

Last week's winners: Monday 14/7/03

1st Chuck/Jon 68%
2nd Clive/Bob 61%

Friday 18/7/03

1st Clive/Bob 26 IMPs
2nd Joe/Guy 9 IMPs

A Consensus of opinion?

Last week's news sheet was somewhat short as I had produced a number of pages for comment. The reason being that I wanted the contents to be agreed by a couple of players before I released it. Chuck was very obliging. The other player (Hans) was not. He insisted that since I mentioned Acol then I should describe it in detail. He also would not comment upon any sequences involving a double of an overcall as he said I had to explain what an overcall meant. Normally I do not respond to stupid frivolous unproductive remarks. But just to humour him, I have included something on Acol and overcalls. I will simply continue to print my views from now on. If anyone does not wish to be featured in the news sheets, then best not to offer unsolicited erroneous advice and criticise others. Any sensible written comments from anybody will continue to be included.

What is Acol?

Seems a silly question, I know. But one club member had a problem with me stating that a sequence like 1♣ - 1♠ - 2NT shows 17-18 points in Acol, he says it shows 18-19. So, let's start at the beginning. Acol is a **British** system. It was invented in 1934 by a number of British players at a bridge club in Acol Street, North London. The original system featured 4 card majors and a variable opening NT. Over the years, the system has been refined and a weak NT is played throughout these days. It retains its 4 card major suit openings but most serious players adopt the Jeremy Flint philosophy of bidding 4 card suits up the line. Also, many players these days play a prepared 1♣ when exactly 4333 (4 ♠'s). So, the main feature of Acol, the English standard, is a weak NT; and 4 card major suit openings play a secondary role (they are usually 5+).

Now Acol has spread outside the UK, notably to Holland. The system grew in a different way there and a strong NT became the norm. Most Dutch players also adopt the Jeremy Flint philosophy and so 'Dutch Acol' is virtually the same as Standard American.

The strength of NT openings (and thus rebids) has much more influence on a system than if an opening 1♥/♠ is 4 or five cards. For example, the sequences :-

1♠ - 2♦ - 2♠ guarantees 5 ♠'s only whether you play 4 or 5 card majors and

1♠ - 2♦ - 2♥ guarantees 5 ♠'s and 4 ♥'s in both systems (Flint style).

As far as I am concerned, the Dutch do not play Acol. When I refer to Acol in these news-sheets, I specifically mean the English *standard*, a weak NT. The fact that the Dutch play a system that *they* call Acol is irrelevant. It is not Acol. It's probably best to refer to it as 'Dutch Acol' or 'Acol with a strong NT'.

Now then, about the NT bids and rebids playing Acol: -

1NT = 12-14
 1x – 1y – 1NT = 15-16
 1x – 1y – 2NT = 17-18
 1x – 1y – 3NT = 19

This is the traditional set-up. If you don't believe me then ask John G, Clive or any of the ½ dozen or so English club members who play Acol. These days, however, many players prefer the 2NT bid to be 17-19 as this frees the 3NT bid to show a good hand with a long suit (a source of tricks).

Overcalls and Jump Overcalls

Hand A Hand B

♠ KQJxx ♠ KQJxxx
 ♥ xxx ♥ xx
 ♦ xx ♦ xx
 ♣ Qxx ♣ Qxx

Many (most?) players play weak jump overcalls these days. You are non-vulnerable and RHO opens 1♦. With hand B the best bid is a weak jump overcall of 2♠. With Hand A the best bid is a simple 1♠ overcall. Trivial, I agree. I have only included it as one player in the club (Hans) insists that you need a much better hand (an opening bid) to make a simple overcall if you play weak jump overcalls. I say that

the two are totally unrelated, jump overcalls are 6 card suits and in no way affect your simple overcall which may be 5 card. If I include a simple overcall in a bidding sequence, I normally mean that it is an overcall as played by 99% of bridge players.

A simple overcall at the two level, of course, needs to be close to an opening bid.

A New Suit at the three level – this is normally forcing – part 2

On the first page of new-sheet 36 I said that the sequence 1♠ - 2♦ - 3♣ is game forcing. Hans is not convinced and supplied Hands C, D and E, asking how Chuck or I would bid them: -

Hand C

Hand D

Hand E

♠ AQxxx ♠ AQxxx ♠ AQxxx
 ♥ xx ♥ Qx ♥ A
 ♦ x ♦ xx ♦ xx
 ♣ KJxxx ♣ KJxx ♣ Qxxxx

First of all, how you bid these hands depends upon what system you play. I shall consider just three systems; Acol, 2/1 and Standard American.

Secondly, as I mentioned on the last page of the news-sheet (No 36) some people would open 1♣ on these 5-5 black suit hands, and not everybody would open Hand C.

Anyway, I am reasonably happy opening 1♠ on all of them. Hand C is perhaps just about worth an opener, it conforms to the rule of 20 with the points in the long suits. How does one continue after a 2♦ response?

Chuck gave this reply without seeing my answers. Chuck: - 'I would not open Hand C; If I do, I open 1♠; my rebid is 2♠ playing Standard American and 3♣ playing 2/1. I open both Hands D and E with 1♠ and my rebid is 2♠ playing Standard American and 3♣ playing 2/1.'

My response to Hans' three hands: - Playing Acol it's easy. Rebid 2♠ with all hands. There is no other option as 2NT is 15-16 and 3♣ is forcing. Partner's rebid only promises 8 points and any bid other than 2♠ is way over the top. Playing a weak NT with 5 card majors, or 5 card ♠'s, I still rebid 2♠. There still is no other option and this bid does *not* guarantee 6 ♠'s.

Playing 2/1 it's equally easy. Partner's 2♦ response is game forcing. Bid out your shape, so 3♣ with all of these hands – it does not show extra values in 2/1. Yet another example of the superiority of the 2/1 system.

So, now onto the interesting bit. Standard American. You elect to open 1♠ (I don't disagree) and what do you rebid over 2♦? This 2♦ bid could be just 11 (some play 10) points and is not game forcing. 2NT here shows a *balanced* 12-14 points and 2♠ is *generally* a six card suit. I would *never* rebid NT in this situation with a singleton. Some people would bid 2NT with Hand D – I think it's a reasonable alternative but I prefer 2♠. The 3♣ bid here is not a typical reverse as the first suit is not necessarily longer than the second suit; some people refer to it as a high reverse and opener promises another bid. Whether you call 3♣ a reverse or not is not important. It is game forcing and 3♣ is *absolutely* out of the question with these weak hands. A 3♣ bid shows the *values for game*; playing Standard American you would need about 15 points, playing a weak NT (Acol) you would need a little more. Playing Standard American I believe that there is *no* other option but to rebid 2♠ on all of these hands (except possibly 2NT with Hand D). 3♣ is forcing and these hands are not balanced enough for 2NT. If you don't like it, then you should have looked ahead before you opened the bidding and chose 1♣ instead of 1♠.

The bottom lines. Obviously it would be nice to be able to bid both your suits (especially with hands C and E). You cannot. If you think that you should, then open 1♣ with the 5-5 hands or, even better, take up 2/1. The 3♣ bid is forcing in all systems and I believe that it makes life easier if it is game forcing.

Incidentally, Clive held hand type C in new-sheet 36, opened 1♠ and rebid 2♠. I totally agree with his bids; but I also agree with anyone who opens 1♣ (I believe that John G did a week or so back). Both are fine by me. Opening 1♣ with these 5-5 black suit hands was quite common before 2/1 was developed.

Presumably Hans would rebid 3♣ with all the hands? Why else would he give them to me? Hans says that he plays a different system to me. I agree! But I play what most of the real world play.

Hand F	Hand G	We can take this theme one step further. You have the same problem with a ♠-♦ and ♥-♣ two-suiters.
♠ AQxxx	♠ xx	You open 1♠ with Hand F and have no option but to rebid 2♠ over partner's 2♥ response if you are playing
♥ xx	♥ AQxxx	Acol or Standard American. With Hand G you open 1♥
♦ AQxx	♦ xx	and have to rebid 2♥ over partner's 2♦ response.
♣ xx	♣ AQxx	

These hands are classic examples of why a rebid of a major does not guarantee 6 cards. If you have no other bid (unsuitable for NT and insufficient values to force to game by a 3 level bid), then you sometimes have no alternative but to rebid a 5 card major. Hans disagrees, what's new?

Responding 1NT to partner's 1♣ opening

Board 19 from Friday 4th July

- Hand 19W You open 1♣ and partner responds 1NT, do you pass or bid 2♣?
First of all, what agreement do you have about a 1NT bid over 1♣?
- ♠ 109 This takes up a lot of bidding space and needs to be fairly specific.
♥ A1083 Obviously it denies a 4 card major, but does it deny a 4 card ♦ suit?
♦ 62 Does it show a 4 card ♣ suit? There are four main schools of thought,
♣ AKJ95 they all assume no 4 card major.
- School A With 6-10 points and no 4 card major, always respond 1NT.
- School B Bid 1♦ with a 4 card ♦ suit, else bid 1NT. So 1NT is 6-10 and usually 3334 (in that order) shape.
- School C 6-10 is a large point spread, so bid 1♦ with 6-8 and then a subsequent 1NT bid over partner's 1♥/♠ shows 6-8. The direct 1NT shows 8-10. Thus the 1♦ response may mean just 3 card and the direct 1NT response (8-10) may conceal a 4 card ♦ suit.
- School D Bid 2♣ (or 3♣ if you play inverted minors) with 6-8 points. A direct 1NT shows 8-10 and denies any 4 card suit other than ♣'s.

Chuck pointed out that some players have a slightly different range for the 1NT bid with schools C or D – (9-11, or 8-11). OK, having another bid for the lower range is what's important. Which is the preferred method? I definitely prefer school C but it is not commonly played. This advantage with the school C approach is just one reason why I always open 1♣ (when I cannot open 1NT) when equal length (33 or 44) in the minors, and why I like to open 1♣ when exactly 4432.

School D is reasonable. The only problem is that in a sequence like 1♣ - 1♦ - 1♥ - 1NT then the range of the 1NT bid is still an unmanageable 6-10.

If you have no agreement with partner, I would assume school B. Bidding 1NT is a poor bid if there is a sensible alternative. 6-10 is a large point spread, so bid your ♦ suit if you have one and wait for partner's rebid. So, back to the problem hand. If responder is indeed 3334 then 2♣ is a far better contract than 1NT. John G held this hand and rebid 2♣, a bid with which I totally agree. Hans says that this promises 6 ♣'s. I say not so, especially if partner promises 4 ♣'s with his 1NT bid.

What if you belong to school A (The NT hog school? - which I believe has little merit other than ensuring that the weaker hand is declarer in a NT contract), then responder has 6-10 points and does not promise 4 ♣'s. He is probably 3343 or 3334 shape. With the points concentrated in two suits, opener rebidding 2♣ with Hand 19W is still best, but Hans says it must be a 6 card suit. I disagree. As I said, I don't like school A, but then getting to play the hand has never been high on my list of priorities. What actually happened?

Hand 19E This was partner's hand which responded 1NT. Unless this bid specifically promises 9-10 points (school C) then I don't like it. Bid 1♦. In this particular case partner would rebid 1♥. You could then try 1NT, but I would prefer 2♣ as partner is very likely to have a 5 card ♣ suit and the pointed suits are weak. Anyway, this hand responded 1NT initially (School A?) and opener rebid 2♣. What now after opener rebids 2♣? Obviously pass. This hand (Hans) chose 3NT 'because it is vulnerable at teams and partner has a 6 card ♣ suit'. When the dust had settled, that was 300 away. Defender's cashed their 5 ♠ tricks, but a defensive mistake meant that they only got 2 of their 3 top ♦ tricks. East berated West for not having 6 ♣'s. What West said about East's 3NT bid is unprintable. I *totally* agree with West, although I can print something: -

Even if West did have 6 ♣'s, you still lose the first 8 tricks. Once you have limited your hand (1NT here) partner is the captain. If you feel that you must do something because you are top of the range, then enrol in school C. West (correctly) thought that 2♣ was a better contract than 1NT. As West's 2♣ rebid says that he does not like 1NT, he is sure not to like 3NT. West has a two suited hand (♥'s and ♣'s in this case) or a single suited hand. East has most of his points in West's suits. Two suits are probably wide open. Agreed, East does not know which other suit West has (a very good case for bidding 1♦ initially to find out). Finally, West's rebid of 2♣ most certainly *does not* promise 6 ♣'s as East has promised 3 or 4 cards in the suit and there is a fit. I can go on and on, but this hand really is a beginner's problem and I have said enough already.

Board 9 from Monday: -

East 9	West 9
♠ KJ108	♠ 753
♥ K83	♥ AQ4
♦ K6	♦ J932
♣ AJ92	♣ K74

An easy 3NT was reached at three tables. East opened 1NT (15-17) and West raised to 3NT. At the fourth table they were playing a weak NT. East opened 1♣ and West replied 1NT which East passed. The problem is that if East makes an effort (with 2NT) over West's 1NT, then 2NT may be in jeopardy if West has just 6 points. Thus it really is important

to enrol in school C if you play a weak NT. Incidentally, this East hand is a perfect example of why I don't particularly care for opening 1♠ when I have an alternative, a 1♣ opener allows West to show his point range. So, with these hands, the bidding when playing Acol should go:

East	West	(1) I am a member of the Jeremy Flint fan club, bid 4 card suits up the line. So 1♣ here and not 1♠.
1♣ (1)	1NT (2)	(2) School C. 8-10 points, may have 4 ♦'s.
2NT (3)	3NT (4)	(3) invitational
		(4) OK

Note that School D fails here, as the sequence 1♣ - 1♦ - 1♠ - 1NT (6-10) leaves East no better off than the actual sequence played at table 4.

The bottom line. Enrolling in School C is a good idea as it informs opener of your point range more accurately. It is really important if you play a weak NT as partner will not know what to do if he has 15-16 points. This particular problem does not exist when playing a strong NT as partner would have opened 1NT.

Board 13 from Monday: -

East

West

♠ AKJ	♠ Q107
♥ A1096	♥ J42
♦ 6	♦ A105
♣ KJ875	♣ Q932

This board was played 4 times but the good 5♣ contract was reached only once. East opens 1♣. If a 1NT response from West promise 8-10 points and at least 3♣'s (School C) or 8-10 points and 4♣'s (School D), then 5♣ should be easily reached (perhaps a 3♦ splinter from East?). A reverse bid of 2♥ by East should also get to 5♣.

Another alternative with this Board 13 is that West can bid an inverted 2♣ (if you play inverted minors). I think it's dodgy, I prefer a better/more shapely hand for an inverted minor raise and I prefer 1NT (8-10) with this hand.

So, belonging to School C or D is also important if you play a strong NT (this last sequence is independent of your opening NT range).

Just one final point. There is a mechanism that solves all of these problems concerning schools C, D etc. It is called Walsh, whereby after the bidding starts 1♣ - 1♦, then opener may bid 1NT concealing 4 card major(s). It is, however, probably a bit too complex for the news sheets, so best to stick a school other than school A.

Lead the A from AK?

I held J83 when defending a week or so ago. Partner led the King and dummy came down with three small. I encouraged with the 8. Partner then produced the Ace and declared made his queen. I thought that partner had led K from KQ. You have to discuss this with your partner, but I recommend for all casual partnerships that you always lead top from everything, it is a good simple system. So A from AK and K from KQ.