

Last week's winners: Monday 15/3/04

Friday 19/3/04

N-S 1 st Phil/Michael	57 %	E-W 1 st Laine/Sirkkala	55 %	1 st Norman/Dave	61 %
N-S 2 nd John/John	56 %	E-W 2 nd Sid/Don	54 %	2 nd = Phil/Michael	56 %
				2 nd = Phillis/Chris	56 %

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

Hand A Hand B

♠ KJ109532	♠ KQ5
♥ 863	♥ KJ6
♦ K8	♦ QJ43
♣ 8	♣ 542

With Hand A both sides are vulnerable. RHO opens 1♥, what do you bid?

What do you open with Hand B? And if you play a weak NT?

Hand C Hand D

♠ J9854	♠ Q7
♥ AK	♥ KQ
♦ J10832	♦ QJ63
♣ 7	♣ QJ976

With Hand C RHO opens 1NT, what is your bid?

With Hand D both sides are vulnerable. LHO opens 1♥ and partner bids 3♠ (7 card suit, pre-emptive). RHO passes, what is your bid?

The Two-level response.Board 20 from Friday ^{19th}, both vul.

West	East	West	North	East	South
♠ AJ96	♠ 32	1♥ (1)	pass	2♦ (2)	pass
♥ A1096	♥ J5	2♠ (3)	pass	3♦	pass
♦ KJ	♦ Q1098742	6NT	pass	pass	pass
♣ AJ9	♣ K2				

It was a bold effort, but 6NT went one down, so anybody to blame?, let's look at the bidding: -

- (1) Playing Acol, so a 4 card major (1♥) is the correct bid with this hand.
- (2) Now here's the problem. How many points do you need for a new suit at the two level? I've said over and over again that it's 11 (or a good 10), but that's when you play a strong NT. Playing Acol it's different and 8 (or a good 7) is quite sufficient (I've gone into why a few times in past news-sheets). Anyway, 8 is enough and I think it's reasonable to up-grade with a seven card suit.
- (3) A reverse, so forcing. Normally it promises longer ♥'s than ♠'s but West was in control - I guess he was always going to bid 6NT?

Obviously West was at fault, but to be fair he is used to playing a strong NT or Precision and did not realize that partner only promised 8 (or so) points with a 2-level response.

The bottom line. The strength of your opening NT has repercussions elsewhere.

In particular, a new suit at the two level is 10-11+ playing a strong NT system but 7-8+ playing a weak NT. I mentioned this difference last week.

The Beginner's Page

I have covered responder's bids when partner opens one of a suit in the past few articles. Time now to consider what to do when partner opens 1NT.

Up to now, we have only dealt with natural bids, it's time to discover our first conventional bid. There are thousands of conventional bids around, and the most common are undoubtedly Blackwood (asking for aces) and Stayman and Jacoby transfers (the latter two used when partner opens 1NT). This week we'll deal with Stayman

The first thing to remember when partner opens 1NT is that he has a balanced hand. Balanced hands usually play well in NT and NT scores more than a minor suit. In all of our examples, partner had opened 1NT (15-17).

Now when partner opens 1NT we know how many points he has (15-17) and it is up to us to stop now, invite game or bid game. We need 8-9 points to invite game and a good 9+ points is usually enough to bid game without inviting.

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	
♠ 1095	♠ 1095	♠ K105	All of these hands are fairly balanced and we have no reason to think of anything other than NT as a final strain. So with hand 1 we pass; with Hand 2 we invite with 2NT and with Hand 3 we bid 3NT. Note that even a 5 card ♣ or ♦ suit is not worth mentioning, NT scores more.
♥ 976	♥ Q76	♥ QJ8	
♦ J9	♦ KJ942	♦ KJ942	
♣ KJ942	♣ Q9	♣ KJ	

Stayman

Fine, a minor suit is usually not even worth mentioning; but major suit(s) are different! There is only 10 points difference between the scores for a NT contract and a ♥/♠ contract and if there is a major suit fit (4-4, 5-3 or better) then you usually get more tricks by playing in the major.

Hand 4	Hand 5	
♠ J87	♠ Q76	Partner has again opened 1NT. Hand 4 is worth a game invitation and Hand 5 is worth game. But in NT or is there a 4-4 ♥ fit? If we respond 2♥, how does opener know if that is a 4 or 5 card suit? Now I said above that we don't bother to mention a ♣ or ♦ suit, so the 2♣/♦ bids are spare. We use the 2♣ bid for the Stayman Convention. It says 'I have a 4 card major (possibly two 4 card majors) and I want to find out if we have a fit. It is totally artificial and says nothing about the ♣ suit
♥ Q1095	♥ A1095	
♦ KJ92	♦ KJ92	
♣ Q9	♣ J9	

With both Hand 4 and 5 we bid Stayman 2♣. The responses to Stayman by opener are: -

- 2♦ = I have no 4 card major
- 2♥ = I have 4 ♥'s (and also possibly 4 ♠'s)
- 2♠ = I have 4 ♠'s but do not have 4 ♥'s.

So with Hand 4 we bid 2♣ Stayman. If partner replies 2♦ (no major) or 2♠ (4 ♠'s but not 4 ♥'s) then we bid 2NT – showing our 8-9 points and invitational to 3NT. If partner bids 2♥ then we invite the 4♥ game by bidding 3♥. Hand 5 is worth game but we still start with Stayman. Over 2♦/♠ we bid 3NT and over 2♥ we bid 4♥. One final point; since partner must respond to 2♣ we may have to play in 2NT and so 2♣ guarantees invitational values +. There are exceptions, but for now let's say Stayman guarantees 8 or more points.

A 4♦ Opening? – part 1

Board 2 from Monday 15th, N-S vul.

Last week I covered a couple of strong (Benjamin) twos; and I also said that one requirement for a strong two is that it has 8 (or 9) playing tricks. But one point that I apparently failed to mention is that a strong two has to be strong!

Dealer:	♠ AK954	West	North	East	South (B)
East	♥ 876				
N-S vul	♦ 42	-	-	pass (1)	2♦ (2)
	♣ 1065	dbl	2♠	pass (3)	3♦
		pass	5♦	pass	pass
		pass			
♠ QJ107	N	♠ 863			
♥ AKQJ	W E	♥ 932			
♦ J8	S	♦ Q			
♣ 974		♣ AKQJ82			
	♠ 2				
	♥ 1054				
	♦ AK1097653				
	♣ 3				

- (1) I would open 1♣. But I guess that pass is not unreasonable for a conservative player??
- (2) Explained by North to be a strong two in ♦'s.
- (3) I would bid 3♣.

E-W took their four tricks off the top for a poor score to N-S. South then criticised North's bidding saying that he had only promised 8 tricks with ♦'s as trumps, was his rebuke justified? No! South was clearly to blame. The problem is that a strong two should be a *strong* hand, one where you would feel sick if a 1 level opening was passed out. As I said last week, it should contain 8 playing tricks, but it also needs to have a decent point count, 16 is probably about the minimum.

This South hand is not even good enough for a 1♦ opening! So what do you open? I suppose that pass is reasonable but I would open with a pre-empt. An 8 card suit, so too good for a weak 2♦; that leaves 3♦ or 4♦. Many players say that with 7 cards open 3 and with 8 cards open 4. That is often good advice in a major, but the problem with opening 4 of a minor is that it goes past 3NT which may be the best contract if partner has a decent hand. I prefer to play opening bids of 4♣/♦ as Texas transfers and I would open 3♦ with this hand. 5♦ is not totally unreasonable; but, again, it goes past 3NT.

A Defensive Problem

Board 18 from Friday 19th, N-S vul.

N	♠ 86	West	North	East	South
W E	♥ 762				
S	♦ AKJ98732	-	-	4♦	pass
	♣ -	pass	4♥	5♦	5♥
		pass	pass	pass	

♠ AJ2
♥ J3
♦ 105
♣ K76542

Don't worry about the bidding for now (I go into it on the next page). You are East, defending 5♥. You lead ♦A and both West and North follow small. What card do you lead to trick two? Answer next page.

A 4♦ Opening? – part 2

Board 18 from Friday 19th, N-S vul.

Dealer:	♠ K7	West	North	East	South
East	♥ AKQ84	-	-	4♦ (1)	pass
N-S vul	♦ Q6	pass	4♥ (2)	5♦ (3)	5♥ (4)
	♣ AQ83	pass	pass	pass	
♠ Q109543	N	♠ 86			
♥ 1095	W E	♥ 762			
♦ 4	S	♦ AKJ98732			
♣ J109		♣ -			
	♠ AJ2				
	♥ J3				
	♦ 105				
	♣ K76542				

- (1) An 8 card suit, so open 4♦? That's what a lot of players would do, and it's not wrong. I, however, am not so keen on it as it goes past 3NT, which may well be the best contract if partner has a decent hand. On this occasion, however, partner had a heap and 4♦ could have worked out well, making it difficult for the opposition.
- (2) It's difficult at the 4 level, but North got this one right for this particular deal (it's a bit of a lottery, double may work out best on another lay-out).
- (3) Now I do not like this bid. You have made the opponent's guess at the 4 level and they may well have got it wrong. Partner may even be waiting with the axe. I am not going to go into whether this hand is worth 5♦ or not, but if you feel that it is worth 5♦, then bid 5♦ at (1)! Pre-empting twice is silly – it gives the opponents time to exchange information and upsets partner if he could set the opponents.
- (4) Indeed, once partner bid 4♥ then South finds the fine 5♥ bid. The extra round of bidding makes all the difference!

And what happened? Needless to say that West did not find the defence of ruffing partner's ♦K at trick two and returning a ♣. However, East may possibly have seen the light? He knows that somebody is ruffing the 2nd ♦ and a Lavinthal lead of the 2♦ at trick two is unlikely to cost and would have worked wonders! However, East was not the likes of Hans or Chuck (or maybe me on a good day?) – did you lead ♦2 when I set the question overleaf? If East had a ♠ void instead of a ♣ void, then ♦J (or ♦9) would be the card. Anyway, back to the real world

I'm not saying that I would open 5♦, but it would have worked here. North cannot possibly step in at the 5 level and would have doubled. 5♦ went minus 3 at two other tables for a good score against the 650 for 5♥.

The bottom line. Pre-empt just once, to the limit which the hand, vulnerability, your style etc dictates. If you think that the 5 level is a good bet then open five, do not raise your pre-empt later. Never bid again having pre-empted unless partner invites. Think in the defence, don't just automatically bang out aces and kings. If you want a ruff, you have to get partner to take the lead. Lavinthal (McKenny) tells partner which suit to return.

Quacks

Board 7 from Monday ^{15th}, both vul.

West (A)	East (D)	West	North	East	South
♠ KJ109532	♠ Q7	-	-	-	1♥
♥ 863	♥ KQ	3♠ (1)	pass	4♠	pass
♦ K8	♦ QJ63	pass	dbl	pass	pass
♣ 8	♣ QJ976	pass			

(1) Weak

N-S took their four aces and -200 was a poor score for E-W. So, was West's 3♠ overcall too much vulnerable or was East's raise too optimistic?

Perhaps a matter of style, but I think 3♠ is fine. The problem is the East hand. Now queens and jacks (quacks) are good cards in partner's suit, and sometimes in a NT contract; but when partner has advertised a decent 7 card suit, quacks in other suits are virtually worthless. East should pass.

And what happened? West's 3♠ bid had done its job. 3♠ making would have been an excellent score and if the opponents pushed on to 4♥ then that went down.

The bottom line? Quack, quack.

Go to Jail, ... do not pass Go.

Board 8 from Friday ^{19th}, love all

North	South	West	North	East	South
♠ 1052	♠ Q3	1♦	pass	1♠	dbl (1)
♥ K109	♥ AJ76	2♠	3♥ (2)	pass	pass
♦ KQJ10	♦ 53	dbl	pass	pass	pass
♣ J95	♣ A10863				

3♥ doubled was minus two for a cold bottom on a partscore deal, anyone to blame? As always, let's look at the bidding: -

(1) Now some people believe that you need an opening hand for a double – that is incorrect (although this hand is probably worth an opener). A take-out double shows values in the unbid suits, so ♣'s and ♥'s in this case. This hand is ideal. What's more, my personal opinion is that majors are more important than minors – if this South hand held 5♥'s then I would prefer an overcall of 2♥ non-vul (you probably need a six card suit for a two level overcall if vulnerable). Thus this double implies exactly 4♥'s, fine.

(2) So, 10 points and decent ♥ support, so bid 3♥? No, this is totally wrong. Partner has probably got only 4♥'s and this goes over the 'safe' level of 7 tricks by two – too many. Points are largely irrelevant here and this is a good defensive hand. Pass.

And what happened? 2♠ either made (twice) or went down (twice) at other tables.

The bottom line. I keep saying it – obey The Law. The fact that North has a decent 10 count and partner has doubled are largely irrelevant in any decision to bid – the over-riding factor is the total combined number of trumps. Do not bid more than one level over the combined number of trumps in competitive situations where the points are roughly even between the two partnerships. North got what he deserved. Obey The Law or face the consequences.

Passed Out?

Board 6 from Friday^{19th}, E-W vul.

West East (B)

♠ 1063 ♠ KQ5
♥ Q4 ♥ KJ6
♦ A987 ♦ QJ43
♣ KJ97 ♣ 542

Table A:

West	North	East	South
-	-	1NT (1)	pass
pass	(2)	pass	

Table B:

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♦ (3)	pass
2♣ (4)	pass	2NT	pass
3NT (5)	pass	pass	pass

Table C:

West	North	East	South
-	-	pass (6)	pass
pass	pass		

Table A: So then, did you open with Hand B in this week's quiz? At table A East opened a weak NT at (1) - I'll give my opinion of this opening later. But is this West hand worth 2NT? It has good intermediates but 2NT here would be 11-12 points and it's not quite worth it, I agree with the pass at (2).

Table B: This pair played a strong NT and East elected to open with 1♦ at (3). So what should West respond at (4)? It's close. 1NT is 6-9 and a new suit (2♣) is 11+. With 10 you have to decide which way to go. Obviously if your partner opens on rubbish like this East hand then you should settle for 1NT! 3NT at (5) is an overbid of course.

Table C: I've let the cat out of the bag! This East most certainly got this right at (6) in my opinion. The East hand is not worth an opener! How many times must I say that totally flat hands (4333 type) are bad and should deduct a point?

Actually, before I saw the complete deal one distinguished member did thrust this East hand under my nose and ask 'would you open?' I said no, I would pass. Chuck nodded in approval.

And what happened? It was passed out twice but four pairs found a poor opening bid. 1NT went minus one, 2♦ was minus 2 and the silly 3NT (bid twice!) was minus 4!!

The bottom line. I'll just keep on playing the same old record – deduct a point for totally flat hands. This deal is *just another* example of how badly flat hands play – minus four in 3NT!! Even a combined 22 points fails to make 7 tricks! This hand is not worth any sort of opener, either 1♦ or a weak NT – pass.

Double! Take-out or penalties?

Board 3 from Friday 19th, E-W vul

Dealer:	♠ K10762	West (C)	North	East	South
South	♥ 82		(me)		(Ian)
E-W vul	♦ 97	-	-	-	1NT
	♣ A1095	2♠ (1)	dbl (2)	pass	3♥ (3)
		pass	pass	dbl	pass
		pass	pass (4)		
♠ J9854	N	♠ -			
♥ AK	W E	♥ Q10963			
♦ J10832	S	♦ K54			
♣ 7		♣ Q6432			
	♠ AQ3				
	♥ J743				
	♦ AQ6				
	♣ KJ8				

This was not a success for N-S (5 losers in the trump suit!), what went wrong?

- (1) I have no idea if this was natural (or ♠'s and a minor). Either way it's an appalling overcall of a strong NT – vulnerable, with two suits headed by jacks. A candidate for worst bid of the year? – No, South can do far better!
- (2) 1000% Penalties. No if's, but's, or maybe's about it.
- (3) South does not even have to look at his hand again. He has opened 1NT and partner has doubled for penalties. That's it.
- (4) Since North simply wanted to throw all 13 of his cards at his partner, you can hardly blame him for passing here? It's no longer possible to take the hand seriously.

And what happened. One down for a bottom. And the other tables? 4♠ made +1 once, but by N-S! If my arithmetic is correct (it usually is) then that would translate into 6 down and 1700 to N-S? I shall be enrolling both West and South into my next beginner's class. Funny thing is that they both consider themselves way above the beginner stage! It really is sad to see the opposition offering these *enormous* penalties week after week and then have partner make a ludicrous bid and go down! It's ridiculous; you can hardly call it bridge.

Now South said that he plays all doubles below 2NT as take-out. Total garbage of course, and this particular South did in fact ask me a year or more ago to write up what doubles are penalties. I obliged (news-sheet 17 and various subsequent ones). Shame he failed to read them?

The bottom line. After partner's 1NT opening has been overcalled double is 100% for penalties and it's best to play that all other bids are natural (except a bid of opponent's suit which is Stayman). More advanced players may wish to read up on Lebensohl.

Bidding Quiz Answers

- Hand A: I would bid 3♠, weak. This is an excellent suit for a pre-empt (texture).
- Hand B: Pass. This is a miserable flat hand. Deduct a point for the flat (4333 type) shape and it's only 11 points, so pass. Open a hand like this and you will get too high.
- Hand C: Pass. You need a decent hand to come in over a strong NT, this shape is fine if the points were in the long suits, but not with just 2 points in the two long suits. I would still pass even playing a system like Multi Landy or Cappelletti where a 2♠ bid promises ♠'s and a minor.
- Hand D: Pass. Partner has a reasonable pre-empt because he is vulnerable, but this hand is not good enough to raise. It has too many quick losers. Queens and jacks in outside suits are virtually useless in this scenario.