

Last week's winners: Monday 19/1/04

Friday 23/1/04

1st Chuck/Hans 69 %
 2nd Paul (Ire)/Joe 62 %

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 2nd Lis/Finn 62%

A Happy New Year to All.

Year of the monkey. Well we all know that, at least until November. But will there be another 4 years? Let's hope people come to their senses, but no names!

To celebrate the new year I have decided to add a new regular feature to our news-sheet. Since we have a very large number of beginners and 'rusty' players – how about a regular beginner's page?

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

Hand A	Hand B	With Hand A you play negative doubles. You open 1 ♠ and LHO overcalls 2 ♦. Partner passes, round to you, what now?
♠ AKJ1082	♠ A7	
♥ Q84	♥ 2	With Hand B you open 1 ♦ and partner responds 1 ♠, what is your rebid?
♦ Q106	♦ AKJ643	
♣ 6	♣ KQ94	
Hand C	Hand D	With Hand C RHO opens 1 ♠, what do you do?
♠ 654	♠ AK	
♥ K2	♥ QJ92	What would you open with Hand D? Suppose that you choose 1 ♦ then what is your rebid over partner's 1 ♠?
♦ AJ74	♦ 6543	
♣ K854	♣ KQ2	
Hand E	Hand F	With Hand E RHO opens 1 ♦, what do you do?
♠ AQ102	♠ AQ102	
♥ KJ9	♥ K1094	With Hand F RHO opens 1 ♦, what do you do?
♦ Q6542	♦ AQ54	
♣ Q	♣ Q	
Hand G	Hand H	With Hand G partner opens 1 ♠ and RHO overcalls 2 ♦. What do you do?
♠ 73	♠ K954	
♥ AJ3	♥ A873	
♦ K9532	♦ 109	With Hand H LHO opens 1 ♦ and this is passed round to you. What do you do?
♣ A103	♣ J76	

The Beginner's Page

One of my critics has repeatedly said that the news sheets are too advanced. Perhaps so, and so I propose to have a new regular page for beginners/improvers. Now a couple of people have asked me to recommend a good Standard American book for beginners. Unfortunately I don't know of one! I have a couple of good books, but they are Acol and the best American book I know (Standard Bridge Bidding for the 21st century – Max Hardy) is a bit too advanced. If anybody has a good beginner's book, then lend it to me please.

Anyway, I'll bring out a page each week and who knows, by the end of the year I may have enough material for a small beginner's book? Let me know what you think, and if there is a topic that you would like me to cover.

Standard American

I'll start this week by explaining what Standard American is. There are a number of different bidding systems around but the most popular worldwide is Standard American. The basis of this system is that a 1NT opening is balanced in the 15-17 point range and a one level major suit opening must be a five (or longer) card suit. That means that when you do not have a 5-card major and cannot open 1NT (incorrect point range) then you sometimes have to open a minor suit with less than four cards.

Let's consider these six hands. You are dealer and you must decide what your opening bid should be.

Hand 1	Hand 2	Hand 3	Hand 4	Hand 5	Hand 6
♠ 98764	♠ K876	♠ K876	♠ K876	♠ J10964	♠ 64
♥ KJ8	♥ KJ8	♥ KJ8	♥ KJ8	♥ KJ1064	♥ 8
♦ A6	♦ A6	♦ A96	♦ AJ9	♦ A6	♦ AQ942
♣ KQ5	♣ Q876	♣ Q87	♣ KJ7	♣ A	♣ AK764

Hand 1: 1♠. With 13 points it is a clear opener. A 1NT opening is not possible because that would promise 15-17 points. You have a 5 card major so open it! It would be nice to have a few points in the major suit, but this is what you were dealt. Any opening bid other than 1♠ would be a distortion of the hand.

Hand 2: 1♣. A fairly flat 13 points but too weak for 1NT. You cannot open 1♠ as that promises a 5 card suit, so bid your best minor.

Hand 3: 1♣. Now this is perhaps personal preference and many people would open 1♦ as it is a better suit. My advice is to always open 1♣ when equal length (3-3 or 4-4) in the minors. I will explain why in later episodes.

Hand 4: 1NT. Similar to Hand 3 but this time you have enough points to open 1NT (15-17). Always open 1NT with a suitable hand.

Hand 5: 1♠. You have two 5-card majors, so which should you open? It is not a matter of choosing the better one, you always open 1♠ with 5♠'s and 5♥'s. Partner will usually respond and you then bid your ♥'s next go. I will come onto responder's bids and opener's rebids in future exciting episodes.

Hand 6: 1♦. I said that when equal length (3-3 or 4-4) in the minors then open 1♣, but when 5-5 you always open the higher ranking suit – you can rebid the lower ranking next go without raising the level of the bidding too much.

If you don't open 1NT... then rebid 1NT?Board 4 from Friday 23rd, both vul.

West	East (D)	West	North	East	South
♠ Q943	♠ AK	pass	pass	1♦ (1)	pass
♥ 643	♥ QJ92	1♠	pass	2♥ (2)	pass
♦ AJ8	♦ 6543	pass (3)	pass		
♣ 853	♣ KQ2				

2♥ got a poor score. So what can we say about the bidding? ..

A lot! (two pages). East decided to downgrade the East hand (they play a strong NT) and I certainly would not disagree. AK doubleton is poor and the two four card suits have just 3 points between them – so it's not worth a strong NT, points belong in long suits. Fine, but then what's the correct rebid at (2)? 1NT of course (12-14). 2♥ here is a reverse and shows a strong hand (16+) with a 5+ card ♦ suit. Luckily(?) West passed at (3) but it's no good, the best contract of 1NT has been bypassed. I believe that East probably bid 2♥ because he had read (perhaps repeatedly in the news-sheets) never to deny a 4-card major. Bidding 1NT here is not denying 4 ♥'s, it is the cheaper bid, partner has (generally speaking) denied 4 ♥'s when he bids ♠'s – there is no ♥ fit.

The bottom line? Balanced hands should normally open 1NT - or rebid 1NT (without support for responder) if it does not *deny* (i.e. go past) a 4-card major.

Never deny a Four Card Major

Now I said that you should normally rebid 1NT, but not if it *denies* a 4-card major. Let's shuffle the above hands around slightly: -

West (J)	East (K)	West	North	East	South
♠ 643	♠ QJ92	pass	pass	1♦ (1)	pass
♥ Q943	♥ AK	1♥	pass	1♠ (2)	pass
♦ AJ8	♦ 6543	1NT (3)	pass	pass	pass
♣ 853	♣ KQ2				

Both hands are the same except that I have swapped their major suit holdings. Again East devalues and opens 1♦ at (1). This time West responds 1♥ but it would be wrong of East to rebid 1NT at (2) – that *would* be denying a 4 card major and West could have 4 ♠'s. In this example West does not and so simply rebids 1NT at (3). Fine.

Support with Support

West	East (L)	West	North	East	South
♠ Q943	♠ AK6	pass	pass	1♣ (1)	pass
♥ 643	♥ 92	1♠	pass	2♠ (2)	pass
♦ AJ8	♦ Q543	pass	pass		
♣ 853	♣ KQ92				

This time we have a different East hand and he opens 1♣ at (1) with the intention of re-bidding 1NT over partner's 1♦ or 1♥. When partner responds 1♠, however, it is better to support with 2♠ at (2). There are two reasons why you should support with just 3 cards in this situation: - (a) partner may have a 5 card ♠ suit, and (b) partner probably has 3 or less ♥'s and this suit may be vulnerable in NT.

Hand Evaluation

Back to the original board but let's improve West's hand slightly.

West (M)	East (D)	Sequence A		Sequence B		Sequence C	
		West	East	West	East	West	East
♠ Q943	♠ AK						
♥ 643	♥ QJ92	pass	1NT	pass	1NT	pass	1♦
♦ AK8	♦ 6543	2♣	2♥	2♣	2♥	1♠	1NT
♣ 853	♣ KQ2	3NT	pass	2NT	pass	pass	

As I said, the East hand should de-value because of the poor 4-card suits and doubleton AK, a 1♦ opening is excellent. I have improved the West hand to 9 points, but I keep harping on about devaluing 4333 shape hands. This deal is a perfect example of what happens if people ignore my advice: -

If neither player heeds what I say then you get sequence A. If just West correctly devalues his hand (to 8 pts - deduct a point for 4333) then he has an invitational hand and you get sequence B. If East devalues his hand correctly then sequence C leads to the best contract. 3NT is a very poor contract and I would much prefer to be in 1NT rather than 2NT or 3NT (but then I don't play the cards that well).

I included this rather detailed analysis because one of my critics thought that I should keep it simple and tell people to always open 1NT with balanced 15-17 counts. I like to think that readers are capable of distinguishing between 'good' 15 counts and 'bad' 15 counts (as, indeed, this East player did). Opening 1♦ on this East hand D is an excellent bid (as I have demonstrated) and I know that the player concerned would have opened 1NT if it were not for my writings. I shall continue to preach the gospel. If you would like to read up similar hands that should be re-evaluated (either up or down) then there is a detailed analysis in the booklet I produced on hand evaluation. It is reproduced on our website.

How do you play the ♣ suit?

Board 13 from Friday 23rd, both vul.

North	South	West	North	East	South
♠ 5	♠ Q2	-	1♥	1♠	3♥ (1)
♥ KQJ984	♥ A1053	pass (2)	4♥	pass	pass
♦ AQ2	♦ 874	pass (3)			
♣ A105	♣ K962				

First of all, the bidding. At this table N-S were lucky and reached the good 4♥ contract with minimal opposition bidding. At other tables they were not so lucky. South's 3♥ at (1) is fine, in competitive situations it's usually best to bid as high as The Law allows. E-W both had 5 ♠'s. West had just a 6 count and decided not to bid at (2) or (3) holding ♠K10876. He should go to 4♠ – The Law. Points Smoints. In fact E-W bid 4♠ at all of the other 5 tables on Friday – good show. 4♠ went down once (– 100) but N-S bid on to 5♥ at the other 4 tables.

That's why E-W have to compete to 4♠ – push 'em up. Anyway, suppose you are in just 4♥, what are the chances? East overcalled and so probably has ♦K (he did), so 1 ♠ loser and 2 ♦ losers, how do you tackle the ♣'s for no losers?

The answer is that you don't (tackle them) – you make the opponents lead them!

So, a ♠ lead and continuation. You ruff, pull trumps in three rounds and try the ♦ finesse. It loses and a ♦ come back which you win with the ♦A leaving this position: -

North	South	You are in the North hand. What now?
♠ -	♠ -	You should exit with ♦2. It does not matter who wins, if the
♥ J9	♥ 10	♣ honours are split you are home. If a ♣ is returned then you
♦ 2	♦ 8	play low and the 3 rd player must insert an honour and you
♣ A105	♣ K962	can then finesse his partner for the other one. If they return
		a ♦ or ♠ then you ruff in the South hand and discard the ♣5.

This is called a throw-in. In this particular case you are not guaranteed 100% success because if the opponent who wins the 3rd round of ♦'s has no ♣ honour then he can safely exit with a ♣ and his partner wins one of his honours. So the end-play is not 100% but it has a very good chance of success and worked on this occasion.

Incidentally, The Law was one trick out here. N-S can make 10 tricks in ♥'s and E-W can make just 9 tricks in ♠'s, so a total of 19 tricks with 20 trumps. The Law is an excellent guide, but is not always 100% accurate. Quite often it is the reverse, with more tricks than trumps – this is usually when there is a double fit or a long side suit.

Re-open with a double?

Board 6 from Monday 19th, E-W vul.

Dealer:	♠ 73	West	North	East	South
East	♥ AJ3	(C)	(A)		(G)
Both vul	♦ K9532				
	♣ A103	-	-	pass	1♠
♠ 654	N	2♦ (1)	pass (2)	pass	dbl (3)
♥ K2	W E	pass	pass	oh dear!	
♦ AJ74	S				
♣ K854					
	♠ AKJ1082				
	♥ Q84				
	♦ Q106				
	♣ 6				

2♦ doubled was a disaster for E-W (-1400), so let's look at the bidding. Obviously the 2♦ overcall, vulnerable, with a 4 card suit was totally absurd. As it happens, 2♣ would have been OK

but overcalls are 5-card suits! Especially at the two level. A double by West would be just as bad a bid – a double of 1♠ normally promises 4♥'s and ♠ shortage. Pass is the only sensible bid at (1).

N-S were playing negative doubles and so North cannot double for penalties at (2). When you play negative doubles you have to pass when you would wish to penalise the opponents and partner (at least most partners) will usually re-open with a double.

I was kibitzing this hand, and after the dust had settled I did not comment upon the overcall but mentioned to E-W that they were perhaps unlucky in that they were up against probably the only pair in the club who know how to bid negative double sequences correctly. South's redouble at (3) is, in my opinion, 'automatic' playing negative doubles.

Now there are differing views on what constitutes a penalty double (or penalty pass) and also when you should re-open with a double when playing negative doubles. I think that both N-S players got this spot on here. The North ♦ holding is fine for a penalty pass and I would not even consider bidding NT, regardless of vulnerability. A mis-fit for partner – go for blood. If people make absurd overcalls then the only way that they will learn is if they concede huge penalties? Double! That'll learn 'em.

♠ AK8 Let's look back at a hand that we've seen a few times before. It's from
♥ 109 news-sheet 18. It opened 1♦, LHO overcalled 1♥ and partner passed.
♦ KJ10943 Round to you, you play negative doubles. I said that a double was automatic
♣ A5 here with this hand. One distinguished resident (Hans) said not so. Why?
He claims that partner cannot have a penalty pass because this hand contains
the ♥109. He thinks that it is inconceivable that LHO can overcall and partner have a penalty pass
missing these two (109) cards! Looks like South in the above example disagrees with him (Q106). We
live in the real world and there will always be players who will overcall on rubbish. They will only learn if
you teach 'em a lesson. I will always trust partner rather than an opponent and the double costs nothing
as you are also happy if partner has nothing and pulls it (both with this hand and the South hand above).

A re-opening double promises no more than a sound opening bid when you play negative doubles.

Who should bid?

Board 10 from Monday 19th, both vul.

North (E)	South (H)	West	North	East	South
♠ AQ102	♠ K954	-	-	pass	pass
♥ KJ9	♥ A873	1♦	pass (1)	pass	pass (2)
♦ Q6542	♦ 109				
♣ Q	♣ J76				

At the end of the Monday session one pair asked me what went wrong here. 1♦ made exactly and all the other N-S pairs got + scores (generally in ♠ contracts). Who should bid?

Let's start with North at (1). If West had opened 1♣ then a take-out double would be fine; it would be nice to have 4♥'s but these 3 are good enough. However, you cannot double 1♦ as you will be completely fixed if partner responds 2♣. The hand has 14 points and is not quite good enough for a 1NT overcall. With a couple more points I would overcall 1NT – a singleton is OK for a 1NT overcall (sometimes you are fixed) but not for a 1NT opening. Anyway, this hand is not good enough. So 1♠? Now some experts do advocate overcalling on a good 4 card suit like this, but only (as in this case) if your suit is good and you have length in the suit opened. No, partner will expect a 5 card suit for an overcall and will support with 3 cards (or even two!). I feel that 4 card overcalls are best left to the experts – they are experts because they can play Moysian fits and even 4-2 fits well.

We've run out of options. The only bid that North can make at (1) is pass!

So then, should South step into the breach at (2)?

Yes! This is called balancing (USA) or protection (UK) – bidding in the pass-out seat. LHO has opened with a simple 1 level bid and RHO has passed (so he has 5 or less points). You have just 8 points – so where are all the missing points?

With partner! The answer is that partner has values but probably had no 5-card suit to bid. You now have to make a noise. A bid in the pass-out seat does not promise much – you are bidding partner's points. With a 5 card suit, bid it. 1NT in this position shows about 8-11 points. With no ♦ stop and two 4-card majors double is best with this South hand.

And just one final point. Suppose that South had indeed doubled, then what should North bid? Normally when partner doubles and you have 14 points then you insist upon game. But not when partner's double was a protective (balancing) bid – partner is not promising any more than about 7 or 8 points. 3♠ would be correct with this North hand. One way of thinking about it is to think that partner has 'borrowed an ace' from your hand – so make the bid that you would make opposite a non-protective bid from partner if you had 4 points less.

Hand F Just to underline one point I made above, what would you bid with this hand if RHO opened 1♦. This really is too strong to pass. I would overcall 1NT! (15-18 pts). Perhaps not everybody's choice. If you double and partner bids ♥'s or ♠'s then everything is rosey, but if partner bids 2♣ then you are fixed. 2NT over partner's 2♣ would show a stronger hand (19-21 pts) and 2♥/♠ would show a better hand and suit. If you were dealer then you would open this hand 1♦, but after RHO has opened 1♦ you are a bit fixed – that's why a singleton is acceptable in a 1NT *overcall*.

Finding a fit?

Board 9 from Monday 19th, E-W vul.

North (B)	South	West	North	East	South
♠ A7	♠ 98432	-	1♦	1♥	1♠
♥ 2	♥ 7	pass	3♦ (1)	pass	4♦ (2)
♦ AKJ643	♦ Q85	pass	4NT	pass	5♦
♣ KQ94	♣ AJ76	pass	pass	pass	

I have frequently said that 5 of a minor is usually not a good contract if 3NT is a viable option. Here, of course, 3NT is not an option and so N-S should look for a fit. This was the bidding at one table but I don't like it too much. North has a good hand and when opponents bid the shortage and partner bids ♠'s it improves. I think it's worth a force; 3♦ at (1) is not forcing and I prefer 3♣. Anyway, South supported ♦'s and a sensible final contract was reached (5♣ would be equally good – better on a non ♥ lead).

Two pairs ended up in a poor 4♠. I would not re-bid this miserable ♠ suit, but support whichever minor partner chose to bid at (1).

Bidding Quiz Answers

Hand A: If you play negative doubles then you have to double with most hands in this situation – partner may have a penalty pass. There are a (very) few hand types where it is incorrect to re-open with a double, but this is not one of them.

Hand B: 3♣. I would want to force (to game) after partner did not bid ♥'s. 3♦ is not forcing and I prefer to show my good 2nd suit.

Hand C: Pass. Of course.

Hand D: 15 points, so 1NT? That's OK but I think that downgrading because of the poor 4 card suits and AK doubleton is in order. So opening 1♦ is fine, but the rebid over partner's 1♠ is then 1NT (12-14). Do not bid 2♥, partner's 1♠ bid has denied 4♥'s (unless he is so strong that he can bid again). A 2♥ bid here is a reverse which most players play as forcing.

Hand E: Pass. Wrong shape for a double.

Hand F: Tricky, but I feel it's too good to pass. The only sensible bid that I can see is 1NT showing (15-18) and (semi) balanced and ♦ stop(s).

Hand G: Double for penalties. If you play negative doubles then you must pass, partner is then expected to re-open with a double which you pass for penalties. If you do play negative doubles but partner did not re-open with a double with Hand A then play penalty doubles with him or find a new partner.

Hand H: Double. Partner may have as many as 14 or so points but no bid he could make (no 5 card suit and wrong shape for a double). You know that partner has points and you must balance with a hand like this.