



Last week's winners:

Monday 5/5/03

Friday 9/5/03

1<sup>st</sup> Don (UK)/Sid 63 %  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Chuck/Gerry 57 %

1<sup>st</sup> Hans/Jan (Nor) 63 VP  
 2<sup>nd</sup> Per/Tomas = Ian/Bill 45 VP

Congratulations Don and Sid, a fine result. Could it be that the weak NT really is a viable system?

Chuck seems upset about my continual US and bush bashing, asking why I don't include the Brits.

Now I consider myself to be fair. I have the advantage over Chuck as he is a visitor and I have a computer, printer etc. I am, however, always willing to type up any contributions from anybody. Back in news-sheet 25 I stated that America was not playing cricket when it declared war on a small nation that had been under sanctions for a decade and had destroyed its missiles. Chuck gave me this reply, where 'you' is Chuck referring to me: -

'You have outdone yourself with stupidity. You have no proof that Iraq destroyed anything. And why don't you include the Brits? The inner fear since 1776?'

My response: - Iraq not destroying anything does not even warrant a reply, guess they don't show BBC in America? The answer as to why I don't include the Brits is that the vast majority of Americans were for the war, the vast majority of Brits were not. It has been very clear that Tony Blair went against public opinion (both UK and worldwide) in siding with the USA. I have no problem with anybody saying whatever they like about Tony. As to who's stupid (me, Chuck, bush), I will leave that up to you. This final point about 1776; seems a long while ago to me. So let's look at more recent events, America's non-action in 1939-41, Vietnam, agent orange, Bay of Pigs etc etc.... Best not to get me going here, but as they say in America, Chuck opened the door. Mind you, UK's record is not that much better; Northern Ireland, Palestine/Israel... Nuff said, it's all over now, ancient history. **I suggest we leave it there.** We have far more important matters to discuss than the relative glories of America and the UK and their contribution to mankind, onto bridge: -

Welcome back Gerry! Gerry is a part-time Bridge teacher from England. He normally plays Acol with a weak NT but is fairly flexible. He partnered Chuck on Monday – first time they had met. They played Standard American – certainly the table for me to kibitz!

How about another quote from Chuck (about me): - 'For a man who is always speechless you sure talk a lot to create controversy'. Agreed. But then I have a number of overseas readers and I have to keep them interested. They enjoy a bit of friendly bantering; it *is* friendly, isn't it? Would you rather read the Financial Times or the Sun? (the Sun is a UK gossip paper). Long time since I've been in the UK, do they still have page 3?

One final Chuck quote: - 'The better we feel about ourselves, the fewer times we have to knock somebody else down to feel tall – Odetta'. Seems fitting, I'll have to remember that one the next time somebody says anything at the table. Now who is it who keeps on commenting? Yes, I know, me .... but who else ...?

## I Stand Corrected

Chuck seems to have got 'upset' with me saying that most Americans play SAYC. The main reason I thought this is that whenever I log on for an internet game, my partner always seems to play SAYC.

Anyway, Chuck is the undoubted expert in this field (what Americans play/do), so let's hear it from him: -

'SAYC is a very limited version of Standard American and very few play it.' Chuck's estimates of what Americans play (if anybody is interested) is: -

2/1	65%	Now at first sight this may appear not to add up. To be
weak NT	33%	fair, Precision includes a weakish NT (13-15) and so the
SAYC	2-3%	addition does come to 100% provided that nobody plays
Precision	15%	Standard American. I guess Chuck must be correct as I
Standard American 'the rest'		have never actually played bridge in America. I may not
		know who plays what in America, but I am quite good at math(s). More of
		this later.

Anyway, this is all totally irrelevant, I will be very careful to state 'Standard American' (even though nobody plays it?) instead of SAYC from now on. It was just that SAYC is quicker to type – I did not realise that it would be such an issue. I apologise. I promise to consult Chuck before I say anything about America(ns) ever again!

## An Overcall?

♠ J32	Remember this Hand F from news-sheet 26? I overcalled a 1♣ opening
♥ K9743	with 1♥. I have Chuck's opinion: - <i>'Hand F is a poor overcall. Suit is</i>
♦ 943	<i>poor and a quack is not a good lead direction'</i> . My comment – what
♣ A2	quack? I would have preferred a better hand, but this hand with an ace
	and a 5 card suit to the <i>king</i> is what I was dealt.

## To Stayman or not, that is the Question!

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C	Partner opens a strong NT (15-17), what do
♠ KQ53	♠ 74	♠ A107	you do? Obviously you have the values to try
♥ KJ74	♥ A1053	♥ A1053	game, but Stayman or a direct 3NT? Now
♦ 64	♦ A1074	♦ J42	'everybody' would bid Stayman with Hand A
♣ 1094	♣ J94	♣ 1094	– if there is a fit in either major that will be
			preferable to 3NT with this small doubleton ♦
			And Hand B? Again, use Stayman. If a 4-4 ♥

fit exists, then 4♥ will normally be a far superior contract to 3NT. But what about Hand C?

A direct 3NT on this flat hand or look for the 4-4 ♥ fit? This is North hand 9 from Monday. South (Chuck) opened 1NT, 15-17, and North (Gerry) raised immediately to 3NT with Hand C. Is this the recommended bidding? I said no, Chuck and Gerry disagreed and they challenged me to make my case in the news sheet – big mistake! I can (and do) type away for hours!

Now we all agree (I hope) that 4-4 major suit fits are usually better than 3NT, especially if one player has a weak doubleton. The argument for not bidding Stayman on Hand C is that it is totally flat – no ruffing values. I *totally* agree, no ruffing values in this hand – but what about partner? He has opened 1NT, promising a balanced 15-17. If he does not have a 4 (or 5!) card ♥ suit then there is no problem with bidding Stayman (you end up in 3NT anyway). So, let's consider the case where partner does have a 4 card ♥ suit, is 3NT best? – very unlikely! The point is that although you do not have ruffing potential, partner may well have! Partner's most likely shape is (any order) 4432. If he shows 4 ♥'s then, with this shape, you almost certainly belong in 4♥, not 3NT. Partner will have a doubleton opposite one of your 3 card suits – when opponents have 8 cards in a suit then that spells trouble for a non-max 3NT. And what if partner also happens to be exactly 3433? Nowhere near so likely, but 4♥ is still probably the best spot! In this case you have three 6 card suits with the opponents on lead. It only needs one of them to be

divided 5-2 (or worse) and 3NT is probably a disaster. The only case where it is preferable to play in 3NT rather than 4 of a major is when you have *ample* points (say 27+) and at least a double stop in every suit, even then, 4 of the major may be better. In this actual case you are nowhere near max for 3NT and both minor suits are suspect. Additionally, of course, if you are one of the enlightened pairs who may open 1NT with a 5 card major, then you will be the laughing stock of the club if you end up in 3NT missing a 5-4 ♥ fit!

Now I really can't wait to hear if Hans agrees with me on this one or not (he's off for a week or so). EDITOR'S POSTSCRIPT, *Hans re-appeared on Friday and I gave him Hand C, He thought for a while and then said ... yes ... well ... I bid Stayman.*

I would really love a detailed analysis from Chuck or Gerry as to why they don't want to bid Stayman. Now if you change Hand C slightly, and swap the ♥A with the ♣4, thus having a very weak 4 card ♥ suit, then I would agree that there is a case for forgetting Stayman. With this actual hand (4 ½ points in ♥'s) the strong ♥ suit means that *all* the other suits *cannot* be adequately covered. Quite simply, a 4-4 ♥ fit will produce an extra trick and stops the rot of opponents running a suit. I have repeated this over and over again (the major suit 4-4 fit), but people still want to disagree .....

**Never deny a 4 card major!** (especially if you are American or a bridge teacher from England!). Will Chuck eat his words and accept that I am right (again)? Don't count on it, so how about some analysis? Let's look at possible bidding sequences a little more closely:

West	East	<u>Example 1</u>
♠ KQ63	♠ A74	You are playing a strong NT. Obviously you open 1♣, partner replies 1♥, you support with 2♥ and partner raises to 4♥. But who was dealer? Makes no difference, the bidding is the same. Actually instead of the final 4♥, 3NT is a better bid just in case opener has supported on a 3 card suit; either way, the correct 4♥ contract is easily reached. Now what happens if you are playing a weak NT? You open 1NT, partner bids Stayman and you again reach the simple 4♥. If East opens the bidding, that is certainly the case, but what if West is dealer? There are players out there who would not bid Stayman with 4333 type shape and just game values! 3NT is the wrong contract.
♥ KJ74	♥ AQ53	
♦ 63	♦ J74	
♣ KJ3	♣ Q94	

West	East	<u>Example 2</u>
♠ KQ63	♠ A74	Let's try a couple of strong NT openers. If you ignore Stayman then you reach 3NT making +2. You make 12 tricks in ♥'s. This shows (yet again) the power of a good 4-4 fit. Are there people out there who are trying to tell me that if East opens 1NT then they reach 4♥ but if West opens 1NT they play in 3NT?
♥ KJ74	♥ AQ53	
♦ K3	♦ A74	
♣ KJ3	♣ Q94	

West	East	<u>Example 3</u>
♠ KJ	♠ AQ4	So when does this policy of ignoring Stayman work? When you have an abundance of points <i>and</i> all the side suits well covered. Often, the weakest suit is the 'trump suit'. Here, ten top tricks, maybe also a ♥ trick in 3NT. And if ♥'s are trumps? Not so nice, you have to tackle ♥'s if they are trumps and it does not play so nicely.
♥ Q764	♥ 9532	
♦ KQ63	♦ AJ4	
♣ AJ4	♣ KQ9	

There – 'I told you so' shout Chuck and Gerry in unison – 'East should not bid Stayman on his 4333 shape'. Hogwash – it has little to do with being 4333. Consider what happens if East opens the bidding with 1NT. Presumably West then bids Stayman? Something is wrong – you reach 3NT if West is dealer but 4♥ when East is dealer? The answer is that deciding not to bid Stayman has little to do with being 4333, you must make the same decision if 4432! When the West hand opens 1NT in example 3, East could simply bid 3NT. And if East opens? - then West could simply bid 3NT. Being 4333 or 4432 is largely irrelevant to this decision to ignore Stayman, it is the quality of the 4-4 fit and having excellent cover in the outside suits that counts.

West	East	<u>Example 4</u>
♠ KJ92	♠ AQ84	One final example, loads of points, so 3NT with 4333 shape? This deal illustrates what I have just said ideally. Partner (either!) opens 1NT. If you simply bid 3NT because you are 4333 then you will be in an inferior contract. Go for the 4-4 fit when you have decent trumps, especially if all outside suits are not well covered. The 4333 shape is a red herring.
♥ Q104	♥ KJ2	
♦ AJ3	♦ KQ4	
♣ A64	♣ 732	

I must emphasise here that ignoring the 4-4 fit is very rarely a good decision. I have only brought it up because one (two) of our leading players has got it wrong. It only applies when the other three suits are *well* covered (with at least 27 combined pts) and usually only when the 'trump' suit is very poor. You will not be going far wrong if you ignore example 3 and always look for the 4-4 major suit fit.

## Simple Math(s)

Hand D Remember this hand from news-sheet 25? I stated that dbl in the sequence 1♥ - pass - 1NT- dbl is for take-out of the opening suit but that you need a good hand as LHO is unlimited and RHO has advertised (balanced) values. You are sticking your neck out. Chuck maintains that this hand warrants a cue bid as it is worth 20 points in support of partner's suit when he bids it. Can't see it myself, looks like 4-5 tricks to me (partner is virtually bust). Don't see where the extra points come from. On the bidding, it's quite possible that partner's only 4 card suit is ♥'s. Chuck also says that if partner jumps (9-11 points) then this hand should bid on. Sorry, I am used to playing with just 40 points in the pack, partner can have at most 4 points – opener 13+, 1NT response 6+, this hand 17 leaves 4 -; check the math(s).

Hand E OK. So they were not playing Michaels, so what should a cue bid show? Obviously a *very* strong *distributional* hand. A 4144 17 count is nowhere near good enough. Now Hand E is more like it and is what I would expect. There is no point in raising the level by cue bidding if you do not stand a realistic chance of making game opposite partner's expected 0-4 count. Chuck says that I stand alone and that Paul and Hans agree with him. Really? I asked Hans what he would do with Hand D and he said double.

Simple. As for Paul, he was Chuck's partner but I would be very surprised if more than one person would find a cue bid with Hand D. Anyway, I would much prefer to stand alone than join the short bus queue.

How do you differentiate between hands D and E?

I gave Hand D to Gerry and he said either double or pass (double could spell trouble).

My sentiments exactly, but then we're both Brits.

The bottom line? This is not an ordinary scenario of a double of opener's bid. Here you know that your partner is virtually bust. Both opponents know that they probably have the balance of the points. Even a simple double with hand D could land you in deep water if either opener or responder is non-min. The only sensible alternative to a double with Hand D is pass, perhaps opponents will mis-play the hand if you keep quiet? Perhaps partner has a ♥ stack (as Gerry pointed out)? It is a partscore hand, why stick your neck too far out? Chuck is totally missing the point here; in the direct seat over a 1♥ opening, Hand D may be worth a cue bid as opposed to a take-out double (debatable – I would double). This is *not* the direct seat – you *know* that partner has nothing (at least, if they taught you math(s) at school). Talk about short busses. Don't ask me what that means, it is something peculiar for Americans. I certainly was not the one who first brought them up and we don't need them in the UK.

## A Strong (15-17) 1NT opener?

Hand F	Hand G	Hand H
♠ KQ74	♠ 832	♠ A93
♥ Q54	♥ QJ2	♥ K5
♦ AJ9	♦ AKQ74	♦ AQJ106
♣ K43	♣ A9	♣ A102

A recurring topic? But these three hands are all from Friday. Hand F is hand 1 South from Friday. Gerry opened 1♣, I totally agree. Totally flat with poor intermediates, so not worth a strong 1NT opener. Hand G is Hand 5 West. It opened 2♦, strong I think.

A strong two should be 8 playing tricks, this hand is not good enough. The correct opening is 1NT (1♦ is reasonable but you may have a rebid problem). A 1NT opening does not promise a stop in every suit. Ian asked why Hand G should open 1NT and Hand F not, when it seems that it should be the other way round (F is balanced with cover in every suit). The answer is that a 1NT opening is specific about the point range (after adjusting for shape, intermediates etc.) Hand F is only worth 14 points. Hand G should be upgraded to 17 points. Of course, if you play a weak NT then you would open these hands the other way round.

And Hand H? This is Hand 19 South from Friday. It opened a strong NT. The hand is 18 HCP, and with the fine 5 card suit, the good intermediates and three aces, it is *far* too strong for a strong NT. The hand should open 1♦ and rebid 2NT over partner's 1♥/♠/NT (showing 18-19). Closer to a 2NT (20-21) opener than 1NT (15-17).

## An Interesting Little Hand

North	South	North	South
♠ Q106	♠ AKJ85	1♦	1♠
♥ AK43	♥ 6	1NT	?
♦ KJ85	♦ 10732		
♣ 54	♣ 972		

This is Board 4 from Friday. I was kibitzing South (Gerry) and he bid 2♦. I totally agree with this bid (it was IMP scoring). The known 4-4 fit is safer than the probable 5-2 ♠ bid. At pairs the extra 20 points for making 2♠ is probably worth the risk. Now that was going to be

the extent of my commentary until I saw the North (Chuck's) hand. What do you think of that 1NT (12-14) rebid? I would have rebid 2♠ because of the small doubleton and excellent ♠ support. But then ensuring that I am declarer has never been a high priority with me as I play the hands so badly. Lucky that South had the shape to pull 1NT to 2♦.

## An Interesting Big Hand

North	South	North	South
♠ AKQJ54	♠ 1093	2♣	2♦
♥ AKQ	♥ J10985	2♠	4♠
♦ -	♦ Q63	6♠	pass
♣ AQ32	♣ 95		

This is Board 15 from Friday. Obviously a very good contract, but what is the best line of play? You get a small trump lead. A reasonable knowledge of % splits is required, in this case for the ♥ and ♠ suits. Relevant info is given overleaf. More of this hand next week (Hans and myself are still analysing it!).