



Clarence Gardens Bridge Centre

Newsletter March 2026



2026 AGM Election Results

President: Carmel Thompson

Vice President: Graham Stucley

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Committee: Earlene Aufderheide, Greg Staker, Jackie Ward & Jackie Watkins

A Plea to the Slow Pairs

If the change has been called and you are still midway through a hand then please pass one of your completed boards to the previous table. It's the polite thing to do!

Four Spades, Anyone?

As South, you are declarer in four Spades on the lead of the ♣Queen. Overtricks are not a consideration - all you need to do is make your contract.

♠AK95

♥K64

♦AQ9

♣K92

♠QJ1076

♥532

♦43

♣A4

East follows suit, trumps break, plan your play, answer back page

Nametags

We have several new members and a new committee so it's time to order some more nametags. Please let a director know if you want one, cost \$8 each.

2026 GOLDEN BUNNY TEAMS
12:30 START, GOOD FRIDAY 3RD APRIL
NOMINATIONS TO THE DIRECTOR OR VIA THE WEBSITE.

Hand of the Month

Dealer East ♠ 862

Nil vul. ♥873

 ♦Q8765

 ♣65

♠J43

♥AKQJ9

♦J9

♣KQ10

♠AKQ107

♥4

♦AK32

♣AJ9

 ♠ 95

 ♥10652

 ♦104

 ♣87432

A hand from Friday 27th February, where East West have 37 points between them and 17 tricks on top!

Marlene Chapman and Christina Cheung, playing in the Pink section did well to bid 7NT for a top board in that section. In Purple most pairs bid 7NT, the best auction coming from Cecilia and Kent Makin.

 1♠

2♥ 6NT!

7NT

How would you have bid it? For a more measured approach see the next article.

Key Card Blackwood

When you have an agreed trump suit a bid of 4NT has special responses, with the trump King treated as the fifth Ace.

The replies are:

5♣ = zero or three key cards

5♦ = one or four key cards

5♥ = two without the trump Queen

5♠ = two with the trump Queen.

If partner signs off after 5♣ or 5♦ responder should press on if having the larger number.

Also, after 5♣ or 5♦, the next non trump step asked for the trump Queen, partner to sign off without it, otherwise show the number of outside Kings.

The above hand:

 2♣

2♥

2♠

4NT

5♦ (1 or 4 Key Cards – must be four after the 2♣ opening)

5♥(trump queen ask)

6♣(trump queen, one outside King)

7NT

Modern Bidding

The game of bridge is a boon for statisticians. A convention should be chosen above others because the hands that it satisfies will occur more frequently than those covered by the alternatives, or it is a necessity for your system structure.

As an example, when I first played in the Association 60 years ago common conventions were Acol twos, Roman jump overcalls (which showed two-suiters), the Roman 2♦ (17+ points and a 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0 shape), and penalty doubles of pre-empts and overcalls. The meaning of each of these calls have usually been replaced by bids with alternate and more useful meanings.

The most obvious change is the double of interventions for takeout. Hardly anybody plays these doubles for penalty these days, however I do recall a team mate at the National Championships 50 years ago overcalling 1♥, doubled for penalty, minus 500!

Opening two bids now usually incorporate weak twos and, where possible, two-suiter openings - the old structure allowed no place for these pre-emptive calls, and a call, or calls, for weak twos in a major should be incorporated in all bidding systems. Roman jump overcalls have been replaced by single-suited jump overcalls (a single-suited hand with a six card suit is statistically far more likely than a hand with two five card suits), with the two suiters being covered, somewhat less effectively by the Michael's cue bid.

The changes of approach to bidding over pre-empts are also due to the sheer force of accumulated experience. Whilst players generally feel annoyed when an opponent interferes with their auction, and human nature dictates that this intrusion should be doubled for penalties whenever possible, takeout doubles in fact make a lot more sense.

Playing takeout doubles of opposition pre-empts means that you can join the auction with significantly less values than in the past - the old convention of bidding the lowest available minor needed a powerhouse hand, since you were usually committing your partnership to the four level. It is true that you miss some juicy penalty doubles, however there is a large amount of compensation gained when partner converts a takeout double into penalties by passing.

Understanding Two Over One

The better players who used to play Standard are now playing the Two over One bidding system. What's it all about, and what are the advantages?

The main theme of 2/1 is that a new suit response at the two level is game forcing. So, in the following auction the 2NT call is forcing, asking opener for more information.

1♠ 2♦
2♠ 2NT

This allows opener to rebid a six card suit, introduce a third suit, take appropriate action with extra values, or, usually, just bid 3NT. This compares well with the older systems, where the 2♠ or 2NT calls could both be dropped.

This approach also allows you to open the bidding with weaker hands than needed in other systems, since partner is going to need full values before going to the two level. I open nearly all 4-4-3-2 eleven point hands, gaining a lot of part scores. Far too often users of other systems find themselves in 2NT with misfitting hands and insufficient values – it doesn't happen to us.

Note: Because this system features change of suit by opener as forcing (except after a 1NT response) with a minimum values opening you should try to rebid 1NT as often as possible, including when you have a shortage in partner's suit.

Some Variations.

Like all systems the above approach has its problem hands, so I recommend the following.

1. Inverted minor raises. An immediate raise of opener's minor to the two level promises 10+ points, no four card major, and is forcing with step responses, as follows:
 - 1st step minimum,
 - 2NT 13-14 balanced,
 - new suit shortage with extra values.
2. Bergen raises, showing four card support for opener's major, are a must.
3. An immediate 2NT response to opener's major suit opening shows four card support, game forcing. A 2NT response to a minor one level opening shows a balanced hand, no major, 11-12 hcp.
4. If responder bids a suit at the two level, then rebids it at the three level, the second call isn't forcing, however promises 10-11 points and a decent six-carder.
5. After opener's major suit opening a 2♣ response either has its customary meaning, or else is a near opening with three card support. A new suit or NT call by opener is then forcing, a simple rebid of opener's major can be dropped since it indicates minimal values.
6. A jump to two of a new major by responder shows 3-7 points and a six card suit.

Thursday Evening Bridge

Thursday night players usually have much more complicated systems than we ever see at Clarence Gardens. Recently I sat South against Kate McCallum on the following deal. How do you think she bid the East hand?

	♠AQ85	
	♥953	
	♦1095	
	♣Q107	
♠42		♠K
♥107		♥AKQJ84
♦J873		♦AKQ64
♣AJ832		♣K
	♠J109763	
	♥62	
	♦2	
	♣9654	

She opened 4NT, which asks partner to bid the suit of any Aces held, 5♣ with none. Her partner, Axel Johansson replied 5NT, showing the club Ace, 6♥ by Kate, contract making 13 tricks on my hopeful diamond lead.

Monthly Place-Getters

MONDAY FEBRUARY PAIRS

- 1 Genevieve Donnelly & Terry Healey
- 2 Chris Barnwell & Stewart Kingsborough
- 3 Jackie & Warren Ward

FRIDAY FEBRUARY PAIRS

- 1 Genevieve Donnelly & Terry Healey
- 2 Jake Howie & Peter Solomon
- 3 Clive Hardwick & Ingrid Payne

FRIDAY PINK FEBRUARY PAIRS

- 1 **Marlene Ryan & Jill Stone**
- 2 Pam Bowman & Lois Glanfield
- 3 Veronica McCaffrey & Maja Reed

Calculating Bridge Statistics

Bridge is a game of chance, the top players usually being those who make the most of their opportunities. However, if one mentions bridge statistics to the average player, you will usually see their eyes glaze over as they search for another topic.

The percentages are also frequently misunderstood - an old friend of mine once led a small trump away from his King doubleton against the opponent's grand slam. Dummy came down with QJ10xx, and dummy's queen held the first trick. Declarer then led the Jack from dummy, the other defender played a small trump, and declarer played her Ace, dropping the King! When asked how she had found such a play, she replied "Eight ever, nine never".

Players such as the late Tim Seres knew the probabilities from their years of accumulated experience. Ordinary mortals instead have to rely on what they have been told (sometimes incorrectly), or look up the answer in a textbook. This article refers to the manner in which these statistics are calculated, and will hopefully teach the more patient readers how to resolve their own card play problems.

Let us start with the example of a nine card fit, missing the queen. If there is no other significant information, why is it right to play for the drop?

AJ1032

K987

The answer is obtained by using a comparatively straightforward and logical approach. Let us assume that you are attacking this suit after winning the opening lead, so both defenders are holding 12 cards. You play the King, both follow, so now each player has 11 cards. Next you play a small card from the South hand, and West follows. West now has 10 hidden cards, while East has 11. As there are 21 cards outstanding, the chance of East having the queen is $11/21$, whilst the chance of West having the Queen is $10/21$. Therefore, the odds favour playing the Ace. Similarly, with an 11 card fit missing the King, there is again a marginal advantage in playing the Ace, the respective chances for this situation being $12/23$ and $11/23$.

The more inquisitive readers (of those that are still with me) will therefore deduce that the probabilities vary with the number of cards outstanding - if the defenders had cashed the first three tricks in a side suit (without giving away any extraneous information), and declarer then won the fourth trick, the respective odds would be $8/15$ and $7/15$.

For more complex situations the table of probabilities should be used, some of the more useful percentages of a suit dividing in a particular manner being:

Cards Outstanding	Split	%	Split	%	Split	%
2	1-1	52	2-0	48		
3	2-1	78	3-0	22		
4	3-1	49.7	2-2	40.7	4-0	9.5
5	3-2	67.8	4-1	28.2	5-0	3.9
6	4-2	48.4	3-3	35.5	5-1	14.5
7	4-3	62.1	5-2	30.5	6-1	6.8

Some caution in the use of the above tables is required. For example, with four cards out the stated chance of a 3-1 break includes three with West, one with East, and one with West, three with East. Further, at the time of calculation, some possibilities should be excluded since they plainly have not occurred. So, for the above hand, having played your King, then lead low towards dummy, left hand opponent following, the option of three cards on your right, one on your left, can no longer occur, so instead we are comparing the two-two break possibility with three on the left, one on the right. So, the respective chances are

2-2 break 40.7%

3-1 break 49.7% divided by 2 = 24.85%

As these two possibilities are the only ones that concern us, each of them should be divided by their total to give answers with a sum of 100%. This process, which is called factoring, provides a 2-2 break figure of 62%, and a 3-1 break figure of 38%.

The minor difference between these figures, and those shown in the probabilities table, is because the table relies on no previous cards have been played.

Some calculations are simpler than others. With three cards out, missing the King, playing the Ace only works when the suit divides two with West, singleton King with East, which is 78% divided by 2, and then divided by 3, i.e. 16%.

The finesse works, however, if West started with Kx, or Kxx, ie two thirds of 78% divided by 2, plus 22% (half of the 3-0 breaks) divided by 2, for a total of 37%. All other possibilities, where declarer must fail, can be ignored.

As an exercise, some readers may wish to confirm that with a 4-4 fit missing the Queen, no other information, the second round finesse is heavily favoured (due to the 4-1 break possibility) by a margin of 40%.

Finally, statisticians use the expression **a priori** which means essentially that no outside information is available. This applies to the above calculations, and players should always be on the lookout for clues that improve their chances of a successful play.

Consider the following hand:

♠AJ1098

♥KQ2

♦Q54

♣K6

♠K876

♥AJ4

♦642

♣A43

You are declarer in 4♠ from the South hand, on a small diamond lead to East's Jack, King, Ace, followed by the ♣Q return.

How you would play the spade suit in the following circumstances:

1. No opposition bidding, East passed as dealer.
2. East originally opened a weak No trump.
3. East originally pre-empted in diamonds, west led his singleton.
4. You as dealer originally opened 1NT, East passed throughout, and
 - West followed to all three rounds of diamonds.
 - West had a doubleton diamond.

Answers last page

Not Another -1920!

Our scoring program flags unusual scores for the director's attention. These are usually through people bidding 2 No Trumps or higher without the necessary values. However occasionally we see a particularly unlikely score which, when checked, proves to be one of suit redoubled.

The auction has invariably gone

1 suit X XX All pass

When your partner passes after your takeout double and the opponent's redouble, it is possible that he has length in the opponent's bid suit, and wants to play in the redoubled contract. It is far more likely, however, that partner has an indifferent hand, without an obvious call, so has passed to let you choose.

Therefore, unless your partnership has an alternate agreement (preferably in writing, signed by both players), if the auction goes as per the example, BID!

If partner doesn't like your suit he will bid another, and, even if you are doubled and go down, it will usually be much cheaper.

And, you will save your partnership!

A Hand from the Past

The following hand from 1998 features Justin Williams, now a champion player and the SABA club teacher, then a promising 15 year old.

Dealer West	♠ 8	
Nil vul.	♥632	
	♦AQ987654	
	♣A	
♠Q963		♠AKJ107542
♥AK105		♥QJ9
♦5		♦ -
♣K843		♣102
	♠ -	
	♥874	
	♦K1032	
	♣QJ9765	

It is galling when the opponents make a sacrifice call over your making slam. It's much worse when their contract makes.

On the above hand, featuring as North South Remo Bianchini and Justin, the auction went as follows:

W	N	E	S
1♣	3♦	4♠	5♦
5♠	6♦	6♠	pass
pass	7♦	X	All pass

On the lead of a high spade declarer had no problems - he ruffed in dummy, took his club Ace, diamond to dummy's King, then ran the club Queen, discarding a heart from hand.

When East's ♣10 fell declarer was able to establish that suit, on which he discarded his remaining two heart losers for the contract.

Even if a heart lead had been found declarer would still have only conceded 500, much better than all the -980's achieved elsewhere in the section.

Calculating Bridge Statistics - the answers

♠AJ1098

♥KQ2

♦Q54

♣K6

♠K876

♥AJ4

♦642

♣A43

No opposition bidding, East passed as dealer.

East has shown up with 10 points already, so play the King then finesse West

East originally opened a weak No trump.

Play the Ace, then finesse East

East originally pre-empted in diamonds, west led his singleton.

West is much more likely to have the Queen

You as dealer originally opened 1NT, East passed throughout, and

West followed to all three rounds of diamonds.

Play for the two-two break

West had a doubleton diamond.

Finesse West

Four Spades, Anyone?

How to guarantee your four spades contract on the following deal.

♠AK95

♥K64

♦AQ9

♣K92

♠QJ1076

♥532

♦43

♣A4

Lead: Club Queen, East plays the three.

You could hope that either the ♥Ace or the ♦King are on side, but there is a better way.

Win the ♣Ace, draw trumps in two or three rounds, cash dummy's ♣King, trump a club in hand, then lead a diamond to dummy's NINE! Whatever East returns will give you your tenth trick.