



Last week's winners: Monday 22/3/04

Friday 26/3/04

1st Harry/Marlies 66%
 2nd Chuck/Einar 65%

1st Chuck/Terry 64%
 2nd Hans/Jan 60%

I added them up, we have no less than 5 pairs playing 4 card majors this Monday (and that's with Dave/Norman absent). So, a few comments on 4 card majors this week and a couple in the bidding quiz.

Bidding Quiz**Standard American is assumed unless otherwise stated.**

Hand A Hand B

♠ 86 ♠ J92
 ♥ A872 ♥ AK76
 ♦ KQ764 ♦ AQ
 ♣ K9 ♣ A753

For Hands A & B you are playing 4 card majors. With Hand A you are also playing a strong NT so what do you open?

You are again playing 4 card majors with Hand B

- (a) What do you open?
 (b) What is your rebid when partner responds 1♠?

Hand C Hand D

♠ 86 ♠ AQ732
 ♥ A7 ♥ KJ64
 ♦ AKQ7642 ♦ -
 ♣ K9 ♣ 8754

Back to Standard American. With Hand C you open 1♦ and partner responds 1♠, what is your rebid?

With Hand D partner opens 1♦

- (a) What do you respond?
 (b) If you decided upon 1♠, then what do you do after partner's 1NT rebid?

Hand E Hand F

♠ K63 ♠ K106
 ♥ 765 ♥ AJ842
 ♦ 73 ♦ K
 ♣ K5432 ♣ AKQJ

With hand E partner opens 1♠, what do you do?

What do you open with Hand F?

Hand G Hand H

♠ AQ763 ♠ K5
 ♥ Q108 ♥ K96
 ♦ A8742 ♦ QJ95
 ♣ - ♣ QJ75

With hand G LHO opens 1♠ which is passed round to you, what do you bid?

With Hand H RHO opens 1♠, what do you do?

Hand J Hand K

♠ J985 ♠ Q8
 ♥ AQ10 ♥ AQ
 ♦ AQJ ♦ K762
 ♣ AJ10 ♣ KJ874

What do you open with hand J?

- (a) What do you open with Hand K?
 (b) Suppose that you open 1♣, then what is your rebid after partner responds 1♥ (or 1♠)?

The Beginner's Page

Stayman when you have both majors

I started on the Stayman convention last week, let's have a few more examples. First of all, let's consider the situation when responder has two 4 card majors: -

Hand 6	Hand 7	Partner has again opened 1NT. Hand 6 is worth a game invitation and Hand 7 is worth game. But in NT or is there a 4-4 major suit fit? So we know now to bid 2♣, Stayman.
♠ KJ92	♠ KJ92	It's easy then. If partner responds 2♥ or 2♠ we invite with 3 of the major with hand 6 and bid 4 of the major with Hand 7.
♥ Q1095	♥ A1095	
♦ J87	♦ Q76	
♣ Q9	♣ J9	If partner responds 2♦ then we bid an invitational 2NT with hand 6 and bid 3NT with Hand 7.

So, both majors is simple. But what if opener has both majors and partner bids Stayman?

Hand 8	Hand 9	You open 1NT with both of these hands and partner bids 2♣. With both majors you always respond 2♥, regardless of which suit is 'better'. So you bid 2♥ and partner bids 2NT, invitational. What do you do now? Hand 8 is minimal and you do not want to be in game, so pass? No! Partner's 2♣ Stayman bid promises a 4 card major, he did not like ♥'s and so he must have 4 ♠'s, so bid 3♠. With Hand 9 the same logic applies, since you want to accept the game invitation, bid 4♠ (not 3NT).
♠ AQ92	♠ AQ92	
♥ Q1095	♥ A1095	
♦ KJ7	♦ KJ7	
♣ K9	♣ K9	

Let's consider these same hands 8 & 9 some more. we opened 1NT, partner bid Stayman, we bid 2♥ but this time partner jumps to 3NT. What do you do? Partner has said that we have sufficient values for game, so pass? No! If partner simply wanted to play in 3NT he would not have bid Stayman. Since he started with 2♣ and then bid 3NT over our 2♥ response he has game going values with a 4 card ♠ suit. We must convert to 4♠ with both of these hands.

One more twist. It starts off the same but this time partner bids 4NT after our 2♥ response. What is this? We will cover Blackwood later, but this bid is not Blackwood, it is natural (quantitative). It is a slam invitation and we should bid slam with Hand 9 but not with Hand 8. So what do we do with Hand 8? Pass or 5♠ would both be reasonable and I'm sure that either would get lots of votes; but what do you bid with Hand 9? 6♠! This is not a 'new suit at the 6 level'! partner had promised a 4 card ♠ suit and 6♠ is usually better than 6NT when you have a good 4-4 fit and no points to spare.

Remember, the 2♣ Stayman bid *promises* at least one 4 card major.

Next week... what to do with a 5 card major.

Responding with 5 ♠'s and 4 ♥'s.Board 25 from Monday 22nd, E-W vul.

North (A)	South (D)	West	North	East	South
♠ 86	♠ AQ732	-	1♦ (1)	pass	1♠ (2)
♥ A872	♥ KJ64	pass	1NT	pass	2♥ (3)
♦ KQ764	♦ -	pass	3♥	pass	4♥
♣ K9	♣ 8754	pass	pass	pass	

A very sensible contract that was reached at nearly every table, so what's so interesting about the bidding? First of all, N-S were playing 4 card majors (and a strong NT), so should North open 1♦ or 1♥? 1♦ is correct, I go into the opening bid when playing 4 card majors later in detail. And what should South respond when 5-4 in the majors? This hand is easy but what would you do with a few points less? If you bid 1♠, partner rebids 1NT and you pass then you may miss a 4-4 ♥ fit. If you try 1♥ and partner rebids 1NT and you pass then you may miss a 5-3 ♠ fit. The solution is that you should always respond 1♠ and if partner rebids 1NT then 2♥ shows 5-4 but is a weak bid! This South hand (in my opinion) is too strong for this sequence. Now 1♠ is clearly correct at (2), so what is the correct bid at (3)?

So what should South bid at (3) with this invitational hand if 2♥ is weak? The answer is to play Checkback (or new minor forcing - NMF). In this example 2♣ at (3) shows invitational values (or better) and asks opener to clarify his major suit holdings. Opener should bid 2♥ with 4 ♥'s, 2♠ with 3 ♠'s but not 4 ♥'s and 2♦ with neither (2NT with neither but max).

And if you play Checkback (or NMF) what does 3♥ at (3) mean? Since all invitational and forcing auctions when 5-4 can go via 2♣, it's best to play 3♥ as 5-5 in the majors (invitational). And what happened? 4♥ was bid 6 times. It made exactly 4 times but went down twice.

A 1NT opener?Board 7 from Friday 26th, both vul.

North	South (K)	West	North (Chuck)	East	South (me)
♠ J7	♠ Q8				
♥ J6542	♥ AQ	-	-	-	1NT
♦ AQ8	♦ K762	pass	2♦	pass	2♥
♣ 652	♣ KJ874	pass	pass	pass	

Well then, did you open 1NT with hand K in this week's quiz? Generally speaking it's not a good idea with two doubletons, but there are always exceptions. I think that it's sometimes OK if the long suits are minors and the two doubletons are not weak (Qx or better). The point is that if you open 1♣ then you have no sensible rebid if partner responds in a major (very likely). If the minor suits were reversed you could open 1♦ and rebid 2♣, but here you would have to rebid a 5 card ♣ suit and so I like the 1NT opener. A reverse into 2♦ is a possibility but I would prefer a stronger hand.

And what happened? 2♥ made +1 for a top as at other tables the opponents were making 9 or 10 tricks in ♠'s. Note that the strong 1NT opening makes it less easy for the opponents to compete with their shovels (vulnerable at the two level).

The bottom line. You don't have to agree with me about a 1NT opening with this hand; but whenever you have to make an opening bid, think about your rebid. If it's going to be difficult then remember that you don't need a rebid if you open 1NT!

The Number of pages etc

This week's issue is rather large. That's because there were a number of interesting hands, but also I got stuck into an article on 4 card majors. I used to keep a few deals 'in reserve', but I think it's best to print an article when it's still relatively fresh in people's minds.

I do listen to what people say: Jan commented that it's nice to have an even number of pages – with the answers to the bidding quiz on the last page. He finds the quiz so much easier when you can spread out the news-sheet so that the questions and answers are both visible!

Also, I read a lot (of Bridge magazines, books etc) and I really hate it when you get a diagram with the commentary overleaf. I spent a lot of time shuffling the articles around. How did they manage in the days of typewriters? Anyway, this was just a space filler as the next article was less than a page: -

When an opponent bids your suit...

Board 14 from Friday 26th, love all

Dealer: ♠ AQ763
East ♥ Q108
Love all ♦ A8742
♣ -

♠ 10 N ♠ J9842
♥ 532 W E ♥ AJ74
♦ K103 S ♦ 6
♣ 1086432 ♣ AK9

♠ K5
♥ K96
♦ QJ95
♣ QJ75

Table A:

West	North (G)	East	South (H)
-	-	1♠	pass (1)
pass	pass (2)		

Table B:

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♠	dbl (3)
pass	pass (4)	pass (5)	

Table C

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♠	pass_
pass	dbl (6)	pass	3♦
pass	4♦	all pass	

Table A: I like this bidding by N-S (well I have to, Chuck and I were N-S!). First of all, what did you bid with Hand H in this weeks quiz? Double at (1) is not totally unreasonable but you know me, I prefer to have 4 ♥'s for a double of 1♠. And what did you bid with Hand G in the quiz? 2♦, or perhaps double at (2)? Again, I don't like to double with only 3 ♥'s and if you do double, what would you do after partner's highly likely 2♣ bid? (2♦ after doubling initially would promise a much stronger hand). With this ♠ suit I would prefer to defend rather than bid ♦'s at the two level.

Table B: Here South chose to double at (3) and North's pass at (4) (thus converting into penalties) is reasonable. However, if I was East I would not stand it with this anaemic ♠ suit and would redouble (SOS) at (5) with a view to playing in ♣'s or ♥'s.

Table C: As I said, I prefer to pass at (6). 4♦ made but scored poorly.

And what happened? 1♠ went 4 down at Table A (200 to N-S) and this was only beaten by Table B (3 down, 500). ♦ contracts made 10 or 11 tricks but scored poorly.

The bottom lines. When the opponents bid your best suit it may piss you off, but think about a pass. Even if they are non-vul you may get a good score (as here). Double would be take-out and so you have to accept the undoubled penalty. If you are doubled at the one level and have a really poor suit (as East here), remember the SOS redouble.

Too strong for a 1♥ opener?

Board 14 from Monday 22nd, love all.

North (F)	South	West	North	East	South
♠ K106	♠ Q5	-	-	pass	pass
♥ AJ842	♥ K5	pass	1♥ (1)	pass	1NT (2)
♦ K	♦ 9863	pass	3♣ (3)	pass	4♣ (4)
♣ AKQJ	♣ 98752	pass	5♣ (5)	all pass	

A reasonable final contract, but let's study the bidding: -

- (1) Perhaps the most important decision on this deal, what do you open? Now many believe that 21 points is too much for a 1♥ opening, but is there an alternative? Just suppose that you play strong two's (or Benjamin), is the North hand worth 2♥? It's 21 points but actually does not have the required playing strength for a strong two. The Hand is nowhere near worth a 2♣ opener (2♦ playing Benjamin), but how about 2NT? Now some experts do in fact say that a singleton ace or king is acceptable – the reason being that otherwise hands like this have to open one of a suit. I personally would not argue with a 2NT opener, nor with 1♥ or a strong 2♥ (I'm an easy going guy); any could work out best. I would open 1♥, with a strong 2♥ (via Benjamin) my 2nd choice. Bear in mind that if partner cannot respond to a 1♥ opening, then game is probably not on. This is a poor 21 count (a singleton king is not good, neither is 10 points in a 4 card suit).
- (2) Anyway, this North chose a perfectly acceptable 1♥, but should South bid at (2) or pass? Bidding 1NT is very dubious – only 5 points and all of the points in two two card suits! However, there are two factors that indicate that bidding may work out best. First, 60% of the points are in partner's suit. And secondly partner has opened 1♥ in fourth seat; now a 1♠ opening in fourth seat may be a borderline opener, but any other opening has to be full value +. Would I respond or pass? On balance, I would pass.
- (3) Obvious. Once partner has responded a game forcing 3♣ bid is definitely in order.
- (4) The auction is now game forcing and so I would bid 5♣ – fast arrival. South had a very dubious initial response and a jump to game in a game forcing situation shows a minimum and warns partner.
- (5) Luckily North did not go slamming.

And what happened? 5♣ made, whether it would have or not if West had risen with the ♦A when a ♦ was played from dummy we will never know. 4♥ was bid and made at another table (but it went down twice) and 1♥ was passed out twice – good enough for above average if you make 10 tricks.

Just a detour into the play. You are West and hold ♦Axx and a ♦ is led from dummy; do you smoothly play low or charge in with the ace? Normally it's best to play low, but the bidding may affect this choice. Declarer has shown a huge hand with at least 5♥'s and 4♣'s. He has only 4 cards (max) in the pointed suits. A singleton king is a strong possibility! Going up with the ace only (possibly) loses in a few cases (if declarer has ♦KJ, or partner has singleton ♦K), but would declarer be in such a hurry to play the suit with these holdings??

The bottom lines. Sometimes you have no choice but to open at the one level with as many as 21 points! Very occasionally 2nd hand plays high!

A 3NT rebid? – part 1

Board 10 from Monday 22nd, both vul.

Dealer: ♠ AK5
East ♥ KJ65
both vul ♦ 764
♣ 963

♠ 3 N ♠ Q7642
♥ AQ9732 W E ♥ 4
♦ J10532 S ♦ AQ9
♣ 10 ♣ AQJ8
♠ J1098
♥ 108
♦ K8
♣ K7542

West (C)	North	East	South
-	-	1♠	pass
2♥ (1)	pass	3NT (2)	pass
4♥ (3)	dbl (4)	pass	pass
pass			

This was not a success for E-W, what went wrong?

- (1) Playing a weak NT, so 2♥ is OK as it only promises a good 7-8 points.
- (2) This jump rebid shows 17-19 points. This is a really poor bid, the hand is 15 points but with a poor 5 card suit and a singleton in partner's suit I would rebid 2♠. This pair were playing Acol and so a 2NT rebid here would show 15-16 but (for the reasons I said) this hand is not even worth a 2NT rebid.
- (3) East's 3NT rebid promises a balanced 17-19 and with a good 6 card suit and two singletons 4♥ is a good bid in my opinion ...
- (4) ... unfortunately North knew just what to do with the 4♥ bid!

And what happened. Two down for a bottom. And the other tables? Various partscores, but I note that one pair did reach a silly 3NT (minus two). And how should the bidding go?

How about: -

Playing Standard American: 1♠ - 1NT - 2♣ - 2♥ - pass

Playing Acol: 1♠ - 2♥ - 2♠ - 3♥ - pass or 1♠ - 2♥ - 2♠ - pass

Obviously Standard American works better on this particular deal.

The bottom lines. Do not lie about your points with either your NT opening or NT rebid. Do not bid NT with misfits. Do not overbid with mis-fits. Definitely do not overbid in NT with mis-fits.

The 3NT rebid – part 2

Board 26 from Monday 22nd, both vul.

North South (B)

♠ KQ8763 ♠ J92
♥ 8 ♥ AK76
♦ 97 ♦ AQ
♣ KQJ10 ♣ A753

Table A:

West	North	East	South
-	-	pass	1♥ (1)
pass	1♠	pass	3NT (2)
pass	pass (3)		

Table B:

West	North	East	South
-	-	pass	1♥ (1)
pass	1♠	pass	3NT (2)
pass	4♠ (4)	pass	pass

Table C:

West	North	East	South
-	-	pass	1♥ (1)
pass	1♠	pass	2NT (2)
pass	4♠ (5)	all pass	

(1) playing 4 card majors.

I was asked to comment on this board. Now as it happened all three of the N-S's at these tables were playing 4 card majors and, as I explain in detail on the next page, 1♥ is then the correct opening bid at (1).

- A: So then, what did you rebid with Hand B in this week's quiz? I've been through this in previous news-sheets (45 + some others). When playing a strong NT the jump to 2NT shows 18-19 points and the double jump to 3NT shows a strong hand worth around 18-19 points but with a long strong suit. Playing a weak NT it's similar but the range is 17-19. This really is far better than the old fashioned approach of playing the jump to 3NT as showing 19 points. Anyway, why an experienced Acol player should want to bid 3NT rather than 2NT at (2) is beyond me, this is a non-spectacular 18 points. And what should responder do at (3)? If the 3NT bid promised a balanced 19 points, then I would look for slam – bid 4♣ (natural), but if it is the long suit variety then pass is correct.
- B: So, it's catching! Eddie found the same 3NT bid that John G found at table A. I simply do not understand this from two very experienced players. This time North bid 4♠. Now I don't like this either. If 3NT is a long suit then pass is clear. If 3NT shows about a balanced 19 points then 4♣ looking for slam is best.
- C: Finally somebody got the bid right. This time Chuck was South and obviously bid 2NT at (2). Unfortunately his partner could find no better bid than 4♠. 3♣ (forcing no matter what you play it as) is a better bid at (5) and slam should be easily reached. Fast arrival shows a weak hand and this North hand is a monster.

And what happened? 4♠ was reached 5 times, it made 12 tricks on just 3 occasions (12 tricks are cold, you do not need the ♦ finesse and even the 4-0 trump break is irrelevant). Just one pair managed to bid slam (but they went down in 6♠!). Obviously 6♣, 6♠ or 6NT are excellent contracts. Now as I said, South should rebid 2NT at (2) and then bid 3♠ over partner's 3♣. Partner will then get to 6♠ which South may pass or even pull it to 6NT in order to protect the ♦AQ. If you feel that you prefer to play in NT to protect the ♦AQ then this is the time to insist upon NT, do not make the silly 3NT bid at (2).

The bottom lines. The jump to 2NT shows 18-19 points and leaves the final contract open. The double jump to 3NT promises less high card points but shows a good long suit that definitely wants to play in NT. It does not invite partner to bid on unless there is a slam.

4 Card Majors

At the end of the Monday session a group of players were discussing the hands and I was asked to comment upon boards 25 & 26, and in particular my opinion of the correct opening bid when playing a 4 card major system. I guess that the asker did not really expect 2 pages!

Hand A (25) Hand B (26)

♠ 86	♠ J92
♥ A872	♥ AK76
♦ KQ764	♦ AQ
♣ K9	♣ A753

I said that 1♦ is correct with Hand A and that 1♥ is correct with Hand B. I.e. you do not open a 4 card major if you have a 5 card minor but you do open a 4 card major if you have just a 4 card minor. Hans was present and predictably said that that was totally wrong and that with a 4 card minor and a 4 card major you always open 'up the line' and open the minor. Well I'm used to this sort of thing by now, so I wandered off and got the latest issue of UK's 'Bridge Magazine'. I come prepared. They have a bidding quiz every month with a reasonably sophisticated version of Acol; the rules are spelled out and the very first line says '*4 card majors with a major bid before a minor and ♥'s before ♠'s*' So, pretty clear, eh?

Hans said that 'nobody bids like that any more'. Now I guess that Hans can call John G, Eddie, Phil and Chuck 'nobody' – they all opened 1♥ with Hand B on Monday (Chuck's partner insisted upon playing 4 card majors), and I don't really mind what anybody calls me, but isn't it going a bit far to call the whole of the UK 'nobody'? What Hans really meant, of course, is 'nobody in Holland bids like that anymore'. This statement is largely correct.

So Acol is a 4 card major system and it means just that, open a 4 card major (if 1NT is not an option) unless you have a longer minor. With Hans' variation I believe that he will only open a 4 card major if exactly 4333 (then 1♠) or 3433, 4432, 4423 (then 1♥). Now Hans' system is very playable but it can hardly be called a 4 card major system! In fact, it is the system advocated by Dutch experts such as Westra/Leufkens and is called Dutch Acol. It differs from Acol in two very important points – it has a strong NT and a 4 card major is very rarely opened. I really can't see the point of a system that only occasionally opens a 4 card major; surely it's better to do it most of the time (Acol) or never (play a 5 card major system)?

Time for some history. Acol was originally 4 card majors with a variable NT (weak when non-vul and strong when vul). It became apparent that the strong NT with 4 card majors combination was unsatisfactory, and so the Brits changed to weak NT throughout. And what did the Dutch do? They borrowed Acol from the Brits but tried to 'improve' it by changing to a strong NT throughout. After a number of painful experiences they realized that this did not work (I give a couple of examples of why overleaf). So they changed the bidding style to avoid opening a 4 card major whenever possible – what a mish-mash. I much prefer the British solution, or the straightforward American approach. If 4 card majors don't work with the strong NT then they don't work with the strong NT – so don't mess about, play 5 card majors (America) or play a weak NT (Britain).

Dutch Acol vs Standard American

Standard American (5 card majors and a strong NT) is the complete opposite of Acol. Dutch Acol is very far removed from Acol, and in fact it is

virtually the same as Standard American. As far as I can see, the only difference between Standard American and Dutch Acol is the opening bid on these 4 hand shapes (4333, 3433, 4432 and 4423) when outside the range of 15-17 pts. So which is the best opening? Playing Dutch Acol you open a major and this means that all minor suit openings promise a 4 card suit. Playing Standard American you open a minor and this means that all major suit openings promise a 5 card suit. So it boils down to: which is most important for partner to know – that you opening minor suit is always 4+ cards or that your opening major suit is always 5+ cards? I think it's obvious, but who am I to argue with the likes of Berry Westra? I'll leave it up to you.

The 4441 Type Hand (playing 4 card majors)

So, let's forget about Dutch Acol (it is not a 4 card major system) and consider a system such as Acol where you frequently open a 4 card major. Whenever you open 1♥/♠ then you obviously need to have a rebid in mind. When you open a 4 card major you cannot then rebid another suit as that would promise 5 cards in the major; thus whenever you open a 4 card major then your rebid is always NT unless you can support partner.

Hand L	Hand M
♠ AQ76	♠ AQ76
♥ A872	♥ A872
♦ K984	♦ AQ84
♣ 9	♣ 9

There is just one problem, the 4441 type hand – notoriously difficult in any system. If the hand is outside your 1NT opening range Acol players open 1♥ (1♠ if 4144) and then rebid NT if partner bids the singleton. I hate to bid NT with a singleton in partner's suit but there's no alternative here. But the main problem is when your 4441 type hand is within your 1NT opening range: - Obviously you cannot open 1NT with a singleton and you cannot

rebid NT as that would show an incorrect point count; so in this situation you have to open a 4 card minor even though you have one (or two) 4 card majors. Suppose you play Acol (weak NT), then with Hand M you can open 1♥ as you have a 2NT rebid (15-16) if partner bids 2♣. But with Hand L you have to open 1♦; if partner is inconsiderate enough to respond 2♣ then you have no option but to lie with a rebid of 2♦. If you open 1♥ and partner responds 2♣ then 2♦ would promise 5♥'s. Sometimes you have to lie, and it's better to lie in minor suit length than to lie about your major suit length or your point count (by bidding NT out of range).

Playing a strong NT you have the same problem but the other way round – you open Hand L with 1♥ but you have to open Hand M with 1♦.

So, playing 4 card majors, you do not always open a 4 card major – with a 5 card minor open the 5 card minor, with NT shape within your 1NT range open 1NT and with 4441 type hands within your 1NT range open a minor.

Now most experienced Acol players know all this, but my advice is to play 5 card majors! You can play 5 card majors with a strong NT (Standard American, 2/1 etc.) or with a weak NT (no name as far as I know). 4 card majors work reasonably well with the weak NT (Acol) but I personally detest the fourth combination (4 card majors with a strong NT), *it does not work* – that's why Berry Westra and co. developed 'Dutch Acol' which rarely opens a 4 card major. If you don't like to open 4 card majors (I concur), then play 5 card majors!

So what's wrong with the 4 card major and strong NT combination?....

Hand Nin short, lots. Just take this hand as an example; if you play this system, then
♠ AJ76	1♠ is the opening with this hand. A 1♠ opening takes up a lot of room and a
♥ J82	2♣/♦ response is quite likely. This is a balanced hand in the 12-14 point range
♦ A97	and so a NT rebid is called for, so 2NT in this case. If partner has responded on
♣ K92	11 points (or, heaven forbid, 10 points) then 2NT is in real danger of going
	down. Playing a sensible system it's easy to stop in 1NT. And consider this sequence a
	little further; suppose that responder has a good 11-12 points.

He will then raise your 2NT bid to 3NT which will not make. Why have you got into this pickle? Because the wrong hand is doing the inviting. It should be the 11-12 point hand inviting the hand with the 12-14 point spread. The whole mess is caused by the initial opening on a 4 major card suit (in conjunction with the NT rebid being just 12-14 points). It simply does not work, and this example is just the tip of the iceberg. Best to open 1♣, keep the bidding low. Standard American is the system to play. And when you've mastered that, move on to the best 'basically natural' system of all – 2/1.

Respond with 6 points!

		<u>Table A:</u>			
		West	North	East	South
Board 1 from Monday 22 nd , love all.		-	-	pass	1NT (1)
North (E)	South (J)	pass	pass	pass	

		<u>Table B:</u>			
		West	North	East	South
♠ K63	♠ J985	-	-	pass	1♠ (1)
♥ 765	♥ AQ10	pass	pass (2)	pass	
♦ 73	♦ AQJ				
♣ K5432	♣ AJ10				

		<u>Table C:</u>			
		West	North	East	South
		-	-	pass	1♦ (1)
		pass	1NT	pass	3NT (3)
		pass	pass	pass	

Table A: I know that Hans would never open 1NT on this, so I guess that this was his partner (Jan) playing a 15-18 (19, whatever....) 1NT? A really poor opening which did not get its just deserts as 3 other players mis-bid the North hand. I don't know why it's always Hans' partners who bid these really silly 1NT openers – I'm pretty sure that Hans gives them a good ticking off every time? Hans is obviously more tolerant than me, I simply would not play with people who *repeatedly* bid like this. I'm tolerant enough with beginners but only if they are willing to learn.

Table B: A 19 count, so what should you open? It's totally flat (4333) but has excellent intermediates. Thus it's still worth 19 points and so you open 1♣ (1♠ if you play 4 card majors) and jump in NT next bid. Mind you, it won't work if partner fails to respond at (2)! Quite why three players passed a 1♠ opening is beyond me! This North hand is a reasonable 6 count (it's not flat), kings are good cards and Kxx in partner's suit is certainly a good holding. Playing 5 card majors then 2♠ is correct. Playing 4 card majors then it's a toss up, either 1NT or 2♠ could work out best (just another reason why I prefer 5 card majors!). Pass at (2) is pathetic.

Table C: A good sequence playing Standard American although I prefer to open 1♣ with equal length in the minors. 3NT at (3) shows a good 18-19 points whatever system you play; 2NT would show 17-18.

And what happened? 3NT made exactly the two times it was bid. 1NT (+2) got an undeserved average score as *three* pairs subsided in a silly 1♠ (+1).

The bottom line? Do not open 1NT with 19 points! Respond to partner's one level suit opening when you have 6 points. Remember that a 1NT response does not promise a balanced hand when partner opens 1♠, it shows 6-10 points and could be virtually any shape.

'I would object'!

Board 20 from Monday 22nd, both vul.

Dealer: ♠ KJ54
West ♥ K1095
both vul ♦ KJ6
♣ Q2

♠ 98763 N ♠ AQ2
♥ J W E ♥ A83
♦ Q8 S ♦ A32
♣ 98765 ♣ AK103
♠ 10
♥ Q7642
♦ 109754
♣ J4

(1) weak, 12-14

Table A:

West	North	East	South
pass	1NT (1)	2♣ (2)	2♥
pass	pass	pass (3)	

Table B:

West	North	East	South
pass	1NT (1)	dbl (2)	2♥ (4)
2♠ (5)	pass	4♠	pass
pass	pass		

Table C:

West	North	East	South
pass	1NT (1)	dbl (2)	redbl (6)
2♠	pass	pass (7)	pass

A weak NT was opened at these three tables, but then the bidding diverged: -

Table A: This 2♣ overcall at (2) is woefully inadequate. When RHO opens 1NT you should normally double (penalties) with 15 or more points. And, of course, passing with 21 points is feeble at (3).

Table B: Everybody got this right. South should run from the double at (4) and bidding 2♥ is fine. West has decent shape and decided to make a free bid at (5) which East understandably raised to game. West played it well and the game duly made.

Table C: Now this table is where the controversy was. N-S play a somewhat complex escape system after their 1NT opening is doubled, and redouble at (6) here showed a weak hand (I think) and forces partner to bid a suit. Now this is not standard (standard is that redouble shows a strong hand) but North failed to alert the bid. When the bidding was completed the director was called and the failure to alert explained. I said to play the hand out and then call me back. Now this time declarer was not quite on the ball (perhaps he was a bit flustered by the unnecessary agro?) and the 2♠ contract went one down. When I returned to the table after the play I said that there was no need to adjust the score, but if West had made 10 tricks then an adjusted score (4♠ bid, making) would be in order as it is possible that East passed at (7) because South had shown values (but there's not many values left!). South then stuck his oar in by saying that he would object. I checked with the club's leading player and he agreed that my ruling would have been fair (if West had made 10 tricks).

Incidentally, this same N-S pair got a good score last week when the bidding went 1NT – double – pass (1) – pass – redouble (2) – all pass. Apparently the pass at (1) showed values and demanded that opener redouble at (2). None of this was alerted and they got a top score. I shall try to be more vigilant in my director duties in future.

The bottom lines. If you play any complex/non-standard conventions then you must alert. The director may give an adjusted score at *his* discretion. I really don't see the need to argue with the director (or other players), this is a friendly club, isn't it? It's not as if we are battling it out for green points or the Gold Cup. And will people bear in mind that some people's hearing is not too good (we're all getting older) and that not everybody is fluent in English.

Bidding Quiz Answers

Hand A: 1♦. Playing Acol you open a 5 card minor in preference to a 4 card major.

Hand B: (a) 1♥. Playing Acol you open a 4 card major in preference to a 4 card minor. Playing Standard American you open 1♣ of course. The hand is not totally flat (it has two reasonable 4 card suits) and so it is too good for a strong 1NT opener. The hand has 18 points; the ♦ AQ are a –ve factor but the ♠ 9 and two aces and a king in 4 card suits are more than enough compensation; the hand is well worth 18 points after evaluation.

(b) 2NT. 18-19 pts (or 17-19 if you play a weak NT). A double jump 3NT rebid is best used to show a good hand with a good long suit. 3NT is especially poor here with 3 card ♠ support for partner; there could be a good 5-3 or even 6-3 ♠ fit (as with the actual deal) and you may miss slam.

Hand C: 3NT. This is a typical double jump 3NT rebid. It shows a good hand with a good long suit and does not invite partner to look for another contract unless he has enough for slam.

Hand D: (a) 1♠ is correct ...

(b) ... but after a 1NT rebid from partner it's tricky. Would you play 2♥ as weak, invitational or forcing? Best is to play 2♥ as weak and play 2♣ as Checkback Stayman, showing 5 ♠'s and often 4 ♥'s, with invitational or better values. It asks opener to clarify his major suit holdings (4 ♥'s or 3 ♠'s). So 2♣, Checkback, here.

Hand E: 2♠. Better than 1NT (support with support). This is trivial of course, so why is it in the quiz? – Because *three* players passed on Monday.

Hand F: This is the type of hand that does not appear in bidding books – because there is no perfect answer! The correct opening is the one that works on the day! The sensible alternatives are 1♥, a strong 2♥ (if you play strong twos or Benjamin twos), or 2NT; and that is my order of preference. I would open 1♥ but would not argue with a strong 2♥. I'm not keen on 2NT.

Hand G: Pass. Double is a poor choice; not only because you have only 3 ♥'s but because you will be fixed if partner bids a quite likely 2♣.

Hand H: Pass. I like to have 4 ♥'s for a take-out double of 1♠.

Hand J: 1♣ (or 1♦ if that's what you prefer) and then jump to 2NT showing 18-19 points. Do not open 1NT (it's far too strong). If you open 1NT with hands like this, partner will pass with 6 or 7 points and you will miss game.

Hand K: (a) I would (did) open 1NT. This is because

(b) ... there is no good rebid if you open 1♣. 1NT shows 12-14, 2♦ would be a reverse (strong – this hand is not good enough in my/Chuck's style) and 2♣ would normally be a 6 card suit. If you do open 1♣ then you would have to grit your teeth and rebid 2♣. It's not good enough for 3♣.