things to discuss with your partner. You will certainly need to discuss whether the king from ace-king applies against a five-level contract. If you are going to lead differently in suits that your partner has bid, you will need to discuss when the changes apply. For instance, when, if ever, does giving preference count as support? If you have made a takeout double, does that count as showing support? If you open third in hand and pass partner's response, does that count as showing support?

# GUESSING WRONGLY

Have you noticed how good players so often guess correctly? They get what looks like a 50-50 guess right far more than half the time. I would like to give you a few tips.

?	♠ A J 8 7	?
	<div></div>	
	♠ K 10 9 5 2	

Simon gave a hint, the same as Culbertson's by the way, on how to play a nine-card suit missing the queen. He said that with no singleton or void between the two hands you play for the drop. With shortness in a side suit in one hand or the other, finesse.

Sixty-five years on, we can improve on this. If the opponents have passed throughout or if they have bid little for their values and fit, play for the drop. If they have bid a lot on few values, finesse the opponent who is less likely to hold the singleton for the queen. The modern strategy has a much stronger practical and logical basis. The opponents are bound to bid more when they possess a bit of shape than when they do not. Simon's advice relied upon imperfect shuffling of cards that players had arranged into tricks on a previous deal. In cards dealt by computer or after proper shuffling, his strategy has no basis at all.

?	♠ K J 8 7	?
	<div></div>	
	♠ A 10 9 2	

How should you play an eight-card or shorter suit with a two-way finesse for the queen? Assuming you have no real clue from the bid-

ding, I suggest you use the rule I'm about to give. In truth, I don't claim to have invented it — but then Stayman didn't invent Stayman!

If the finesse is in the trump suit, play the opening leader for the queen. If it is in a side suit, play the other defender for the queen. Can you see the basis for this? How often do you lead from Qxx of trumps? Rarely, I imagine. How often do you lead from a collection of low trumps? More often, I dare say. When the initial lead is not a trump, this could be because the opening leader has the queen of trumps. In side suits, the converse applies, unless you know that your opponents go out of their way to make passive leads. A lead from a suit headed by the queen tends to hold more attraction than a weak suit or a suit headed by the king or jack. That the opening leader chose another suit therefore increases the chance that the other defender holds the queen.

Similar advice holds true if you have a king-jack holding and again no other clues. If the guess is in a side suit, play the opening leader for the ace. In a side suit, a lead from Qxxx is far more attractive than one from Axxx. A side suit with the ace but not the king is rarely a good lead. The fact that the opening leader has not led the suit suggests that he holds the ace there. If you are missing AQxx of trumps, it is less clear what to do. People rarely lead a singleton trump or from Qxx.

Of course, these rules only apply when the bidding or play gives you nothing better to go on. In practice they often do.



If your right hand opponent chooses to lead this suit early in the play, you should tend to put up the king. Leading away from the queen would be very risky for him. On the actual layout, it gives you a chance to make a trick that you couldn't otherwise make. If you had K10x, it would give you two tricks instead of one. By contrast, if RHO shies away from leading the suit early on but later leads it only having run out of other options, you should duck. LHO's failure to lead the suit at Trick 1 and RHO's failure to switch to the suit earlier are big clues. They suggest that instead you place the queen on your right and the ace on your left.

The play by the opponents also provides a strong clue to the layout in the following situation:

?	♠ Q 10 5	?
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px;"></div>	
	♠ A 2	

Suppose you have just given up the lead and forced the opponents to open up this suit. Assuming they could choose who won the previous trick, play the ten from dummy if LHO leads low. If LHO held the king, RHO would have won the previous trick to leave you no winning option.

To solve this type of situation you need to put yourself in the shoes of your opponent and ask yourself, 'If I held the key card, would I defend this way?' If the answer is yes, play this defender for the card. If no, play the other defender for the critical card. An interesting example along these lines came up just as I started to write this book:

♠	A 6 5 3
♥	Q 4
♦	J 8 6 5 2
♣	10 9
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px;"></div>
♠	K Q 10 9 7 2
♥	A 7
♦	A 9 4
♣	A 3

You play in 4♠ after an uncontested auction. West leads a low club to the nine, queen and ace. You draw trumps and play ace followed by another diamond. East wins this with the queen and leads a low club. West wins with the jack and switches to a heart. How should you play?

If East has underled the ♣K, you can be certain who holds the ♥K: East. Even if not, you have a good idea. Without the ♥K East might very well have switched to a heart rather than returning a club. Attempting to win with dummy's queen is therefore a silly thing to do. Instead, you should win the heart with the ace and exit with a heart. You hope that West holds the last diamond, the king. In this case, after making the ♥K, East will have to give you a ruff and discard.


As it happens, another point arose at the table. The declarer played low from dummy on the first club smoothly enough but paused before winning in hand. This is not the right way to go about things.

Since he would hardly consider ducking if he held AJx or AKx, he told both defenders that they had the king-jack between them. The time to think about both dummy's play and your own is before you play from dummy. By the way, the player who fumbled before winning the club (and who put up the ♥Q!) was no Mr. Smug. He is a good player who just happened to have a brainstorm on this particular deal.

As a defender, you can also use the principle of putting yourself in an opponent's shoes. Suppose that the contract is 4♠, dummy puts down a club suit of ♣AKQ10x and declarer's first move is to give up the lead in some other suit, say finessing in trumps. In this case, you can normally assume that your opponent doesn't have a singleton club and a fast loser or two on the side. If he did, he would probably have taken a quick discard first. His losers will tend to be of the type that he cannot quickly discard — or he will have some club length with dummy.

Now suppose again that the contract is 4♠ and dummy puts down ♥Kx. Declarer instantly proceeds to draw all your trumps and dummy's. What sort of heart holding do you think he has? A doubleton is quite likely: Qx, Ax or even two low cards. If he has a three-card holding, it is quite probably QJx or AQx. He is unlikely to hold Axx or Axxx as then he might well have looked to ruff a heart in dummy. How does this knowledge help you? For one thing, it helps you to count declarer's hand, at least if you can see the ♥Q. For another, it tends to mean that you can safely discard hearts.

Let's return to the play as declarer. Players sometimes go wrong by ignoring relevant factors or by giving undue weight to things that aren't relevant. Consider this suit:

♠ 10 9 5 4 3  
  
 ♠ A K

You cash the ace-king and both defenders follow low. Imagine that dummy contains two entries and that you have another possible use for those entries, say for taking a finesse that needs taking twice. You will want to work out the chance of a 3-3 spade split and decide whether this gives you a better bet than the 50-50 chance of a finesse. At the outset, the chance of a 3-3 break was 36% and of a 4-2 break was 48%. Assuming you have no other information from the

bidding or play (which of course is rarely true), can you believe that a 3-3 break is now slightly more likely than a 4-2 break?

Since both opponents have followed low, you can exclude any layouts on which someone holds Jx or Qx. You must also exclude any layouts on which someone holds QJx. Clearly, you can also exclude all the 5-1 and 6-0 breaks. Which layouts are still possible? West could have started with Qxx, Jxx, QJxx or xx. On half of these, the spades started as 3-3. On the other half, the spades started as 4-2. The reason that the 4-2 breaks were more likely in the first place is that there are more of them — however, you have now eliminated more of them also. Since each individual three-card holding is a fraction more likely than each two- or four-card holding, a 3-3 spade split is now a little better than a 50-50 shot.

I have assumed, of course, that your opponents know what is going on and that they do not signal their length in spades. Certain opponents signal when they shouldn't. In this case, you do best to cash the king before the ace and watch their cards. By leading the king, you may get the defender who does not hold the queen wondering whether you have led from king-queen rather than ace-king, and he might give a length signal.

In the above example, you could use the fact that the opponents had followed with low spades because they had no choice in the matter. They had to play low spades to leave you a guess. You need to exercise more care in using data that they have volunteered.

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

Suppose that you, South, open a weak 1NT and North raises to game.

West leads the ♥3; you play the jack from dummy and East plays the queen. You duck and win the return of the ♥9 with the ace while West follows with the two.

You need five clubs for your contract and must judge which of the ace or king to cash first in case clubs break 3-0.

Unless the opponents are playing a deep game, you have learned from the play to the first two tricks that West started with five hearts and East with three. Does this mean that West is more likely than East to be void in clubs?

'Not really' is the answer. The knowledge that West holds more hearts than East is tainted. What do you expect West to lead against 3NT? You expect him to lead his longest suit. If he has done that, he has done no more than what you expect. You cannot read much into an opposing play that was merely what you would expect.

Suppose North had been the dealer. The auction might have been 1NT-3NT again but now East would have been on lead. East would no doubt have led a spade or diamond. If the play proceeded in similar fashion, partner would place East with five cards in that suit. Would you want partner to use the known break in that suit to say that East is more likely to be void in clubs? It cannot be right that the opening leader is always the one more likely to hold the void!

After the play has begun with a heart to the queen and a heart back, I would duck a spade next just in case the spade split is freakish. Assuming nothing special happens in spades, I would probably feel inclined to lay down the ♣A. Since West's hearts are poor, he might have led another suit if he had two five-card suits. You therefore have the slight inference that West holds no more than one five-card suit. In this case, he will only be void in clubs if his shape is 4=5=4=0.

Now imagine that West led the ♥2. In this case, you could lay down the ♣A with some confidence. So long as West has not led from a four-card heart suit in preference to a five-card or longer suit elsewhere, you can be certain that West is not void in clubs.

If you want to know more on the subject, I suggest you consult the article on the Monty Hall Trap in the *Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*.

A friend of mine, whom I shall call Alvin (not his real name), had an interesting discussion with me on this deal from [Back through the Pack](#):

♠	6
♥	A Q J 4
♦	A Q 9 4
♣	A K 4 2
	<div></div>
♠	A K J
♥	K 10 9 8 5
♦	—
♣	J 8 6 5 3

South plays in 7♥ after East has opened 3♦. West leads a trump and East follows. You take the trick in dummy and ruff a diamond. You go back to dummy with a trump and, when all follow, ruff a diamond again. Next you cross to the ♣A and ruff a third diamond, on which West discards a spade.

After this, you cross to the ♣K, on which East discards a diamond, and cash dummy's remaining winners. You discard three clubs and West three spades to leave this ending:

♠	6
♥	—
♦	—
♣	4 2
	<div></div>
♠	A K J
♥	—
♦	—
♣	—

You have a complete count on distribution. West followed to two rounds of diamonds and showed out on the third round. East followed to one club and showed out on the second round. Both opponents followed to two rounds of trumps. So West is 6=2=2=3 and East 3=2=7=1. You also know that you can make the slam if you guess correctly. If West has the ♠Q, it will drop. If East has it, you can finesse.

I stated that West is twice as likely as East to hold the queen because he started with six spades to East's three. Everyone who saw the book before it came out accepted this explanation. Alvin thought I was wrong. He said that as West now has two spades to East's three,



the odds are in fact 3:2 that East has the queen. He argued further that the ten holdings remaining possible when you take into account the specific spades West has played support this. West has the queen in four of these and East the queen in six, confirming his 60:40 odds.

Suppose for the sake of argument that West has played the three, five, seven and nine (in some random order). In this case, these are the ten holdings in question:

Q 10 9 7 5 3	10 9 8 7 5 3
Q 9 8 7 5 3	10 9 7 5 4 3
Q 9 7 5 4 3	10 9 7 5 3 2
Q 9 7 5 3 2	9 8 7 5 4 3
	9 8 7 5 3 2
	9 7 5 4 3 2

There are four holdings on the left and six on the right, yet the initial odds of 2:1 hold true. Why is this? The holdings are not equally likely. While West might play his spot cards at random, his overall strategy will not be random. If he holds the queen, he will have chosen not to play it. Assuming West plays his other spades at random, he has five ways to play each holding on the left and fifteen ways to play each on the right. So, given that he has played as he has, each specific holding on the left is three times as likely as each specific holding on the right. The odds are thus not 4:6 but 12:6 – the same as they were at the start.

You could arrive at the same answer through logic rather than by arithmetic. Whether or not West's spades include the queen, he has no trouble in finding four spade discards. Since he has had no choice but to discard spades, he has done exactly what you expected him to: discard four losing spades. Since he has simply done what you expected, you cannot gain any useful knowledge about the spade suit from his discards. You would therefore expect the original odds to hold.

The above discussion has elements of Monty Hall and elements of Restricted Choice. Let's do a recap of the Principle of Restricted Choice because it still confuses (or at least fails to convince) many players.

♠	10 9 5 4 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px;"></div>
♠	A K 8 2

Suppose you cash the ace and West drops the jack. Some players would cash the king next on the basis that West is more or less equally likely to hold queen-jack doubleton as a singleton jack.

While it is true that West was more or less equally likely to have been dealt queen-jack doubleton as a singleton jack, the jack is almost twice as likely to have come from the latter holding. With a singleton jack, he has no choice but to play the jack. With QJ doubleton, he might play the queen half the time and the jack half the time. So the initial chance that he holds QJ doubleton has halved.

Another way to arrive at the same conclusion is to decide upon your strategy before West has played a card. Let's consider two strategies, A and B:


A — cash the ace and king

B — cash the ace and, if West plays the queen or jack, finesse

Clearly, strategy A wins in one of the relevant cases (QJ doubleton) while B wins in two cases (singleton jack or singleton queen).

If you have been reading carefully, you will have noticed a word that I slipped in there: 'relevant'. West can hardly gain by dropping the jack or queen from Jx, Qx or QJx, so we can dismiss all other holdings.

Another area in which players go wrong with Restricted Choice is by trying to use it when an opponent might have played a falsecard.

♠ Q 5  
  
♠ A K 9 8 7 2

Suppose you cash the queen and West drops the jack or ten. Should you finesse on the second round?

Although whichever honor West has played is more likely to be a forced play of a singleton than a voluntary play from J10 doubleton, you should not finesse. This is because West might have cunningly played a high card from J10x. This holding is much more likely than a singleton honor, or J10 doubleton, so if you have any inkling that West is good enough to falsecard, you should play him to have done so.



# GIVING THE WRONG SIGNAL

What do you normally do if partner leads something and you don't need to play high to win the trick or force out a high card from declarer? You play a high spot card if you want partner to lead the suit again and your lowest card if you don't. This, as far as it goes, is fine — at any rate if you play standard rather than reverse attitude.

Do you ever play high to show an even number in the suit instead? If you say no, you are giving many wrong signals. Take this layout:

♥ Q J 7	♥ 9 6 4 3
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	

Let's say that your side has bid and raised hearts and that your partner leads the ace (or whatever you lead from ace-king). In this case, your lack of interest in the suit is clear. Partner really wants to know whether you hold four hearts or three (or maybe five) because this will affect whether a second round will stand up.

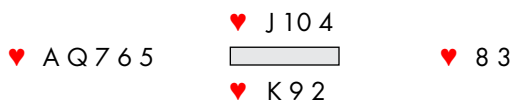
This layout is similar:

♥ J 9 7	♥ 8 6 4 3
<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 0 auto;"></div>	

Partner leads the king. When declarer has the ace, he will capture the king with it 99 times out of 100, either just to follow suit (because the ace is bare) or to ensure a second trick with dummy's jack. Your lack of interest in the suit is thus about to become apparent. What partner will find more helpful to know is how many hearts declarer holds. If

it is only one, the jack is not a trick but neither is the queen. If it is two, the queen is a winner and there could be a discard coming on the jack.

On both layouts above, the helpful thing to do is to signal your length. You play second highest from four and low from three or five.



This is another count position. West leads the ♥6 against 3NT. Since your failure to top the jack rather marks the location of the high cards, you play the eight to show your doubleton. This tells partner that South's king will not drop under the ace and thus that it may be wise to try to put you in to continue the suit. With three cards, you would play your lowest card and partner would defend with that knowledge.

Are you sitting there thinking that you cannot handle using the same card to mean two different things (in the case of a high card, sometimes to encourage, sometimes for an even number)? I don't believe you. I think I can prove it.

Do you drive a car? I thought so. Do you use a flashing light to tell other road users when you plan to turn right or left? I thought you would say 'yes' again. Do you use the same flashing light when you change lane, pull out from or into the curb, overtake another car, or go round an obstacle? I hope so. If not, you are probably breaking the driving laws of wherever you live. If you and other road users can accept that a signal can convey multiple meanings, surely you and your partner can do so at the bridge table. You no longer have your life and the cost of your insurance at stake – probably just some small change or a few masterpoints.

You need to ask yourself one simple question to determine whether you should be giving an attitude signal or a count signal. It is this: 'If I don't give any signal at all, would my partner know whether I wanted the suit again?' If the answer is no, give an attitude signal. If the answer is yes, give a count signal.

Don't imagine that the layouts I have quoted are marginal. Almost any decent partnership would regard these as calling for a count signal no matter what the bidding. Partner can normally figure out whether you have four cards or two. Telling the three-card holding

apart from the four-card holding is much harder with no signal or with the wrong signal.

In truth, the key question I gave is not quite the whole story. At times dummy's holding means neither a count nor a length signal will help partner. The classic case for this is in a trump contract when dummy has a singleton in the side suit led. In this case, partner will surely want to try some other suit next. Therefore, you give a suit-preference signal just as you do when you give your partner a ruff: you play a high card to ask for the higher of the other two side suits and a low card to ask for the lower of the two. The reason why the positions call for the same treatment is that your partner is not going to continue the current suit. In one case, he simply can't. In the other, he can see it is probably pointless to do so. By the way, if you didn't want a switch, you would try a middle card.

As with count signals, most players give too few suit-preference signals. You should give a suit-preference signal any time your attitude and count in a suit are clear or are clearly not relevant. Suit-preference signals often apply (or at any rate should apply) on the second round of any suit when you have already given your main signal.

	♥ Q J 10 4	
♥ 7 5 2	<div></div>	♥ A 8 6 3
	♥ K 9	

You, as West, follow with the two when South leads the king on the first round to show your odd number. On the second round, you can't reverse the meaning of the two on the first round. What can you do? You have a choice of cards to play. You can play the higher card to ask for a high-ranking suit or the lower card to ask for a low-ranking suit.

	♥ 10 9 4	
♥ A K J 5 2	<div></div>	♥ 8 6 3
	♥ Q 7	

West leads a top heart. You as East play the three on the first round to discourage. Unworried by this, West cashes a second top heart. Again, you have a choice of cards and should express suit preference.

Count and suit-preference signals can also apply with discards.

♣ A 7 5	♣ K Q J 10 4	♣ 8 6 3 2
	<div></div>	
	♣ 9	

Both defenders can see dummy's ♣KQJ104. There's not much point in telling partner whether to shift to clubs. Almost certainly, declarer plans to play on clubs anyway. However, partner might very much want to know how many clubs you hold because this will affect his decision of whether to take the ace on the first round. If as East you discard a club, you discard a high one to show an even number. A low one would show an odd number.

How can a suit-preference signal apply with a discard? The classic position occurs when partner already knows your exact holding in the suit because declarer has run out. In this case expressing either attitude or length makes little sense. Instead, any discard in the suit must be a suit-preference signal.

♥ K 10 7 5 2	♥ J 9 4	♥ A Q 8 6 3
	<div></div>	
	♥ —	

After West leads the five and South ruffs East's ace, both defenders can use their hearts for suit-preference discards. The two from West or the three from East asks for the lower suit. The ten from West or the eight from East asks for the higher. The seven and six are neutral.

In a few pages, I cannot hope to do justice to the diverse subject of defensive signals. If you want to know more, I suggest you get hold of a copy of *Easy Guide to Defensive Signals at Bridge*. Normally I hesitate to recommend one of my own books. In this case, I make an exception. For one thing, I can't think of any classic works on the subject. For another, a famous author and book reviewer has said that he regards it as the best textbook that I have ever written.

# Failing To Count

When you started playing bridge, you probably learnt to count two things: losers when playing a suit contract and winners when playing a notrump contract. Perhaps you thought this was a lot of counting. In fact, if you want to achieve your potential as a bridge player, this is just the tip of the iceberg. For a start, you often need to count winners *and* losers.

In a suit contract, you can sometimes get round having too many losers by scoring enough tricks for your contract first. In a notrump contract, you normally need to count how many tricks the defenders could take if they gain the lead. Suppose you have ♣KQJ in dummy opposite three low clubs in hand. Clearly, this suit will give you two winners once the ace has gone. You may well want to play on the suit. Counting may warn when you should not. Suppose you count the defenders for enough tricks to defeat the contract as soon as they gain the lead. Then you might try your luck elsewhere. This will certainly apply at teams or rubber if other suits offer the potential for enough tricks for the contract.

You have the message now about counting tricks. You count your side's tricks. You count the opposing tricks. The total comes to thirteen. You can count up to thirteen, can't you?

What else do you need to count? Count shape. You have surely learnt to count trumps. In a suit contract, you often want to draw the opposing trumps. One way to make sure of drawing them is to keep



leading trumps until both defenders show out. Of course, this is not efficient. Often you don't have trumps to spare. You usually want to play just enough rounds to draw them. What's the easiest way of doing this? Most people look at the combined holding and consider the possible breaks. Suppose you have AKJxx facing Qxx. On the common 3-2 break, three rounds will suffice to draw trumps. On the less common 4-1 break, you need to play four rounds. On the rare 5-0 break, you won't want to draw them all. You will want to leave the ten out as a winner.


How do you know whether the break is 3-2, 4-1 or 5-0? It's simple. If all follow to two rounds, it must be 3-2. If someone shows out on the second round, it's 4-1. If someone shows out on the very first round, it's 5-0. You just need to watch whether the defenders follow suit. You will find this much easier than counting every trump that has gone. What a pity that Mrs. Guggenheim missed the lesson on how to count!

If you can count trumps, you can count the side suits. Let's say you have a suit of AKxxx facing a losing doubleton. The most likely splits are 4-2 and 3-3. If you play the ace, king and a third round and nobody shows out, you know the split is 3-3. If all follow to two rounds but someone shows out on the third, you know the suit is 4-2. In this case, the suit is not yet good and you will need two more entries — one to set up the long card and one to cash it. Aha! That's one more thing to count — entries. Luckily, you don't need to use high numbers to count entries. Two, three or maybe four are as high as you normally need to go.

Can you see another reason for counting shape? Suppose you have a club suit of AJx in hand facing K10x in dummy. If you know that the hand on the left has six clubs, you can cash the ace and finesse the ten with certainty. How do you get to know, without playing clubs, that LHO holds six cards in the suit? You need to count the other three suits. If LHO turns up with a doubleton heart, a doubleton spade and three cards in diamonds (or any number of cards adding up to seven), you will know he has six clubs. You know he started with thirteen cards. If seven of these are not in clubs, six are in clubs. In practice, you rarely get to know of a 6-1 break. Can counting still help? Yes, of course it can. If you find out that RHO holds more non-clubs than LHO, LHO is still, other things being equal, more likely to hold the queen.

Let's look at some real life examples of declarer's failure to count:

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



♠ Q J 7 2
♥ 10 8 6
♦ J 5 4
♣ J 9 4

West	North	East	South
		1♥	pass
pass	dbl	2♣	pass
2♥	pass	pass	2♠
all pass			

Can you see where declarer slipped? What's 4 plus 3? You know the answer – 7. When was the last time you failed to respond to your partner's opening bid when holding 7 points? Whatever system you play, I bet it was a long time ago. West couldn't hold the  $\heartsuit K$  as well as the  $\heartsuit A$ . Declarer should have put up dummy's  $\heartsuit A$  and made the contract.



West	North	East	South
			2NT
pass	4NT	pass	6NT
all pass			

Let's say they correctly won the opening lead in hand and led a low diamond. When the queen popped up, they could win with the king, cash the jack and take the marked finesse on the third round.

Quite a few declarers smiled too soon after picking the diamonds. They thought to themselves, 'Since West is short in diamonds, East may be short in clubs.' They crossed to dummy with a heart and led a club to the king. In the end, they had to concede a club to East.

Where did they go wrong? Before cashing the ♦A, they should have played the ♥A followed by a heart to the queen. When East showed out, they would get a count on the hearts. It would then be clear to come back with the ♦A to lead a low club.

So far, we have talked solely about declarer play. Counting is surely just as important when you defend. In the classic *Killing Defense at Bridge*, Kelsey says, 'It is impossible to produce consistently tight defense unless both defenders make a conscious effort to count the

hand.’ He even suggests that readers who find counting a boring subject should trot back to their bookseller and request a refund.

As a defender, you can’t see all of your side’s assets. You need to build up a mental picture of them. You can’t expect to do that without counting. Since declarer has always made at least one bid, counting points tends to prove useful more often when you defend than when you play the hand. As soon as dummy comes down, you add together your points, those in dummy and those shown by declarer. Often he will have limited his hand in some way. Even if he hasn’t, you often need to assume he has a minimum or near minimum to give yourself any chance of defeating the contract.

The bidding also helps you in counting declarer’s shape. The bids he has made, as well as any suits he has failed to bid or failed to raise, all give vital clues. The longer the auction, the more you will normally know. Suppose the opponents bid 1♥-1♠-2♣-2♥-2NT-3NT. You know an awful lot about declarer’s hand. If you place him with a 1=5=3=4 shape and about 17 points, you can’t be far wrong. He can hardly hold six hearts or he would have elected to play in hearts. He can’t have many spades because he has bid two suits and shown a stopper in the third. He can’t hold much less than 17 points or he would have passed 2♥. He can’t hold much more or he would have rebid 2NT or 3♣ over 1♠.

In any contract, once you have built up a picture of declarer’s strength and shape, you start counting his tricks. You can see which finesses are working for him and which suits are breaking. You can also see what dummy might contribute. You take all this into account when counting his tricks. If your count reveals that declarer has the tricks he needs, you must do something about it. You need to cash or set up winners quickly; maybe you can ruff one of his winners. Conversely, if your count reveals that declarer is short of tricks, you defend passively. You avoid opening up new suits and wait for him to run out of steam.

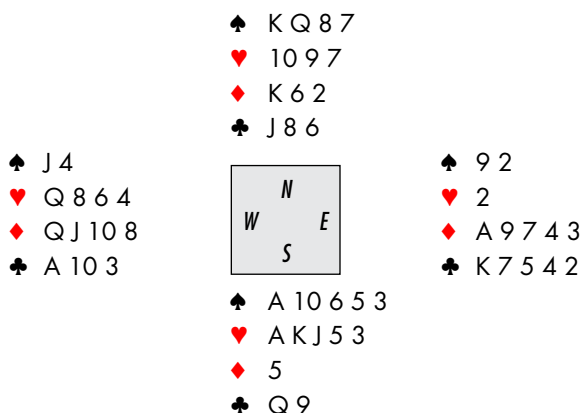
	♠ J 8 4	
	♥ 10 7	
	♦ A 7 3	
	♣ K Q 10 7 2	
♠ A 6		♠ K Q 7 5 3
♥ A 9 6		♥ 8 5 3 2
♦ Q 8 6 4		♦ 10 9 5
♣ 6 5 4 3		♣ 9
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>W</span><span>E</span> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	
	♠ 10 9 2	
	♥ K Q J 4	
	♦ K J 2	
	♣ A J 8	

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT (15-17)

West leads the ♦4 to the nine and jack. At Trick 2, declarer leads the ♥4.

The average West plays low. After the ten wins, declarer rattles off five club tricks and two diamonds to go with the two tricks already won. You didn't make the same mistake, did you?

You would have counted declarer's tricks, wouldn't you? If he holds the ♣A, he has five club tricks. You know the diamond position from partner's play to Trick 1. This gives declarer three diamond tricks. If he makes eight tricks in the minors, you must stop him from winning any in the majors. You will need partner to hold the ♠K and ♠Q. Moreover, you need to stop the ♥10 from scoring. Alarm bells should ring when declarer tackles hearts from hand. He wouldn't do that with a tenace. Counting confirms the position. There are 20 points between your hand and dummy. Since South has promised at least 15, partner can hold only 5. Since there seems no hope unless East holds the ♠KQ, he can't have anything else. This tells you to grab the ♥A and switch to the ♠A.



West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♠	pass	3♥
pass	4♠	all pass	

West leads the ♦Q and continues the suit. Declarer ruffs the second round and draws trumps with the ace and king, all following. He then leads the ♥10 to the two, three and queen.

The average West continues with the third round of diamonds. He can see this is safe and wouldn't want to risk opening the club suit. You can see from the diagram why this costs. Declarer discards two clubs from dummy on the hearts and proceeds to ruff a club.

West was guilty of failing to count. Since East would play high-low in hearts if holding a doubleton, West should read the ♥2 as a singleton. This gives declarer a five-card heart suit. He can hardly have only three hearts given the bidding. Even if he did, West could recover. East would play a low club under the ace, denoting a lack of interest in clubs, and West reverts to diamonds. On the actual layout, East plays the seven to encourage clubs and West knows to continue the suit. How does West know that it is safe to cash the ♣A? South can't hold ♣Kxx; that would give him twelve or fourteen cards. (South is known to have exactly six cards in the pointed suits, and five hearts or just possibly three. Therefore he cannot hold three clubs.)

West	North	East	South
			1♥
dbl	2NT	pass	4♥
all pass			

West leads the ♦K, on which go the six, two and nine, and continues with the jack. Declarer wins the second diamond in dummy and runs the ♥J to West's queen.

Can you improve on this? Declarer holds at most six hearts and three diamonds. This leaves him with four black cards. This makes it quite safe for West to exit with a low club. Either South has two clubs, in which case the ♣A makes later, or he has three spades, in which case the ♠Q takes the setting trick. A count of points half suggests declarer's void in clubs. If the ♥J play was a finesse, East must hold the king. This leaves South with 11 HCP. He needs good shape to have bid 4♥ with a minimum – North did only invite game.



West	North	East	South
			1♦
pass	1♠	pass	2NT (18-19)
pass	3NT	all pass	

At both tables in a team match, the bidding and the play to the first two tricks was the same. West led the ♥J, which ran to the queen. Declarer ran the ♠Q and East won, West having played the two. Then the play diverged. The first East returned a heart. The second East played the ♦3. At both tables 3NT made.

The first East should have counted declarer's tricks and points. Even if West had ♥AJ10xx and an ace – unlikely in view of his failure to bid 1♥ over 1♦ and because this leaves South with only 17 points – declarer was likely to have at least nine tricks. These are three spades, two hearts and four clubs if West holds the ♦A or, if his ace is in clubs, three spades, two hearts and five diamonds.

The second East did better but failed to count the defensive tricks. To get up to five in all, the defenders surely need four from diamonds. This indicates switching to the  $\spadesuit 9$ . If this holds, East can continue with the jack to repeat the finesse against South's king. This caters for a holding of either  $\spadesuit AK10x$  or  $\spadesuit AQ10x$  with West.

	♠ J 10 8 5 2	
	♥ A Q	
	♦ A Q 10	
	♣ J 9 2	
♠ A 7	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> <span>N</span><span>E</span> </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> <span>W</span><span>S</span> </div> </div>	♠ K Q 6
♥ J 8 5		♥ 4
♦ J 9 8 6 5 3		♦ 7 4
♣ 10 5		♣ A Q 8 7 6 4 3
	♠ 9 4 3	
	♥ K 10 9 7 6 3 2	
	♦ K 2	
	♣ K	

West	North	East	South
		1♣	3♥
all pass			

West leads the ♣10 and the king falls under the ace. Since declarer can't know of the uneven split in clubs, East can read the ♣K as a true card. In this case, with any diamond finesse working for declarer, the defenders can make no more tricks in the minors. This means they need four tricks in the majors. This dictates assuming South has three losing spades. In addition, West will need to score a trump trick either by force or via a trump promotion. This simple count of the defensive tricks tells East what to do: return the ♠6.

West wins with the ace and continues with spades. East scores the king and queen while West discards a club. A second round of clubs then promotes the ♥J. If declarer ruffs with the ten, West over-ruffs. If declarer prefers to ruff with the king, the jack makes later.

A defender who failed to count might well not beat any of these contracts. Each one involved a winning play that differed from the norm. You might work them out in a book because you know to look for a catch. At the table, you stand little chance of finding them by accident. At the table is where you must get it right.

On my final example, you must find some discards.

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

W

N

E

S

♠ A 8 7 3
♥ A K 8 7
♦ K 4 2
♣ A K

West	North	East	South
			2NT
pass	4♣ <sup>1</sup>	pass	4NT
pass	5♣ <sup>1</sup>	pass	5NT
pass	7NT	all pass	

1. Gerber.

West leads the ♦J, which the king wins. Declarer runs six rounds of spades. What should the defenders discard?

South has shown three aces and three kings. This seems to give him thirteen tricks: six spades, two hearts, two diamonds and three clubs. When declarer fails to claim, both East and West need to recount. They must infer that the ♣AK are doubleton. This tells East that he can safely discard three clubs. Indeed, he must throw nothing but clubs. If he throws a heart, West will find himself squeezed. If he throws the ♦Q, the nine scores on a finesse.

What should West discard? This is trickier. He can start with three clubs, two diamonds and a heart. He must then discard on the second round of clubs. If South is 4=5=2=2, he needs to save hearts. On the actual layout, he needs to keep diamonds. How does he decide? He must trust East not to have kept two losing hearts and so abandon hearts. In any event South would be a bit too good for 2NT if 4=5=2=2.

# Playing Under a Handicap

Up until this chapter, this book has covered how to play bridge. Now we tackle the oft-neglected subjects of when, where and with whom to play.

On the matter of timing, let's start with some purely personal issues. Do you play your best bridge after a long tiring day at the office? If not, might you arrange to play bridge on days with a lighter workload? If you have enough influence, you can try to arrange your most testing tasks on the days you are not due to play. More likely, you have to do it the other way round, arranging bridge around work. Some like to play on a Monday when they still feel fresh after the weekend. Others prefer to play on a Friday, knowing they don't have to get up for work the next day. It's a question of whether you rate bridge or work more highly! If you are retired, you could play in the afternoon rather than the evening. In the afternoon, you can expect to find a lower standard (which may not be a snag, of course, if you want to win!) and most of the people playing will come from the same age group.

For the top events, you tend to need to play on the weekend. Now you need to consider not the balance between work and bridge but between home and bridge. Even if you have few family duties, you might want to do something else at weekends. If you feel fed up with playing on a floodlit driving range, you might well want to go out onto a real golf course at the weekend. Whenever you play, the key thing is that you feel at ease with yourself. If you fear that you are going to be in trouble with your boss or your spouse or that you are cursing all that lovely sunshine outside, you are unlikely to play at your best. I know some people who give up bridge in the summer to pursue sporting and other outdoor pastimes. After all bridge is only a

game. Nobody should force you to play if you would rather be some place else.

This brings us to the related issue of how often to play. If you play too little, it is difficult to stay sharp. Some people play almost every night of the week. This wouldn't work for me even if I had the time.

I like to have sufficient gap between games that I feel hungry for the next one. Two or three times a month suits me just fine at the moment. There is no right or wrong answer. It depends upon how many other interests you have and how badly the bridge bug has infected you.

Talking about hunger, I for one do not play at my best if I am feeling ravenous. Then again, a large heavy meal can send one to sleep. It's a matter of striking a sensible balance. A light meal shortly before the start of play works well for many. If you need to eat more, allow a little time for it to go down before you start playing, just as you would before swimming. I also advise a modest intake of non-alcoholic liquids. Both hunger and a lack of body fluids can lead to headaches. A headache is one thing you can well do without at the bridge table. As to whether you should consume alcohol, it depends upon your ambitions at the game. If those around you are drinking just as much, you can join in without feeling under a handicap. Some people find that a small amount lightens their nerves and helps them play better. No famous bridge players in this category spring to mind but a certain snooker player from Canada does. For most people, abstinence or at any rate temperance is the best policy. Quite a few studies have shown that alcohol consumption slows down the brain's reactions. The best time for a strong drink (so long as you don't have to drive home) is when the other players are applauding you on your win at the end of the session.

Allied to the question of when to play is where to play. If you have three friends with whom you get on both at the bridge table and away from it, you can play wherever you can get together — in a meeting room at lunchtime, on the train on the way home, at one of your homes or in a bar somewhere. Of course, if you take a serious interest in bridge, you need to find a club. If you live in a large city, you can probably find a different club for every night of the week. Often the largest clubs are in the suburbs, where more people live. Sometimes you need to accept a compromise between the most pleasant ambience and the standard that suits your game. If you are an average or

near average player, you should find a club to your liking. Clubs that fail to cater to this kind of player don't tend to last very long.

If you are a serious player, you may find club play too little of a challenge. In this case, you need to try tournaments. These normally take place at weekends. If you don't mind how far you travel and feel so inclined, you can attend a tournament every week. Of course, the more you play and the further away from home you go the greater the time and expense involved. You need to check your diary and bank balance to make sure you are not playing too much. Bridge may be a great game but it's not worth running up debts for or losing your family or job over.

If time and/or money are major constraints, you can think about playing online. I've never tried it myself but a number of my friends have. Since I work at home tapping away at a computer, face to face bridge suits me far better. If, however, you work in a busy office that meets all your need for social contact, online bridge may suit you very well. You don't have to put aside three hours to play. If you only have one hour, that's just fine. If your journey to and from work gives you more time on the road than you want, why not play in the comfort of your own home?

Now comes the most vexing of my three questions. With whom should you play? Sometimes your status dictates the answer. If the only way you can play bridge is with your spouse or with someone who can provide you with transport, you can skip this section. More likely, you have some sort of choice. Most bridge players have at least one regular partner. Some people have one partner for one club and another partner for a different club or one for during the week and another for weekends. That way you should be able to play as much or as little as you like.

Most successful partnerships involve players of similar strength. You may play on occasion with someone up and coming, or with someone stronger in order to improve your own game. Most of the time you will play with someone at your level, at any rate you will if you both want to win. You won't want a partner who drags you down in anything important and you can't expect a much better player to sit opposite you on a regular basis. Where you both live is also a factor. Unless you play online, you can't play much with someone who lives hundreds of miles away.

As important as how well you play is how well you get on with one another. It helps a lot if you like your partner! What can I say about this?

Many people like to play with someone of a similar age or social background. Many lasting friendships and quite a few romances have begun at the bridge table. If you want to improve, you will want to discuss the session afterwards with your partner. This tends to prove more constructive if you get on well. Unless a huge point arises (for example you have forgotten to talk about whether you are using fourth highest leads or third and fifth), you should defer any discussion until the end of the session. You don't want to waste mental effort on what has been and gone, or risk falling out with your partner in the middle of a session.

What do you do if you and your partner want to play a different system or at any rate different conventions? If you are the younger or better player, you should give way and try to play what your partner wants. It should be easier for you to make adjustments and remember what you have agreed. If you are of similar age and ability, common sense applies. It ought to be a bit of give and take. You agree to play suit-preference discards if partner agrees to play all jump overcalls as weak — something like that. Instead, if one of you is a stickler for system, you could bring another factor into the equation. For instance, you might offer to give way on the system issues if your partner agrees to play at your choice of venue or on the night that suits you best. If you and your partner are part of a group who often all play with each other, it makes sense to play the same thing with each member of the group.

How often you play with any given partner, and the time you can commit, should affect your choice of system. In my student days, I had plenty of time to play bridge and played a strong club system with many relays. The system notes ran to forty pages of computer printout. In recent years, I have rarely played anything that takes more than four or five pages of system notes. For you, even four or five pages may sound a lot. Some people get by with little time spent on system discussion. I have covered the key areas on which to have an agreement in Chapter 4. Online bridge has made casual partnerships quite common again. Many such partnerships use a system known as Standard American Yellow Card (SAYC for short). To find details of this, type 'SAYC' into the search bar of your Internet search engine.

PART 2

# An Evening at The Club



By custom Mr. Smug, the club Chairman, occupies the South seat with the other players rotating around him. The club uses the oldest method for setting who is vulnerable, namely that the dealing side is vulnerable on the second and third deals of each four-deal 'rubber' and that both sides are on the fourth. In theory, any partscore made on the first, second or third deals can count towards a game later in the 'rubber'. In practice, the 'Famous Four' rarely stop short of game and, when they do, they fail to make the contract. The effect is as if duplicate scoring applies.

Mr. Smug, who (like the others) you may have met before in S.J. Simon's *Why You Lose at Bridge* and *Cut for Partners*, believes in bidding the full value of his hand (and some of his partner's!) and likes to be declarer. Counting, planning and giving his partner signals are things in which he rarely indulges. He survives pretty well on many deals, though of course his *laissez faire* attitude means he comes to grief at times.

Mrs. Guggenheim tries very hard to be good at the game, attending regular lessons and always carrying a [Pocket Guide to Bridge](#) around with her. So long as the auction is straightforward, she bids quite well. She panics if something unusual happens. She also shakes like a rabbit every time she becomes declarer and happily lets her partner take control. Unlike the other three players, she is modest about her abilities.

The Unlucky Expert is in theory an outstanding player. He has good bidding judgment and knows all the correct techniques of play and defense. He falls down by failing to allow for the shortcomings of the other players. He assumes that everyone bids and plays as he does, often making logical but disastrous decisions.

Futile Willie is a bit of mixture of the others. His confidence exceeds Mrs. Guggenheim's but is below that of Mr. Smug. He bids in a scientific style; the standard of his card play varies, at times up to the Unlucky Expert's, at times worse than that of Mrs. Guggenheim.

Neither vulnerable

♠ 10 9 8 4 2  
 ♥ 8 7 3 2  
 ♦ 8  
 ♣ K 8 7

♠ AK3  
 ♥ AQ  
 ♦ 976  
 ♣ J10654

♠ J65  
 ♥ J10954  
 ♦ QJ103  
 ♣ A

♠ Q7  
 ♥ K6  
 ♦ AK542  
 ♣ Q932

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
			1NT <sup>1</sup>
pass	3♣ <sup>2</sup>	pass	4♣ <sup>3</sup>
pass	4NT <sup>4</sup>	pass	5♦ <sup>5</sup>
pass	6♣ <sup>6</sup>	all pass	

1. An overbid: although the five-card suit may indeed be worth a point, he has no tens and the doubleton ♠Q is a minus. Such trifles don't concern Mr. Smug. He judges — correctly — that the best chance of game is 3NT, so wants to start with 1NT. The fact that at the club it shows 15-17 points he regards as a minor matter.
2. This is typical Futile Willie. He sees a possible 31 points between the hands. This gets him thinking of a slam. He overlooks the poor quality of his clubs and that his heart holding is not pulling full weight.

If he had ♠AKx and ♣AQ10x, his hand would warrant a slam try. With his actual hand, he needs perfect cards from his partner. World champion Bob Hamman says to his partners, 'Don't play me for perfect cards. I won't have them.' Futile Willie isn't listening.
3. Though it takes the bidding past 3NT, Smug feels obliged to raise clubs with four-card support.
4. What does Futile Willie intend this to mean? Logic says it can't be a sign-off. How could he want to sign off when his partner has just done something highly positive, like raising his suit?

5. Mr. Smug ponders the same question and finally admits to possession of an ace.
6. Futile Willie, noticing that the bidding has gone past 5♣, decides to shoot a slam. He considers bidding 6NT to protect a possible diamond tenace in Smug's hand. He then remembers that, with at most 31 high-card points between the two hands, the values for a slam will only be present if he can find a ruffing value in dummy.

## The Play

The Unlucky Expert leads the ♦Q. Futile Willie wins in dummy and displays surprising coolness given the hopelessness of the contract. Perhaps he knows he is largely to blame. He leads the ♣Q off dummy.

Mrs. Guggenheim pulls out a card. She puts it back. In the olden days, she covered without thinking. Now she knows it can be wrong to cover, she is of two minds. She pulls out the ♣K again. As she thinks her pause has given the position away, she might as well cover.

The Unlucky Expert looks even more stony-faced than usual as he overtakes with the ace. Being an expert, however, he doesn't allow this setback to throw him off stride. His side needs another trick to defeat the slam. His thoughts focus on this.

On the bidding, Futile Willie surely holds the two top spades and the ♥A together with his presumed ♣J10xxxx. The Unlucky Expert reads Futile Willie for just six clubs from Mrs. Guggenheim's pause but tries to put this out of mind. Anyway, he must hope Futile Willie started with three losing diamonds. Moreover, if Mrs. Guggenheim ruffs dummy's ace, this will be a second undertrick. He pauses to judge whether it would be ethical to lead a diamond. Seeing nothing else to play for, he decides it is.

*Result: Two down, 100 to East-West*

## Post Mortem

Smug and Willie have quite a wrangle trying to pin the blame for this disaster on each other. Smug fires the opening salvo.

'You don't have anything like enough to bid 3♣. All you had was a flat 14-count and a jack-high suit.'

'At least I can count,' retorts Willie. 'You had 14 points yourself.'

Smug changes tack. 'Why didn't you bid 5♠ when you found out there was an ace missing? Then I bid 5NT.'

The Unlucky Expert intervenes, 'I'm afraid you don't make that. You make two diamonds, two hearts, three spades and three clubs.'

## Chucks

East-West should have beaten six clubs by another trick: 50.

It's harder to assess for North-South. The opening bid should have been a winner because Mrs. Guggenheim would lead a spade against 3NT, after which ten tricks are easy. After the normal 1♦ opening, Futile Willie bids 2♣, Smug raises to 3♣ and Futile Willie bids 3NT. On a heart lead from the Unlucky Expert, declarer lacks the time to set up the clubs (unless the defenders crash their ace-king!) and must play on diamonds. As the cards lie, it takes the careful play of leading the ♦9 to cater for a singleton eight to make nine tricks. I suppose we should judge against the par result of 400, making the North-South chuck 500.

Dealer West  
East-West vulnerable

♠ 8 5 3 2  
 ♥ Q 9 6 2  
 ♦ Q 6  
 ♣ 9 6 2

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

♠ K J 10  
 ♥ K J 10 5  
 ♦ A 9 7  
 ♣ J 8 5

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

N  
 W E  
 S

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
pass	pass	1♣ <sup>1</sup>	dbl
pass	pass <sup>2</sup>	redbl <sup>3</sup>	pass
pass <sup>4</sup>	pass <sup>5</sup>		

1. You already know my views on playing that a one-of-a-major opening bid absolutely guarantees a five-card suit. The case for opening a four-card major on a hand like this is very strong. Facing a passed partner, you dismiss hope of game and can afford to pass any normal response that partner might make. If it is not your hand and LHO becomes declarer, you would much prefer partner to lead a heart than a club. Oh well, the Unlucky Expert feels constrained by system to open his three-card club suit.
2. Futile Willie has no doubts about leaving in the double. He has good trumps and enough strength to give his side the balance of power.
3. I agree with the Unlucky Expert about the wisdom of running from 1♣ doubled. When RHO leaves in a takeout double, he often holds very good trumps. When you have opened a short suit, you nearly always have a better spot somewhere. Usual practice if the opponents have doubled for penalty and your hand is suitable for playing in more than one other contract is to use an SOS redouble. At a low level, you would very rarely want to redouble for business because one of the opponents would surely have a safe escape suit. While his redouble is the correct technical call, because his hand is playable in any suit, it is madness

playing with Mrs. Guggenheim. How can one expect her to understand the subtle difference between the sequence 1♣-pass-pass-dbl-redbl (when the redouble shows strength rather than a desire for rescue) and the actual sequence? The sensible thing, playing with her, is to bid your four-card heart suit.

4. As you or I would have expected, Mrs. Guggenheim doesn't think that her partner has invited her to bid.
5. If this makes, it will be Mr. Smug's fault. In any case, 1♣ redoubled is not enough for game. There is more to gain than to lose.

## **The Play**

For once Mr. Smug and Futile Willie defend perfectly.

Mr. Smug has perhaps read that a trump lead often works well after this auction. In any case, he hardly fancies a lead from his tenaces in spades and diamonds or his ♥A. Futile Willie draws three rounds of trumps and Mr. Smug discards a low heart on the third round. Futile Willie correctly switches to a spade. Mr. Smug makes his ace and queen and continues with a low spade. Futile Willie ruffs this, which also sets up Mr. Smug's nine. Recalling that Mr. Smug threw a low heart, Futile Willie switches now to a diamond. With a resigned air, the Unlucky Expert plays low from hand. Mr. Smug wins with the king and cashes the ♠9, on which Futile Willie sheds a heart.

Knowing that Futile Willie's last trump is a winner in any event, Mr. Smug does not look to give him a heart ruff. Instead, he reverts to diamonds. Dummy's queen wins and the Unlucky Expert tries a heart. Mr. Smug wins with the ace and perseveres with diamonds. This sets up a long diamond. The Unlucky Expert makes a measly two tricks: the ♦A and ♦Q.

*Result: Five down redoubled for 2900 to North-South (with 100 honors)*

## **Post Mortem**

Some events are too grim for words. Mr. Smug cackles but Futile Willie is much too courteous to rub further salt in the wounds.

## **Chucks**

In theory, North-South can double 1♥ and collect 500. In practice, with only five hearts between them, they will never manage to achieve this. Most likely they play in a partscore and, with the cards

## RUBBER 1 DEAL 3

Dealer North

### North-South vulnerable

♠ A 10 7 5 3  
♥ J  
♦ K 8 7 5 4  
♣ K 5

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

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

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

Diagram illustrating a bridge hand layout. The cards are distributed among four players (North, South, East, West) and a central dummy box. The dummy box contains the cards: ♠ 4, ♥ Q 9 8 7 6 3, ♦ Q 10 6, and ♣ J 9 8. The other cards are held by the four players.

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
	1♠	pass	2♣
3♣ <sup>1</sup>	3♠ <sup>2</sup>	pass	4♣ <sup>3</sup>
5♣ <sup>4</sup>	dbl <sup>5</sup>	all pass	

1. Mrs. Guggenheim holds a good hand — by far the best hand at the table — but she can hardly bid more than 3♣.
2. The five-card suits give good playing strength and the ♣K appears to be in the right place. Competing up to the three-level seems right.
3. Mr. Smug cannot resist having a pot at game. He never can. Futile Willie's 3♠ bid was no game try. He could have bid 3♦ or 3♥ to invite game. Mr. Smug has more than he might for a single raise but not so much more as to override his partner's opinion about game prospects.
4. Mrs. Guggenheim should probably double. She has four useful trumps and three aces on the side. However, didn't the Unlucky Expert tell her just a couple of rubbers back that a seven-card suit is always worth bidding twice?
5. The temptation to double Mrs. Guggenheim is always high. Here Futile Willie sees the added reason that he doesn't want Mr. Smug to bid 5♣.

## The Play

Futile Willie leads his fourth highest diamond, the five.

‘Thank you partner,’ says Mrs. Guggenheim, trying to summon up a smile. The three trumps look useful but she is sorry to see her partner is not void in spades. She plays low from dummy, Smug plays the nine and she wins with her bare ace.

Mrs. Guggenheim correctly decides to set about trying to ruff some spades in dummy. She leads the nine. Futile Willie plays low and Mr. Smug wins with the jack.

Mr. Smug starts to think. What can he be thinking? The position seems to scream for a trump switch. Ah yes, the reason for the pause is that Mr. Smug is trying to work out whether Futile Willie could hold a void in hearts. He can see eleven hearts between his hand and dummy. In the end, he decides against the heart switch and returns his partner’s initial diamond lead. What has happened to his trump?

Mrs. Guggenheim ruffs and, in a rare attentive moment, she notices that Futile Willie has followed with the four. He has played high-low in diamonds. Perhaps he started with a doubleton. She had better bear that in mind. She ruffs a spade in dummy and returns to hand with the ♥A. Dozing as dummy on the previous deal has worked wonders for Mrs. Guggenheim’s alertness. She notices that Futile Willie drops the jack. She wonders whether he could be short in hearts as well as diamonds. No, he can’t be short everywhere. Perhaps the jack has come from KJ10x. It doesn’t occur to her that Futile Willie has played a true card in hearts and fourth followed by fifth highest in diamonds.

Mrs. Guggenheim ruffs a second spade in dummy and the ace does not appear. She needs to return to hand to once more to take the final spade ruff. Mrs. Guggenheim is still more worried about an overruff in diamonds than in hearts. So, she leads a heart. She would still make the contract if she ruffed with the ace. No, she tries to get by with the six. Futile Willie overruffs with the king and returns his remaining trump. Mrs. Guggenheim slowly leads out her trumps one by one but Futile Willie isn’t throwing his ♠A away. He knows there’s no point in holding on to the ♦K as declarer has ruffed a diamond.

*Result: One down doubled — 100 to North-South*



## Post Mortem

Futile Willie clears his throat. ‘We were a bit lucky there, weren’t we partner?’

Mr. Smug can’t quite bring himself to reply but gently nods.

## Chucks

Mrs. Guggenheim could have made the contract easily by leading the ♠K on the first round. Futile Willie, who had opened the bidding and doubled, was very likely to hold the ace. He could not attack trumps from his side of the table without losing the king. So, the chuck is 650: 550 for 5♣ doubled made plus the 100 lost for one down.

I would like to charge 650 to North-South as well because Mr. Smug’s failure to return a trump would let the contract through against most declarers. However, in keeping with how Simon estimated chucks, I shall compare what should have happened with what did happen rather with what might have happened. How long can Mr. Smug’s luck hold?

### RUBBER 1 DEAL 4

Dealer East

Both vulnerable

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

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
pass	1♥	pass	pass
pass <sup>2</sup>	3♦ <sup>3</sup>	pass <sup>1</sup>	2♥
pass	4♥ <sup>5</sup>	pass	3♥ <sup>4</sup>
		all pass	

1. The Unlucky Expert sets high standards for a vulnerable two-level overcall. The lack of a sixth club is a major flaw.
2. You or I would double for takeout. Players lose many points by going quietly on partscore deals when the other side has a fit. If they have an eight-card fit, your side will have a fit unless it has seven cards in each of the other suits. If they possess a nine-card fit, your side must have an eight-card fit or better. You risk little in coming in since opponents will rarely double you at a low level when they know they have a fit.
3. Futile Willie plays a gadget and uses it. The usual term for his 3♦ is a help-suit game try. It invites game in the agreed major, asking partner to look in particular at his holding in the trial suit. Futile Willie, a confirmed scientist, never takes shortcuts in the bidding.
4. Mr. Smug looks for an excuse to accept but can't find one. He has four trumps when he might have only three but otherwise his hand looks like a minimum. It contains ten losers on the losing trick count.
5. This is typical Futile Willie. He makes a game try, partner signs off and he bids game anyway! In truth, it is close whether his hand warrants a game bid after the single raise. It depends on the worth of his ♦Q. With ♠Axx and ♦KQx, he would have a five-loser hand with no obvious flaws. This would warrant a direct game bid. On his actual hand, many experts would have bid 4♥ over 2♥. The hand is worth 18 points (the singleton counts as 3 with the known nine-card fit) and the bonus for a vulnerable game is attractive. One thing, though, I can say for sure. If you bid game, you bid it on the previous round.

Futile Willie's sequence involves three risks:

- (i) In theory, you are showing a slam try — why else not bid game directly? This just might cause partner to carry you overboard.
- (ii) If partner signs off slowly over 3♦, you will face an ethical problem and may feel debarred from bidding on.
- (iii) The more you reveal about your hand and your partner's the higher the chance that the opponents will defend to optimal effect.

## The Play

A spade lead would kill the contract but the Unlucky Expert has an obvious club lead. Futile Willie wins the ♠K with the ace and plays a trump. Mrs. Guggenheim goes in with the ace (a nice easy play!) and switches to the ♠10. She must have just attended a lesson on sur-rounding plays! Having won this, Futile Willie crosses to the ♥10 to draw the last trump; it now dawns on him that he is in a pickle.

Somehow, Willie needs to discard a spade from one hand or the other. Perhaps Mrs. Guggenheim has five spades and he can persuade her to win the first diamond. If she has fewer spades, perhaps she will revert to clubs. Futile Willie calls for the ♦J. His plan works – well, the first part of it anyway. Mrs. Guggenheim wins with the ace. She still doesn't fancy leading a club to set up dummy's jack and so leads another spade. Futile Willie wins and crosses to dummy with a trump. He then leads the ♦9, intending to run it. Mrs. Guggenheim covers with the ten and his queen forces out the king.

The Unlucky Expert wastes little time on his next move. If declarer has a losing club, it can't run away. Conversely, if Willie has the ♦8, dummy's third spade might well do so. He plays the ♠J, taking the setting trick.

*Result: One down for 100 to East-West*

## Post Mortem

'Good switch, partner,' says the Unlucky Expert.

Mrs. Guggenheim glows under her partner's abnormal praise. 'Yes, we covered that type of switch at the online bridge lesson last week. If you had AJx or KJx, my ten would prevent declarer from running the lead round to dummy.'

The Unlucky Expert smiles, 'I think you mean AJx or KJx with declarer.'

'Oh yes, partner,' Mrs. Guggenheim concedes, 'that as well.'

'Was there any way to make it?' Futile Willie inquires.

'I don't think so. I did try to sign off,' snaps Mr. Smug in reply.

## Chucks

North-South 720 for 4♥ one down (-100) instead of 4♥ made (620).

Can you see how to make the contract?

A simple count of losers reveals four: two in diamonds and one in each major. The only one you might avoid is the spade loser. Since you need to lose the lead twice to set up a diamond, you must play the suit before touching trumps. Although you have a two-way finesse in the suit, you should clearly finesse West for the ♦10. Moreover, since you lack a quick reentry to dummy, you must run the ♦9 on the first round.

Why do I say you should finesse West for the missing ten? The fact that East holds the ♣KQ and so has slightly less room for other cards is just part of the reason. If Mrs. Guggenheim holds the ♦AK, she will surely not duck the nine – indeed many players would find it hard to duck. So you succeed whenever she has the ♦10 or both the ace and king. You might like to consider whether you should tackle the suit some other way if Mrs. Guggenheim sits on your left. In this case, perhaps you ought to ruff a club to start with a low diamond from hand. She will surely go in with the king whenever she has it and possibly with the ace when she has that card.

\* \* \* \*

‘Time for a change of partners,’ announces Mr. Smug. He glances around the room and sees one empty table after another. Where are the rest of the club’s usual players? He looks at Mrs. Guggenheim, then at Futile Willie and back at Mrs. Guggenheim. They get the message. Futile Willie gets up and swaps seats with Mrs. Guggenheim.

Dealer South  
Neither vulnerable

♠ 6 2  
♥ K 10  
♦ K 9 4 2  
♣ K 10 8 6 3

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

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

♠ A J  
♥ Q 9 8 3  
♦ A Q J 6  
♣ A 7 5

Diagram of a square with vertices labeled N (North), S (South), E (East), and W (West).

West	North	East	South
<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
			1♦ <sup>1</sup>
pass	1♠	pass	2NT
pass	3NT <sup>2</sup>	all pass	

1. This is correct whether you are playing four- or five-card majors.
2. Any of the other players would make the correct bid of 4♣. With a good six-card major and a singleton in an unbid suit, you should take a unilateral decision to play in the suit game. Mrs. Guggenheim's fear of playing the dummy badly puts her off this action. She could bid 3♠, of course, offering her partner a choice of games — these days any bid over 2NT creates a game force<sup>†</sup>. However, Mrs. Guggenheim finds that for her, 3♠ is in effect a transfer to 3NT and so doesn't bother.

You see why Mrs. Guggenheim plays fewer hands than she should. Her partners hog the bidding and she colludes in their doing so!

With a five-card suit that nobody has bid and a couple of potential entries, Futile Willie has an easy lead: the ♣6. Mr. Smug, true to form, calls for the queen the minute he sees his partner's clubs. This

‡ Some play 3♣ as a weak bid, a puppet to 3♦: the Wolff sign-off.

wins, the Unlucky Expert playing the nine. Mr. Smug continues with a spade to the ace and returns the jack. Futile Willie follows low and the jack wins the trick, the Unlucky Expert playing the ten. How does Mr. Smug intend to reach all the spades? Has he forgotten that the ♣K is still out?

Mr. Smug rearranges the spades in dummy.

'Your hand,' Mrs. Guggenheim warns him.

'Drat,' Mr. Smug chunters.

At last, it seems the problem has dawned on Mr. Smug. He pauses before proceeding. He then tables the ♦Q. Futile Willie looks hard at this before playing low. Mr. Smug continues with the ♦J. Futile Willie plays low rather more smoothly this time. Mr. Smug cashes the ace next. When the Unlucky Expert shows out Mr. Smug shrugs his shoulders. Mr. Smug perseveres with a fourth round of diamonds. Futile Willie wins perforce. He faces quite a tricky decision. What should he lead next?

	♠	K Q 9 8
	♥	—
	♦	—
	♣	J 4
♠	—	
♥	K 10	
♦	—	
♣	K 10 8 3	

	N	
W		E
	S	

Only one card will do here: the ♥10. Alas, Futile Willie tables the ♣3. It seems he has forgotten the Unlucky Expert's nine on the first trick, which surely suggested a doubleton. The jack wins in dummy and Mr. Smug runs the spades. His ♣A takes the last trick.

*Result 490 to North-South*

## Post Mortem

'Did you want to be in the slam?' Mrs. Guggenheim politely inquires.

Mr. Smug chortles. After a quick glance in Futile Willie's direction, he shakes his head. He knows that even game was tricky.

Mr. Smug lights up his pipe. The 'no smoking' rules that have come to much of the bridge world have yet to filter through to this club!

## Chucks

540 by East-West (50 plus 490)

The Unlucky Expert did his best to make life easy for Futile Willie. If the Unlucky Expert had played the ♠2 at Trick 1, Futile Willie would have been entitled to assume that this was from a three-card holding and that Mr. Smug's ace was now bare. Did you notice the Unlucky Expert's other good play? He dropped the ♠10 on the second round — a suit-preference signal for hearts.

Mr. Smug really deserved to go down. He missed a sitting duck on the first trick. If he wins with the ace, unblocks the spades and returns a club, he ensures nine tricks barring a very unlucky layout. As it went, he could still make the contract without any help from Futile Willie if he overtook the second round of spades. His adjustment of dummy's cards in the suit suggests that he didn't see one of its spades first time around. After all, he didn't expect to find six spades in dummy on this bidding, did he?

### RUBBER 2 DEAL 2

Dealer West

East-West vulnerable

	♠ A 8 7 6 2	
	♥ A 9	
	♦ 10 6 5	
	♣ A Q J	
♠ K J 9 4		♠ 10 5 3
♥ K 3		♥ J 10 8 7 2
♦ K 8		♦ Q 9 2
♣ K 8 6 5 2		♣ 10 7
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>W</span><span>E</span> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	
	♠ Q	
	♥ Q 6 5 4	
	♦ A J 7 4 3	
	♣ 9 4 3	

West	North	East	South
<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
1♣	1NT <sup>1</sup>	pass	2♣ <sup>2</sup>
pass	2♣ <sup>3</sup>	pass	3NT <sup>4</sup>
all pass			

1. Mrs. Guggenheim has been taking in her lessons, hasn't she? Modern thinking is to treat almost any 5-3-3-2 hand as balanced, even with a five-card major. With good clubs and moderate spades, 1NT is fine.
2. Mr. Smug looks for a heart fit. Since opener's suit is clubs, making 2♣ both a cuebid and Stayman, even Mrs. Guggenheim will understand.
3. Well bid again, Mrs. Guggenheim. Some people wrongly jump to 3♠ to show the five-card suit. Such action tends just to help the defenders when, as is common, partner holds other than exactly three spades.
4. With the bare ♠Q of uncertain value, a simple 2NT seems adequate on Mr. Smug's hand, even though the five-card diamond suit is a plus. He has no tens for a start. He should also take into account that Mrs. Guggenheim is unlikely to play the hand well. Still, old habits die hard.

## The Play

The Unlucky Expert has listened to the bidding and noted Futile Willie's failure to double 2♣. If his partner badly wanted a club lead, he would have doubled 2♣. With slightly weaker hearts, the Unlucky Expert would probably lead his fourth best heart rather than the top card. Here, with four cards almost in sequence, he prefers the jack.

'Thank you partner,' says Mrs. Guggenheim.

She counts her top tricks and finds them in rather short supply. She notices that entries to dummy are equally scarce. She puts up dummy's queen. Futile Willie covers with the king.

'I was hoping you wouldn't do that,' remarks Mrs. Guggenheim with a resigned air. She decides to hold up her ace.

Futile Willie ponders over his next move. If his partner has the ♠10, he can set up three spade tricks to cash when he gets in with the ♦K. He tries the ♠K. Mrs. Guggenheim follows with the two and the Unlucky Expert does his best to encourage with the five. Futile Willie trances again. He can't tell for sure who holds the ♠3. He decides to revert to hearts.

Mrs. Guggenheim wins with the ace perforce and leads a low diamond, finessing the jack. After the briefest of trances, Futile Willie plays low! He has it all worked out, you see. If, as seems likely from the bidding, Mrs. Guggenheim holds ♦Qxx, she will make four diamond tricks if he wins. By ducking, he believes he can restrict her to three. After the ace wins the second round, the queen will win the third, thereby blocking the suit. What has Futile Willie missed? If she does hold Qxx, she can simply duck the second round, making his play at



best break even. This helps explain why Futile Willie loses so much. He comes up with chucks that an average player could not imagine.

After the jack wins, Mrs. Guggenheim decides she would like to make the next diamond play from hand but finds the lead tiresomely in dummy. She leads a club to the queen. It wins! She continues her plan, leading a low diamond. When the Unlucky Expert plays the nine, Mrs. Guggenheim ducks in dummy, bringing forth Futile Willie's king. By this masterstroke, she sets up the diamonds, retains an entry to dummy and keeps the Unlucky Expert off play. Well played, Mrs. Guggenheim!

Futile Willie tries a low spade next but to no avail. Mrs. Guggenheim wins, runs the diamonds and repeats the club finesse for nine tricks.

*Result: 3NT made for 400 to North-South*

## Post Mortem

'Did you by any chance have the ten of spades?' asks Futile Willie.

The Unlucky Expert nods gravely.

'In that case we could have beaten it,' observes Futile Willie.

'Not the only way to beat it,' mutters the Unlucky Expert.

## Chucks

550 by East-West (150 for 3NT down three instead of -400)

If Futile Willie takes his ♦K when he should, the contract goes three down. Declarer just makes three clubs and three aces.

Mrs. Guggenheim misplayed the hand but survived doing so. Where did she go wrong? For one thing, she should have played low from dummy at Trick 1 and won with the ace. For another she should have started diamonds with the ten. Then she could have made four diamond tricks no matter how the Unlucky Expert and Futile Willie defended.

If the Unlucky Expert covers, dummy ducks. Then, on the second round, the ace drops Futile Willie's king. If the Unlucky Expert ducks, declarer finesses the jack on the second round. While it is true that you normally start low to the jack with this holding, here the entry position makes it pointless to play East for Kx or Qx — the suit would become blocked. In addition, from the bidding, one can rule out KQx with East.

## RUBBER 2 DEAL 3

Dealer North

North-South vulnerable

	♠ K Q J 9	
	♥ K Q 7	
	♦ 10 3 2	
	♣ 9 8 6	
♠ 8 4		♠ 10 6 3
♥ A 8 5 4 3		♥ J 9 6 2
♦ J 8 5		♦ 7 6
♣ A 5 2		♣ K Q J 10
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           N W                  E S         </div>	
	♠ A 7 5 2	
	♥ 10	
	♦ A K Q 9 4	
	♣ 7 4 3	

West	North	East	South
<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
	pass	pass	1♦
pass	1♠	pass	3♠ <sup>1</sup>
pass	4♣ <sup>2</sup>	all pass	

- On the Losing Trick Count (a common yardstick for assessing playing strength when your side has a fit) the hand is worth a double raise. A seven-loser hand is a normal minimum opening. This hand, with a mere six losers is clearly better than minimum. However, when you take into account that your partner passed as dealer and that she has an Achilles' heel when it comes to playing the dummy, a simple raise should suffice. Perhaps Mr. Smug hopes that Futile Willie will misdefend again...
- Over a single raise Mrs. Guggenheim would have had a wide choice: 2NT, 3♠ (a general game try for her) and 3♣ (asking for help in clubs). The double raise spares Mrs. Guggenheim any difficult decisions. Even she can summon the courage to go to game.

### The Play

The Unlucky Expert leads the ♣K, which holds the trick. He continues with the jack. Futile Willie overtakes with the ace and plays a third round of the suit. The Unlucky Expert ponders his next move. The defenders have taken three tricks. The setting trick will surely need to come from trumps — more on this later. If Futile Willie holds the king

of trumps, it should make whatever he does. However, if Futile Willie holds the jack or queen, the Unlucky Expert needs to play a fourth round of clubs. This must be the right play.

Mrs. Guggenheim considers this welcome, if surprising, turn of events. What did her teacher say? She remembers. You ruff in the short trump hand. She looks at her own hand and dummy: four trumps each. Perhaps she should ruff in the weaker hand. Then again, if she ruffs low in dummy, Futile Willie might overruff. Could that happen?

Mrs. Guggenheim thinks back to what happened in clubs. Both defenders followed to the first round. That's four clubs gone. The Unlucky Expert led a second round and Futile Willie won with the ace. That's eight clubs gone. What happened on the third round? It's already a bit of a blur. Mrs. Guggenheim hits upon a brainwave. If the Unlucky Expert can lead a club now, he must have followed to the third round. Yes, that's twelve clubs gone. Futile Willie is out of clubs. Who said Mrs. Guggenheim can't count?

Suddenly thoughts turn to action. She calls for dummy's ace.

'Which ace?' asks Futile Willie.

'That one,' replies Mrs. Guggenheim, as she points one of her less adorned fingers towards dummy's trumps. Futile Willie discards a high heart and Mrs. Guggenheim a low one. She continues with the king, queen and jack of trumps. She notices that the Unlucky Expert has dropped the ten on the third round and Futile Willie has thrown another heart. Mrs. Guggenheim stops to count the trump suit.

Everybody followed to two rounds of trumps. That's eight gone. Only three people followed to the third round. So that's eleven gone isn't it? She has one left. Does this mean there is one still out? She looks down at her nine. Is it a winner? It must be, mustn't it? The ten came down last time, didn't it? Mrs. Guggenheim takes a deep breath. The nine of trumps wins the trick. The Unlucky Expert didn't have one left after all. Anyway, playing the fourth round of trumps has worked well because she has been able to discard dummy's singleton heart on it. She plays diamonds from the top. When all follow to three rounds, the Unlucky Expert concedes. The play has taken long enough already.

*Result: 4♠ made for 620 to North-South*



Mr. Smug rubs his hands as he enters the score in larger writing than normal.

'Why did you give a ruff and discard?' asks Futile Willie.

The Unlucky Expert sighs. 'If my play was to matter, it was surely the only way to beat the contract. Dummy's diamonds looked pretty solid and I knew you didn't have the ace of hearts.'

'I did have the ace of hearts,' protests Futile Willie.

‘Then why on earth didn’t you cash it? How many heart tricks did you expect to make when you could see a singleton in dummy?’

'I thought declarer might hold KJx instead of KQx and misguess. If she's going to take four rounds of trumps, dummy will be out.'

This passes over Mrs. Guggenheim's head but not Mr. Smug's.

'My partner has just made two contracts in a row, possibly for the first time in her life. We should let her enjoy the moment.'



I charge this as 720 by East-West (100 if they cash their four top tricks plus the 620 they did in fact lose).

The Unlucky Expert was right of course. Futile Willie's sequence of plays was not consistent with his holding the ♥A. Although he couldn't be sure a third round of clubs would stand up, it was surely the best chance. In this case, his ♥A would be the setting trick.

Mrs. Guggenheim misplayed as usual but got away with it once more. This was the position at her decision point:

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

♠ A 7 5 2	♠ A 7 5 2	♠ A 7 5 2
♥ 10	♥ 10	♥ 10
♦ A K Q 9 4	♦ A K Q 9 4	♦ A K Q 9 4
♣ —	♣ —	♣ —

She should have thrown dummy's heart on the fourth round of clubs and ruffed in hand. The way she played, she would have gone down on most 4-1 trump breaks. Counting the trumps might help as well, at least to avoid going two down had diamonds been 4-1.

Mrs. Guggenheim was correct in thinking that the usual thing with a ruff and discard is to ruff in the short trump hand. There are exceptions of course, and with equal trump length you normally take the discard before the ruff. This avoids the risk of having to ruff in both hands, which is in general a bad idea. Perhaps whoever came up with the term 'a ruff and discard' should have called it 'a discard and ruff' instead. Then Mrs. Guggenheim wouldn't go wrong... or perhaps she still would.

## RUBBER 2 DEAL 4

Dealer East

Both vulnerable

	♠ Q 10 6 5 2	
	♥ —	
	♦ 9 3	
	♣ Q J 9 5 3 2	
♠ A K 7	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; text-align: center; width: 100px; margin: 0 auto;">             N W      E S           </div>	♠ 9 4 3
♥ K 10 7 5 4		♥ A J 8 3 2
♦ A 4		♦ J 2
♣ K 10 7		♣ A 6 4
	♠ J 8	
	♥ Q 9 6	
	♦ K Q 10 8 7 6 5	
	♣ 8	

West	North	East	South
<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
		pass	3♦
dbl <sup>1</sup>	pass	4♥	pass
4NT <sup>2</sup>	pass	5♥	pass
6♥ <sup>3</sup>	all pass		

1. An expert panel would be split three ways with the main votes going to 3NT and double, 3♥ being a distant third. As a scientist, Futile Willie clearly chooses the most flexible action. It allows his side to play in any of four strains or to defend. If the Unlucky Expert holds a weak hand, defending may be the only way to go plus.

2. Futile Willie is in a state of shock. On the previous three deals, his opponents have bid and made game — twice with Mrs. Guggenheim as declarer. Still, a slam here would almost square the rubber, wouldn't it?

He thinks that if the Unlucky Expert can jump to game and he holds all this, a slam should be on. He knows how well his partner handles the dummy and that the opponents are moderate defenders. The chance seems too good to miss. Futile Willie forgets that his partner has passed as dealer and has bid just one level higher than he had to.

3. On many auctions, when the response to 4NT tells you that your side holds all the aces, you should continue with 5NT to confirm this fact to your partner in case this news enables him to bid a grand slam. Has Futile Willie woken up to the fact that he has overbid already — or has he finally remembered his partner's initial pass? I suspect a bit of both.

## The Play

Mr. Smug puts down his pipe and briefly fingers his singleton club. Then he looks at his trumps. He may well score a trick even without a ruff. He tables the ♦K.

The Unlucky Expert adjusts his glasses to survey dummy's assets. His renown as a skillful player makes it common for his partners to bid too much and put him in a challenging contract. He sees a likely loser in each of the side suits and a possible trump loser. He reflects on the bidding. He cheers up a bit. Something, it seems, is afoot.

He calls for dummy's ace. Mrs. Guggenheim follows with the nine. Flushed with her success on the two previous deals, she doesn't want to make a silly mistake like failing to show her doubleton. The Unlucky Expert drops the jack, retaining the two. What's he up to?

His plan becomes a little more apparent when he leads a low trump from dummy. Normally, given South's known diamond length, he would cash the king, the void being much more likely on his left than on his right. He leads low because he wants Mrs. Guggenheim to be the hand short in trumps. He wants Mr. Smug to be very short in the black suits to make him open to a throw-in and Mrs. Guggenheim to hold loads of black cards to make her ripe for a squeeze. Two tricks short of his contract, he is going to need both types of endplay!

The Unlucky Expert raises a slight smile when Mrs. Guggenheim shows out on the first round of trumps and the ace wins. He proceeds to draw the missing trumps in two more rounds.

Now he needs to guess Mr. Smug's shape. He can't afford to cash the ace-king of both black suits because he needs to keep an en-

try with one of the threats. He leads a low club off dummy. Mrs. Guggenheim plays the nine and the ace wins as Mr. Smug drops the eight. Declarer continues with a spade. Again, Mr. Smug produces the eight and the ace wins; this time Mrs. Guggenheim plays the five.

	♠ Q 10 6	
	♥ —	
	♦ 3	
	♣ Q J 3	
♠ K 7		♠ 9 4
♥ 7 5		♥ J 8
♦ 4		♦ 2
♣ K 10		♣ 6 4
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           N W       E S         </div>	
	♠ J	
	♥ —	
	♦ Q 10 8 7 6 5	
	♣ —	

Since Mrs. Guggenheim might well have dropped the queen or at least started some sort of high-low if she had ♠QJ10xxx, the Unlucky Expert reads the layout correctly. He cashes the ♠K before leading the ♦4 from dummy. Lo and behold, Mrs. Guggenheim underplays with the three. This is just what the doctor ordered. The Unlucky Expert starts to purr.

‘Blast!’ exclaims Mr. Smug. He wins the diamond and, having run out of all other options, returns the suit.

The Unlucky Expert ruffs in dummy and throws a club from hand. He then wins the fourth round of trumps in hand and proceeds to cash the fifth. Dummy discards a spade and Mrs. Guggenheim surrenders.

*Result: Six hearts made for 1430 to East-West*

## Post Mortem

‘Well played, partner!’ exclaims Futile Willie.

The Unlucky Expert takes a deep breath and shrugs his shoulders. ‘It played itself.’

‘We couldn’t beat it, could we?’ asks Mrs. Guggenheim.

‘No, we couldn’t.’ Mr. Smug replies, reaching for his pipe. At least he can console himself that his four deals with his present partner have just ended.

## Chucks

I must charge this as 1630 by North-South (the slam goes two down if Mrs. Guggenheim retains her ♦9). Perhaps it is as well for Mrs. Guggenheim that she claims no Scottish ancestry!

By the way, if Mrs. Guggenheim had been South, it might have been a good idea for the Unlucky Expert to keep the ♦J. The plan would be to rely on her to win the second round with the queen and endplay herself regardless of North's diamond holding. She would be unlikely to find the winning play of ducking the ♦J in the end position. Making an extra diamond trick would do declarer little good because it would still leave him with a loser in each black suit and no squeeze on which to fall back.

\* \* \* \*

Mr. Smug clears his throat and rubs his hands at the prospect of what is to come. The Unlucky Expert raises a slight smile and rises from his chair. Mrs. Guggenheim pauses for a moment to gather herself and her possessions. She picks up her pen, her glasses, her scoresheet and her handbag. She then exchanges seats with the Unlucky Expert.



Dealer South  
Neither vulnerable

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

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

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

♠ A 7  
♥ K 10 9 8 7 5 2  
♦ 9 8 2  
♣ 9

Diagram of a square with vertices labeled N (North), S (South), E (East), and W (West).

West	North	East	South
<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
			3♥
pass	3NT <sup>1</sup>	pass	4♥ <sup>2</sup>
all pass			

1. The Unlucky Expert judges well. If Mr. Smug is short in one of the black suits, there may well be four top losers in 4♥. 3NT should play as well as, if not better than, 4♥ unless Smug is short in diamonds.
2. Mr. Smug really should know better. True, he has a weak hand with a string of hearts but he already showed that by opening 3♥. Playing with Mrs. Guggenheim, one might vaguely excuse the bid — but not with his present partner. Mr. Smug holds an ace and a king, which could prove equally useful in 3NT or 4♥.

Futile Willie leads the ♦K. This holds, as East plays the five and South the two. He continues with the ten, dummy plays low and Mrs. Guggenheim wins with the ace. She then goes into a trance.

While you or I may think it obvious that the ♦10 should be a suit-preference signal for spades, Mrs. Guggenheim doesn't. After consulting the ceiling and the floor, she decides to trust the matter to fate. She takes two small spades and a small club from her hand and shuffles them under the table. Why take two spades and one club? She

has twice as many spades as clubs and wants to make things fair. She produces a card. It's a spade. Smug wins with the ace and crosses to the ♥A. He continues with the jack and avoids facing a guess of his own when Mrs. Guggenheim covers with the queen. He plays two more spades, throwing his singleton club and claims the rest.

*Result: 4♥ made 420 to North-South*

## **Chucks**

470 by East-West (the 50 they should have had plus 420)

How should the defenders take their four top winners? They had an easy way. Mrs. Guggenheim should overtake the ♦K with the ace and return the suit. Futile Willie could then cash his ♣A before giving Mrs. Guggenheim a ruff. Even if he didn't cash his ace, both defenders would know that his next lead would be suit preference. Mrs. Guggenheim had no reason to fear setting up the ♦J (if declarer had a third diamond). The only loser he might discard on it would be a black singleton, but her partner would be on lead and in a position to cash out. Futile Willie should share the blame, at any rate with a decent partner. Leading the ♦10, trying to pin the nine-eight, was silly. He should have led his lower remaining diamond to ask for a club.

Did you notice that Mr. Smug also erred? If he had dropped the ♦8 and ♦9 on the first two rounds, even a competent East might misread the seven as high.


Dealer West  
East-West vulnerable

♠ 7 4  
 ♥ K 6 4 3  
 ♦ A K Q J 8 7 5  
 ♣ —

♠ Q 10 6 2  
 ♥ Q J 8 5  
 ♦ 10 6 2  
 ♣ 10 8

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

♠ K 9 8 5 3  
 ♥ 10 9  
 ♦ 9  
 ♣ A K J 7 3



West	North	East	South
<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
1♦	pass	2♣	2♠ <sup>1</sup>
3♦ <sup>2</sup>	3♠	3NT <sup>3</sup>	pass
4♥ <sup>4</sup>	pass	5♦ <sup>5</sup>	all pass

1. Mr. Smug needs little excuse to enter the bidding. While the suit is poor, he does have a good shape. At least he is not vulnerable.
2. I agree with Futile Willie. The solid seven-card diamond suit is his main feature. His partner is unlikely to have four hearts unless she is strong enough to make a responder's reverse (game-forcing for many).
3. Albeit in fear and trembling, Mrs. Guggenheim knows she must bid this with her solid spade stopper.
4. Futile Willie, bless him, cannot let the bidding die without describing his shape. True, a slam could be on if his partner turns up with ♥Ax but the odds are against this. Most likely Mrs. Guggenheim will just give him preference to 5♦. For 5♦ to play as well as 3NT, he will need to make two tricks more than she would in 3NT. For it to play better, he will need to make three tricks more. This hand doesn't warrant such odds. His diamonds are surely worth seven tricks in either contract and Mrs. Guggenheim has a spade stopper — you can count on that. Given her two-level response, it isn't much to ask that she can find one extra trick.
5. Mrs. Guggenheim struggles to make sense of Futile Willie's latest bid. If he had hearts, why didn't he bid them the round before? In the end,

she decides that even if he does have hearts he must have much better diamonds and puts him back to his first suit. It never crosses her mind to consider whether she could sign off in 4NT.

## The Play

The Unlucky Expert ponders over the opening lead. His heart holding suggests a trump lead. He knows, however, that a trump lead is a fraction risky from his holding and that it will displease Mr. Smug if a trump allows the contract to make when a spade would beat it. With some misgivings, he leads the ♠2.

Mrs. Guggenheim looks worried as she puts down her dummy.

‘Thank you partner,’ says Futile Willie, trying to reassure her.

Futile Willie can see ten easy tricks. A 3-3 heart break clearly offers the best chance for an eleventh. Can he give himself another chance?

Dummy’s lack of entries will make it very hard to set up the clubs even if he finds Mr. Smug with AKx. Still, after winning the spade, he decides to try one round to see what happens. Mr. Smug plays the jack and Futile Willie ruffs. He then has an idea. If he plays three rounds of hearts before drawing trumps, perhaps he can ruff one in dummy. Upon regaining the lead, he intends to draw one round of trumps in the hope that whoever holds a doubleton heart has no more trumps.

Futile Willie pauses to check that his plan risks nothing if hearts are 3-3. Then he goes into action with the ace, king and a third heart. Mr. Smug throws a spade on the third round and the Unlucky Expert wins.

The Unlucky Expert sums up the position nicely. A trump lead will be no good, playing into declarer’s hands in fact. Nor will it help to play a fourth round of hearts at this point. Although partner can surely overruff the dummy, declarer can counter by discarding a spade from dummy and later ruffing a spade. He knows this might happen because declarer’s club ruff has given him a complete count on the hand. Unless Futile Willie has all the missing trumps – in which case there is no hope anyway – he must be 2=4=7=0. Since he needs to hold the lead to play the fourth round of hearts, the Unlucky Expert plucks out the ♣Q. When, as expected, this holds, Mr. Smug overruffs the next heart with the ♦9 to score the setting trick.

*Result: down one, 0 score (declarer had 100 for honors)*

East-West 700 (5♦ made for 700, including 100 for honors); since 5♦ was makeable, I shall excuse the 4♥ bid.

Futile Willie was a tad unlucky. His line would have worked against many defenders. He also had the quite good chance that Mr. Smug held the ♠KQ. On that layout, the Unlucky Expert would have been unable to do what he did. Certainly one can fault Willie's club play. It helped the Unlucky Expert count the hand and achieved nothing. Mind you, he should have been able to do that anyway if Mr. Smug showed an odd number of spades at Trick 1.

The club play was not in fact the main issue. I think Willie should have made the contract. Do you see how? It's not through anything tricky in the endgame. He just needed to give up the first round of hearts rather than the third. Then, when he regained the lead, he could draw Mr. Smug's trump before playing any more hearts.

## RUBBER 3 DEAL 3

Dealer North

### North-South vulnerable

♠ 10 6 2	♠ 9 5	♠ Q J 8 3
♥ 6	♥ J 8 7 5 4 2	♥ K Q 10
♦ 10 4 2	♦ J 6 5 3	♦ A K Q 8 7
♣ K J 9 8 6 3	♣ 4	♣ 2
	<div>W<div>N S</div>E</div>	
	♠ A K 7 4	
	♥ A 9 3	
	♦ 9	
	♣ A Q 10 7 5	

West	North	East	South
<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
	pass	1♦	2♣ <sup>1</sup>
pass	pass	2♦ <sup>2</sup>	2♠ <sup>3</sup>
pass <sup>4</sup>	3♣ <sup>5</sup>	pass <sup>6</sup>	pass
dbl <sup>7</sup>	all pass		

1. Has Mr. Smug read too many modern magazines? In days gone by everyone would have doubled on his hand. Nowadays some experts go to great lengths to overcall on a five-card suit, planning to double on the next round. Would you believe that an expert panel, when asked what to do with a 5-4-4-0 hand and the void opened by RHO, voted narrowly for the overcall? Freddie North, one of the dissenters and as it happens a leading rubber bridge player, shared my view that it was a textbook takeout double. One panel member didn't want to double first and later bid the five-card suit, saying that would overstate the main suit.

I agree on that last point. If you are 5-4-4-0 and the opponents keep bidding your void, you double again if you want to take further action.

Returning to Mr. Smug's actual hand, 2♣ does have a couple of things going for it. Firstly, it stops Futile Willie from responding at the one-level. Secondly, if partner winds up on lead, you would like a club lead. To my mind, these are not good enough reasons to bid 2♣. With a hand this good, you do not expect partner to end up on lead very often, nor need you worry that the opponents can locate a fit in a major. I would be much more worried about missing a fit in one of the majors myself. The hand offers good support for spades and fair support for hearts. I would hate to buy the contract in 2♣ and find that we have an easy game in some other strain. I use a simple rule for hands with a 5-4-3-1 shape and a singleton in the suit opened. So long as the hand is strong enough for a takeout double, I double unless the five-card suit is a major and the four-card suit is a minor.

2. The phobia about takeout doubles seems catching. Mrs. Guggenheim simply rebids her longest suit. While she does hold more diamonds than anything else and high cards in the suit to boot, partner might work this out from the fact she chose to open 1♦. By reopening with a double she gives her partner a choice of three suits in which to play — any of which would suit her — or, if he has length in clubs, to defend. This time every member of an expert panel would vote to double.
3. Mr. Smug still doesn't double! Nobody seems to have told him that 5-4-3-1 is more three-suited than two-suited. In broad terms, the same arguments apply to his second call as to his first. He is — or should be — happy to play in any of three suits or, if it suits his partner, to defend.
4. Futile Willie briefly considers competing with 3♦. He expects the bidding to die in 2♠. Perhaps he doesn't trust Mrs. Guggenheim to have the six-card suit that her rebid has shown. More likely, he simply doesn't want her to play the hand.

5. The Unlucky Expert isn't happy about the turn of events. He considers passing before the doubling starts. He reconsiders. What would Mr. Smug say about having to play in a 4-2 fit if he has six or seven clubs? Mr. Smug must hold more clubs than spades, possibly several more.
6. Mrs. Guggenheim thinks she has done enough. Since I wouldn't have found her previous bid, it's hard to say whether I agree.
7. Futile Willie can hardly believe his luck. This should be a juicy penalty.

## The Play

Futile Willie should probably lead his singleton heart. With so many trumps, there is always a danger of falling victim to a trump endplay. He prefers to lead his partner's suit. The ♦2 hits the table.

Mr. Smug remains calmer than you might expect on seeing dummy. He intends to take up later why the Unlucky Expert didn't run to 3♥.

Mrs. Guggenheim wins the first trick with the ♦Q. To her the lead looks like a singleton. She bid the suit twice and her partner never put her up, did he? She cashes the ♦A.

No she doesn't. Mr. Smug ruffs. Quick as a flash, he plays three rounds of spades, ruffing the third round in dummy. Mr. Smug didn't notice what diamond Futile Willie played on the second round but he doesn't care. Whatever it was it must have been higher than the two, in which case he will hold a third diamond. Mr. Smug plays a diamond and trumps it. He has made five tricks already – so far, so good. He cashes the ♥A. That's a sixth. With the ♣AQ10 of clubs left in his hand, he clearly wants someone else to lead the suit. He exits with a heart. Poor Futile Willie must ruff his partner's winning heart and return a trump into Smug's tenace.

Since his first heart exit worked a treat, Mr. Smug tries it again. Once more Futile Willie ruffs his partner's winning heart and leads a trump. Mr. Smug chortles as he gathers this with the queen. He then cashes the ace and waves the ♠7 around to see if anyone can beat it. Yes, Futile Willie still has a trump.

*Result: 3♣ doubled made vulnerable: 670 to North-South.*

## Post Mortem

Mr. Smug cackles.

‘I don’t believe it!’ exclaims Futile Willie. ‘My partner bids twice and I have KJ10xxx of trumps and they make their contract.’

‘KJ98xx,’ corrects The Unlucky Expert.

‘Was there anything I could have done?’ asks Mrs. Guggenheim meekly, still struggling to calculate the score.

I hope you don’t need the Unlucky Expert or Futile Willie to tell you. She should have switched to a trump at Trick 2. Whenever you place partner with a long, broken trump suit over declarer, you should think of a trump switch. The doubleton spade in dummy gave further reason for leading a trump. Carrying on with diamonds was criminal. After a trump switch, Mr. Smug makes just three of his trumps and none of dummy’s — I leave you to work out the details. This makes a difference of three tricks — a penalty of 800 instead of a loss of 670.

## Chucks

East-West 1470

I wish I could charge Mr. Smug for the difference between 2♥ made (or 3♦ down one) and 800. Then he wouldn’t keep bidding the same way!



Dealer East  
Both vulnerable

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

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

♠ K 9 8  
♥ K 9 4  
♦ J 8 3  
♣ 10 6 5 3

♠ Q 10 4 3 2  
♥ 10 5  
♦ 7 2  
♣ A J 7 4

Diagram illustrating a bridge hand layout. The table is divided into four quadrants by a central square labeled N (North), S (South), E (East), and W (West). The hands are distributed as follows:

- North (♠): K 9 8, ♥: K 9 4, ♦: J 8 3, ♣: 10 6 5 3
- South (♠): Q 10 4 3 2, ♥: 10 5, ♦: 7 2, ♣: A J 7 4
- East (♠): 6 5, ♥: J 8 7 6 2, ♦: Q 9 4, ♣: K 8 2
- West (♠): A J 7, ♥: A Q 3, ♦: A K 10 6 5, ♣: Q 9

West	North	East	South
<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
1♦ <sup>1</sup>	pass	pass	pass
3NT <sup>2</sup>	all pass	1NT	pass

- 1 Why doesn't Futile Willie open the obvious 2NT? Has he taken a point off for his doubleton queen but failed to add anything on for his good five-card suit? Has he simply miscounted? If, as I suspect, he doesn't fancy opening 2NT without a sure club stopper, he is simply storing up problems for the next round. Suppose Mrs. Guggenheim responds 1♥ or 1♠. If he rebids 2NT, this will be an underbid. Moreover, now that they have bid two suits, he has increased the risk of a club lead. If he rebids 3NT, similar issues arise and this will overstate his diamond suit. Futile Willie might intend to make a cute reverse into 2♥ if his partner responds 1♠. What, though, can he rebid over 1♥?
2. Futile Willie's luck is in. Mrs. Guggenheim has made the one response that leaves him with an easy rebid. Mind you, this highlights another problem with Futile Willie's choice of opening. In general, you don't want to have the strong hand on the table because it makes life so much easier for the defenders. It compounds the error when the weak hand is the one held by a poor dummy player like Mrs. Guggenheim.

## The Play

Mr. Smug doesn't mess about with the lead. He tosses the fourth highest of his longest and strongest – the ♠3 – on the table.

Mrs. Guggenheim beams when dummy comes down – 20 points – what a hand! The opening lead is kind as well. She plays low from dummy and wins cheaply in hand. At Trick 2, Mrs. Guggenheim leads the ♦J and lets it run. At least she is playing the right suit, if not playing it in the right way. Clearly, she should lead low in case Mr. Smug has the singleton queen. Whether she should lead low to the ace on the first round to cater for a singleton queen on the other side is less clear. She will need to return to hand with one of her kings to finesse on the second round. This will increase the risk of getting a club switch should the finesse lose. I very much doubt that Mrs. Guggenheim thought about this. She wanted to take a finesse, found herself in the right hand for taking it and took it. On the actual layout, her play makes no difference. The Unlucky Expert makes one diamond trick whatever she does.

The Unlucky Expert sums up the position quite quickly. Since any finesses are working for declarer, she surely has two or three spade tricks, two or three heart tricks and certainly four diamond tricks. This makes it essential for the defenders to cash the next four tricks.

If Mr. Smug holds ♣AJ10x, any club will do. To cater for the possible weaker holding of ♣AJ7x, the Unlucky Expert neatly unblocks the eight. Mrs. Guggenheim plays low from hand and Mr. Smug wins with the ace. Mr. Smug thinks the eight indicates a lack of interest in clubs. If his partner has nothing much in the black suits, maybe he has something in hearts. Lo and behold, he switches to the ♥10!

The contract is now simple. Mrs. Guggenheim cashes all her top winners to emerge with an overtrick.

*Result: 3NT made with an overtrick for 630 to East-West*

## Chucks

730 by North-South.

Mr. Smug, if he had bothered to count declarer's tricks, should have worked out that the only hope was to find his partner with the ♣K and so play back the four. His ♣J7 would then entitle him to two more tricks. If Mrs. Guggenheim had the ♣K, she would have four diamond tricks, three spade tricks, the ♥A and at least one club.

Failing to count is probably the number one sin committed by the average defender. If you want to win more often, you need to make the effort to count. On this deal, it wasn't hard because he could see so much strength in dummy. Mr. Smug couldn't be bothered. He found it too easy to glance at the card that his partner had played and draw a speedy conclusion. We are all guilty of being lazy at times. However, laziness doesn't bring success. As with most things in life, the more effort you put in, the more you get out.

\* \* \* \*

"Table up!" cries Futile Willie.  
 Mr. Smug snorts. "We're the only people here."  
 Futile Willie holds up his hands. "So we are."  
 Mr. Smug refills his pipe. "It's your turn back with me, isn't it?"  
 Futile Willie gets up and exchanges places with the Unlucky Expert.

RUBBER 4 DEAL 1

Dealer South  
 Neither vulnerable

♠ A 10 7 4 3

♥ 6

♦ Q 8 7 5

♣ Q 10 4

♠ K J 9 8 5

♥ 8 5

♦ A 10 6 2

♣ 8 6

♠ 6 2

♥ A K J 7 4 2

♦ —

♣ A K J 9 2

♠ Q

♥ Q 10 9 3

♦ K J 9 4 3

♣ 7 5 3

N

W

E

S

West	North	East	South
Unlucky Expert	Futile Willie	Mrs. Guggenheim	Mr. Smug
pass	pass <sup>1</sup>	1♥	pass
1♠	pass	3♣ <sup>2</sup>	pass
3NT	pass	4♣ <sup>3</sup>	pass
4♠ <sup>4</sup>	dbl <sup>5</sup>	pass <sup>6</sup>	pass
redbl <sup>7</sup>	pass	pass <sup>8</sup>	pass

1. Third in hand, one can make a good case for opening a weak two in spades. The deal probably belongs to the opponents. In this case, you want to cut out some of their bidding space and encourage partner to play a spade if he ends up on lead. Futile Willie thinks otherwise.
2. This is the correct rebid. Long ago, some players may have too readily made a jump rebid. Now the pendulum has swung the other way.

For some reason a number of modern writers have gone on and on about the importance of keeping the bidding low. Equally, you need to consider the pressure it puts on responder if opener makes a minimum sounding rebid on a hand way above minimum strength. This hand might make game opposite a 4=2=3=4 or a 5=2=2=4 Yarborough. It also needs little more than a spade trick and a fit for one of your suits to give you play for a slam. Rebidding 2♣ is a very poor way to convey this. If you rebid 2♣, partner will never imagine that you possess first- and second-round control in three suits and a good four-loser hand. Having knocked an expert panel earlier, I am pleased to report that in a recent multi-team event of high standard all four players holding a hand like East's made the jump-shift rebid.

3. With eleven cards in her two suits and a void in the unbid suit, you can see why Mrs. Guggenheim does not fancy being dummy in 3NT. Yes, I admit that on this sequence partner might hold four spades and longer diamonds, in which case 3NT could be the best spot. Even so, game in one of her suits should have a play facing all but the most horrible misfit.
4. The Unlucky Expert makes a clever bid, an advance cuebid, agreeing clubs and showing a spade control. Logic says it cannot be an attempt to play in spades. If his spades were playable facing a moderate heart-club two-suiter, he would have bid 3♠ on the previous round. Now that she has shown an even more pronounced two-suiter, his spades cannot possibly be good enough to play in. Sadly, a clever bid is not so clever playing with Mrs. Guggenheim. She uses Blackwood and Gerber to look for a slam. A control cuebid never came up in any of her lessons.
5. Futile Willie thinks that his partner will end up on lead and so doubles to ask for a spade lead. He hopes to set up the ♠K at Trick 1 and to score the ♦A. Perhaps this is a little hopeful given Mrs. Guggenheim's announced shape. At any rate, I think so. Today his luck is in.
6. Mrs. Guggenheim is unsure what is going on and passes the bidding back to her partner. He has never supported either of her suits, has he?
7. Many good players these days use a system of cuebids known as Italian or Multi cuebids. This means that a cuebid below the level of 4NT

shows either first- or second-round control in the suit. The Unlucky Expert therefore redoubles to confirm that he has first-round control.

8. The double surprised Mrs. Guggenheim. In the context of her previous bidding, she could scarcely hold a more suitable hand for a spade contract. Why, she almost redoubled herself.

## The Play

‘My lead?’ enquires Futile Willie with gusto.

The Unlucky Expert is too lost for words to reply.

‘Yes,’ chirps Mrs. Guggenheim.

Futile Willie tables the ♦A. The Unlucky Expert inspects the dummy. Things could have been worse. The contract has some play. He ruffs in dummy, comes to hand with the ♣10 and ruffs another diamond. He then returns to hand with the ♣Q and lays down the ♠A. When Mr. Smug drops the queen, he pauses to review the position.

The Unlucky Expert knows that a 3-3 trump break is unlikely in any event, still more so after the queen’s fall. However, he sees a chance if trumps split 4-2. If he can get rid of his two remaining diamonds before losing the lead, he might restrict his losses to three trump tricks. To discard both diamonds he needs to find Futile Willie with either ♥Qx or ♥Qxx. His mind made up, he continues with a heart to the jack.

Mr. Smug wins with the queen, cashes the ♦K and, recalling that Futile Willie has played high-low in clubs, leads a club. Futile Willie ruffs this and still has three more trump tricks to come.

*Result: Three down redoubled for 1000 to North-South*

## Post Mortem

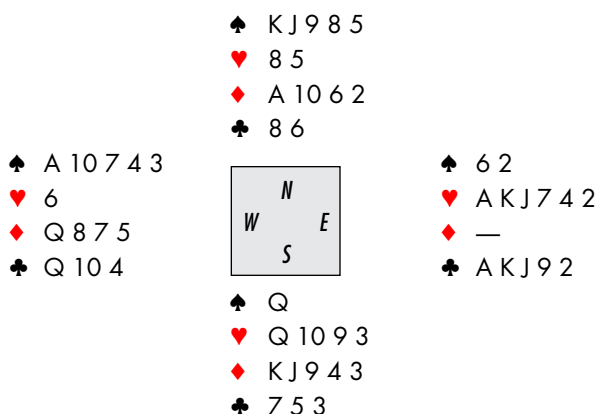
Futile Willie notes that an initial low diamond might have taken the contract four down but deems it impolitic to say so. The Unlucky Expert is in too great a state of shock to say anything either. Mrs. Guggenheim breaks the silence. ‘What’s the score for that?’

This is just the line Mr. Smug has been waiting for. ‘I think it comes to a nice round thousand,’ he chortles.

## Chucks

With a decent declarer as East, 6♣ is the right contract. Declarer can succeed by ruffing two hearts in dummy.

Diagram repeated for convenience:



On this layout, there are two ways to do this. One is to cash both top hearts before ruffing the third and fourth rounds high. Another is to cash just one, again allowing two safe ruffs. Given Mrs. Guggenheim's abilities, it seems fairer to adjudge the best spot as 5♣. If we assume no overtricks, this makes the chuck 'only' 1400 (400 plus 1000).

By the way, you may laugh and think that something like this could only happen to someone like the Unlucky Expert. If so, it will surprise you to hear that a top Italian pair suffered a very similar mix-up. In fact, they had it the other way round. The player who bid 4♠ intended it as a possible place to play. His partner read 4♠ as a cue-bid and jumped to a hopeless 6♣ on their deal. Since I don't know their partnership agreements, I can't say who was right and who was wrong. All I can say is that having a clear agreement on whether or not unclear bids are forcing might well have spared their blushes.

Dealer West  
East-West vulnerable

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

♠ K 9  
 ♥ K 4  
 ♦ K 9 8 6 5 4 2  
 ♣ 9 5

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

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

N  
 W E  
 S

1. Although the 7-2-2-2 shape is less than ideal and one would prefer to have a few more of the values in the long suit, I agree with Futile Willie's preemptive overcall. Most opponents are less likely to reach the right contract if you take away several levels of their bidding space.
2. With a double stopper in diamonds and a moderate heart suit, 3NT would be the expert choice on the hand. Of course, Mrs. Guggenheim's partners train her to avoid making a notrump bid if she can help it!

Mr. Smug leads the ♦10 to the jack, king and ace. Mrs. Guggenheim counts her losers — one or two in trumps and maybe three in spades. She doesn't count her low diamond; she knows she can ruff it in dummy. Still, four losers are too many. She stops to make a plan — well done, Mrs. Guggenheim. Might she discard a spade on the third round of clubs? She leads a club to the two, ace and nine. She follows this with the king and queen. Futile Willie ruffs with the ♥4.

Futile Willie looks up at Mr. Smug. It seems that Mr. Smug should have given a gentle high-low with his four-card holding.

Mrs. Guggenheim decides that the time has come to take care of her diamond loser. She leads the ♦3 and ruffs it in dummy. If she plays another club now, Futile Willie will surely ruff again. Instead, she decides to use this entry to take a trump finesse. Futile Willie covers the jack with the king and the ace wins.

Mrs. Guggenheim wonders how she can avoid losing three spades. It would be so nice to be in dummy. Then she has an idea. If she ruffs her winning diamond in dummy, she can lead a fourth round of clubs. Perhaps Futile Willie will have no more trumps and be unable to ruff.

When Mrs. Guggenheim tries to put her plan into action, Mr. Smug redeems his earlier sloppy carding in the club suit with two neat plays.

	♠ K 9	
	♥ —	
	♦ 8 6 5 4 2	
	♣ —	
♠ 10 8 3 2		♠ Q 7 5
♥ 10		♥ 9 8 2
♦ —		♦ Q
♣ J 4		♣ —
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           N W      E S         </div>	
	♠ A J 6 4	
	♥ Q 6	
	♦ —	
	♣ 8	

He ruffs the ♦Q with the boss ♥Q and then underleads his ♠A. Futile Willie wins with the king and returns a spade to sink the contract.

*Result: One down for 100 to North-South*

## Post Mortem

Mr. Smug chortles even more loudly than usual.

Futile Willie can't bring himself to join in the merriment. He firmly believes that with ♣10832 Mr. Smug had a duty to play the eight on the first round.

Futile Willie makes a good point. Too many players lazily follow with the three, when they can easily afford the eight. Very few are as lazy as Mr. Smug in neglecting to show the even number at all!



## Chucks

720 by East-West (620 for 4♥ made plus 100 lost)

After Futile Willie ruffed the third club low, Mrs. Guggenheim had a winning line. She needed to cash the ♥A before ruffing a diamond. Then Futile Willie would indeed have been unable to ruff the fourth round of clubs.

However, the defenders should not have given her this chance. If Futile Willie ruffs the third club high, she cannot succeed. She must overruff or lose two trump tricks. She can then return to dummy with a diamond ruff, but Futile Willie still has a small trump to deal with the fourth round of clubs. Against a competent declarer, North should work out the club position from the line of play. Who would play three rounds of clubs with five clubs in dummy and three in her hand? One of the defenders is bound to be out. Against Mrs. Guggenheim, it is normally safer to trust your partner's signals than to draw inferences from her line of play – but not on this occasion.

3NT, which I suggested Mrs. Guggenheim should have bid, is easier to make. Since Futile Willie's ♥K is doubleton, a single heart lead from dummy would suffice to pick up the suit.

# RUBBER 4 DEAL 3

Dealer North

North-South vulnerable

♠ Q 7 6 5 3  
♥ 3  
♦ 8 7 6 5 4  
♣ 7 6

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



♠ J 4  
♥ Q 10 7 4  
♦ K J 10  
♣ A K 4 3

♠ K  
♥ A K J 8 5  
♦ 9 2  
♣ Q 10 9 5 2

West	North	East	South
<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
	pass <sup>1</sup>	1♥	pass <sup>2</sup>
pass	1♠	2♣ <sup>3</sup>	3NT <sup>4</sup>
all pass			

1. Mr. Smug would probably open this hand. He would overlook trifling matters like the fact that the doubleton ♣J is not worth a full point. Using Ron Klinger's HLQT count, I make the hand worth 11 points in high cards (the ♠1098 of spades surely offset the soft ♣J), 8 length points (5 cards in the longest suit and 3 cards in the next longest) and two and a half defensive tricks, for a total of 21.5. Since Klinger suggests that you have 22 when vulnerable (non-vulnerable you can open on 21 or 21.5), the hand is not quite worth opening. I must confess that I don't always use the option to open lighter non-vulnerable.

On this hand, with the length in the high-ranking spade suit and fair defensive values, why rush to start the bidding? If you use the simpler but less accurate Rule of 20 (Bergen), the hand falls short: 11 points in high cards and 8 length points. In any case, playing with Mr. Smug, one need not strain to open. He always bids the full value of his hand!

2. Mr. Smug feels sorely tempted to overcall 1NT, upgrading his hand for the couple of tens.
3. Mrs. Guggenheim is acting bravely. She knows who is vulnerable.
4. Mr. Smug makes up for his earlier pass. Since he could hardly have any more, he jumps to 3NT. He ignores the fact his partner is probably bidding some of his values, mentally adding one of his kings, and Mr.

Smug forgets that his partner passed first in hand. Futile Willie's hand could easily be like the one on which he doubled 4♠ (with ♠KJ9xx and an ace on the side if you recall). In that case, who would want to be in 3NT, with 8 points opposite 14? To argue that 'he could hardly have anything more' is like passing as dealer with 11 points and, when LHO's 1NT comes back to you, doubling because partner 'must have some points'! Yes, he must... but perhaps no more than 5!

There is another issue. With strength in Mrs. Guggenheim's suits, and expecting his side to hold the balance of power, he should look for a penalty. With game uncertain, the penalty may well exceed the value of the best makeable contract. Mrs. Guggenheim's renowned prowess (ahem!) as declarer gives South added reason for doubling rather than bidding higher.

## The Play

The Unlucky Expert leads the ♣7 — he slightly prefers clubs to hearts.

'Thank you partner,' says Mr. Smug, as well he should. The dummy is just about as good as it could be.

Mr. Smug tries the ♣J from dummy. Mrs. Guggenheim covers with the queen and he ducks. This seems a smart move on his part. Mrs. Guggenheim on lead as a defender is often a recipe for a defensive error. This time she makes no mistake. Seeing that a wooden fourth-highest return would present dummy with a cheap trick, she returns the ♣10. Mr. Smug wins this time with the ace.

'One or two things need to be right,' announces Mr. Smug.

Mr. Smug leads the ♠J and runs it when the Unlucky Expert plays low. Mrs. Guggenheim wins with the king and goes into a trance. Clearly, she is trying to work out whether her ♣9 and ♣5 are equals against declarer's remaining high club. Then a bright idea hits her. If she switches to the ♥K (after the first trick you normally lead king from ace-king), she might combine her chances.

The Unlucky Expert might encourage if he wants her to continue hearts and discourage if he wants her to revert to clubs. As luck would have it, the Unlucky Expert's singleton heart is the three and she gets the right message. She leads the ♠5 and smiles when this dislodges the king. Mr. Smug repeats the spade finesse, getting good news and bad. Good is that the Unlucky Expert has the ♠Q and the finesse works. Bad is that Mrs. Guggenheim shows out.

Mr. Smug puffs on his pipe. He can see eight tricks if he concedes a trick to the ♠Q: three spades, three diamonds and two clubs. He

sees a possible nine tricks if he plays on hearts, finessing the ten: two spades, two hearts, three diamonds and two clubs. A further advantage of playing on hearts is that it gives Mrs. Guggenheim scope to go wrong. She doesn't take it. She hops up with the ♥A, cashes the ♣9 and proudly tables the ♣2.

*Result: Two down for 200 to East-West*

## **Post Mortem**

'Did you say two down?' asks Mrs. Guggenheim. 'I must have missed one of our tricks. Did you make one?'

The Unlucky Expert finds a rare smile as he shakes his head. 'You made them all, dear.'

'I knew my 5-5 shape was good. I was just reading Klinger the other day. He said "Six-Four Bid More." 5-5 is much the same as 6-4, isn't it?'

The Unlucky Expert nods and starts to purr.

Events have impressed Futile Willie rather less. 'Did you have to bid 3NT? Mine was just an overcall you know.'

'What?' snaps Mr. Smug, 'I bid what I thought I could make. It was just unlucky. How could I know the king of spades was a singleton?'

'If I may be so bold,' interjects the Unlucky Expert, 'you didn't *know*, but it was the thing to play for. It's no good putting me with four spades to the king or queen. You can finesse twice but that gives you only two fast spade tricks. Since you know I can't have the king-queen from my partner's bidding and my lack of it, a singleton king or queen offers by far your best chance.'

## **Chucks**

North-South 800 (600 for 3NT made plus the 200 they lost)

By the way, 2♣ doubled played by Mrs. Guggenheim should fail by two tricks. The defenders need to draw trumps to stop declarer from ruffing hearts in dummy. This makes it easy for her to make three clubs and two hearts. She also comes to a long heart or the ♠Q. This makes the penalty 300. So, by accident rather than design, Mr. Smug arrived at the best contract given the conditions and layout.

If Mr. Smug had played a round of diamonds early and seen Mrs. Guggenheim follow, he could have been sure that she didn't hold ♠Kxx or ♠Qxx. She would surely not rebid 2♣ with minimum values and a mere nine cards between her long suits.

Dealer East  
Both vulnerable

♠ J 6 3  
♥ A K J  
♦ A 10  
♣ J 9 7 5 3

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

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

♠ 7 4  
♥ 9 7 5 4 2  
♦ J 7 5 2  
♣ A 8

Diagram of the table layout:

	N	
W		E
	S	

West	North	East	South
<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
1 ♣	1 ♠	pass	pass
3NT <sup>2</sup>	all pass	2NT <sup>1</sup>	pass

1. Mrs. Guggenheim overcomes her usual aversion to a notrump bid.
2. The Unlucky Expert rarely adjusts down for his partner's play. If he did, he might adjust as much up for his opponents' defensive skills!

Mr. Smug leads the ♠7. Even he knows better than to lead his own suit.

Mrs. Guggenheim plays low from dummy, Futile Willie plays the queen and the ace wins. Mrs. Guggenheim thinks back to what her teacher said to do in a notrump contract. Count your top tricks and look around to see how you might develop any more you need. She sees six on top and a source of three more in clubs. It has yet to occur to her that she might be in trouble. With the current defenders, she has chosen the right time not to worry.

When Mrs. Guggenheim leads a low club from hand, Mr. Smug plays the eight. She plays the jack from dummy and Futile Willie, after a quick scratch of his head, wins with the king. Futile Willie stares at dummy. It looks like his partner holds something in clubs. Even Mrs.

Guggenheim would know to finesse if she held the ace and queen. Might Mr. Smug hold a third spade or is it more likely he has some decent diamonds? Futile Willie thinks back to the Unlucky Expert's switch to the ♣8 in an earlier rubber when he was dummy. Is this position similar? If his partner has ♦KJ7x and the ♣Q as an entry, might the ♦8 be the card to lead? Will Mr. Smug have learnt from his previous mistake? Futile Willie crosses his fingers and leads the ♦8.

Mrs. Guggenheim captures the ♦J with the ace and returns a club to the queen and ace. Mr. Smug tries another diamond but in vain. Mrs. Guggenheim takes the queen with the king and goes on to run the club suit, discarding a low spade on the fifth round. She continues with three rounds of hearts. It would seem she has forgotten that her ♦9 is high. As it happens, her oversight makes no difference. Futile Willie has no more hearts to lead when he comes in with his ♠K and must concede the last trick.

*Result: 3NT made with one overtrick for 630 to East-West*

## **Post Mortem**

'You made it, partner', says the Unlucky Expert, gritting his teeth.

Mrs. Guggenheim beams, 'Thank you, partner, for putting me in it.' She never could understand a backhanded compliment.

## **Chucks**

Apart perhaps from Futile Willie's thoughtful switch, the play was a comedy of errors. Mr. Smug should have gone in with the ♣A on the first round to clear the spades while his partner still had an entry. I must therefore charge North-South with 730: the 100 they had the chance to score plus the 630 they lost. Of course, they went wrong before that.

What happened on the first trick? Mrs. Guggenheim usually holds up with three to the ace whether or not it is the right thing to do. Why did she win at once this time? Simple: she could see a double stopper that way. She missed that she would equally have a double stopper if she held up. The bidding and lead marked Futile Willie with the ♠K to go with the queen. By ducking the first trick, she would have made the contract even if the defenders took their club winners in the right order. So was the par result 600 to East-West? No, Futile Willie should have ducked the first trick, hoping that his partner would

produce a quick entry. This way, declarer can do nothing to stop the defenders from scoring three spades and two clubs.

\* \* \* \*

Mr. Smug looks around the table and sees the other deck of cards sitting on the right of his left-hand opponent. This means he is to deal next, which means time for another change of partners. Mr. Smug glances round to Mrs. Guggenheim and gestures with his head as he takes a puff on the pipe he has just lit. She gets the message and swaps seats with Futile Willie.

RUBBER 5 DEAL 1

Dealer South  
Neither vulnerable

♠ 7 6

♥ 9 7 4 2

♦ J 8 7 5

♣ 9 6 4

♠ K 8 4

♥ K Q J 10 8 3

♦ —

♣ J 7 5 3

♠ 10 9 2

♥ A 6

♦ A Q 9 4 3

♣ A K 2

♠ A Q J 5 3

♥ 5

♦ K 10 6 2

♣ Q 10 8

N

W

E

S

West	North	East	South
Unlucky Expert	Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Mr. Smug
			1♠
2♥	pass	2♠	pass
3♥	pass	5♥ <sup>1</sup>	pass
6♥ <sup>2</sup>	all pass		

1. Futile Willie holds a good hand, which he reckons is long overdue. He thinks to himself that if he and his partner can make a slam, it will bring his score back to about level. Although I could go along with a cuebid of 4♣, the jump to 5♥ seems a bit much. If his previous 2♠ agreed hearts and showed at least the values to invite game, the Unlucky Expert's 3♥ indicates a minimum overcall. The hand therefore warrants at best a mild slam try. I suppose we should be grateful that he does not launch into Blackwood with fast spade losers.
2. A voluntary advance to five of a major, when the opponents have bid a suit and neither member of the partnership has promised a control in the suit, asks for a control. The usual ways to continue are as follows: pass with no control, bid six of the trump suit with a singleton, bid 5NT with the king and cuebid if holding first-round control. With his void in diamonds on the side, the Unlucky Expert does not fancy a possible 6NT contract and so just bids the slam.

## The Play

We can hardly fault Mrs. Guggenheim for leading a spade even though the bidding indicates that the opponents are ready for it.

Mr. Smug wins with the ace and returns the queen. Who knows? Mrs. Guggenheim might hold a singleton. The Unlucky Expert wins with the king, relieved to see Mrs. Guggenheim follow. He thinks for some time before deciding how to continue. Ten tricks are easy to see. The eleventh and twelfth tricks appear harder to come by. He toys with the idea of playing Mr. Smug for a 5=1=5=2 shape. In this case, he might draw one round of trumps, drop the ♣Q in two rounds and ruff the fourth round of clubs in dummy. Then he hits on a better idea.

The Unlucky Expert crosses to dummy with a trump and leads a low diamond off dummy. If Mr. Smug holds the ♦K but not the jack, perhaps he will go in with the king.

Mr. Smug thinks for while before playing the six. The Unlucky Expert ruffs the diamond. His stern face mellows slightly. Has he just spotted something? What is it? It doesn't take Mr. Smug long to find out. He cashes the ♥K, on which Mr. Smug throws a spade, followed by the queen, on which both East and South throw spades. The Unlucky Expert leads a fourth round of hearts, drawing Mrs. Guggenheim's last trump in this position:



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

	♠ J	
	♥ —	
	♦ K 10 2	
	♣ Q 10 8	

	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W      E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
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After dummy throws a low club, Mr. Smug goes into a trance. Could Mrs. Guggenheim hold a third spade? He tries in vain to remember whether she played high-low or low-high. He decides to return later to the option of throwing a spade. The diamond position he knows for sure. If he throws a diamond, the Unlucky Expert can cross to dummy with a club and set up the diamonds with a ruff. This will cost him two tricks — both the ♦Q and the fifth diamond will become winners. He dismisses this idea. Nobody has played a club, which makes the suit difficult to read. If the Unlucky Expert has the ♣J or any five clubs, he reckons that a club discard will cost two tricks. He decides to throw a spade after all. It will certainly cost at most one trick.

The Unlucky Expert produces the ♠8. Mr. Smug mutters something under his breath. Mr. Smug has no choice now but to discard a club in the hope that his partner turns up with ♣Jxx. It is not to be. The Unlucky Expert cashes the ♣AK and claims the rest when the queen falls. ‘I don’t even need the ace of diamonds.’ To Futile Willie this outcome confirms his view that he bid well. He can’t have overbid by much if the play ended with winners to burn!

*Result: 6♥ made for 1080 to East-West (with 100 for honors)*

## Post Mortem

‘I thought it ought to be a slam,’ says Futile Willie happily. ‘You see, I had a feeling you would have good trumps.’

Mr. Smug snorts. ‘Apart from those trumps, it needed the ace of spades onside, spades 5-2, diamonds 4-4 and clubs 3-3. What a slam!’

## Chucks

None!

I cannot charge Mrs. Guggenheim anything for her unlucky opening lead. If she led a trump, she would probably choose the two (normally, unless you play suit-preference signals in trumps, you lead low from an even number of trumps). This would give the Unlucky Expert the entries he needs in dummy to play up to the  $\spadesuit K$  and ruff a diamond to reach the same ending as he did. My third choice of lead would be a diamond, which would again produce the same result.

Note that it would not have helped Mr. Smug to duck the first trick. If anything, it would have made life easier. After he had to come down to a singleton spade, a spade exit would endplay him and the need for a second squeeze would not arise.

On another day, it might have helped Mr. Smug to discard in a more even tempo. On this occasion, once the Unlucky Expert had decided to go for the progressive ruffing squeeze, he had an inferential count of the hand. Why is this? He needed the cards to lie as they did. The threats in clubs and diamonds had to offer two tricks directly. If Mr. Smug started with only three diamonds, it would be easy enough to set up the queen with a ruff but there be no squeeze for a twelfth. Likewise, if he had two clubs, the  $\clubsuit Q$  would drop but a lack of entries would leave declarer unable to squeeze a twelfth. Therefore, since Mr. Smug had to have at least four diamonds and three clubs and he had already shown up with five spades and a heart, his shape had to be  $5=1=4=3$ .

## East-West vulnerable

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

♠ K 8 4	♠ K 8 4
♥ —	♥ —
♦ K J 8 6 3 2	♦ K J 8 6 3 2
♣ A Q 8 4	♣ A Q 8 4

West	North	East	South
<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
1♥	pass	4♥ <sup>1</sup>	5♦ <sup>2</sup>
dbl <sup>3</sup>	pass	5♥ <sup>4</sup>	pass
pass	dbl <sup>5</sup>	all pass	

1. Futile Willie displays good judgment for him. Holding such good heart support, he sees no point in showing the spade suit.
2. It is never easy when the bidding has reached the four-level before it comes to you. At this vulnerability, one can't deny that 5♦ doubled could be cheap. Then again, it could prove very expensive if partner holds nothing. Facing a worthless hand, you might easily make only six tricks — five on a terrible day. When you add in that 4♥ could go down — you have two and a half defensive tricks and know that the opposing trump suit is splitting badly for them — the risk does not seem worth it.

If you do intend to take some action, a double should work better. If partner happens to turn up with good hearts, this allows you to defend. At worst partner bids 4♠ and someone doubles. In this case, you would have the option of bidding 5♦ and being little worse off than you would with a direct 5♦ bid.

3. Although East bid to game, it was via a preemptive raise, so a pass would not be forcing. Forcing passes apply when your side has shown normal game values. This double expresses a positive desire to defend rather than a lack of interest in going any higher.

4. Futile Willie loses the plot. Yes, he holds five hearts and no diamonds, but he has already shown a weak hand with good trump support with his bid of 4♥. In effect, he is bidding his hand twice. He should also know that Mr. Smug tends to take a bit of a flyer. Had Futile Willie wrongly bid 1♠ on the previous round, one could understand the 5♥ bid; in that case, his five-card support would be a major surprise to his partner and perhaps justify removing the double.
5. Even Mrs. Guggenheim knows a gift horse when she sees one!

## **The Play**

Since the bidding strongly suggests that dummy has no diamonds, one could make a case for leading something else. Mrs. Guggenheim has no such thoughts. She always leads her partner's suit. Rarely does blame fall upon her when she leads it. Out pops the ♦4.

The Unlucky Expert takes the ♦A and ♦Q, throwing two clubs from dummy. He sees a chance of making the contract with the wind in the right direction. If the spade finesse works, he needs little more than to avoid two trump losers. He plays a spade to the queen. It loses. Mr. Smug cashes the ♣A and continues the suit.

The Unlucky Expert surmises from Mr. Smug's reluctance to lead a trump that he doesn't have one and soon concedes two down.

*Result: Two down 500 to North-South*

## **Post Mortem**

'I had to double, didn't I?' asks Mrs. Guggenheim.

'Yes, well done,' Mr. Smug replies. 'We had to push them up a level first of course.'

'There was no 'had to' about it,' remarks The Unlucky Expert dryly.

'If I may say so, I thought it rather unlucky to find you with half your values in their suit,' replies Futile Willie.

'I did double you know.'

'Yes but you might have doubled on general values rather than on a diamond stack.'

The Unlucky Expert knew it was fruitless trying to pursue the point, 'If you say so.'

## **Chucks**

East-West 1000 (500 conceded instead of 500 collected from 5♦ doubled.)

Had Futile Willie left in his partner's double, the chuck would be 600 by North-South instead (100 for defeating 4♥ and the 500 penalty in 5♦ doubled). As it was, Mr. Smug's bashful bidding scored another goal. Indeed, this raises a point of interest: a subtle difference in tactics between four-deal bridge and normal rubber bridge.

If you have read *Why You Lose at Bridge*, you will recall that Simon said never to sacrifice when playing with Mrs. Guggenheim. He gave this advice because you don't want to prolong playing under a handicap. Of course, this argument doesn't apply in four-deal bridge. You will play precisely four deals with her regardless. In this format, taking out a sacrifice that makes her dummy is a lot safer than one that makes her declarer. She is more likely to misplay a hand than to misdefend, with the risk of a misplay highest in a doubled contract. For sure, you don't sacrifice when she is your opponent and due to play the contract!

### RUBBER 5 DEAL 3

Dealer North

North-South vulnerable

	♠ Q 5 2	
	♥ A	
	♦ A J 9 7 5 2	
	♣ A Q 6	
♠ A 4 3		♠ 10 9 7 6
♥ J 6 5 4		♥ K 10 3
♦ K 8 6		♦ Q 10 4 3
♣ K 4 2		♣ 5 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> <span>W</span><span>E</span> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	
	♠ K J 8	
	♥ Q 9 8 7 2	
	♦ —	
	♣ J 10 9 8 7	

West	North	East	South
<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
	1♦	pass	1♥
pass	2♦ <sup>1</sup>	pass	2♥ <sup>2</sup>
pass	2NT <sup>3</sup>	pass	3♣ <sup>4</sup>
pass	3NT <sup>5</sup>	pass <sup>6</sup>	pass
pass <sup>7</sup>			

1. Mrs. Guggenheim goes into a trance. She knows she is better than minimum but doesn't want to jump to 3♦ with such a moderate suit. She can't rebid 1NT as that would show no extras and she wouldn't consider jumping to 2NT with a singleton. Futile Willie would probably bid one of his three-card suits. You or I would rebid 2NT. You can afford to owe your partner a point when you have a six-card suit on the side.
2. If we ignore the players involved, the ethics of this bid seem dubious.  
The huddle before North's rebid cast doubt about the right level or strain. In the latter case, the partnership may well belong in some suit other than diamonds. Here Mr. Smug might argue that he doesn't believe in putting down dummy with a void in trumps when he has a partner who likes him to play the hand. Well, that's one way of putting it.
3. The auction has worked out nicely for Mrs. Guggenheim. She now gets the chance to show her extra values without giving the wrong idea of her shape or the quality of her main suit.
4. The auction has worked out quite nicely for Mr. Smug as well. Mrs. Guggenheim must be very short in hearts and, since she didn't rebid 1♠, is marked with a club fragment. 3♣ should play well.
5. What did the Unlucky Expert tell her only the last time they played? 'A new suit at the three-level is forcing.' Feeling obliged to bid again Mrs. Guggenheim considers her options. She can't raise her partner's second suit with three cards. She doesn't want to rebid 3♦; her partner has already taken her out of 2♦. False preference on a singleton isn't her cup of tea either. With some misgivings, she bids 3NT.
6. Futile Willie considers doubling on the bidding but his hand is just too weak.
7. The Unlucky Expert has noticed his partner's slight pause and feels debarred from doubling. In any event, he doesn't fancy his diamond holding or want to induce Futile Willie to pick some fancy lead.

## The Play

Futile Willie finds he has an easy lead: the ♠10.

Mrs. Guggenheim sees two spade tricks (once the ace has gone), two red aces and one club trick. She works out that her best chance by far is to find West with the ♣K and make five club tricks.

Wanting to get the lead in dummy for the club finesse, she puts on the ♠J. This wins the trick, the Unlucky Expert playing low smoothly. She leads the ♣J from dummy. Again West plays low smoothly. She pulls out the ♣Q. She puts it back. Maybe she can overcome the possible club blockage by reaching dummy with a spade. Good thinking,

Mrs. Guggenheim. When the ♣J holds, she continues with a club to the queen and the ♣A. Futile Willie fumbles before parting with the ♥3.

Mrs. Guggenheim leads a low spade and Futile Willie plays low. Mrs. Guggenheim feels a lump in her throat. Should she play the eight or the king? Then she recalls that the jack won the first trick and that the Unlucky Expert gave no thought to winning. She calls for the king. Her heart sinks when this loses to the ace. A spade comes back, which she has to win in hand. After this, she makes just two more tricks, her red aces. The defenders score two spades, three diamonds and a heart.

*Result: Two down for 200 to East-West*

### Post Mortem

‘Well defended, partner,’ says Futile Willie

‘One of us had to be on the ball,’ replies the Unlucky Expert in a more jovial manner than usual. ‘I worried a bit when you pulled out the wrong card on the second round of spades.’

Futile Willie smiles, ‘So I did.’

Mr. Smug coughs, for reasons other than his smoking I think.

### Chucks

North-South 800 (200 lost plus 600 for 3NT making)

Since the opening lead marks East with the ♠10 and ♠9, declarer can ensure a second entry to dummy. She should put up the king and, regardless of whether it wins, drop the queen from hand. Now it doesn’t matter who turns up with the ♠A and whether East is awake enough to play the nine on the second round.

Both vulnerable

♠ K 10  
♥ 10  
♦ 10 7 6 4 3  
♣ Q J 10 7 4

♠ 9 7 5  
♥ J 7 6 4 3  
♦ A 5  
♣ A K 3

♠ J 8 6 4 3 2  
♥ 9 5  
♦ K 9  
♣ 9 8 5

♠ A Q  
♥ A K Q 8 2  
♦ Q J 8 2  
♣ 6 2

Diagram of a square table with four seats labeled N, S, E, and W.

West	North	East	South
<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
		pass	1♥
pass	4♥ <sup>1</sup>	pass	4NT <sup>2</sup>
pass	5♥ <sup>3</sup>	pass	6♥ <sup>4</sup>
all pass			

1. Once upon a time Mrs. Guggenheim could make a forcing raise with 3♥. Now that 3♥ is a limit raise, she doesn't know what to do. She knows she is too good to invite game. Many duplicate players use some convention to show a forcing raise, Jacoby 2NT being the most popular. Mrs. Guggenheim isn't playing this. If she is, she has forgotten. Probably the best of a bad job is to respond 2♣. At least this shows where her values lie and is forcing. If a slam is on with minimal values, a club fit may well play a part in it. For instance, ♥AKxxx, ♣QJxx and a singleton spade opposite makes 6♥ a superb contract.

Bidding 4♥ is right on the good trumps but wrong on values. The hand on which Futile Willie raised the Unlucky Expert from 1♥ to 4♥ is more what the bid shows. Still, if there is no slam on, her bid will cause no harm.
2. Mrs. Guggenheim's jump raise shows good trumps but normally at most 10 points in high cards — some play it even weaker. On this basis, Mr. Smug's hand barely warrants a slam try. One thing I can say: even if it does, 4NT is a poor choice. He has two fast club losers. Wait a minute.



He's missing the top diamonds too. If partner shows one ace, he will never know whether there are two top losers. The only sensible try is 4♠.

3. Mrs. Guggenheim shows her two aces.
4. This solves Mr. Smug's problem — not that he knew he had one. There can't be two fast losers anywhere if partner holds two aces.

## The Play

The Unlucky Expert makes the obvious lead of the ♣Q.

Mrs. Guggenheim beams as she puts down dummy. If this is the wrong contract, it's not her fault.

Mr. Smug strokes his chin. 'Thank you, partner — it's a good slam.'

Mr. Smug never messes about. He wins the club, draws trumps in two rounds with the ace-king and runs the ♦Q. Futile Willie wins with king and switches to a spade. Mr. Smug shrugs his shoulders. He plays the queen. The Unlucky Expert wins with the king.

Mr. Smug shakes his head. 'Not my day,' he mutters.

*Result: One down giving 100 to East-West*

## Post Mortem

'Did I bid it right?' asks Mrs. Guggenheim

Mr. Smug nods. 'Sorry I couldn't make it. Everything was wrong.'

## Chucks

North-South 1530 (100 lost and 1430 for 6♥ made)

Mr. Smug was right. Everything was wrong — the bidding (as already discussed) and his line of play. After drawing trumps, he should have cashed dummy's second club winner and ruffed a club to strip the suit. Then he should have led a diamond to the ace and one back towards his queen. This guarantees the contract whenever East holds the ♦K. If he rises with the king, declarer can discard two spades from dummy on the ♦QJ. If he ducks, he goes to bed with his king and declarer loses at most one spade trick.

Apart from the fact that Futile Willie happened to hold the ♦K, can you see an advantage in playing the suit this way? For one thing, if East has ♦109x, you will have time to test for this before taking the spade finesse. When Mr. Smug finessed into East, he knew he would get a spade back. This meant he had no chance to find out if the ♦109 would fall under the queen-jack. This is just one of many reasons for playing the way I suggest.

If diamonds split 5-2 and West has the king, he may very well lack a safe exit card upon getting in with the king. If he is the one with the doubleton, he will have to return a spade or give a ruff and discard. Now suppose that East holds ♦9x or 10x. Again, West has only losing plays because a diamond lead will set up the eight.

On a 4-3 diamond division, the play might still gain because even the Unlucky Expert can't see through the backs of the cards. If he is looking at the ♠K and either ♦K10xx or ♦Kxx, he must guess. If his partner holds ♦9xx in the first case or ♦109xx in the second, he can safely return a low diamond, avoiding the risk that South has a spade tenace. Conversely, if Mr. Smug holds ♦QJ9x and either ♠AJ or ♠A10, he wants to return a spade. Placing West with the ♣QJ and the ♠K gives further reason for playing East for the ♦K — more space in East's hand. The case for playing East for the ♦K is very strong even without this.

\* \* \* \*

Mr. Smug lights his pipe once more. His eyes light up as well when he realizes that the time has come to exchange Mrs. Guggenheim for the Unlucky Expert as his partner.

## RUBBER 6 DEAL 1

Dealer South

Neither vulnerable

♠ A K J 2		♠ Q 10 4	
♥ J 9 8 5 4 3		♥ K	
♦ K		♦ Q 8 6 3 2	
♣ 9 7		♣ A K J 10	
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W      E</div> <div>S</div> </div>		
		♠ 9 7 3	♠ 8 6 5
		♥ A 6	♥ Q 10 7 2
		♦ 9 4	♦ A J 10 7 5
		♣ 8 6 5 4 3 2	♣ Q

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Unlucky Expert	Futile Willie	Mr. Smug
1♥	dbl <sup>2</sup>	2NT <sup>3</sup>	pass <sup>1</sup>
4♥ <sup>5</sup>	pass <sup>6</sup>	pass	3♣ <sup>4</sup>
			pass <sup>6</sup>

1. Even Mr. Smug has his limits on what he needs for a 3♣ opening.
2. This is correct. A takeout double of 1♥ does not guarantee four-card spade support. This action is far better than an overcall of 2♦ or 2NT.
3. Despite the fact that Mrs. Guggenheim sits opposite, a preemptive raise to 3♥ would be overly cautious. Some would even bid 4♥ with this hand. An option for some nowadays is a fit-showing jump of 3♦. Of course, Mrs. Guggenheim would not understand that. 2NT, showing a limit raise or better, is the book bid and the bid Futile Willie makes.
4. With an ace and a six-card suit Mr. Smug is delighted that his partner has asked him to bid.
5. Flushed with the success of bidding up her 5-5 hand earlier, Mrs. Guggenheim knows what to do.
6. Both the Unlucky Expert and Mr. Smug toy with a sacrifice in 5♣. However, when Mrs. Guggenheim is due to play the hand the temptation to sacrifice is never that strong!

## The Play

The Unlucky Expert leads the ♣A.

‘Thank you partner,’ says Mrs. Guggenheim, slightly trembling. The cards have been following her around. ‘Play the queen, will you.’

Mr. Smug follows with the two, a card in which the Unlucky Expert takes great interest. Since Mr. Smug holds a fistful of clubs, his two is without doubt a suit-preference signal for diamonds. The Unlucky Expert switches to the ♦3. Mrs. Guggenheim plays low from dummy and wins in hand with the king.

Seeing no urgency in ruffing a club, Mrs. Guggenheim leads a trump at Trick 2. The Unlucky Expert wins and has no doubt about the position. Mr. Smug is something like  $3=2=1=7$ . He must be the one out of diamonds from his signal at Trick 1. He must hold seven clubs or declarer would have ruffed a club before exiting in trumps. This rules out a club exit as it would give a ruff and discard. Luckily, he doesn’t need to gamble on the position of the ♠J. If he leads a second diamond, Mr. Smug can ruff and exit safely in spades. A squeeze will not save declarer because there will be no entry to dummy’s diamonds after she runs the trumps.

The Unlucky Expert continues with the ♦8, a suit-preference signal of his own, asking for a spade back. Mrs. Guggenheim makes no mistake. She puts in dummy’s jack and discards a spade from hand. Even Mrs. Guggenheim can then manage to discard the ♠J on the ♦A and later ruff a club in dummy.

*Result: 4♥ made for 420 to East-West*

## Post Mortem

‘What a fabulous falsecard,’ remarks the Unlucky Expert, his tone as sarcastic as usual. ‘By playing the two of clubs to ask for a diamond shift you might have persuaded declarer not to finesse against my possible king of diamonds and maybe even to take a ruffing finesse against you. Had she not held the king of diamonds herself, declarer would have been completely taken in.’

Mr. Smug shakes his head, ‘I was just following suit.’

‘You can say that again. Your two of clubs wasn’t even an honest count signal. You had an even number of the suit.’

‘What do you lead if I play the card you want me to play?’

'If you play a middle card, I read you as having nothing much in spades or diamonds. Since I know from the bidding that you can't have good holdings in both suits, your neutral card must denote weakness in both. In this case, if we can beat the contract, you must hold a useful card in trumps. Placing you thus with the ace of hearts I cash my king of hearts at Trick 2. Then I can exit safely with a diamond to wait for you to score the ace of hearts and me to make the queen of spades.'

Mr. Smug nods, though he looks less than entirely convinced.

## Chucks

North-South 470 (50 for 4♥ down one plus 420 lost)

The Unlucky Expert was right in theory of course. However, he failed to take account of the style of the players involved. With a diamond holding of AJ10xx facing Kx, would Mrs. Guggenheim really refrain from taking a free finesse on the first round? One can also dispute the argument that the clubs had to be 7-1. Mrs. Guggenheim has never tried for a throw-in play in her life. One could hardly read anything into her failure to ruff a club. One should read more into Mr. Smug's pass as dealer. With a seven-card club suit and an ace on the side, would Mr. Smug ever manage to resist a non-vulnerable 3♣ opening?

## East-West vulnerable

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

♠ 5 4  
♥ 9 7 6 5 3  
♦ Q 8 6 5  
♣ 10 7

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

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

Diagram illustrating a bridge hand layout. The table is divided into four quadrants by a central square labeled N (North), S (South), E (East), and W (West). The hands are distributed as follows:

- North (N): ♠ 5 4, ♥ 9 7 6 5 3, ♦ Q 8 6 5, ♣ 10 7
- South (S): ♠ A K J 9 2, ♥ Q, ♦ A 4 2, ♣ Q 8 6 5
- East (E): ♠ Q 10 7 6, ♥ A J, ♦ K 10 9, ♣ J 9 4 2
- West (W): ♠ 8 3, ♥ K 10 8 4 2, ♦ J 7 3, ♣ A K 3

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Unlucky Expert	Futile Willie	Mr. Smug
1♠	pass	3♣	pass
4♣	all pass		

All the players make their obvious bids, putting Mrs. Guggenheim at the helm once more. She is feeling tired. Why couldn't her partners play more contracts?

The Unlucky Expert studies his hand with quite some concern. Its weakness suggests that declarer has values to spare. In this case, even Mrs. Guggenheim might manage to make the contract just as she had the last one. Desperate measures seem in order. With an anguished look, he leads the ♣10.

Mr. Smug wins with the king, cashes the ace and continues with the three. Mrs. Guggenheim, for reasons best known to her, plays the queen on the third round. Having ruffed, the Unlucky Expert again is in little doubt about what is going on.

Mr. Smug has returned the lowest missing club, without doubt a signal for diamonds. If Mr. Smug started with something like ♣AKxx and five diamonds headed by the ace, he must lead a diamond next. If he leads anything else, declarer can draw trumps and throw her singleton diamond on the fourth round of clubs.

The Unlucky Expert wonders whether to lead a low diamond or the queen. Low may work better if declarer has  $\spadesuit Jxx$  because it gives her the chance to misguess and go two down. However, if she turns up with a collection of small diamonds, he may do better to lead the queen so that Mr. Smug knows where it is. How can anyone ever again accuse him of making life difficult for his partner if he leads the  $\spadesuit Q$ ? The queen it is.

	$\spadesuit$ 5	
	$\heartsuit$ 9 7 6 5 3	
	$\diamondsuit$ Q 8 6 5	
	$\clubsuit$ —	
$\spadesuit$ A K J 9 2		$\spadesuit$ Q 10 7 6
$\heartsuit$ Q		$\heartsuit$ A J
$\diamondsuit$ A 4 2		$\diamondsuit$ K 10 9
$\clubsuit$ 8		$\clubsuit$ J
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           N W      E S         </div>	
	$\spadesuit$ 8 3	
	$\heartsuit$ K 10 8 4 2	
	$\diamondsuit$ J 7 3	
	$\clubsuit$ —	

Mrs. Guggenheim wonders what to make of this. Against anyone else, she would read the switch as from the queen-jack. She knows that the Unlucky Expert sometimes does strange things. In which hand should she win it? She would hate to misguess.

Suddenly Mrs. Guggenheim stumbles upon an idea. It spares her a guess and gives two chances of success, as we shall see in a minute. She wins the diamond in her hand and draws trumps. She manages to achieve this in only two rounds because, for once, she remembers that the Unlucky Expert has ruffed in.

Mrs. Guggenheim continues her master plan. She plays a diamond to the king. When no jack appears, she returns to hand with a trump and leads the  $\heartsuit Q$ . The Unlucky Expert plays low and Mr. Smug wins with the king.

'Oh dear,' says Mrs. Guggenheim.

Mr. Smug proceeds to cash the  $\spadesuit J$  for a fifth defensive trick.

*Result: Two down, 200 to North-South*

## Post Mortem

Mr. Smug snorts. 'What you are grinning about? I suppose you're going to tell me that I asked for a diamond.'

The Unlucky Expert chuckles. 'As a matter of fact you did. I know now that you couldn't help playing the three of clubs but you could have played the ace of clubs before the king to ask for a heart.'

## Chucks

East-West 820 (200 lost plus 620 for making 4♥)

After the defensive mix up in clubs, declarer should succeed. There is a restricted choice argument that the switch is from just the queen because with both the queen and jack the Unlucky Expert might equally have led the jack. For a player of his class this is certainly true. Can you see an even better reason to play Mr. Smug for the jack? The Unlucky Expert led from ♣10x — hardly an attractive suit for an opening lead. If he held the ♦Q and ♦J, he surely would have led the ♦Q at Trick 1 rather than the club.



Dealer North  
North-South vulnerable

♠ K 9 8 5 4 3 2  
♥ 8 6  
♦ 8 5 2  
♣ 7

♠ Q 6  
♥ Q 10 7 5 2  
♦ 6 4  
♣ 9 6 3 2

♠ 10 7  
♥ J 9 4 3  
♦ 7  
♣ K Q J 10 5 4

♠ A J  
♥ A K  
♦ A K Q J 10 9 3  
♣ A 8

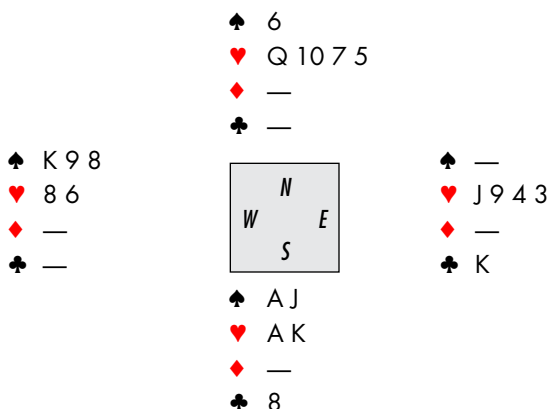
Diagram illustrating a bridge hand layout. The cards are arranged in four columns. The first column contains the cards: ♠ K 9 8 5 4 3 2, ♥ 8 6, ♦ 8 5 2, and ♣ 7. The second column contains: ♠ Q 6, ♥ Q 10 7 5 2, ♦ 6 4, and ♣ 9 6 3 2. The third column contains: ♠ 10 7, ♥ J 9 4 3, ♦ 7, and ♣ K Q J 10 5 4. The fourth column contains: ♠ A J, ♥ A K, ♦ A K Q J 10 9 3, and ♣ A 8. A central diagram shows a square with 'N' at the top, 'S' at the bottom, 'W' on the left, and 'E' on the right, representing the four directions of play.

1. The vulnerability suggests preempting. Nothing else does. For one thing, second seat is the worst position. Half the time you will preempt your partner rather than the opponents. For another, the hand should make a suitable dummy for partner in a heart contract. His 3♣ would make perfect sense third in hand. In second seat he should pass.
2. Mr. Smug doesn't believe in half measures!

Mrs. Guggenheim has an easy lead: a singleton in her partner's suit. 'Very little for you I'm afraid,' remarks the Unlucky Expert as he puts his hand down. 'Not to worry,' replies Mr. Smug, taking a puff from his pipe. Futile Willie puts up the ten and Mr. Smug wins with the ace. He proceeds to draw trumps in three rounds. Mrs. Guggenheim follows upwards to the trumps while Futile Willie follows once before discarding two low clubs. Mr. Smug finally pauses to draw breath. How can he avoid a loser in each black suit? He toys with advancing the ♠J. If Mrs. Guggenheim holds the king and ducks, he will be home. Indeed, if he cashes the top hearts first, he can overtake in

dummy to make the ♥Q for an overtrick. He dismisses this plan. Even Mrs. Guggenheim isn't going to duck. It seems better to play Futile Willie for the ♠K. Mr. Smug can come down to ♠AJ and a club for his last three cards and put Futile Willie in to lead from the ♠K. How about that? Mr. Smug plans a strip squeeze.

He puts the plan into action, rattling off all of his four remaining trumps. He has thrown one club from dummy already. He throws two more, a heart and finally the ♠Q. Mrs. Guggenheim has no problem — she discards one spade after another. As expected, Futile Willie takes longer to discard than anyone else. He parts with two more clubs followed by the ♠7 and ♠10.



Mr. Smug has not been paying as careful attention as he should to the discards but he has noticed the ♠10. Anyway, he doesn't need to commit himself yet. He continues with the ♥A and ♥K to which all follow. Mr. Smug puffs on his pipe. Has Futile Willie really discarded all those winning clubs to hang onto a low doubleton in hearts? It doesn't seem very likely. The ♠10 also looks highly suspicious. Mr. Smug does not know it but he can hardly go wrong from here. If he exits with a club, discarding a spade from dummy, he won't make the ♠A but Futile Willie will have to lead from his ♥Jx round to the ♥Q10 in dummy.

In practice, Mr. Smug concludes that Futile Willie has bared his ♠K. Futile Willie would do something like that. When Futile Willie shows out on the ace, Mr. Smug knows the position. He gives up a club and Futile Willie has to concede the last trick to the ♥Q.

Result: 6♦ made; 1520 to North-South (including 150 honors)

## Post Mortem

'I had a fantastic hand there, partner,' exclaims Mr. Smug. 'I had to read the position right too.'

'A good thing I had the queen of hearts for you,' observes the Unlucky Expert.

## Chucks

The defenders really should have done better. For one thing, Mrs. Guggenheim should have thrown her two losing hearts to clarify the position to her partner. For another, Futile Willie should have worked out that the contract would always make if declarer held ♥AKx. He had to do no more than count the opposing tricks. Three hearts, seven diamonds, a spade (partner can't hold the ace-king or she would have led one) and a club adds up to twelve. I must therefore charge East-West with 1470 (1520 less the net 50 for one down with honors).

However, Mr. Smug should have made the contract without relying on any defensive error. Can you see how?

Once Mrs. Guggenheim parted with her ♦2 on the first round, there was a way home. After cashing two top trumps and two top hearts, declarer exits with the ♦3 in this position:

	♠ Q 6										
	♥ Q 10 7										
	♦ —										
	♣ 9 6 3										
♠ K 9 8 5 4 3 2		♠ 10 7									
♥ —		♥ J 9									
♦ 8		♦ —									
♣ —		♣ K Q J 5									
	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ A J										
	♥ —										
	♦ Q J 10 9 3										
	♣ 8										

With nothing else left, Mrs. Guggenheim must exit with a spade. This allows dummy to make the ♠Q followed by the ♥Q. So long as you find the ♠K where you expect to find it, the worst that can happen is that West has a low heart with which to exit. In this case, if East has



‘Thank you, partner,’ says Futile Willie, trying not to let on that the ♦7 lead has hit his weak spot. The Unlucky Expert wins the first trick cheaply before cashing the king and ace.

‘Umm,’ says Mr. Smug as he ponders his discard on the third round of diamonds. He could discard the ♣3 to encourage a club switch. The Unlucky Expert, being an observant player, will notice that the two is missing. He pulls out the ♣3. He puts it back. Then he wonders whether it would be clearer to discard the ♠2. Yes, if he doesn’t want a spade, surely his partner will work out that he wants a club.

The Unlucky Expert does no such thing. From his point of view, Mr. Smug cannot hold either black ace. If he did, he would have ruffed the third round of diamonds and cashed his ace. The Unlucky Expert sees another chance. Mr. Smug might hold ♥Q9x. In this case, declarer would surely pick up the trumps if left to his own devices. Futile Willie would lay down the king and, seeing the jack fall first time, apply usual restricted choice principles to finesse the ten on the next round. I mean by this that if North had ♥QJ doubleton he would play the queen half the time and the jack half the time. This makes it twice as likely that the jack is a forced play from a singleton jack rather than a chosen play from queen-jack doubleton. If Mr. Smug holds ♥Qxx (with no nine), very similar reasoning applies although then declarer might cash the ace rather than the king and go down anyway. The Unlucky Expert sees how to put paid to this danger. He plays a fourth round of diamonds, forcing dummy to ruff.

Futile Willie makes no mistake. Having ruffed the diamond, he unblocks the ♠A and tries to draw trumps ending in dummy, playing to the king and back to the ace. When North shows out, he has to leave Mr. Smug with a trump. He throws his clubs on the ♠KQ as Mr. Smug and the Unlucky Expert look at each other. He then ruffs a club, draws the last trump and claims.

*Result: 4♥ made; 620 to East-West*

## Chucks

This comes to 720 by North-South for the penalty of 100 they should have had added to the 620 they lost.

On this occasion, the blame falls fairly and squarely at Mr. Smug’s door. It simply didn’t occur to him to ruff the third round of diamonds. From North’s point of view, the deal could have been like this:

♠ K Q 9 5  
♥ A 10 5  
♦ Q 9 3  
♣ K J 10

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

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

♠ J 7 6 4 2  
♥ Q 9 2  
♦ 7 6  
♣ Q 6 3

Diagram showing a square with vertices labeled N (North), S (South), E (East), and W (West).

On this layout, the fourth round of diamonds would be essential. Is it realistic for North to place South with ♥Q9x or ♥Qxx?

The cycle of six four-deal rubbers reaches its conclusion. The four players busily add up the scores and reach for their wallets and purse. Have you worked out the winners and losers?



# An Evening at The Club Revisited

The players themselves no doubt feel exhausted after their 24 deals. Let them have their rest. The time has come to take a fresh look at what has happened. All bridge players make mistakes. This includes world champions. It is the willingness to admit that one makes mistakes and the desire to learn from them that sets the winners apart from the losers. Whenever I play, I try to make a point of obtaining the hand records at the end of the session. If I know that there will not be any records, I make a note of anything worth further inspection as I go along. Then I can come back to these notes at the end of a session. You don't want to waste time or energy on conducting a post mortem with your partner or in your head during the session. You need to think in a positive way. If you lost this time, how could you play better so that you can win next time?



Let us begin by looking at the scoresheet as it currently reads:

Deal	Contract	By	Tricks	Mr. Smug	Mrs. Gugg.	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert
1.1	6♣	North	10	-100	100	-100	100
1.2	1♣ XX	East	2	2900	-2900	2900	-2900
1.3	5♣ X	West	10	100	-100	100	-100
1.4	4♥	North	9	-100	100	-100	100
2.1	3NT	South	12	490	490	-490	-490
2.2	3NT	North	9	400	400	-400	-400
2.3	4♠	North	10	620	620	-620	-620
2.4	6♥	East	12	-1430	-1430	1430	1430
3.1	4♥	South	10	420	-420	-420	420
3.2	5♦	West	10	0	-0	-0	0
3.3	3♣ X	South	9	670	-670	-670	670
3.4	3NT	East	10	-630	630	630	-630
4.1	4♠ XX	West	7	1000	-1000	1000	-1000
4.2	4♥	East	9	100	-100	100	-100
4.3	3NT	South	7	-200	200	-200	200
4.4	3NT	East	10	-630	630	-630	630
5.1	6♥	West	12	-1080	-1080	1080	1080
5.2	5♥ X	West	9	500	500	-500	-500
5.3	3NT	North	7	-200	-200	200	200
5.4	6♥	South	11	-100	-100	100	100
6.1	4♥	West	10	-420	420	420	-420
6.2	4♠	West	8	200	-200	-200	200
6.3	6♦	South	12	1520	-1520	-1520	1520
6.4	4♥	East	10	-620	620	620	-620
				<b>3410</b>	<b>-5010</b>	<b>2730</b>	<b>-1130</b>

Results for Mr. Smug and his partner (the North-South players) are in plain text. East-West scores are in italics.

Mr. Smug won the most on the night, closely followed by Futile Willie. Much of this win derives from the two redoubled contracts that the Unlucky Expert played. Mrs. Guggenheim is the biggest loser.

In *Why You Lose at Bridge*, Simon revisited the results, replacing each player in turn with a sound but not brilliant player. I would like to do the same thing. In some cases, one can clearly say what effect a sound player would have on the result of a particular deal. On a few deals, it is more subjective. If you disagree with a few of my conclusions, I hope this does not distract from the overall point of the exercise.

Rixi Markus once said that many contracts that are made could be defeated and that many contracts that are defeated could be made. In some of the ridiculous contracts in which our foursome arrived, this may not hold true. On most of the more normal contracts it does.

Let us begin by replacing Mr. Smug with our imaginary sound player. One thing that may or may not surprise you is that the sound player does worse than Mr. Smug does on four deals. This may explain why Mr. Smug persists with his tactics. Mr. Smug is a 'half full' man, who remembers his triumphs more than his disasters, even if the latter are more common!

The following I suggest are the effect on the results:

Deal	Original Contract	By	Tricks	Mr. Smug	New Contract	By	Tricks	Sound Player	Change
1.1	6♣	N	10	-100	3NT	N	7	-100	
1.2	1♣ XX	E	2	2900	1♣ XX	E	2	2900	
1.3	5♣ X	W	10	100	5♣ X	W	10	100	
1.4	4♥	N	9	-100	4♥	N	9	-100	
2.1	3NT	S	12	490	3NT	S	9	400	Loss
2.2	3NT	N	9	400	2NT	N	9	150	Loss
2.3	4♠	N	10	620	4♠	N	10	620	
2.4	6♥	E	12	-1430	6♥	E	12	-1430	
3.1	4♥	S	10	420	3NT	N	10	430	Gain
3.2	5♦	W	10	0	5♦	W	10	0	
3.3	3♣ X	S	9	670	2♥	N	8	110	Loss
3.4	3NT	E	10	-630	3NT	E	8	100	Gain
4.1	4♠ XX	W	7	1000	4♠ XX	W	7	1000	
4.2	4♥	E	9	100	4♥	E	9	100	
4.3	3NT	S	7	-200	2♣ X	E	6	300	Gain
4.4	3NT	E	10	-630	3NT	E	8	100	Gain
5.1	6♥	W	12	-1080	6♥	W	12	-1080	
5.2	5♥ X	W	9	500	4♥	W	9	100	Loss
5.3	3NT	N	7	-200	2♦	N	8	90	Gain
5.4	6♥	S	11	-100	6♥	S	12	1430	Gain
6.1	4♥	W	10	-420	4♥	W	9	50	Gain
6.2	4♠	W	8	200	4♠	W	9	200	
6.3	6♦	S	12	1520	6♦	S	12	1520	
6.4	4♥	E	10	-620	4♥	E	9	100	Gain
				<b>Total 3410</b>				<b>Total 7090</b>	<b>Gain of 3680</b>

My thoughts on why the results have changed or remained the same are as follows:

- 1.1 If South opens 1♦, Futile Willie ends up in 3NT and gets a heart lead. While Futile Willie would know to play on diamonds, it seems unlikely he would play the suit carefully enough.
- 1.3 Even though Mr. Smug misdefended, the contract went down anyway. So replacing him leaves the result unchanged.
- 2.1 The sound player plays carefully, winning the opening lead with the ace and makes just nine tricks.
- 2.2 A sound player would only invite game. I have assumed that the play would go the same way as it did in 3NT.
- 2.3 A sound player might give only a simple raise but I have assumed that Mrs. Guggenheim would go on in any event.
- 3.1 A sound player would have no reason to disturb 3NT, which probably makes with an overtrick with the current defenders.
- 3.3 South doubles on the first round and uncovers the heart fit.
- 3.4 After the Unlucky Expert's excellent switch, 3NT goes down.
- 4.3 A sensible South would double 2♣. Declarer should get out for two down but we will never know whether Mrs. Guggenheim would do so.
- 4.4 After declarer's misplay, going in with the ♣A beats 3NT.
- 5.1 Although Mr. Smug's trance aided declarer, I have assumed he would make the contract anyway.
- 5.2 There is a loss here because a sound player would not bid 5♦ all on his own.
- 5.3 After the hesitation, an ethical player would pass 2♦.
- 5.4 A sound player would make the slam and, knowing that Mrs. Guggenheim could have values in reserve, might still have bid it. However, I agree this one is close. I might have scored it at 680.
- 6.1 After the correct play of a middle club on the first trick, the Unlucky Expert would find the brilliant switch to the ♥K.
- 6.2 Same comment as on 1.3.
- 6.3 Although Mr Smug misplayed, he made the contract. Thus, the sound player would merely duplicate the result.
- 6.4 Ruffing the third round of diamonds easily defeats 4♥.

Now we replace Mrs. Guggenheim with the sound player:

Deal	Original Contract	By	Tricks	Mrs. Gugg.	New Contract	By	Tricks	Sound Player	Change
1.1	6♣	N	10	100	6♣	N	9	150	Gain
1.2	1♣ XX	E	2	-2900	1NT	N	9	-150	Gain
1.3	5♣ X	W	10	-100	5♣ X	W	11	550	Gain
1.4	4♥	N	9	100	4♥	N	9	100	
2.1	3NT	S	12	490	4♠	N	10	420	Loss
2.2	3NT	N	9	400	3NT	N	9	400	
2.3	4♠	N	10	620	4♠	N	10	620	
2.4	6♥	E	12	-1430	6♥	E	11	100	Gain
3.1	4♥	S	10	-420	4♥	S	9	50	Gain
3.2	5♦	W	10	-0	5♦	W	10	-0	
3.3	3♣ X	S	9	-670	2♥	N	8	-110	Gain
3.4	3NT	E	10	630	3NT	E	10	630	
4.1	4♠ XX	W	7	-1000	6♣	E	12	920	Gain
4.2	4♥	E	9	-100	3NT	E	9	600	Gain
4.3	3NT	S	7	200	3NT	S	7	200	
4.4	3NT	E	10	630	3NT	E	10	630	
5.1	6♥	W	12	-1080	6♥	W	12	-1080	
5.2	5♥ X	W	9	500	5♥ X	W	9	500	
5.3	3NT	N	7	-200	3NT	N	9	600	Gain
5.4	6♥	S	11	-100	6♥	S	11	-100	
6.1	4♥	W	10	420	4♥	W	10	420	
6.2	4♠	W	8	-200	4♠	W	10	620	Gain
6.3	6♦	S	12	-1520	6♦	S	12	-1520	
6.4	4♥	E	10	620	4♥	E	10	620	
				<b>Total -5010</b>				<b>Total 5170</b>	<b>Gain of 10180</b>

Introducing the sound player now has more impact. For one thing, Mrs. Guggenheim misplayed more contracts than did Mr. Smug. For another, the new substitution has avoided two big misunderstandings.

My explanations for the changes or otherwise are as follows:

- 1.1 Not covering with the ♣K results in an extra undertrick.
- 1.2 After rescuing the redouble to 1♥, North-South probably play in 1NT and make nine tricks.
- 1.3 The routine avoidance play of leading out the ♠K lands the game.
- 2.1 A sound player jumps to 4♠ and makes ten tricks by overtaking the second round of trumps.
- 2.2 Even though Mrs. Guggenheim misplayed, she made the contract. Replacing her thus leaves the result unchanged.
- 2.3 Ditto.
- 2.4 North saves the ♦9, which beats the slam if the Unlucky Expert plays as he did or if Mr. Smug works out not to capture the jack.
- 3.1 A sound player would overtake the opening diamond lead. Surely even Futile Willie would defeat the contract after that.
- 3.3 Futile Willie would pass the reopening double of 2♣ but then the Unlucky Expert would retreat to 2♥.
- 3.4 Same comment as 2.2.
- 4.1 The sound player would bid and make the club slam, reading the Unlucky Expert's 4♠ as a cuebid,
- 4.2 I have assumed that that Mr. Smug finds the spade switch against 3NT as he found it against the heart game.
- 4.4 Same comment as 2.2.
- 5.1 I regard the killing club or high trump lead as too hard to find.
- 5.3 The sound player rebids 2NT and reaches 3NT, making the contract with correct use of the spade entries.
- 5.4 Mr. Smug would be even more likely to bid the slam facing a constructive raise to game. I have assumed that the Unlucky Expert makes the same lead whatever the auction.
- 6.1 Same comment as 2.2.
- 6.2 The sound player would place Mr. Smug with the ♦J and make the game.
- 6.3 Even though Mrs. Guggenheim followed carelessly with her trumps, declarer failed to take advantage.

Now we replace Futile Willie by the sound player:

Deal	Original Contract	By	Tricks	Futile Willie	New Contract	By	Tricks	Sound Player	Change
1.1	6♣	N	10	-100	3NT	S	10	430	Gain
1.2	1♣ XX	E	2	2900	1♣ XX	E	2	2900	
1.3	5♣ X	W	10	100	5♣ X	W	10	100	
1.4	4♥	N	9	-100	4♥	N	10	620	Gain
2.1	3NT	S	12	-490	3NT	S	8	50	Gain
2.2	3NT	N	9	-400	3NT	N	6	150	Gain
2.3	4♠	N	10	-620	4♠	N	9	100	Gain
2.4	6♥	E	12	1430	4♥	E	11	650	Loss
3.1	4♥	S	10	-420	4♥	S	10	-420	
3.2	5♦	W	10	-0	3NT	E	10	630	Gain
3.3	3♣ X	S	9	-670	3♣ X	S	7	500	Gain
3.4	3NT	E	10	630	3NT	E	10	630	
4.1	4♠ XX	W	7	1000	4♠ XX	W	7	1000	
4.2	4♥	E	9	100	4♥	E	9	100	
4.3	3NT	S	7	-200	3NT	S	7	-200	
4.4	3NT	E	10	-630	3NT	W	10	-630	
5.1	6♥	W	12	1080	4♥	W	11	550	Loss
5.2	5♥ X	W	9	-500	5♦ X	S	8	500	Gain
5.3	3NT	N	7	200	3NT	N	7	200	
5.4	6♥	S	11	100	6♥	S	11	100	
6.1	4♥	W	10	420	4♥	W	10	420	
6.2	4♠	W	8	-200	4♠	W	9	-200	
6.3	6♦	S	12	-1520	6♦	S	11	-50	Gain
6.4	4♥	E	10	620	4♥	E	10	620	
				<b>Total 2730</b>				<b>Total 8750</b>	<b>Gain of 6020</b>

My thoughts on the above, including an explanation of why two results became worse, are as follows:

- 1.1 Raising 1NT to 3NT is routine. Mr. Smug makes ten tricks on the ♠10 lead.
- 1.4 The sound player would set up a diamond trick for a discard before touching trumps.
- 2.1 Picking up any of the clues that the Unlucky Expert has the ♥A enables the sound player to defeat 3NT.
- 2.2 Nobody sensible would replicate Futile Willie's 'blocking' play.
- 2.3 Cashing the ♥A before playing the third club defeats the game.
- 2.4 The sound player would not put the Unlucky Expert in a slam.
- 3.1 Since Mrs. Guggenheim failed to read the ♦10 as a signal, the fact that the sound player would have played the right card makes no difference.
- 3.2 The sound player appreciates that Mrs. Guggenheim would only bid 3NT if she expected to make it.
- 3.3 The sound player would probably lead the singleton heart. Even Mrs. Guggenheim would manage to beat the contract now.
- 3.4 The 2NT opening would change who played the hand but not, I suspect, the result.
- 4.2 Since the contract failed even after Futile Willie's lazy low ruff, replacing him makes no difference.
- 4.4 I have assumed that Mr. Smug would be just as asleep if his partner played the ♠8 at Trick 1 as he was at the table.
- 5.1 Same comment as 2.4.
- 5.2 It is clear to leave in partner's double.
- 5.3 As the contract failed even after Futile Willie's lazy low spade, replacing him makes no difference.
- 6.3 After the sound player passes, Mr. Smug would still reach 6♦. When Mr. Smug misses the trump gambit, correct discarding defeats this.

Futile Willie had the chance to emerge as the biggest winner on the night but blew it.



Finally, we replace the Unlucky Expert with the sound player:

Deal	Original Contract	By	Tricks	Unlucky Expert	New Contract	By	Tricks	Sound Player	Change
1.1	6♣	N	10	100	6♣	N	10	100	
1.2	1♣ XX	E	2	-2900	1NT	N	9	-150	Gain
1.3	5♣ X	W	10	-100	5♣ X	W	10	-100	
1.4	4♥	N	9	100	4♥	N	9	100	
2.1	3NT	S	12	-490	3NT	S	12	-490	
2.2	3NT	N	9	-400	3NT	N	9	-400	
2.3	4♠	N	10	-620	4♠	N	10	-620	
2.4	6♥	E	12	1430	6♥	E	12	1430	
3.1	4♥	S	10	420	4♥	S	10	420	
3.2	5♦	W	10	0	5♦	W	10	0	
3.3	3♣ X	S	9	670	3♣ X	S	9	670	
3.4	3NT	E	10	-630	3NT	E	10	-630	
4.1	4♠ XX	W	7	-1000	5♣	E	11	400	Gain
4.2	4♥	E	9	-100	4♥	E	9	-100	
4.3	3NT	S	7	200	3NT	S	7	200	
4.4	3NT	E	10	630	3NT	E	10	630	
5.1	6♥	W	12	1080	6♥	W	11	50	Loss
5.2	5♥ X	W	9	-500	5♥ X	W	9	-500	
5.3	3NT	N	7	200	3NT	N	7	200	
5.4	6♥	S	11	100	6♥	S	11	100	
6.1	4♥	W	10	-420	4♥	W	9	50	Gain
6.2	4♠	W	8	200	4♠	W	8	200	
6.3	6♦	S	12	1520	6♦	S	12	1520	
6.4	4♥	E	10	-620	4♥	E	10	-620	
				<b>Total -1130</b>				<b>Total 2460</b>	<b>Gain of 3590</b>

This proved the most difficult substitution to evaluate. I assess its impact as follows:

- 1.2 The sound player would either open or retreat to 1♥.
- 2.3 The way Futile Willie has defended clearly indicates going for the trump promotion. This means no change to the result.
- 2.4 Would Futile Willie still have bid this slam and the slam on 5.1 playing with a normal partner? I have assumed that he would but that only one slam would make.
- 3.1 The sound player might not find the inspired 3NT bid. As Mr. Smug bid 4♥ anyway, raising directly to 4♥ would make no difference.
- 3.2 The way Futile Willie played made it easy enough for a sound defender to know to go for the heart ruff, so no change.
- 3.4 The sound player might fail to find the ♣8 switch. As the contract made anyway, this would make no difference.
- 4.1 The sound player would simply put Mrs. Guggenheim in 5♣, which she would make.
- 5.1 See comment on 2.4.
- 5.3 The sound player might not manage to duck the first trick smoothly. Since Mrs. Guggenheim failed to finesse the ♠8 at the table, I have assumed that she again fails to do so.
- 6.1 The sound player would not find the trump switch but would find the safe club exit after scoring the ♥K.
- 6.2 The sound player might exit with a low diamond. I have assumed that Mrs. Guggenheim would again try to 'combine her chances'.
- 6.4 Trying to set up a trump trick for Mr. Smug was clearly indicated.

In case you want to know, I can tell you the history of some of the deals. 1.1, 1.3 and 3.1 all come from South-of-England-wide charity pairs competitions. On 1.1, I have modified the clubs slightly; on 1.3, I have swapped the majors. 3.1 you have just as the original competitors had it. On 3.1, the expert commentator said that 4♥ would normally fail. In fact, it made at most tables. I have based 3.2 closely on a deal in a partnership bidding competition. The commentator (not me this time) could see no way of playing diamonds for one loser. 4.1 I have based on a real life mix-up by an Italian pair in the Rosenblum. 4.3 I have based on a hand defended by Mike Fithyan of Hampshire, England.

To me 5.1 has the most interesting background. When the publisher of Hugh Kelsey's books on squeezes decided to reprint them as a single volume, he asked me to report any mistakes that might need correcting. I found very few, which is remarkable when one considers that Kelsey worked largely on his own and before the days of 'Deep Finesse'. One of the few examples that suffered from so many flaws that it needed (in my opinion) total replacement was in the section on the progressive ruffing squeeze. In the end, Kelsey's widow would not agree to any corrections. 5.1 is the potential replacement deal that I created. 1.2, 2.1, 2.4, 3.3 (however did you guess?), 5.2 and 5.4, I created especially to suit the famous four. The rest of the deals were sitting in my file of interesting deals awaiting a suitable outlet. I hasten to add that in many cases the auctions or other aspects to the settings on file were more sensible than those that you have just read. One exception was on 3.4. I must have miscounted West's points as I already had the 1♦-1NT-3NT auction.

\* \* \* \*

When I started to write this book, I had expected to end it at this point. However, if you have enjoyed reading it only half as much as I have enjoyed writing it, you will understand why it has to continue.

# One Final Rubber

The Unlucky Expert feels his wallet. It has slimmed down quite a bit during the course of the evening. Could he afford to go home yet?

‘Why don’t we play one more round, a proper rubber, for old time’s sake?’

‘Oh yes, let’s,’ says Mrs. Guggenheim eagerly.

Mr. Smug strokes his chin. ‘I don’t see why not. There’s nobody else here to mind.’ He thinks his luck is in and wants the bridge to continue. ‘Are you game, Willie?’

‘I wouldn’t want to break up the party,’ Futile Willie replies.

‘That’s settled then,’ says Mr. Smug.

Mrs. Guggenheim cuts the ♦Q.

Futile Willie cuts the ♦K and quickly glances at his watch. ‘Good heavens, is that the time?’

Mr. Smug snorts. ‘Yes it is the time but you’ve agreed to play. You’re a man of your word, aren’t you?’

Futile Willie nods.

‘After you,’ says Mr. Smug, turning towards the Unlucky Expert.

The Unlucky Expert cuts the ♦9.

Mr. Smug waves his hand over the pack. After a couple of motions from side to side, he reaches down and cuts the ♣A. ‘It’s you and I then, Willie. I’ll stay here and we’ll have the blue cards.’

Dealer South  
Neither vulnerable

♠ K 8 2  
 ♥ 10 8 7 6 4  
 ♦ K 7  
 ♣ 8 7 2

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

♠ J 5  
 ♥ A 9 5 3 2  
 ♦ A 5  
 ♣ K 6 5 4

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

N  
 W E  
 S

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
			1NT <sup>1</sup>
pass	2♣	pass <sup>2</sup>	2♠
pass	3♠ <sup>3</sup>	pass	pass <sup>4</sup>
pass			

1. As usual, Mr. Smug opts for the more aggressive bid. To open 1♦ and reverse with 2♠ after a 2♣ or 1NT response would be too much even by his standards. Opening 1♦ and rebidding 2♦ would be the middle of the road action, albeit consistent with a hand a fraction weaker.
2. When responder uses Stayman, he usually has length in one or both majors and at least the values to invite game. This makes it highly likely that someone will double if you overcall on the wrong hand. You need a six-card suit, a good one if possible, to consider an overcall.

I learnt this lesson long ago. I once overcalled 2♠ with spades better than these hearts and found partner with the wrong hand: values to stop the opponents from making game and a singleton spade. Why do I still remember? One of the selectors was watching (I was playing for the England Junior team) and his comments made sure that I would!

3. Futile Willie judges the hand well. The singleton jack is worth less than full value and the trumps are moderate. If Mr. Smug passes, game is unlikely to be a good prospect.
4. Even Mr. Smug admits to holding a minimum.

## The Play

Mrs. Guggenheim ponders her opening lead. She has just been reading *The Golden Rules of Opening Leads*. What were the rules that told you when you might lead a short suit? Yes, you need a weak hand so that partner figures to have an entry or two. She could tick that box. It also helps to have a trump entry. She could tick that box as well. The ♦K lands on the green baize.

Now look at things from the Unlucky Expert's point of view. He can see six diamonds between his hand and dummy. It doesn't occur to him that his partner could have led from Kx. If, as seems far more likely, the lead comes from KQxx, he can almost write the hand down. He can see only 15 more points missing, which means that Mr. Smug has them all. Declarer's hand must be something like this:

♠ A K Q x   ♥ K Q x   ♦ J x x   ♣ x x x

In this case defending passively will be useless. Even without ruffing anything, declarer can make four spades, two hearts and three clubs. To beat the contract East must overtake the ♦K with the ace and return the five before ruffing the third round. The defenders score the first three tricks, with the ♠K and ♥A to come.

The Unlucky Expert puts the plan into action – well the first part of it anyway. Enjoying the moment, Mr. Smug wins the return with the jack. The Unlucky Expert can't help raising an eyebrow when his partner follows with the seven. Why would she want to duck?

Mr. Smug plays the ♥K to drive out the ace. The Unlucky Expert exits with a heart, which dummy ruffs. A trump goes to the nine and king. The Unlucky Expert grasps what is going on now. In the end, he makes the fourth defensive trick with the ♠K.

*Result: 3♠ made exactly – 90 below the line to North-South*

## Post Mortem

'Accurate bidding,' observes Futile Willie.

'Quite,' replies Mr. Smug.

The Unlucky Expert shakes his head. How unlucky could he be? At least it wasn't game. 'What a brilliant lead, partner,' he remarks in his customary tone.

Mrs. Guggenheim looks puzzled before breaking into a smile. She had better acknowledge what little praise comes her way!

Although not quite from the textbooks, Mrs. Guggenheim's lead could easily have worked. I suppose the majority would choose a low heart. East's pass over 2♣ gives you a slight reason not to lead a club. Since the 1NT opening is in theory strong, a double of 2♣ would ask for a club lead. (Most play that if the 1NT opening is weak, a double of 2♣ shows values and a desire to compete.) After a heart lead, the Unlucky Expert would switch to ace and another diamond, certainly defeating the contract.

We cannot blame the Unlucky Expert for deciding to overtake the diamond. The hand he played Mr. Smug for was far more likely than the hand Mr. Smug in fact held. I guess I should charge Mrs. Guggenheim 140 plus the value, yet unknown, of the partscore.

## FINAL RUBBER DEAL 2

Dealer West

Neither vulnerable;

North-South 90

h 90

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

♠ 3  
♥ Q 9 7 5  
♦ 10 9 8 5  
♣ Q 8 4 3

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

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

Diagram: A square with 'N' at the top, 'S' at the bottom, 'W' on the left, and 'E' on the right.

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
1♠	pass	3♣ <sup>1</sup>	pass
pass <sup>2</sup>	pass		

1. With a normal partner, the limit raise is about right. Although reduced in value, you can't fully write off the ♥K. Of course, when playing with Mrs. Guggenheim, a slight downward adjustment is quite in order. I would not quibble with a single raise.

2. With a good 13 points in high cards, good trumps and good controls, this hand justifies an advance to 4♠ whatever the score. Here, because the opponents have 90 below the line, game is worth more than usual. This means you should bid it even more readily than normal. Of course, all this passes over Mrs. Guggenheim's head. She applies another rule: bid what you think you can make!

## The Play

Futile Willie has an obvious lead: the ♦10.

The Unlucky Expert puts down his hand, feeling slightly nervous. If his partner has a dead minimum, will she come to nine tricks?

'Thank you, partner,' says Mrs. Guggenheim, 'Queen please.'

Mr. Smug covers with the king. Mrs. Guggenheim sighs. She wins with the ace. She decides to lead the ♠K. Life will be easier, she thinks, with the ace gone. Mr. Smug doesn't play ball. He ducks the first round so that he might win the second round and play a third.

Mrs. Guggenheim looks again at dummy. She notices the singleton heart. Perhaps she had better ruff a heart or two before playing any more trumps. Mr. Smug wins with the ace and lays down the ♠A. Without giving the matter much more thought, he cashes the ♦J before reverting to a trump. Futile Willie discards a low heart on this, having discarded a diamond on the second round.

Mrs. Guggenheim decides that she had better ruff a heart while she has the chance. She wins the trump in hand and ruffs a heart. She then pauses. She looks down at the pile of tricks in front of her. She has made four tricks. She needs five more. Even Mrs. Guggenheim can work that out. She has two trumps left in her hand. That's two more. Then there's the ♣A and ♣K. She finds herself one short.

She crosses to hand with the ♣A and returns a club. When only a low card appears, she goes into a trance. Should she go up with the king and ruff the third round or should she finesse now? Her guardian angel must be near at hand because she suddenly spots that it's no good ruffing out the suit as dummy has no entry. She calls for the jack and can hardly bear to look at Mr. Smug's card. She guesses it must be a low one because he makes no effort to gather the trick. She calls in triumph for the ♣K and discards a losing heart.

*Result: 3♠ made — 90 below the line to East-West*



## Post Mortem

Mrs. Guggenheim beams. 'I made it, didn't I?'

The Unlucky Expert struggles to raise a smile. He knows that it's a plus score but one somewhat smaller than it should have been.

## Chucks

Mrs. Guggenheim had quite a few ways of arriving at ten tricks, which any decent player would have contracted to make. She can even make ten tricks despite taking a wrong view in clubs. If she plays off the ace-king early and leads the jack for a ruffing finesse, Mr. Smug has no answer. If he ruffs, declarer can throw her losing diamond. Mr. Smug can then play two rounds of trumps but to no avail. Declarer makes two heart ruffs and the long club. If Mr. Smug doesn't ruff any clubs, declarer still gets rid of her diamond. She makes four club tricks and just needs one heart ruff.

As the play in fact went, Mrs. Guggenheim could still have made ten tricks if she had finessed Futile Willie for the queen before taking the heart ruff. East-West should have bid and made game, wiping out the North-South 90 and putting them in a great position to win the rubber. Remember, the side that scores the first game has a 75% chance of earning the rubber bonus. As it is, the scores are dead level.

By my reckoning, the bonus value of the first game is 350 (half the 700 bonus for a two-game rubber). This makes the chuck 380.

## FINAL RUBBER DEAL 3

Dealer North

Neither vulnerable;

both sides 90

	♠ 10 8 7 3 2	
	♥ 6 5	
	♦ A 9 3	
	♣ 10 9 8	
♠ A J 9 6 4		♠ Q 5
♥ 10 9 4		♥ 8 2
♦ Q		♦ K J 10 7 5 4 2
♣ K 6 4 2		♣ J 7
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           N W       E S         </div>	
	♠ K	
	♥ A K Q J 7 3	
	♦ 8 6	
	♣ A Q 5 3	

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
	pass	3♦ <sup>1</sup>	3♥ <sup>2</sup>
4♦ <sup>3</sup>	pass	pass	4♥ <sup>4</sup>
all pass			

1. The Unlucky Expert opens the same as he would at a nil score. He's probably right. If partner has a good hand, 3♦ should be a reasonable spot. He can hardly expect to buy the contract any lower. If she doesn't have a good hand, at least he has made life difficult for the opponents.
2. Mr. Smug notices the score. Clearly, he would jump to 4♥ if 3♥ were not enough for game.
3. Mrs. Guggenheim makes a brave bid. She knows how well her partner plays the hand and how reluctant the opponents will be to double.
4. Mr. Smug doesn't mind bidding 4♥. He does not double in part because his partner might bid 4♠. In any event, he prefers an action that makes it likely he will play the hand.

### The Play

Mrs. Guggenheim knows exactly what card to lead: the singleton in her partner's suit. When Mr. Smug sees dummy come down with the ♦A, he asks Futile Willie to play it. I very much doubt that he has thought whether the Unlucky Expert would overtake and give Mrs.

Guggenheim a ruff. He is just in a rush as usual. However, he does spot the shortage of entries in dummy. 'A club, please.'

The Unlucky Expert plays low smoothly and Mr. Smug plays the queen. Mrs. Guggenheim wins with the king. What can she do next? If only she had a second diamond, she would continue the suit. She fans her cards a couple of times. Then a brainwave strikes her. She has five spades and can see five spades in dummy. If she plays ace and another spade, one of two things can happen. If her partner has the singleton, he can ruff the second round. If declarer is the one with the singleton, her lead can't give anything away. The Unlucky Expert plays the five and Mr. Smug drops the king. Following through her plan, she continues with the six. She looks a little saddened when her partner follows and declarer ruffs.

Mr. Smug draws trumps in three rounds and plays a fourth for good measure. '100 for honors, partner.'

Mrs. Guggenheim has a discard to make. Can she find a safe one? Yes, declarer has run out of spades, making it safe to throw a spade. Mr. Smug shrugs his shoulders. 'Still in with a chance,' he announces. He plays the ♠A, dropping the jack, and another club. After the ten wins the third round, Mrs. Guggenheim tries in vain to work out whether her six is good. Luckily, it isn't her lead and she can defer the decision. Mr. Smug leads a spade off dummy. The Unlucky Expert played the queen last time. Maybe he'll play the jack this time. No, he throws a diamond. Mr. Smug snorts. He throws a diamond as well.

Mrs. Guggenheim blinks. Is that a diamond? She wins with the ♠9. Still unsure of the club position, she exits with the ♠J. Mr. Smug ruffs and faces his last card: the ♣5. 'I think this one's mine,' announces a grinning Mrs. Guggenheim.

*Result: 4♥ one down with 100 honors — 50 above the line to East-West and 100 above the line to North-South*

## **Post Mortem**

'I don't think they make 4♦,' Mr. Smug announces.

'You want me to double with one ace and a bust?' replies Futile Willie in disbelief. 'I didn't know you had such a good hand.'

Mr. Smug nods, 'Guess you can't.'

## Chucks

Mr. Smug could have made the contract if he had played the clubs correctly. He fell into a trap of thinking that the layout required the same technique as AQ109xx facing a singleton. On that layout, you should usually finesse the queen. This is because you can never play the suit for one loser if leftie has Kx but you can do it if she has Jx.

Here two things pointed to doing it the other way. The first was the Unlucky Expert's opening bid. If he has a weak hand (not a sure thing I admit given the score), he is more likely to hold Jxx than Kxx. The second is that if the queen loses to the king, it leaves you reliant on a 3-3 break. As we saw, the fall of the jack on the second round didn't help declarer. By contrast, it would have helped him if he had run the ten on the first round. He would then have the ace for the second round, the nine for the third and the queen for the fourth.

Mr. Smug's chuck is almost as expensive as Mrs. Guggenheim's on the previous deal. Instead of putting his side game up, he has left the score very nearly all square.

## FINAL RUBBER DEAL 4

Dealer East

Neither vulnerable;

both sides 90

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

	♠ Q 10 6 2	
	♥ 9 8 5 4	
	♦ Q J 10 6	
	♣ 6	

	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W      E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
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West	North	East	South
<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
		1NT <sup>1</sup>	pass
4♣ <sup>2</sup>	pass	4♠ <sup>3</sup>	pass
5♣ <sup>4</sup>	pass	5♠ <sup>5</sup>	pass
6NT <sup>6</sup>	all pass		

- Any partscore sufficient for game, the Unlucky Expert shades his opening by a point. He reckons that a suit opening would make it easy for his opponents to enter the bidding. His four defensive tricks mean that he won't mind if they overcall and his partner doubles for penalties.
- Mrs. Guggenheim struggles to conceal her excitement. If she has eight tricks and her partner a strong notrump, surely there is a slam on. What is more, she has the chance to use one of her pet conventions.
- Two aces.
- Mrs. Guggenheim uses Gerber again to check on kings.
- Two kings.
- If you intend to stop in six even if partner keeps you giving the best possible responses, why bother asking? Her inquiries have achieved little but given the defenders a virtual blueprint of her partner's hand.

### The Play

Mr. Smug yawns. 'My lead is it?'

'Uh-huh,' responds the Unlucky Expert.

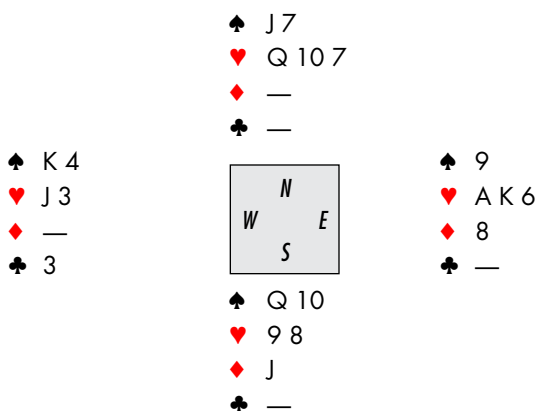
Fate has dealt Mr. Smug an attractive sequence of diamonds and he places the queen on the table.

The Unlucky Expert studies the dummy carefully. He sees twelve top tricks if the club suit breaks 3-2 or the jack falls singleton. Knowing his luck, he will have to lose a club and need to fall back on a squeeze. He wins the diamond with the ace, plays a club to the ace and cashes the king. All follow to the first club but Mr. Smug discards a heart on the second round. The Unlucky Expert shakes his head. Why does this always happen to him? Since this means he will have to lose a club at some point, he continues with a low club, throwing a spade from hand. Futile Willie might exit safely in clubs and leave his entries intact. First Mr. Smug has to find another discard. He chooses a spade this time.

Futile Willie notices that Mr. Smug is keeping diamonds and takes this as a request to return the suit. He leads the  $\spadesuit 9$ . The Unlucky Expert wins and strokes his chin. Assuming Futile Willie would not return the nine from 109x, his eight has become a threat against South alone. It is not ideal – he would prefer threats over stoppers rather than under – but it's a start. He has little choice about how to continue. He must use a spade entry to continue the clubs. North follows to the fourth round of clubs while East and South discard diamonds.

The Unlucky Expert takes note of this, thinking to himself, 'South has thrown one card in each suit. This surely suggests a 4=4=4=1 shape.'

On the fifth round of clubs, North discards a diamond while East and South throw hearts. If his reading of the layout is correct, the Unlucky Expert can see the way home from here:



On the sixth round of clubs, North has to throw a spade to keep three hearts. With his ♥6 no further use, declarer discards it. South comes under no pressure on this trick and throws another heart. For the finale, the Unlucky Expert plays a heart to the ace and cashes the king. As expected, Mr. Smug goes into a trance. Which is Futile Willie more likely still to hold: two spades or the ♦8? Even Mr. Smug's limited counting talent answers this question. With two cards left, one of which must be the ♥Q, his partner can't have ♠Jx. Mr. Smug discards his last diamond.

The Unlucky Expert draws in a deep breath. He flips the ♦8 on to the table. 'This one's good and I have a spade to lead to dummy for the last trick.'

*Result: 6NT made — 190 below the line and 500 above to East-West*

## Post Mortem

Mrs. Guggenheim hasn't followed the play carefully. However, she has worked out from its slow pace that the contract must have been hard to make. 'I had to put you in the slam, didn't I?'

The Unlucky Expert nods in frustration. He has just landed a slam on a double squeeze, squeezing the opponents on different tricks to boot, and his partner wants to ask a facile question about the bidding.

## Chucks

Although the squeeze was genuine at the end, the defenders missed several chances. The biggest mistake, though not directly fatal as the cards lie, was Futile Willie's ♦9 return. When defending a squeeze you don't want to convert a threat that you and your partner can both guard into one that only one of you can. If declarer had been 3=5=3=2, this return would have set up a squeeze from which there was no escape. It would have been better to return his lower diamond.

An even better return is the ♠3. Why is this? Well, North knows South has the ♠Q (or there are twelve easy tricks) but South may not know who has the ♠J. After a low spade to the queen and ace, Mr. Smug might have worked out that his partner had the spades guarded and that he didn't need to keep the suit. A good idea is to guard the suits held on your right rather than on your left. Futile Willie should have been keeping spades and Mr. Smug hearts. For sure, Mr. Smug

The slam should have gone one down for 50 to North-South. As it is, East-West have scored 190, gone game up and scored a slam bonus. This amounts to a chuck of 1090 (190 plus 500 plus 350 plus 50).

## East-West vulnerable

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

♠ A 10  
♥ 6  
♦ A K J 10 9  
♣ A K Q 9 3

♠ J 8 7 6 3 2  
♥ 9 2  
♦ —  
♣ 10 8 7 4 2

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

Diagram of a square table with North (N) at the top, South (S) at the bottom, West (W) on the left, and East (E) on the right.

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
			1♥
pass	2♦ <sup>1</sup>	pass	3♦ <sup>2</sup>
pass	4NT	pass	5♦
pass	7♦	all pass	



avoid getting too high is to make a waiting rebid of two of your suit. You intend to show preference for partner's suit on the third round.

What is the downside? Partner can't easily distinguish a raise from mere preference. Mr. Smug, I'm sure, does not worry about such things. In any event, by his standards, his hand is a little better than minimum.

The rest of the auction is very straightforward. It has to be for Mr. Smug and Futile Willie to handle it.

## The Play

The Unlucky Expert ponders his opening lead. Fate has denied him the chance to make the classic lead of a trump. Which is the safest of the side suits? A lead from the jack nearly always involves some risk. He shies away from a club as well. On this auction, either opponent may have concealed length in clubs. He settles on the ♥9, leading through dummy's strength.

'Thank you, partner,' says Futile Willie, as usual.

He puts up dummy's ♥A and plays a trump to test the suit. He can count thirteen tricks if all follow. Alas, the Unlucky Expert shows out. Futile Willie seems unworried. Barring hostile breaks in the side suits, he can ruff a club in dummy and discard his losing spade on a top heart. He plays a club to the jack, pitches a spade and returns a club.

'What are trumps?' asks a surprised Mrs. Guggenheim.

'I'm not sure you can ask that,' replies Mr. Smug.

'True, but my partner *can* ask what the contract is,' adds the Unlucky Expert.

Mr. Smug nods, 'Seven diamonds.'

Mrs. Guggenheim ruffs and Futile Willie concedes one down. He remembers just in time to claim his 100 for honors.

*Result: 7♦ down one 50 to East-West and 100 to North-South*

## Post Mortem

'Couldn't you have drawn the trumps?' asks Mr. Smug. 'It was playing with fire to keep leading clubs when you had so many of them.'

'It doesn't help if I draw trumps,' Futile Willie replies. 'Then I have a slow club loser. By playing clubs early I gave myself the extra chance that the hand with the singleton trump was short in clubs as well.'

'I think you mean void in trumps, but it doesn't sound much of an extra chance to me. What happens if you just run the trumps?'

The Unlucky Expert comes to Futile Willie's rescue, at any rate in part. 'That doesn't help. For one thing, you have no entry to dummy. For another, I have the clubs and discard after declarer while my partner who has the hearts discards after dummy. You need to take an entirely different approach.'

Have you spotted the winning line?

## Chucks

Futile Willie missed a sitting duck. He simply had to ruff a heart at Trick 2. Then, when he found the bad trump break, he could cross to the ♣J, cash the ♥K and ruff a second heart. By ruffing twice in the long trump hand, he would generate an extra trick. For some reason, many players have a blind spot when it comes to the dummy reversal. If by any chance Mrs. Guggenheim were short in hearts rather than clubs, he would still make the contract. He could overruff, draw the rest of her trumps, run the clubs and go on to ruff a spade in dummy.

While Futile Willie was unlucky, he did miss an almost 100% line. Sometimes you have to help make your own luck. Do you have much sympathy for a baseball hitter who strikes out when he was bunting on a two-strike count? Do you feel for a tennis player who tries a fast second serve right into the corner on set point down and makes a double fault? I thought not.

The North-South chuck, the costliest of the rubber, comes to 1540. This comprises 140 for the trick score, 1000 for the grand slam bonus, 350 for the value of the game and 50 for the penalty conceded.

## FINAL RUBBER DEAL 6

Dealer West

East-West vulnerable

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

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K Q J 10 7 2
♥ Q 6
♦ 7 6 3
♣ K 3

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
pass	1♣	pass	1♠
pass	4♠	pass	4NT <sup>1</sup>
pass	5♠	pass	6♠ <sup>2</sup>
all pass			

1. 'Who's been shuffling these cards?' wonders Mr. Smug to himself. 'It looks like another slam.' As usual, he wants to check on aces before committing himself. As usual, he's chosen the wrong hand for doing so. Unless his partner happens to announce possession of all four aces, Mr. Smug won't know whether there are two fast losers in one of the red suits. He also overlooks the issue of whether his hand is strong enough for him to take control. Let's give him the benefit of the doubt on the second point — but not on the first. He should cuebid 5♣.
2. Mr. Smug bids the slam unaware that he is taking a chance. So long as his partners keep turning up with controls in the suits for which he lacks a control himself, he will go on bidding the same way.

### The Play

Mrs. Guggenheim cogitates over the opening lead. Normally she leads her partner's suit. He hasn't shown one. Her fallback is a nice sequence. She can't find one. Then she remembers something that she learned a long time ago (not from *The Golden Rules of Opening Leads*

I might add). ‘When in doubt, lead a trump.’ Since Mrs. Guggenheim is often in doubt, she often leads a trump.

Mr. Smug draws trumps ending in hand. He then stops to think. He can see eleven tricks on top and chances in both red suits. It looks like he needs one of two finesses. Then he spots a snag. If he plays the wrong suit first, he may never get the chance to test the other. Suddenly he has an idea. He leads the ♥Q. Without a pause for thought Mrs. Guggenheim ducks. She has learned from the very first deal of the evening when it was so costly to cover!

Mr. Smug is in no doubt about the location of the ♥K. He puts up the ace and plays four rounds of clubs, throwing a heart and a diamond. He then leads a heart off dummy, letting out a loud snort when the Unlucky Expert plays low. He wonders whether he should stick with his original plan. No, the Unlucky Expert would surely have covered if he held the king. Mr. Smug ruffs the heart and leads a diamond to the king, letting out a loud sigh when this loses to the ace. The Unlucky Expert promptly cashes the ♦Q for the setting trick.

*Result: 50 to East-West (but see below)*

## **Post Mortem**

The Unlucky Expert shakes his head before breaking into a smile. ‘If they don’t cover, they don’t have it.’

Mr. Smug frowns and then gently nods. He hasn’t heard Zia’s tip before but he understands.

‘Did I do the right thing?’ asks Mrs. Guggenheim.

Mr. Smug throws up his hands in despair. He then raises a finger. ‘Don’t forget I had 100 honors.’

## **Chucks**

Mr. Smug dwelt so much on trying to entrap Mrs. Guggenheim that he missed a foolproof way to combine his chances. After drawing trumps, he should have played four rounds of clubs, throwing two of his diamonds. He could then come to hand with a trump and safely lead a diamond to the king. If, as would happen on the actual layout, the king loses to the ace, he could ruff the diamond return and take the heart finesse. If the ♦A is onside, he doesn’t need the heart finesse. Assuming that Mrs. Guggenheim grabs her ace, he can discard his second heart on the ♦K. If she doesn’t, she loses it.

Mrs. Guggenheim was lucky that her lead didn't cost. A trump lead is in general a poor lead against a small slam. Unless both opponents have shown balanced hands, they usually have the firepower to make twelve tricks given the chance. This makes it vital to set up a winner or cash out quickly. She should have tried one of the unbid suits. If she had led a diamond, the contract would have been down at once. If she had led a heart, Mr. Smug would have had to guess whether she held the ♥K or the ♦A. He would have had no way to combine his chances. At least Mrs. Guggenheim knew what to do when Mr. Smug led the ♥Q. I guess we should be grateful for that.

The value of the North-South chuck comes to 1080. This comprises 180 for the trick score, 500 for the slam bonus, 350 for the value of game and 50 for the penalty conceded.

# FINAL RUBBER DEAL 7

Dealer North

East-West vulnerable

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

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
	pass	1♠	pass <sup>1</sup>
3♠	pass <sup>2</sup>	4NT	pass
5♥	dbl <sup>3</sup>	6♠	7♥ <sup>4</sup>
dbl <sup>5</sup>	all pass		

- Weak jump overcalls have become part of Mr. Smug's weaponry. If he could have jumped to 2♥, no doubt he would have. A jump to 3♥ (after the 1♠ opening) is too much even for him.

2. Given the vulnerability, Futile Willie might try an unusual 3NT. His spade holding makes it likely his partner has a singleton, in which case the hands fit well. The downside of showing the minors is that it helps the opposing declarer if, as seems quite likely, you end up defending. The upside is that you might find a profitable sacrifice at this vulnerability, especially since Mrs. Guggenheim is not going to be declarer.
3. Futile Willie wants a heart lead against a spade contract and doubles to ask for one. The risk that the opponents, who have bid and raised spades, will suddenly decide to play in 5♥ redoubled appears slim. Even if they do, they have a bad trump break with which to contend.
4. It never crosses Mr. Smug's mind that his partner might want a heart ruff. In his book, Futile Willie has heart length and strength. He counts six heart tricks at least and sees a chance of another with the ♣K. That would be five or six down and an 1100 or 1400 penalty. This sounds cheaper than losing 700 for the two-game rubber, 750 for a vulnerable slam plus the 180 trick score. He overlooks that if the ♣K is a trick for him in 7♥ then it might take the setting trick against 6♠. He also overlooks that his opponents have already half won the rubber by scoring the first game. If he sacrifices, they will stay game up.
5. Mrs. Guggenheim checks the backs of the cards before doubling.

## The Play

Mrs. Guggenheim has no problem with her lead this time. She holds the ace of her partner's suit and her opponents are in a grand slam!

Futile Willie rises to his feet. 'Can you manage this one without me?'

Mr. Smug nods.

'I'll lay them out for you,' says a helpful Mrs. Guggenheim. She lays out the spades followed by the diamonds.

Mr. Smug waves his finger, 'Put the trumps on the right, will you.'

Mrs. Guggenheim remains quite composed. 'I'm afraid he doesn't seem to have any.'

Mr. Smug snorts even more loudly than usual.

The Unlucky Expert follows with the two to show his odd number. He reckons the bidding marks him with good spades. Mrs. Guggenheim gets the wrong message, reading the signal as a lack of interest in the suit, but this causes no harm. She switches to the ♦10. The Unlucky Expert wins with the king and shifts to his singleton club.

Mrs. Guggenheim makes two club tricks and, noticing that her partner has shown out on the second round, continues with a third

round. The Unlucky Expert ruffs, cashes the ♦A and leads a third round of diamonds. Mrs. Guggenheim ruffs. She reckons that Mr. Smug is out of spades and so tries a club. The Unlucky Expert has been counting the clubs and knows that declarer has no more. He discards a spade. Mr. Smug ruffs and has to lead away from his ♥K. Mrs. Guggenheim tries to win this but her partner overtakes. A spade exit sees Mr. Smug once more ruff and lead away from his ♥K. The Unlucky Expert wins and still has the ace of trumps to come.

*Result: 10 down doubled — 2600 to East-West*

## Post Mortem

‘Well done, partner,’ says the Unlucky Expert, breaking into a smile.

Futile Willie’s return to the table with a bottle of vintage bubbly and four glasses forestalls what might otherwise have been a heated debate about whether he or Mr. Smug was to blame for the disaster.

### *Chucks*

2700 by North-South — they beat 6♠ on a heart lead. Futile Willie scores a quick ruff while Mr. Smug later makes the ♥K.

Playing with a sensible partner, Futile Willie’s double of 5♥ was fine. However, as the result shows, it was a risky thing to do with Mr. Smug sitting across the table. Probably the best Futile Willie could do with his present partner was to pass over 5♥ and then double 6♠. Mr. Smug would take the double as asking for an unusual lead. Since dummy hadn’t bid a suit, Mr. Smug would most likely just lead his longest suit.

Mr. Smug’s final bid was clearly idiotic for the reasons already given. For once, he has not landed on his feet. Whether he will learn anything from this disaster, we can only speculate. As far as he is concerned, the whole thing was his partner’s fault.

## East-West vulnerable

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

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

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

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

W N E S

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
		1♦	1♠ <sup>1</sup>
2♣ <sup>2</sup>	2♥ <sup>3</sup>	3♣ <sup>4</sup>	3♥
4♦ <sup>5</sup>	pass	5♦	all pass <sup>6</sup>

1. Mr. Smug judges the hand too strong for a weak jump overcall this time. With his two aces, he has a point.
2. Mrs. Guggenheim's phobia about making a notrump bid strikes once more. The obvious call with her hand is 2NT. She has a balanced hand, the right values to invite game and two probable spade stoppers.
3. Futile Willie takes the easy chance to show his suit. He's not going to wait again for the bidding to get up at the five-level before telling his partner what to lead!
4. The Unlucky Expert finds himself torn between rebidding his own suit and showing the club support, which is rather good. In the end, he goes for the cheaper bid, often a wise choice in marginal decisions.
5. Mrs. Guggenheim happily shows her diamond support. Now that her opponents have bid and raised hearts, she is very glad that she didn't bid 2NT last time.
6. Futile Willie and Mr. Smug are in no hurry to sacrifice again tonight!



## The Play

Looking at all four hands, you would expect this deal to end the rubber. So let's not do that. Let's look at two hands only:

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



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

You are East in 5♦. South has bid spades and supported hearts but leads the ♣2 (bear with me on this). What is your plan?

The Unlucky Expert quickly sums up the position. The opening lead is clearly a singleton. If he plays a round of trumps, South will win with the ace, put North in with a heart and score a club ruff. He knows just how to counter this. Culbertson called it the coup without a name. We know it as the scissors coup. The Unlucky Expert overtakes the ♠K with the ace and returns the jack, discarding his singleton heart. As expected South wins with the queen. Unexpectedly, South leads a second round of clubs while North completes a high-low. Declarer leads a round of trumps and South wins. After this comes a third round of clubs, North ruffing. North was the one short in clubs!

How, you may ask, did Mr. Smug find this brilliant lead of the ♣2 from ♣952? Allow me to explain.

For once, Mr. Smug listened to the bidding and formed a plan. His opponents had bid and supported clubs. If they had a nine-card club fit, Futile Willie would have a singleton. In this case, since he had a sure entry with the ace of trumps, he could give his partner a ruff. What is more, as he was leading clubs with the idea of giving his partner a ruff, Mr. Smug decided that this was a suit-preference position. Holding an entry in hearts rather than spades, he led his lowest club.

*Result: 5♣ one down — 100 to North-South*

## **Post Mortem**

'What an inspired lead!' exclaims Futile Willie.

'Yes I rather thought so,' replies a grinning Mr. Smug.

The Unlucky Expert is lost for words. He no doubt considers it a great injustice that this devilish lead should come so soon after the foul club split in 6NT. He forgets that in the meantime his crazy opponents have gone down in two cold slams and conceded an enormous penalty.

## **Chucks**

None. I think we can fairly say that the Unlucky Expert was victim to a fix rather than a lapse on his part. Any decent player would have taken the same view about the opening lead and suffered the same fate.

Please don't think that Mr. Smug's brilliance, if that's what you would like to call it, was totally out of character. I did say that counting and planning are activities in which he rarely indulges. I didn't say 'never', did I? As people say, the exception proves the rule!

Dealer South  
East-West vulnerable

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

Diagram of the table layout:

A square table with four seats labeled N (North), S (South), E (East), and W (West).

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

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
			pass
1♦	1♥	dbl <sup>1</sup>	1NT <sup>2</sup>
2♠ <sup>3</sup>	3♣ <sup>4</sup>	pass	4♣ <sup>5</sup>
pass	4♥ <sup>6</sup>	all pass	

1. The club now plays negative doubles at the one- and two-level.
2. This shows the shape and the values of the hand well. The bidding suggests that neither opponent will have five spades. This makes it fair enough to feel relaxed about whether Qxx will be a stopper.
3. Mrs. Guggenheim regards this as a brave bid. In truth, her hand is closer to being worth a jump to 3♠ than a pass.
4. If you asked an expert panel what to do at this point, they might vote for any of double (there's always someone who plays it for takeout), 2NT, 3♣, 3♥, 3♠, 3NT and 4♥. Why would 3♦ attract no votes? If the opponents bid two suits and your side might want to play in 3NT, the accepted practice is to bid the suit with which you can help rather than the one that concerns you. Mr. Smug would no doubt bid a simple 4♥. This is too committal for Futile Willie. 3NT or 4♥ might be the right contract. 3♥ is not the way to get to either spot because it just sounds like an attempt to compete. While Futile Willie's choice of 3♣ doesn't show the great heart suit, it doesn't deny it either.

5. The other option here is 3♦, for the reasons given above. Pass, while possible (since partner could have bid 3♦ or 3♠ to create a force) seems overly cautious. 3♥ is also wrong on the hand. Recently I wrote an article about false preference. A key yardstick for false preference is that one card fewer in partner's first suit is fine, but not two cards fewer. By bidding 4♣, you do not rule out playing in 4♥. If 4♥ is a sensible spot, partner can bid it at his next turn.
6. ...and so it turns out.

## The Play

The Unlucky Expert, with five trumps, wants to make declarer ruff. With help in spades but not much in diamonds, he selects the ♠2.

'Thank you, partner,' says Futile Willie, 'about what I expected.' He plays low from dummy and Mrs. Guggenheim goes into a trance. What did her teacher say about finessing against dummy? She can't quite recall. She tries to think the position through. Suppose her partner has led from ♠Kxxx. In this case, she wants to play the jack to avoid setting up the queen. If he has led from ♠10xxx, she wants to play the jack to stop declarer from scoring the queen as well as the king. Well done, Mrs. Guggenheim. She plays the jack and it wins. Flushed by this success she cashes the ♠A and plays a third round.

Futile Willie ruffs the third spade low. He announces, 'no spades, partner,' as he does so. He then puts the ♥10 on the table, '150 for honors, partner.' He has recalled a couple of occasions earlier in the rubber when players almost forgot to claim their honors.

Mr. Smug frowns when Mrs. Guggenheim shows out, 'Look's like you'll need them.' Futile Willie looks serious. What can he do about the 5-0 break? If he draws all the trumps, he will have none left himself. He will then lose a third spade and (barring a miracle ♣QJ doubleton) a club. He decides that it is better to develop the clubs while he still has a trump left in dummy. He cashes the ♠A, crosses to the king and gives up the third round. Mrs. Guggenheim wins this as the Unlucky Expert discards a spade. What should she return?

Mrs. Guggenheim doesn't fancy a spade. That's for sure. She knows it's a bad idea to give a ruff and discard. A diamond it will have to be. She reaches for a card but stops in her tracks. Mightn't declarer hold the ♦Q? She doesn't want to set it up. Then she has a brighter idea, bright by her standards at any rate. Why doesn't she lead the ♦K? If the queen is singleton, it will go under the king. If Futile

Willie has Qx, he won't get to enjoy the queen: her partner would ruff the second round. The ♦K arrives on the table.

Futile Willie wins with the ace, draws the remaining trumps and finishes with the ♣10.

*Result: 4♥ made — 120 below the line to North-South and 150 above for the honors*

### Chucks:

50 plus the value of 4♥ bid and made (total 520)

Do you see what Mrs. Guggenheim should have done when in with the club? If she plays a fourth spade, declarer can't ruff in hand without losing control. If he doesn't ruff, the Unlucky Expert can score the ♥9 (he threw a spade on the third club). Can you also see how Futile Willie could have avoided giving Mrs. Guggenheim this chance? He just needed to give up the first round of clubs rather than the third.

### FINAL RUBBER DEAL 10

Dealer West

Both vulnerable

	♠ J 10 3	
	♥ 10 8 7 5 2	
	♦ 5 4	
	♣ Q 8 4	
♠ 9 2		♠ K 7 6 4
♥ A K 6		♥ J
♦ 8 7		♦ A K J 6 2
♣ A 7 6 5 3 2		♣ K 10 9
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	♠ A Q 8 5	
	♥ Q 9 4 3	
	♦ Q 10 9 3	
	♣ J	

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
1♣	pass	1♦	pass <sup>1</sup>
2♣	pass	2♠	pass <sup>2</sup>
2NT	pass	3♣ <sup>3</sup>	pass
3NT <sup>4</sup>	all pass		

1. Mr. Smug rarely stays out of the auction when he can find an excuse for bidding. However, he has noticed that his side is vulnerable and that a takeout double would likely make his partner declarer.
2. Quite rightly, Mr. Smug doesn't double. For one thing, if the opponents end up in 3NT, a heart lead might work better if his partner has length in the suit. For another, even though Mrs. Guggenheim can hardly have four spades, 2♠ doubled or even redoubled could well be making.
3. The Unlucky Expert bids out his shape. 5♣ may be best if the clubs are not solid and Mrs. Guggenheim has only one heart stopper.
4. Mrs. Guggenheim isn't sure whether to take 3♣ as forcing. She recalls advice she overheard a night or two back. 'If you're unsure whether a bid is forcing, bid on. At worst, you finish a level too high. If you pass, though, you risk playing in a silly contract.' She doesn't want to play in a silly contract. She finds sensible contracts hard enough to play!

## The Play

Futile Willie sees no reason to shy away from the unbid heart suit. East will be short and West could have rebid 1♥ over 1♦ but didn't.

Mrs. Guggenheim looks worried when dummy appears. 'Thank you, partner,' she says in her usual confidence-inspiring manner. She plays the ♥J from dummy. Perhaps it will win the first trick. No, Mr. Smug produces the queen. She lets him win the trick. She believes in holding up as a matter of principle. Here it's a doubtful move because a spade switch could leave her with three spades, a heart and a club to lose. In any case, she has two heart stoppers and expects to lose the lead just once. This makes the hold-up pointless.

Of course, Mr. Smug doesn't consider a spade switch from a holding like his. He returns a heart. Mrs. Guggenheim makes no mistake on this trick, throwing a spade from dummy as she wins in hand. What should she do next? Should she play on clubs, where she has nine cards — or diamonds, where she has two cards fewer, but is missing the queen rather than the queen-jack? Suddenly she has a bright idea. She can combine her chances. If she plays a club to the king and one back to her ace, she will be in the right hand to take the diamond finesse if the clubs don't break 2-2. Cashing her last heart to unblock the clubs isn't part of her plan but maybe she would spot it if clubs did break 2-2. Alas, Mr. Smug discards the ♠8 on the second round. She must fall back on plan B.

Just in time, Mrs. Guggenheim glances down at the pile of tricks in front of her. She has made three so far. What does this tell her?

Even if the diamonds come in for five tricks, she will be one short. She had better cash her heart winner in case she can never get back to it. Nothing terrible happens when she does that. Alas, when she plays a diamond to the jack, the roof caves in. Mr. Smug wins with the queen and returns a heart. Futile Willie makes two heart tricks, cashes the ♣Q and switches to the ♠J. Mrs. Guggenheim covers, not that her play matters at this point, and the defenders make three spade tricks. They both have a diamond left for the last trick and must concede a trick to dummy's ace. She can't bear to look at her partner. Four down wasn't what he was expecting. Of this, she is sure.

*Result: 3NT four down for 400 to North-South*

### Post Mortem

Mr. Smug rubs his hands, enjoying the moment. The only possible spoiler is the thought that 400 could have been 1100. 'I couldn't double because you would take that as asking for a diamond, wouldn't you?'

Futile Willie nods. 'Someone,' looking at the Unlucky Expert, 'might retreat to clubs if you double. I couldn't double either. I had nothing over here. It didn't look like five tricks in my hand.'

### Chucks

East-West 400 plus the trick score of 3NT made (100) and the value of converting game in a two-game rubber (350), total 850.

Have you worked out how the play should have gone? Declarer should have won the first trick and played a club to the ten. This solves the problem of the possible club blockage and protects dummy's ♠K. It's a routine avoidance play – but not to Mrs. Guggenheim. Barring a 4-0 break, the worst that can happen is that North has QJx. In this case, you won't be able to duck a club to South and will have to settle for ducking the second round of clubs to North. You will then duck twice if North leads high spades. This protects you from losing four spade tricks unless South has exactly four spades including the ace.

Both vulnerable

able	♠ 9 8 3	
	♥ J	
	♦ A Q J 8	
	♣ K Q 10 6 3	
♠ A K J 7		♠ 10 5
♥ 10 7 6 5 2		♥ Q 9 4 3
♦ 6 4		♦ 10 7 3
♣ A 4		♣ 9 8 5 2
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;">             N W      E S           </div>	
	♠ Q 6 4 2	
	♥ A K 8	
	♦ K 9 5 2	
	♣ 1 7	

West	North	East	South
Mrs. Guggenheim	Futile Willie	Unlucky Expert	Mr. Smug
	1♣ <sup>1</sup>	pass	1♠
pass <sup>2</sup>	2♠ <sup>3</sup>	pass	4♠ <sup>4</sup>
pass <sup>5</sup>	pass	pass	

1. Once upon a time, Futile Willie would have opened 1♦ so that he could show both his suits. Bitter memories of playing in 4-3 and 4-2 fits finally took their toll. As it happens, I don't have a problem with opening 1♦ on ♦AQJx with a 3=1=4=5 shape if the clubs are poor. You can rebid 1NT if partner responds 1♥ and raise 1♠ to 2♠.
2. Mrs. Guggenheim knows that she needs a good suit to overcall when she is vulnerable.
3. Although Futile Willie could rebid his clubs, he rightly prefers to support his partner. A 1♠ response to 1♣ often includes a five-card spade suit. If partner holds only four, this does not commit you to playing in spades.
4. Jude Goodwin's cartoon 'Now where's the hand you held during the auction?' springs to mind. Mr. Smug has about five ways to express a hand with a four-card spade suit. This is not one of them. Since he can't support clubs or pass with this hand, he should choose between the underbid of 2NT and the value bid of 3NT. Even if partner has four spades, 3NT may play better than 4♠ because the spades are so poor.
5. Mrs. Guggenheim pauses slightly before passing. Whether she doesn't double because she thinks 4♠ will make or whether she fears a retreat to 4NT, I can't tell you.



## The Play

Mrs. Guggenheim has read that when you hold four trumps you should lead the same as you would in a notrump contract. She thus leads fourth highest of her longest and strongest: the ♥5.

Futile Willie displays his dummy. Mr. Smug snorts. 'Better cover it.'

The Unlucky Expert plays the queen and Mr. Smug wins with the ace. He knows he is in trouble but sees a vague chance of success if East has ♠AKx and the defenders slip. He ruffs a heart in dummy and leads a spade to his queen. Mrs. Guggenheim enjoys this. She wins with the king and cashes the ace. She stares at her partner's ten on the second round and then back at dummy. She is trying to remember whether her seven will be good on the fourth round. She clearly thinks it will be because she continues with the jack and seven. Dummy discards a club and a diamond, East two diamonds.

With trumps drawn, Mrs. Guggenheim reverts to hearts, the nine fetching the king. Dummy throws a diamond as declarer wins perforce. He decides to sneak through a club next. Mrs. Guggenheim is awake. She goes in with the ace and cashes her two remaining hearts.

*Result: 4♠ four down — 400 to East-West*

## Post Mortem

'Should I have doubled?' inquires Mrs. Guggenheim.

The Unlucky Expert shakes his head. 'They might run to 4NT and make it.'

Mr. Smug can contain himself no longer and bangs his fist on the table. 'Willie, did you have to raise spades? I thought you'd have better support than three small.'

'It's the expert bid,' replies Futile Willie. 'Ask anyone.'

Mr. Smug snorts. He's not going to ask.

## Chucks

Mr. Smug should have rebid 3NT, which Futile Willie would clearly have passed. Assuming that Mrs. Guggenheim doesn't lead a spade, Mr. Smug makes ten easy tricks: two hearts, four diamonds and four clubs. With spades led and continued, he would still come to nine.



2. Facing a hand that couldn't open, couldn't make a two-over-one response and could merely muster a courtesy raise, Futile Willie decides to call it a day. For all he knows the partnership has three spades and a diamond to lose. Mr. Smug's limited values might lie mainly in clubs, in which case 3♦ could be the limit.

## The Play

The play doesn't take too long. Who cares about overtricks at 20 a time? The Unlucky Expert leads the ♣K. Futile Willie ruffs, draws trumps in two rounds, cashes the ♥A and ruffs a heart. Then he ruffs a club and ruffs a second heart to establish the suit. He ruffs a third club and runs the hearts. He can discard all his spade losers but, because dummy has run out of trumps, he loses a trick at the end.

*Result: 60 below the line and 60 above it to North-South*

## Chucks

500 (the missed rubber bonus) by North-South. The chuck may come out less than this if North-South go on to convert their 60 score to a game.

I regard reaching 6♦ as tough and I have worked out the chuck based on a par of 5♦. I suppose that North might bid 3♠ as a long suit game try and South might bid 4♠ as a cuebid on the way to 5♦. If you can put your hand on your heart and say that you would have reached 6♦ with your regular partner then you can put down the chuck as 1250.

In keeping with Simon's decision to end *Why You Lose at Bridge* with a decently played and defended deal, I have done the same thing for the last deal of this book. Sit back and enjoy watching the Unlucky Expert as he conjures two tricks out of thin air.

## FINAL RUBBER DEAL 13

Dealer South

Both vulnerable

	♠ 9	
	♥ K J 9 8 5 4 2	
	♦ K 6 4	
	♣ J 6	
♠ J 6 5 2		♠ A K 3
♥ Q 7 6 3		♥ A 10
♦ Q		♦ A 7 5 3
♣ K 9 4 2		♣ A 10 8 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           N W      E S         </div>	
	♠ Q 10 8 7 4	
	♥ —	
	♦ J 10 9 8 2	
	♣ Q 7 5	

West	North	East	South
<i>Mrs. Guggenheim</i>	<i>Futile Willie</i>	<i>Unlucky Expert</i>	<i>Mr. Smug</i>
pass	3♥	3NT <sup>1</sup>	pass all pass

1. With these hearts and only three spades, the Unlucky Expert prefers 3NT to double. A passed partner, who is Mrs. Guggenheim, gives him added reason.

### The Play

Mr. Smug leads the ♦J.

The Unlucky Expert studies the dummy for a while before coming out with ‘Thank you, partner.’ It’s always a good idea to indicate that you are content with Mrs. Guggenheim’s hand even when she hasn’t bid.

The Unlucky Expert lets Futile Willie win the first trick with the king and ducks the diamond return as well. He wins the third round.

What has he thrown from dummy? A heart and a spade have gone. For reasons that will soon become clear, dummy needs four clubs.

The Unlucky Expert continues with the ♣A. If the queen or jack falls from North, he intends to finesse South for the missing quack and set up his ninth trick by leading towards the ♥A10. When all follow low, he cashes the ♠A before running the ♣8. He has a very good

idea of the layout. Futile Willie surely has a seven-card heart suit to open 3♥ vulnerable and has already turned up with three diamonds and a spade. Since the contract is now hopeless if clubs break 4-1 (he would have four diamonds and a club to lose) the Unlucky Expert places North with a 1=7=3=2 shape.

	♠ —	
	♥ K J 9 8 5 4 2	
	♦ —	
	♣ J	
♠ J 6		♠ K 3
♥ Q 7 6		♥ A 10
♦ —		♦ 7
♣ K 9 4		♣ 10 8 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">           N W       E      S         </div>	
	♠ Q 10 8 7	
	♥ —	
	♦ 9 2	
	♣ Q 7	

Futile Willie duly wins the second round of clubs and has to return a heart. He tries the jack, which runs to the queen. The Unlucky Expert can see eight tricks and knows where to find a ninth. He finishes the clubs and cashes the ♥A. This reduces Mr. Smug to three cards. He must keep two spades, or the queen will fall, and so he lets go a diamond. Declarer exits with a diamond and claims the last two tricks. Mr. Smug must lead from his ♠Q into the split tenace.

*Result: 3NT made for game and rubber plus 150 honors for East-West*

## Post Mortem

Mrs. Guggenheim beams. 'I'm glad I had enough for you.'  
Everyone else sighs. The rubber has finally ended!

## Chucks

None. If Futile Willie had exited with the ♥K, declarer would still have arranged to be in hand to endplay Mr. Smug by cashing the ♥Q before winning the fourth round of clubs with the ten.

## THE SCORE

North-South	East-West
	500
60	150
400	400
150	2600
100	50
100	50
100	500
100	50
90	90
	190
120	
60	100
<b>1280</b>	<b>4680</b>

East-West win a 34-point rubber.

Had they the cards to win this much? If you add up the high-card points over the 11 deals, you will find that each side had its fair share: 260. Of course, points are not the whole story. Let's try our usual test of replacing each player in turn with a competent but not brilliant player.

Replacing Mr. Smug in the South seat, the bidding on Deal 1 starts 1♦-pass-1♠-double. Let's say that North ends in 3♣ after East-West have competed to 3♥. Since the defenders will now avoid crashing their ♦A and ♦K, it goes down one. There is no change to the result on 2. On 3, the replacement makes 4♥. On 4, the replacement sees the futility of guarding spades and defeats the slam. On 5, there is no change, except that the penalty is 100 because North-South are vulnerable. On 6, the replacement makes 6♠. The net result is that North-South win a 17-point rubber against non-vulnerable opponents.

Replacing Futile Willie in the North seat, there is no change on Deals 1, 2 and 3. Now, though, the slam fails on 4 but makes on 5. There is no change on 6 (except the penalty is now 100). On 7, the replacement daren't risk a double of 5♥ playing with Mr. Smug, with the probable result that the Unlucky Expert bids and makes 6♠ on a

diamond lead. On 8, there is no change. On 9, 4♥ still makes and this time without the need for a defensive slip. The net result is that North-South win a 14-point rubber.

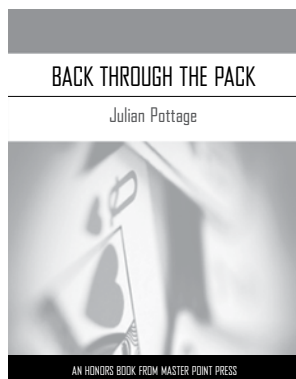
Replacing Mrs. Guggenheim in the West seat, let's say for the sake of argument that there's no change on 1. On 2, the replacement goes on to 4♠ and makes it. On 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 the results are the same, save that the penalty on 4 is now 100. On 8, the replacement won't have bid clubs, so Mr. Smug won't find the brilliant lead. The Unlucky Expert thus makes 5♦ to clinch the rubber. The net result is that East-West win a 33-point rubber against non-vulnerable opponents. I admit this does not seem much of an improvement. However, had play gone on with players in the same seats, they could have won a second two-game rubber by making game on deals 10 and 13 and defeating it on 9.

On this rubber, the Unlucky Expert truly was unlucky and replacing him would not improve the result. You or I would 'unblock' the diamonds on 1 and go for the Scissors Coup on 8.

What does this all go to prove? Many rubbers or other sessions of bridge that you lose, you could have won. Unless you play your bridge in the most exalted of company, your opponents will very rarely commit so few errors that you cannot win.

You will win from now on, won't you?

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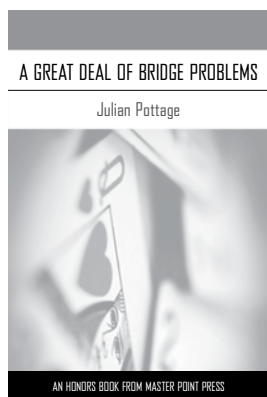
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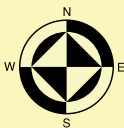
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