



Last week's winners: Monday 28/4/03

Friday 2/5/03

= winners	Hans/Paul	58 %	1st	Paul/Chuck	59 VP
= winners	Bjorn/Nils	58 %	2 nd	Bill/Terry	54 VP

Numbers are going down now. Paul and Philip have both gone back so it's virtually down to the residents. Still, considering the season and the travel (SARS) problems, two tables at Amari and 4 on Mondays is still pretty good. Who knows – it may not be george that causes the end of the world, but a variety of the common cold?

A take-out double? Board 13 from Friday 25th

♠ AQ103 Your RHO opponent opens 1♣, what is your bid? Do you double? That's
♥ K8 what one player with this hand did. The end result was that the opponents
♦ Q10963 ended up in 4♥ doubled by your partner, making! So a disaster, what was
♣ Q6 the root cause? If you chose to double with this hand, then check back to
 news-sheet 18. This hand is not a doubling hand. The ♥ holding is
nowhere near good enough. Partner is entitled to expect 4♥'s or a very good 3 card suit.
Simply overcall 1♦. This overcall does *not* deny 4♠'s, but simply denies holding both majors.

Incidentally, what would you do if RHO's opening bid was 1♥? Not enough for 1NT. Some would choose a double, it would normally work out OK but not if partner bids 2♣. Actually, there are three reasonable alternatives: - pass, 1♠ or 2♦. I think nothing is perfect and would not argue too much if my partner chose any one of these four bids (I'm very easy going). I may come back to this hand if I have some helpful input from Hans, Chuck or anybody else who has a strong opinion.

Which Bidding System?

Are you sure that you are playing the bidding system that is best suited to your style? I have observed various individuals and pairs over the last few years and I am convinced that some of them are simply playing the wrong system!

Some die-hards will never change. Hans plays SAYC or Dutch Acol (always a strong NT), Chuck plays 2/1 or SAYC, John plays Acol (weak NT). Full Stop! It would need to start snowing in Pattaya before any of them considered playing another system. Others are far more flexible and forward going. Martin and Rosemary have experimented with just about every possibility of 4/5 card majors and weak/strong NT. I have far more respect for people who are prepared to experiment than those who simply say that their system is best (usually because they have played no other).

Anyway, are you sure that the system that you play is best suited to your style? Before you read on, consider these hands. Your partner has opened 1♠, what is your reply?

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C	Make a note of what your reply on each of these hands is. If your answer disagrees with mine for your particular system, then you are probably playing a system that is unsuitable for your style. The answers for both a weak and strong NT system are given later in this news sheet.
♠ 94	♠ K7	♠ A7	
♥ 95	♥ Q97	♥ Q94	
♦ A104	♦ 9864	♦ Q86	
♣ KJ9542	♣ KQ95	♣ K9752	

In this news sheet I will be concentrating on the difference between a weak NT system and the strong NT. In subsequent instalments I will cover: -

- 4 card majors or 5 card majors?
- When do you open a 4 card major when playing Acol?
- 2/1 or SAYC?
- Better minor or short/prepared ♣?

Strong NT vs Weak NT

A couple of weeks back, one of our distinguished members (Chuck) could have been heard wandering around the club muttering 'why on earth would anybody want to play a weak NT?' Now this guy probably has no idea what he was talking about – having never played a weak NT in his life? So let's hear it from somebody who certainly does know what he is talking about, and who is equally at home playing either a Strong NT or a Weak NT – me!

An opening 1NT bid should be balanced (as should a NT rebid). No singleton or void. A Strong NT is 15-17 pts, a Weak NT is 12-14 pts. Which system is the best? If there was a simple answer to this, then everybody would play the same system. I (along with the rest of the enlightened world who have had experience in both systems) believe that there is not much in it, but we all have our own personal favourite – I will reveal mine at the end of this news-sheet.

What is the Weak NT?

Before we enter into the discussion of a Strong or Weak NT, I would like to clarify exactly what is meant by playing a Weak NT. A Weak NT is an *opening* bid with a balanced 12-14 pts. Playing a Weak NT, a 1NT overcall of an opponent's 1 of a suit is still 15-18 etc (less in the balancing seat). The 1NT overcall is totally independent of whether you play a Strong or Weak opening 1NT. Now I mention this because a few people at our club were unfamiliar with the Weak NT and thought that it also applied to a 1NT overcall. Also, a few less experienced players have overcalled 1NT on balanced 12-14 counts – this is totally incorrect (you need 15-18); and if you do so, then you deserve the resulting 800 penalty.

Anyway, the point I am making is that the 1NT overcall has nothing to do with the strength of your 1NT opening. I repeat, a 1NT overcall is always 15-18 in the direct seat. Don (UK) please note. Incidentally, common practice is that if your side opens 1NT (either Strong or Weak), if the next hand overcalls then Stayman and transfers are all off. I like to play Lebensohl in this situation but it depends upon exactly what the overcall was and means (there are a lot of artificial overcalls). You need to discuss this with your partner. I have produced a separate leaflet on Lebensohl.

Strong or Weak NT ?

First of all, I would like to clear up a misnomer, a weak NT is not weak! It is simply weaker than a strong NT. If I was dealt 'weak' hands of 12-14 pts all the time, I would take up rubber bridge professionally. However, for clarity, I will continue to call it a weak NT.

Most bidding systems are based on the NT structure, typically –

	Strong NT	Weak NT
Opening bid	15-17	12-14
Rebid	12-14	15-16
Jump rebid	18-19	17-18 (19)

Now both systems have their advantages and disadvantages: -

With a weak NT, you have a good semi pre-emptive bid, it comes up more often and the structure is more orderly and precise. The side that gets in 1NT first often has an advantage. However, you do sometimes go for 800 and even 2 down undoubled when vulnerable is a bottom! Inverted minors and Walsh work much better with a weak NT (opener is far more likely to have a strong hand, 15+).

But playing a strong NT also has its advantages. You are less likely to be doubled for penalties when playing a strong NT and people interfere with your strong NT opening at their peril! Super-accepting (of transfers) is much safer playing a strong NT.

Now any time that you open 1NT with a 4 card major you run the risk of missing a 4-4 fit there is partner cannot respond. This happens more often with the weak NT as a weak NT opening comes up more often and partner needs more to respond.

So which system is best? A close call. I quite like a weak NT, but the strong NT works equally well and we must also consider that the majority of players worldwide prefer a strong NT.

When you add up all of the above pros and cons (the points that are usually discussed) there is not much in it. Basically a weak NT is good if you don't go down for a bad score. But, as far as I am concerned, the most important factor is usually not even addressed or even recognised – I have never seen this extremely important point discussed when considering the two systems: -

Hand A	Hand B	Hand C	Suppose that you are playing a strong NT and partner opens 1♠. What is your bid?
♠ 94	♠ K7	♠ A7	Clearly you would like to bid 2♣, the most
♥ 95	♥ Q97	♥ Q94	descriptive bid, with all 3 hands. But you
♦ A104	♦ 9864	♦ Q86	cannot (should not!).
♣ KJ9542	♣ KQ95	♣ K9752	

Hand A is far too weak, a 2 level response promises 11+ pts. Bid 1NT.

And Hand B? close to a two level (2♣) response, but what when partner rebids 2NT? Usually it's OK, but you could well go down if partner is minimum. I have mentioned this over and over again in these news-sheets; playing a strong NT, a two level new suit response should be up to strength (11+ points). So, playing a strong NT, Hand B should reply 1NT (although I am sure that Hans and Paul would disagree – they bid at the two level when Chuck and myself would not even consider it). Anyway, take it from me (and Chuck) and the experts, playing a strong NT you need a decent 11 points to reply with a new suit at the two level. My personal approach when playing a system like this (Standard American) is that I will only introduce a new suit at the two level if I am prepared to bid again opposite a 2NT rebid.

And hand C? Enough values for a 2♣ response, but what when partner rebids 2NT (12-14)? You have no idea whether to bid game or not. With these 11 point hands, you have to leave the decision up to opener if he is 12-14. The solution? With Hand C, reply 2NT when playing a strong NT system.

So, all of these hand types are not ideal when playing a strong NT as you cannot bid 2♣. But what if you are playing a weak NT? Absolutely no problem at all! You simply reply 2♣ on all of these hands! Playing a strong NT you cannot because a 2NT rebid (12-14) from partner will embarrass you; playing a weak NT this is no problem, it is 15-16. When playing a weak NT, you only need 8+ points (many

players prefer 9+) to introduce a new suit at the two level.

The bottom line? If you listen to the usual arguments about strong/weak no-trumps, there is nothing in it. I believe that the weak NT is superior because you can bid at the two level much more freely. If you answered 2♣ for any of these hands and play SAYC – then why are you playing a strong NT system? Have you considered changing to a weak NT? If you prefer to bid a new suit at the 2 level with 9 or 10 points, then seriously consider changing to a weak NT – it really is a far better system for you.

Now those of you who know me will also know that my favourite system is 2/1 – which includes a strong NT! How is that? As I said, I believe the weak NT to be superior because the two level responses to a suit opening are more flexible. However, the 2/1 system has overcome this by means of the forcing NT. Bidding to the correct game (and slam) is so much easier playing 2/1.

So, my favourite system is 2/1. If my partner does not play 2/1 then I prefer to play a weak NT. I do not really like Standard American (SAYC) – I believe that if you play a strong NT, then play 2/1! Of course things are different in America – they have no idea about the advantages of a weak NT and everybody plays the strong NT (either SAYC or 2/1). And what about people just starting the game and average club players? Obviously if you live in the USA then you have to play a strong NT, but playing a weak NT really is much easier as two level responses can be made on less values (i.e. hands A,B,C)

And what about 4 or 5 card majors? Now here I really do have a strong preference. I'll cover this in a later news-sheet. Editor's note – No. 74.