A GAME AT THE CLUB 1

Oh gosh, where do I start? Today's session had so many interesting hands to share.

You, North, hold:

♠ void
♥ A Q 5
♦ K Q J 9 7 6 2
♣ J 10 3

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			Pass
Pass	1♦	1♠	Pass
2♠	3♦	3♠	Pass
Pass	?		

Would you bid 4♦ or Pass? Does the vulnerability affect your decision? (Everyone is vulnerable.)
Since 3♠ seemed to be competitive, rather than an attempt for game, it seemed plausible that partner had a few useful values for me, so I opted to bid 4♦. If the opposition bid on to 4♠, there was also the option that partner might have some good spades and be able to double. I actually planned to double 4♠ because: the auction could have died in 3♠, I may have been making 4♦ (130, so I needed 200 to beat the score), and I had 'forced' them there – for better or worse.

4♦ was passed out and dummy was just what I hoped for:

♠ void	♠ 8 6 3
♥ A Q 5	♥ K 9 8 3 2
♦ K Q J 9 7 6 2	♦ 10 8
♣ J 10 3	♣ Q 7 2

I ruffed the ♠A lead and started work on drawing trumps. East ducked the first diamond and won the second. I think she should now have tried cashing the ♣A to get a signal, because leading another spade, as happened, allows me to ruff. Now I was able to make 11 tricks, discarding two clubs on the hearts.

This hand was interesting to me. The auction started:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			Pass
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♣

What did 2♣ mean? I thought it was Drury, but had a hand suited to bidding 4♠ regardless:
♠ A Q J 7 6 4
♥ J 3 2
♦ K
♣ A J 7
so that's what I rebid.

I then discovered that partner didn't play Drury – not that it mattered – and that 2♣ was essentially natural, her hand being:
♠ K 9
♥ A Q 4
♦ Q 7 3
♣ 9 8 4 3 2

4♠ made 10 tricks, but the interest in the hand was more about what her best response was, as a passed hand. Before our discussion started, we agreed that we were not playing Drury! I then proposed that a new suit at the 2-level by a passed hand is a maximum pass and at least 5 cards, and that you don't mind playing in the suit opposite a doubleton (if partner has opened on a weak hand and wants to pass). This hand didn't really qualify for a 2♣ on that basis. The question remained: what is the 'best' response? If you play no frills as a passed hand, then you should probably respond 2NT. If you play any fancy stuff (for instance, I play that 2NT shows 4-card spade support with a singleton, with 3♣ asking about the shortage), then you will be stuck responding either 1NT (if it can be wide-range) or 2♣. Isn't this why we love bridge? So often there is no hard and fast answer about what you should do!

If you play Drury, you have to respond 1NT (wide-ranging) on these hands. The other thing to keep in mind when playing Drury is the need to open hands with good clubs – either 1♣ or 3♣ - so you don't have responding problems.

What would you bid after a weak 2♥ opening bid holding:
♠ J 9 4
♥ void
♦ K J 10 9 7 3
♣ A K Q 6

My opponent overcalled 3♦, but I would prefer a takeout double. The hand is playable in three suits, and you'd like to bring all of them into the picture. A double makes it easy for partner to bid the game in spades when they hold five good spades but, with a poor fit for diamonds, our West passed over my partner's pre-emptive raise to 3♥, fearing a poor-fitting hand.

Mind you, I would still have been bidding 3♠, given that partner who had overcalled 3♦ must be very short in hearts. The other hand was:
♠ A K Q 8 6
♥ Q 9 3 2
♦ 4
♣ 8 5 2

You can see, though, that it is useful to bring all the suits into the picture when you are playable in all three unbid suits.

Here's a defensive hand. The auction:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			1NT
Pass	2♥ (spades)	3♥	3♠
Pass	4♠	All Pass	

You are West, with:
♠ 5
♥ 6 3 2
♦ 8 4 2
♣ A Q J 4 3 2

You lead the ♥2, low showing length in partner's suit when you haven't supported them. Partner wins the ♥A and switches to the ♣5. Here are your hand and dummy:

Dummy
♠ A 7 6 4 3
♥ J
♦ K J 10 9 5
♣ 10 6

You
♠ 5
♥ 6 3 2
♦ 8 4 2
♣ A Q J 4 3 2

You win the ♣J and cash your ♣A, partner discarding a heart. What should you lead now?
Despite leading into declarer's ♣K-9, you should do so. You are hoping to promote a trump trick for partner should they hold as little as the ♠J-10-x (ideally the J-10-9). Declarer would have to trump with dummy's ♠A, and then they would have to guess the spade position, even if partner just had ♠J-x-x. As it happened, partner only held ♠10-9-2, so there was no trump promotion, but it never hurts to try.

A few people struggled with this hand after this auction:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
Pass	1NT	2♦ (natural)	?

South
♠ A Q J 10 5
♥ K J 10 6 5
♦ 8 6 5
♣ void

You can't bid 2♥ or 2♠ because they are natural and non-forcing. You could bid 3♠ which is natural and game forcing, but then you may have to introduce your hearts at the 4-level. Furthermore, with those small diamonds, you would really prefer partner to play the hand, so that the lead comes around to any diamond honours they may have.

The solution is to bid 3♦. This cue-bid of the opponent's bid after partner's 1NT opening acts like Stayman. It asks partner to bid a 4-card major if they have one. (They may even bid a 3-card major if they don't have diamonds stopped!)

On this hand, partner will bid 3♥ and you'll reach 4♥ from the right side.

Should partner bid 3NT instead, you now rebid 4♦! This repeats your request to bid a major, implying your 5-5 hand shape. Mission accomplished – your partner plays the hand in your best fit.

What's a double of the natural 2♦ overcall? That is a matter of partnership style. You may choose to play it as penalty, which works particularly well when playing Lebensohl. Alternatively, some like to play takeout doubles, which also work well. The only issue is that responder cannot make a penalty double of a natural overcall, so opener must re-open with a double when holding a weak doubleton in the overcalled suit.

A GAME AT THE CLUB 2

Let me continue with more hands from last session.

You open 1NT (15-17 HCP) and partner raises to 2NT, invitational. What do you bid with 16 HCP?
This dilemma faced my opponent, who chose to pass, but made 10 tricks on a favourable hearts lead and a fortuitous layout of the diamond suit. At the end of the hand, we had a short chat, during which I said that, with 16 HCP, I bid 3NT when I hold a 5-card suit, and I pass when holding a 4-4-3-2 or a 4-3-3-3.

She held:	*Dummy*
♠ K 8	♠ J 9 6 5
♥ A Q 6	♥ 4 2
♦ K 9 6 5 2	♦ A 10 8 7
♣ A 8 6	♣ K 10 4

Therefore, I would have raised to 3NT. However, if I'd held only four diamonds, I would have passed.

(Sometimes players opt to open 1NT with a 6-card minor, in which case I accept an invitation even with 15 HCP. The two extra cards often provide extra winners.)

One opponent did very well not to make a weak jump overcall of 2♥ over 1♣ when holding:
West
♠ 8 6
♥ A Q 10 8 6 2
♦ 8 5 4
♣ 10 8

Instead, the auction proceeded:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		Pass	1♣
Pass	1♥	Pass	1NT
Pass	?		

Sitting North, I held:
♠ J 10 9 3
♥ K J 8 7 4
♦ K Q
♣ K 9

Whilst I can only dream about the penalty that we would have scored if West had overcalled 2♥ (not that I knew that at the time), I had to work out my best continuation, playing natural methods. I could have rebid 2♠, a responder's reverse and, therefore, game forcing, but I was convinced that partner didn't hold four spades. Stylistically, we rebid 1♠ with a 4-4, so she didn't have that. With that in mind, I just jumped to 3NT. I wasn't worried about the minor suits, given I had more than half my points in my shortages.

As it happened, partner had made an anti-systemic rebid of 1NT with a 4-1-4-4, but 3NT and 4♠ were much of a muchness. However, remember that partner will draw conclusions about your hand from your bids, so it is important to give partner accurate information. Not only that, but shape is potentially more important than HCP, so ensure you describe your shape to partner.

Speaking of shape, what would you do with this hand?

♠ K J 9 6 3
♥ A 9 8 7 4 2
♦ 10 5
♣ void

We didn't have a suitable opening bid to fit this hand, though I might occasionally open 1♥. I don't mind not having a bid for such a hand, because I'll usually be able to come in later on – often being able to make a Michaels Cue Bid, describing most of my hand with one bid.

That isn't what happened on this hand:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
Pass	Pass (me)	1♣	1♦
1♠	2♥	3♣	3♥
Pass	4♥	All Pass	

Partner was moderately surprised that, as a passed hand, I could now continue to game.

	♠ K J 9 6 3 ♥ A 9 8 7 4 2 ♦ 10 5 ♣ void	
♠ Q 10 7 2 ♥ 3 ♦ 9 7 4 3 ♣ J 10 7 6		♠ A 4 ♥ K Q 10 ♦ J 6 ♣ A K 9 8 3 2
	♠ 8 5 ♥ J 6 5 ♦ A K Q 8 2 ♣ Q 5 4	

East led the ♣A which I ruffed. Being ignorant about West's sub-minimal bid, I innocently led the ♥A and another heart. This line seemed the 'easiest' because, if hearts broke, I had plenty of tricks. East won the second heart and drew dummy's last trump. She didn't want to lead another top club because that would make dummy's Queen into a winner. Instead, thinking her partner held some spade values (they weren't anywhere else!), she continued with the ♠A and another spade to the Queen and King. Watch what happened…

It was now easy to count the hand. East held 6 clubs, 3 hearts and 2 spades. Diamonds were therefore 4-2. So, it was just a matter of cashing my last two hearts and watching West get squeezed between spades and diamonds. A spade discard would mean my spades were all winners, and a diamond discard would make dummy's suit into winners.

Here is the position:

	♠ J 9 6 ♥ 9 8 ♦ 10 5 ♣ --	
♠ 10 7 ♥ -- ♦ 9 7 4 3 ♣ J		♠ -- ♥ -- ♦ J 6 ♣ K 9 8 3 2
	♠ -- ♥ -- ♦ A K Q 8 2 ♣ Q 5	

West could discard the last club on the penultimate heart, but the last heart left them in an unenviable position. *Keep counting!*

How do you play this auction?

West	*East*
	1NT
2♦	2♥
4NT	

Have you discussed this with your partner? Is 4NT quantitative or is it Roman Key Card Blackwood for hearts? Even as our opponent made this bid, she realised she was in unknown territory. There is, however, a very simple solution: play major transfers at the 4-level as well at the 2-level.

You can play either:

1NT	4♣ = please bid 4♥
	4♦ = please bid 4♠
or	
1NT	4♦ = please bid 4♥
	4♥ = please bid 4♠

I love 4-level transfers for many reasons.

Reason 1: There is no confusion about 4NT bids. If I have transferred at the 4-level, then bid 4NT, it is Roman Key Card Blackwood for my (at least) 6-card suit.
Transfers at the 4-level are either to play at the 4-level or followed by 4NT, slam-going.

Reason 2: This means that a transfer at the 2-level followed by 4NT is quantitative, showing a slam-invitational hand and only 5 cards in the major.

Reason 3: Transferring at the 2-level, followed by a jump to the 4-level now becomes a hand with mild slam interest (and no splinter bid).

Reason 4: You can use the 4-level transfers pre-emptively if you wish – for example if you are really short in the other major and don't want to give the opponents space to either double (the 2♥ transfer) or bid spades (over a 2♦ transfer).

Reason 5: You can use the same structure over intervention, even at the 3-level, and you ensure the hand is played from the strong side (right-sided).

Reason 6: You can still transfer at the 2-level, then splinter, to invite slams too. It doesn't interfere with any pre-existing 'structures'.

Which way do I play 4-level transfers? I play them the same way as at the 2-level, so diamonds is a transfer to hearts, and hearts is a transfer to spades. However, do what works for you – just agree it with your partner.

Back to the auction in question:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		1NT (15-17)	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♥	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♥	Pass
6♥	All Pass		

Our opponents were on the same page:

♠ J 2	♠ A K 9
♥ A K 9 6 5 3	♥ J 8
♦ K 7	♦ A Q 9 8 4
♣ A K 5	♣ J 9 6

When declarer (East) chose to lead the ♥J on the first round, she also picked up the suit for no losers. South held the ♥Q-7 4 and North held ♥10-2. Well picked, giving us a resounding zero!

Partner did well on this final hand.

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			Pass
Pass	1♣	1♠	2♦
Pass	Pass	2♠	?

Sitting South, she held:

♠ 4
♥ 10 5 4
♦ K Q 10 9 3
♣ K Q 7 3

She knew we had to have a fit, either in clubs or diamonds, so she competed with 3♣, corrected to 3♦, and making 10 tricks when clubs broke 3-3.

♠ J 8 3	♠ 4
♥ A K 3 2	♥ 10 5 4
♦ A 8 5	♦ K Q 10 9 3
♣ J 5 4	♣ K Q 7 3

Keep thinking about partner's hand and keep fighting for those part-scores.

A GAME AT THE CLUB 3

"7¼ times world champion" (don't ask about the quarter) Kate McCallum and I have known each other for more than 30 years, but this was our first game together.

Let me start with a board where I 'fell asleep' during the auction. Sitting South, North-South vulnerable, I held:
♠ 8 6
♥ A J 5
♦ 7 6 5 4
♣ A 10 8 5

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		1♥	Pass
1♠	Double	2♥	3♣ (1)
Pass	Pass	3♥	Pass
All Pass			

(1) I could have doubled 2♥ - a responsive double, asking partner to bid her longer minor

The pass of 3♥ was where I fell asleep. I should have doubled 3♥. Partner had made a takeout double, and I held what looked like three sure tricks. Furthermore, if we were making 3♣ the score is worth 110, so I have to double to score as much as possible. We took 3♥ down 2 tricks, worth 100, but the double would have secured 300 for an equal top.

Just from interest, it's worth looking at the defence, since several people did not defend as accurately as we did.

	♠ A K 2 ♥ 6 ♦ K J 9 3 2 ♣ J 9 4 3	
♠ J 9 7 5 4 3 ♥ 7 2 ♦ Q ♣ K Q 7 6		♠ Q 10 ♥ K Q 10 9 8 4 3 ♦ A 10 8 ♣ 2
	♠ 8 6 ♥ A J 5 ♦ 7 6 5 4 ♣ A 10 8 5	

I wasn't really sure what to lead, given I felt I already had two trump tricks, but I chose my doubleton spade. The ♠8 went to partner's ♠K, then ♠A. I was a little disappointed that we didn't get to cash our club winner now, but our communications were severed. Kate led another spade, declarer discarded his club loser and I ruffed with the ♥5.

Accepting that I had already secured my second trump trick, I exited by cashing the ♥A and leading my ♥J. This ensured that declarer could no longer trump diamonds in dummy. Once he finished drawing trumps, he had to give partner two diamond tricks. He did try to endplay her by cashing some more trumps before leading a small diamond to the Queen and North's Ace, but Kate had kept a club exit. He could ruff that, but now he still had a second diamond loser with the A-10 to Kate's J-9.

It was surprising how many declarer's managed to take 8 or 9 tricks, either on a diamond lead or being allowed to trump two diamonds. Our defence held declarer to 7 tricks, but the lack of double was expensive. *(I call these doubles "Pairs doubles" because you must recover or better the score you could have achieved if you had played the contract. Mind you, this one was just 'bridge', given the quality of my hand!)*

The auction has been:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			Pass
Pass	1♥	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣	All Pass	

It's your lead:
♠ 10 6 2
♥ K J 10 6
♦ J 9 4
♣ A K 2

This auction marks South with a heart shortage, given they have already denied hearts then dropped declarer in the second suit. A trump lead is marked, and it's even more obvious when holding such good hearts (declarer's first suit). Our opponent led the ♣A, ♣K and a third club, ensuring 2 off and giving us an equal bottom.

	♠ A 3 ♥ A Q 9 8 4 ♦ A 6 ♣ 8 6 5 4	
♠ K 9 7 ♥ 7 5 3 2 ♦ K Q 10 ♣ 10 9 7		♠ 10 6 2 ♥ K J 10 6 ♦ J 9 4 ♣ A K 2
	♠ Q J 8 5 4 ♥ void ♦ 8 7 5 3 2 ♣ Q J 3	

After the three rounds of clubs, Kate could only make 2 spade tricks (via the finesse), 2 club tricks and the red suit aces. On the other hand, someone made 9 tricks on a diamond lead – you win the ♦A, ♥A, heart ruff, ♠Q – finessing, a spade to the Ace, heart ruff, spade ruff, heart ruff. That is already 8 tricks and somehow another trick was garnered somewhere!

I'll keep saying it – listen to the auction and think about what it has 'told' you before making your opening lead.

Partner opened 1NT, showing 14-16 HCP, and I held:
♠ K Q J 9 7
♥ 4
♦ 5 3
♣ J 10 8 4 2

My first action was easy enough, transferring to spades. Having done that, and received the uninspiring response of 2♠ (no super-accept), the issue was whether to bid again or not. After some thought, I chose to pass. My reason: matchpoint pairs is all about ensuring you get a 'plus' score, and pushing for close games is not winning bridge.

Kate held a maximum 1NT opening opposite my hand:

Kate	*Me*
♠ 8 3	♠ K Q J 9 7
♥ K Q 2	♥ 4
♦ A 10 9 2	♦ 5 3
♦ A K 7 5	♣ J 10 8 4 2

Even with the maximum opposite, on a diamond lead, the 10 tricks required for 4♠ needs a decent spade break (3-3 or 10-doubleton) and picking up the clubs for no loser. As it happened, on the singleton club lead, we made 11 tricks and still scored above average!

At teams, on the other hand, given that we were vulnerable, I would have looked for the game – because vulnerable game swings are significant.

My final offering:

	♠ 9 4 ♥ A 6 5 ♦ K J 6 5 ♣ A J 4 3	
♠ void ♥ J 10 8 7 3 ♦ Q 8 3 2 ♣ Q 10 8 6		♠ A K Q 3 ♥ 9 4 2 ♦ A 10 9 7 4 ♣ 7
	♠ J 10 8 7 6 5 2 ♥ K Q ♦ void ♣ K 9 5 2	

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
Double (!)	1NT	Pass	4♠
Pass	Pass	Pass (!!)	

My 4♠ was a bit of an overbid. The shape compensated to some extent, but partner's opening bid in my void was not favourable for me. However, what still has me in shock is East's final pass. Clearly, she trusted our bidding more than her partner's! Wow… perhaps she's seen some random takeout doubles before? I was shocked when she held all the spades and hadn't doubled, but when she later produced the ♦A as well, I was gobsmacked. (I also decided I was flattered that she trusted my bidding and play to such an extent.) 4♠ undoubled didn't score all that well for us, given that many Easts did double (and presumably without the earlier double from partner.)

A GAME AT THE CLUB 4

There's a theme through the first few offerings today.

I was playing South and held:
♠ K Q 5 4 3
♥ K
♦ Q J 9 8 4
♣ 9 4

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			Pass
Pass	Pass	1♥	1♠ (not sure if we played Michaels)
2♥	3♥	Pass	4♠

I had to decide why my partner made a cue raise when we were both passed hands. I was confident she was aware we had both already passed, so decided she felt she had a really good raise. Therefore, I bid 4♠ because of my 5-5 shape. I was right – but I'd have bid 4♠ on her hand:
♠ A 8 7 6 4
♥ J 10 9 8 4
♦ 5
♣ A J

As she said, she figured I had a heart void – which makes the whole hand even stronger.

Then I held:
♠ A 8 5
♥ A K J 10 6
♦ K 2
♣ Q 7 4

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
Pass	Pass	1♦	1♥
Pass	2♥	Pass	?

I decided to punt 4♥ which proved wrong opposite:
♠ Q 10 9 7 3
♥ Q 9 5 2
♦ J 6
♣ 8 5

I had three minor losers, so played for East to hold the singleton ♠K – somewhat forlornly – and went down one. After the hand, I explained to partner that once you use cue raises, the 3-level raise is freed up, and can be used for weak hands with 4+ card support, just like the hand she'd held. If I'd thought she held 0-6/7 HCP, then I would have stopped in 3♥.

With this new knowledge, here's the next hand, this time from partner's perspective.
As North, all vul, you hold:
♠ K 8 5 4
♥ 3
♦ K 7 4 3
♣ 10 9 8 4

West	*North*	*South*	*East*
		Pass	1♣
Pass	1♥	1♠	2♥
3♠	All Pass		

Fancy picking up a hand that fitted the 3-level raise within a few hands of the discussion! What wonderful timing. Opposite my:
♠ A 10 9 6 3
♥ Q 7 6
♦ J 8
♣ K 9 3
spades broke 2-2, the Aces were onside and 9 tricks were cold, with East-West able to make 9 tricks in hearts.

Personally, I consider cue raises (unassuming cue bids) to be one of the conventions I would prefer not to live without. They simplify life when you overcall, preventing you from getting too high, differentiating between good hands and poor raises, and then giving you back the 3-level raise as a more pre-emptive bid too. Partner, who was familiar with cue raises, but didn't have many of her own partners who play them, is now a convert too.

What does this auction mean to you:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		1♦	Pass
1♥	2♣	2NT ?	

The 2NT rebid should retain the same meaning as opener's jump rebid to 2NT, after all you are now rebidding 2NT over partner's 1♥ response. It should show about 18-19 HCP. With a minimum opening bid, you should pass the 2-level overcall, unless you play support doubles (to show 3-card support). Opener held:
♠ A 10 4
♥ K 7 2
♦ K Q 7 2
♣ Q 10 2

and while I can appreciate the temptation to rebid 2NT, it is wrong. On this occasion it meant that East-West got too high.

You are North, vulnerable, and hold:
♠ Q 10 3 2
♥ void
♦ K Q 8 7
♣ A 6 4 3 2

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			Pass
Pass	Pass	1♥	Pass
1♠	?		

I would open 1♣ on that North hand. I'm comfortable about my rebid, being able to bid 1♠ over the anticipated 1♥ response. However, if I held a 0-4-4-5 hand shape with those 11 HCP, I may well pass, being uncomfortable in terms of my rebid should partner respond 1♠.

Having said that, what action would you now take, having passed initially, on the above auction? I would double – takeout of the two bid suits. It brings both clubs and diamonds into the picture. Bidding 2♣ should show a better suit (or a 6-card suit).

The last hand of my session was one that led to lots of questions afterwards. Sitting South, I held:
♠ 3
♥ A J 9 8 2
♦ A K J 7 6 3
♣ K

Nil vulnerable, your LHO opens 3♠ which is passed around to you. With no 'gadgets' at your disposal (I play non-Leaping Michaels, so could bid 4♦ to show a good diamond-heart two suiter), what bid would you make? Whilst many bid 4♦, it doesn't seem to be the 'practical' bid to me; I bid 4♥ instead. At least a couple of others chose to double – with one South being unhappy when partner passed 3♠ X. I like the theory, *"Don't make a takeout double if you don't want your partner to leave it in."* This hand seems to meet that criterion, being too two-suited (and, therefore, offensive rather than defensive).

Here's the full hand:

	♠ A Q 4 ♥ K 7 5 ♦ 10 8 ♣ 8 7 5 4 3	
♠ K 10 9 8 6 5 2 ♥ 10 6 4 ♦ 9 ♣ A 6		♠ J 7 ♥ Q 3 ♦ Q 5 4 2 ♣ Q J 10 9 2
	♠ 3 ♥ A J 9 8 2 ♦ A K J 7 6 3 ♣ K	

West led the ♦9, a likely singleton. I covered with dummy's 10 and East played the Queen. Being pairs, I wanted overtricks, so I now led a spade to the Queen which won, and discarded my ♣K on dummy's ♠A. Now it was time to play the hearts, so I cashed the ♥K, then led towards my hand. East's ♥Q was a welcome sight and I wrapped up 13 tricks for a shared top.

After the hand, I asked East whether she thought her partner's lead was a shortage lead. She replied in the affirmative, and so I suggested that she should not cover dummy's ♦10. Given that she held four diamonds, either they were breaking 2-2-4-5 around the table, or (more likely given the lead) 1-2-4-6. Look at her spot cards. By covering the diamond, she was making all my diamonds into winners. If she hadn't covered, firstly I am in the wrong hand for the spade finesse, and secondly I will have to finesse again later on – meaning that I would have to keep entries to dummy to repeat the finesse.

Keep in mind the count you can get in any suit. Furthermore, it is generally considered that, having pre-empted, the lead of a different suit is a shortage. Combining both those factors can often indicate whether to duck or to cover a critical honour.

A GAME AT THE CLUB 5

I got to play again with the same partner as last game and, of course, we saw a few more cue raises – great for reinforcement purposes.

Partner held:
♠ 8 7 6 3 2
♥ K 8 7 4 2
♦ 5 2
♣ 5

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		Pass	1♦
1♠	Pass	3♠	All Pass

Our hands:

♠ Q J 10 5 4	♠ 8 7 6 3 2
♥ A 10 6	♥ K 8 7 4 2
♦ 6 4 3	♦ 5 2
♣ A K	♣ 5

I got lucky when North led her singleton heart, ♥9 – 2 – Jack – Ace. Now I was able to discard a diamond loser on the ♣A-K, reducing my losers to four: 2 trumps, 1 heart, 1 diamond. North did extremely well, ducking from K-9 when I led a spade from hand!

North held a 2-1-3-7, and South held a good hand. They could make 10 tricks in either minor, so the pre-emptive raise worked.

After the hand, partner asked if she was too weak for the bid, since she is still becoming familiar with its use. I explained that it was perfect (in fact, I probably would have bid 4♠). The 3♠ raise should show 0-6 (or 7) HCP and 4+ card support. When vulnerable, it is usually 3-6 HCP though it can be weaker with a singleton. When not vulnerable, i.e. you are going down in 50s, it can be weaker again.

Anyway, here are the pick of the bunch from the hands. Let's start with an everyday hand.

♠ A Q 9 5 3
♥ K J 3
♦ A K J
♣ 10 7

♠ 7 6 2
♥ Q 9 8
♦ 10 7 6 4
♣ K Q 4

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
	1♠	Pass	2♠
3♣	4♠	All Pass	

East leads the ♣ 8 to the Queen and Ace. West returned the ♣J – 10 – 2 – King. How are you going to play this spade suit? Should you finesse the Queen or the 9?

At the table, after West played the ♠8, North finessed the ♠9 and East won the ♠10. This is wrong on the hand, since you know that East started with a doubleton club too. If East now returns a heart to West's Ace, a further club lead will promote a trump trick for the defence (since you are missing the K-J-4).

Therefore, you should just finesse with the ♠Q on the first round of the suit. You need to be able to remove two rounds of trumps to stop the trump promotion! Given West's 3♣ overcall, either spades are breaking badly (and you are down) or West has the extra values on the hand.

Think about the implications of the auction for your declarer play and remember what you know about the opposition's distribution – in this case, you know that clubs are 6-2 from the lead and play.

♠ A Q 9 5 3
♥ K J 3
♦ A K J
♣ 10 7

♠ K 8 — ♠ J 10 4
♥ A 10 7 2 — ♥ 6 5 4
♦ Q — ♦ 9 8 5 3 2
♣ A J 9 6 5 3 — ♣ 8 2

♠ 7 6 2
♥ Q 9 8
♦ 10 7 6 4
♣ K Q 4

In the same round, there was another interesting hand. Here's the auction first:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			1♣ (2+ clubs)
1♥	2♥ (1)	Pass	3♣ (2)
3♦	4♣	4♦	5♣
5♦	6♣	Pass	Pass
Pass (3)			

(1) Cue raise in clubs
(2) An underbid opposite a cue raise. This is the weakest bid you can make. Perhaps 2♠ would be better.
(3) Whoops – I may have bid too much!

Knowing that partner held good diamond support, I led the ♥K (with the King-Queen). Here are the two hands from declarer's perspective:

	♠ 10 7 4 ♥ 5 4 ♦ A J ♣ K Q J 8 7 4	
♠ 5 3 2 ♥ K Q J 7 6 ♦ K Q 8 4 3 ♣ void		♠ K J 8 ♥ 9 8 3 ♦ 10 9 7 6 5 ♣ 10 5
	♠ A Q 9 6 ♥ A 10 2 ♦ 2 ♣ A 9 6 3 2	

A diamond lead would not have worried declarer unduly. She would have drawn trumps and taken a spade finesse, discarding the heart loser on the long, winning spade.

The heart loser threatened declarer immediately. However, she had only one chance – that being both the ♠K and ♠J onside. If that's your only prospect for making the hand, you have to play accordingly.

That ♠10 in dummy was a huge card and just had to be appreciated. Having drawn trumps, finishing in dummy, lead the ♠10 and finesse. If East covers, return to dummy with a trump and finesse again. Now you have no spade loser, and when the suit proves to be 3-3, you can even discard your heart loser and make all 13 tricks. (In fact, even on a diamond lead, you should play that way, because you score an overtrick if it works.)

We scored a top instead of a bottom, when declarer failed to appreciate the spade pips. Mind you, the auction was undisciplined, given that South had shown a minimum hand. North should have been doubling 5♦, which goes down three tricks with all the spades offside. She thought she lacked defence, but the values in clubs meant that South had to have significant outside defensive values. North's other option is to pass 5♦, and then South will pass with her three aces.

There were several hands on a theme again, this time being the takeout double after the opponents have bid two suits. Here's the first:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		Pass	1♦
Pass	1♥	?	

You, East, hold:
♠ K J 6 5
♥ J 9 8
♦ 5
♣ A J 5 3 2

Partner overcalled 2♣, whereas I would double. The double shows a maximum hand for your initial pass, and at least 4-4 in the unbid suits. I would bid 1♠ with 5 spades and 4 clubs, but with 4-5 I would prefer to bring both the other suits into the auction.

On this hand, it didn't matter. We competed to 3♣ and subsided when they bid to 3♦, one off.

I held:
♠ A Q 8 4
♥ 4 3
♦ K J 8 7 2
♣ 4 2

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
	1♥	Pass	2♣ (10+ HCP)
Double			

Even though I was lacking points, I was happy to double after my two short suits had been bid. I would much prefer to make a takeout double than to overcall 2♦ on this pusillanimous suit!

Try not to overcall at the 2-level on poor 5-card suits. If you have a hand that suits a takeout double that is a preferable action. You may have a better fit elsewhere. You may avoid going for a big penalty. Further, if partner has a decent hand, they may well consider 3NT as a final contract, but they will be expecting your suit to be the main source of winners, therefore it has to have some quality rather than just quantity!

I was particularly proud of my 'student', sitting South on the next hand:

	♠ A 7 6 4 3 ♥ 10 7 ♦ A 3 ♣ A K J 10	
♠ Q J 2 ♥ K 9 5 ♦ K J 7 5 ♣ 9 8 4		♠ 10 8 5 ♥ Q J 8 4 ♦ 9 8 4 ♣ 6 5 2
	♠ K 9 ♥ A 6 3 2 ♦ Q 10 6 2 ♣ Q 7 3	

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
	1♠	Pass	1NT (1)
Pass	2♣	Pass	2NT (2)
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

(1) Playing 2 over 1, the 1NT response shows 6-11 HCP
(2) The 2NT rebid shows 10-11 HCP

I was regularly finding rotten leads and found another with the ♦5 which ran to declarer's 10. In fact, my whole defence was absent-minded. Regardless, declarer did very well.

He cashed four clubs, on which I chose to discard a heart. Now he cashed the ♠K, and I failed to start unblocking, then the ♠A. He could now have exited a spade and established two extra winners in spades, with the ♦A as an entry, but what he did was 'classier'. He crossed to his ♥A, and again I failed to unblock by playing the ♥K. This time it was a 'sin', reflecting that I was not counting – since I now knew his points (♠K, ♥A, ♦Q, ♣Q). He crossed to dummy's ♦A, his ninth trick, and I claimed!

I had totally forgotten that the ♦Q was still out, thinking it had won trick 1. Whoops. Declarer quietly pointed out to me (after a few director calls) that I was endplayed, and he would also score his ♦Q. Well done – one up on the teacher!

Nobody was able to reach slam on the next hand, but we talked about 'how' it could be bid.

♠ A K J 7 5 3
♥ K 2
♦ A 8
♣ Q 8 6

♠ 10 6 4 2
♥ A Q J 10 9 4
♦ 10 2
♣ 9

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		Pass	Pass (1)
1♣	1♠	Pass	2♥ (2)
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♠
All Pass			

(1) Disciplined, with his 4-6 in the majors
(2) Unsure how to show this hand. However, 2♥ is wrong because you are a passed hand, and partner could pass this response! If you don't want to be passed in a bid, don't make that bid!

How could they bid the slam? I explained that I play fit showing jumps when we are already a passed hand (Drury can pick up the good raises) – and no Bergen! On this hand, the fit showing jump would be a bid of 3♥ and it shows at least 4 card spade support and 5 cards in hearts. The other element is that your values are in your suits.

North can now revalue her excellent major cards and the ♦A. Spades are agreed by inference (the known fit), so North could now bid 4D as a cue bid, denying club control but showing slam interest. Obviously, the bid is really asking for club control. So, with the singleton club, South can cooperate by cue bidding 4♥. (With no control in clubs, South should revert to 4♠.) That's all the encouragement that North needs, and slam can be reached.

Several Souths must have opened 2♥, with North jumping to 4♥. After a weak 2 opening bid, I now use the 2NT response as a 'feature ask, rather than Ogust. My responsive methods are:

3-own-suit	Minimum
New suit below 3-suit	Ace or King (game forcing)
New suit above 3-suit	Splinter (game forcing)

If you upgraded this to a non-minimum (given the shape), then you would be able to respond with 4♣, showing the club shortage. That may lead you to the good slam, though it is still unlikely.
[Note that if you show a non-minimum via the Ace or King-showing bid, your side is now in a game forcing auction, so responder's bids are now giving opener more space, for instance to show a splinter at the 4-level too.]

When do I use fit showing jumps? I use them when we overcall, when we open and an opponent overcalls or doubles, and whenever we are already a passed hand.

Do they occur very often? Often enough to be useful, and when they do, they are a great tool to have available.

Our final agreement is that if the jump could be either fit showing or a splinter, then it's fit showing (unless they have shown the suit).

A GAME AT THE CLUB 6

Having responded to partner's opening bid with 1NT, you are quickly in 3NT with:

♠ A Q 10 7 3
♥ K 3 2
♦ A K 8
♣ Q 10

♠ 5
♥ 10 6
♦ J 10 6 5 2
♣ A 8 5 3 2

West leads the ♥8 to East's Queen, and a heart is returned to the Ace. West leads a third heart which you win with dummy's King as East discards the ♦9. When you ask about the opponents' discarding, you are informed that this shows that East likes spades.

You cash the ♦A and ♦K, dropping West's ♦Q. You now have eight tricks, so have to work on the ninth trick. In these situations, it is wise to cash your long suit's winners, simply to force more discards from the opponents. Partner cashed her diamonds, discarding two spades from dummy. East discarded one club and two spades.

You are now at the critical moment of the hand. One thing to realise is that if West holds the ♣K you will go down, because East will have an exit card. Therefore, lead a spade to dummy's 10, leaving East in an endplay – to lead a spade to dummy's A-Q or a club around to dummy's Queen.

This was the end position that you have created:

♠ A Q 10
♥ ---
♦ ---
♣ Q 10

irrelevant

♠ K J 9
♥ ---
♦ ---
♣ K 6

♠ 5
♥ ---
♦ ---
♣ A 8 5 3

Here's an auction:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
	1♥	1NT	3♥ (weak-ish, bearing in mind the 1NT overcall)
4♣	All Pass		

You lead the ♥4, fourth-highest and see this:

You
♠ A 9 2
♥ Q 9 6 4 3
♦ A J 7
♣ 6 3

Dummy
♠ K Q 10
♥ A J 8 7
♦ 10 6 2
♣ K Q 5

Declarer win the ♥A in dummy, discarding a spade. He leads the ♣K from dummy and partner wins the Ace, switching to the ♦5 – King – Ace. You continue with another heart (correct), declarer trumping. Two more rounds of trumps are led, finishing in dummy. Partner follows to both rounds. Next the ♠K is led from dummy, and you win the ♠A. What is your next lead?

This hand is about counting. West has shown up with only 5 clubs. If he had had 4 spades, he would probably have made some sort of takeout double (the opponents clearly have a heart fit), so he should have no more than 3 spades. You already know he started with a heart void, so he has 5 diamonds and, despite partner's ♦5 lead, you should avoid that suit like the plague! You have taken three tricks, and just need to wait for your ♦J to take the setting trick. In fact, if you continue another heart, you will remove declarer's last trump and he will go two tricks.

Keep counting. Keep working out the shape of the hand (or the points on the hand).

Some hands are very simple in one bidding system, but challenging for others. Here's one such hand, which proved ideal for 2 over 1 game forcing:

♠ A J 9 8 5 2
♥ A K 7
♦ Q 5 3
♣ 6

♠ K Q 3
♥ 10 6 5
♦ 8
♣ A K J 10 8 7

North	*South*
1♠	2♣ (1)
2♠ (2)	3♠ (3)
4♥ (4)	4NT (5)
5♥ (6)	6♠

(1) Natural, game forcing
(2) Guarantees 6 spades (over 2♣)
(3) Setting spades, at least some slam interest
(4) 1st or 2nd round cue bid in hearts, denying cue bids for diamonds or clubs. (Only cue bid an honour in partner's first suit – clubs.)
(5) Roman Key Card Blackwood
(6) 2 key cards

East led the ♦A and another diamond, ruffed in dummy. Partner cashed the ♠K to check the trump break (not 4-0), then crossed to her ♥A to ruff her last diamond with the ♠Q. Now she could return to hand with her ♥K to draw trumps and claim – discarding her heart loser on the second top club.

It seemed this slam was challenging to bid for Acol and Standard bidders.

On the final hand, sitting South, you hold:

♠ J 7
♥ 10 9 6
♦ A 10 8 3
♣ A 8 5 2

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
Pass	1♠	Pass	1NT
Pass	3♣ (1)	Pass	?

(1) Game forcing

What would you bid now?
Since 3♣ is game forcing, you now have plenty of space to apply the principles of fast or slow arrival. Bidding 5♣ is fast arrival, showing the weakest sort of hand you can have. Therefore, this hand is a 4♣ bid, with two Aces and even the ♠J – all useful cards. By bidding 4♣ you are setting the trump suit and leaving partner space either to cue bid or use Roman Key Card Blackwood.

Partner held
♠ A Q 9 6 2
♥ A K 5
♦ void
♣ K Q 10 4 3
and a 5♣ rebid left him 'nowhere to go'. With moderate breaks in the black suits, though the ♠K offside, 6♣ was an excellent contract.

My 'rule of thumb' in such situations is that if I have 2 or more key cards (or useful cards in partner's suits) then I cooperate, by using slow arrival. This rule is also applied in 2 over 1 game forcing auctions (such as the one above). It has proven beneficial, because the rapid jump to game indicates 0 or 1 key card, which helps partner judge their hand.

A GAME AT THE CLUB 7

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
	Pass	1♦	Pass
1NT	Pass	2♦	Pass
?			

All vulnerable, would you bid with this hand?
♠ K 8 4
♥ 7 6
♦ 10 5 3 2
♣ A 10 7 2

I did – for one very good reason. I was confident that the opponents had some very good fit in at least one of the majors, if not both. Also, trusting that partner held six diamonds for the rebid, we have a 10-card fit. Therefore, I raised to 3♦, which was passed out.

	♠ J 9 7 5 2 ♥ A 10 8 5 2 ♦ void ♣ Q 9 3	
♠ K 8 4 ♥ 7 6 ♦ 10 5 3 2 ♣ A 10 7 2		♠ Q 3 ♥ 9 3 ♦ A K Q J 6 4 ♣ 8 5 4
	♠ A 10 6 ♥ K Q J 4 ♦ 9 8 7 ♣ K J 6	

As you can see, either of North or South should have bid. I'd have doubled 1♦, if sitting South. If I had been sitting North, having already passed as dealer, I would have bid 2♦ over the 1NT response. This is a Michaels Cue Bid, showing both majors, and now South should bid 4♥. It's an even safer bid once West has denied a major.

3♦ should fail by a trick, but a slip in the defence allowed it to make. Regardless, -100 was going to be a good score against a major suit contract, since 11 tricks can be made in either major.

The auction has gone:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♣ (nat)	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♠ (2 cards)	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

You are on lead with a pathetic hand:
♠ 6 3
♥ K 10 9 3 2
♦ 9 3
♣ 10 8 7 2

You lead the ♥3 and see this dummy:

Dummy
♠ J 8
♥ J 6 5
♦ A J 5
♣ K 9 6 4 3

You
♠ 6 3
♥ K 10 9 3 2
♦ 9 3
♣ 10 8 7 2

Partner wins the ♥A, declarer playing the ♥7, then returns the ♥8 – Queen. What should you play?

If you have an entry, you can win the ♥K and dislodge dummy's Jack, then regain the lead to cash your long hearts. Without an outside entry, you must hope your partner has the third heart, which is a distinct possibility given the ♥8 return, and the spot cards thus far. If you win your Ace now, dummy's Jack will win the next round, but you can never regain the lead to cash your remaining two heart winners.

All too often, defenders win their Ace in this position, without thought for the need to retain communication with partner. Here's the hand:

	♠ J 8 ♥ J 6 5 ♦ A J 5 ♣ K 9 6 4 3	
♠ 6 3 ♥ K 10 9 3 2 ♦ 9 3 ♣ 10 8 7 2		♠ A 10 5 4 ♥ A 8 4 ♦ 10 8 6 ♣ Q J 5
	♠ K Q 9 7 2 ♥ Q 7 ♦ K Q 7 4 2 ♣ A	

Ducking at trick 2 defeats the contract, as long as partner wins the ♠A immediately to return their last heart. Partner should realise that your lead of the ♥3 indicates an honour. Furthermore, if you play the ♥2 on the second round, they can work out that you have five hearts – so there is a need to win quickly and cash out.

Learning to hold up with your Aces is an easy concept to grasp, however be careful that you don't do it automatically. On some hands it is wrong to duck. Those occasions arise when there is another suit that is dangerous should the opponents switch OR when the opening lead has given you an extra trick (or another stopper):

Dummy	*Declarer*
♠ J 2	♠ A 9 5
♥ A K J 3	♥ Q 6 5
♦ J 10 6 5 2	♦ K Q 9 8
♣ J 2	♣ A 6 5

Your opponent leads the ♠3. You try the ♠J – Queen – what should you do?
Firstly, check what card the opening lead was – the ♠3. If that is fourth highest, then the opening leader only has four spades, since you can see the ♠2 in dummy. You know spades are breaking 4-4 in that case, so you only have three losers in that suit. You are, however, worried about the club suit, and definitely do not want a switch to clubs, so you should win the ♠A at trick 1, to avoid a switch to the 'worse' suit.

A GAME AT THE CLUB 8

Another day, another partner and lots to share.

Sitting North, you hold:

♠ 9 8 6 2
♥ K Q J 10 9 3
♦ 9
♣ A 10

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
	1♥	1NT	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

Your partner leads the ♥7 and you see this:

You
♠ 9 8 6 2
♥ K Q J 10 9 3
♦ 9
♣ A 10

Dummy
♠ 10 3
♥ 8 5 4
♦ K Q J 4
♣ Q 8 7 4

Dummy plays, low, so you overtake with the ♥9 to retain the lead, and declarer ducks. You are going to continue the hearts; are you going to lead the King, Queen, Jack or 10? I use this situation, where it's obvious that you have a sequence and length, to tell partner where your entry is. Therefore, the card you choose should be a suit preference card. If your re-entry is in spades, lead the King then the Queen. If your entry is in clubs, lead the 10 then the Jack. If your entry is in diamonds, you should play middling cards – say the Queen the Jack or Jack then Queen!

Since we had overbid, it would have allowed South to win the ♦A to lead a club, and then North-South would have taken 7 tricks (3 down). Without that guidance, South ducked diamonds twice. Though we went down 2, it wasn't as bad a score. Keep helping your partner solve defensive problems – by using suit preference signals.

This hand was an interesting play problem, which should have been solvable at the table:

	♠ 10 9 5 2 ♥ 7 6 ♦ A J 10 7 4 3 ♣ 10	
♠ Q J 8 7 4 ♥ 5 ♦ 5 2 ♣ K J 9 6 5		♠ A 6 ♥ A K Q 10 9 8 2 ♦ K 8 6 ♣ 8
	♠ K 3 ♥ J 4 3 ♦ Q 9 ♣ A Q 7 4 3 2	

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		1♥	2♣
Pass (1)	Pass	4♥	All Pass

(1) I was planning to pass a re-opening double by East, hoping for a big penalty.

South led the ♦Q – 2 – Ace – 6. North returned the ♦J – King – 9- 2.
Given the diamond lead and carding, hoping for a diamond ruff in dummy is overly ambitious. You know that South started with a doubleton diamond. Your plan, instead, should be to endplay South.

Draw the trumps, which takes three rounds. Now exit with a small club, and South will be caught. If they duck the club, you can win with the King (or Jack), leaving you with just three losers (1 spade and 2 diamonds). If they win the ♣A, they will have to lead either a club or a spade, either of which is fatal. A club return allows you to finesse the Jack, discarding a diamond, then you can cash the King to discard your spade (making 11 tricks). A spade return allows you to win the Queen in dummy, then discard the diamond loser on the ♣K, again making 11 tricks.

Be careful of trying to trump when you know it is a foregone conclusion that someone will over-ruff.
On this hand, finding an alternative was relatively easy, given the auction.

How would you bid this hand after partner opens 1♥?

♠ A
♥ Q 9 7
♦ 6 5 2
♣ A K Q J 8 7

West	*East*
1♥	2♣ (10+ HCP)
2♦	?

There are various options available. Rebidding 4♥ is an underbid. A delayed game raise is usually about 13-14/15 TP. This hand is bigger than that. The best option is to use fourth suit forcing, planning to revert to hearts over opener's rebid.

West	*East*
1♥	2♣
2♦	2♠
2NT	3♥ or 4♥ ?

What's the difference between 3♥ now or 4♥? Using fourth suit forcing then bidding game shows about 15-16/17 TP. Using fourth suit forcing then rebidding at the 3-level shows a bigger hand again. So, on this hand, it is fine to rebid 3♥ - setting hearts and suggesting slam interest.

Now you will be able to use Roman Key Card Blackwood. Admittedly, it is probably wise to consider 6NT in your final actions, in case the heart suit is tatty, as it was – but at least you can check for key cards.

♠ K 7 6	♠ A
♥ K 6 5 3 2	♥ Q 9 7
♦ A K Q 10	♦ 6 5 2
♣ 6	♣ A K Q J 8 7

You would much prefer playing 6NT than 6♥, though we got lucky in 6♥ with a doubleton ♥J-10 in South's hand.

On the next hand you are East and defending 3NT on the following auction:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			1NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

Partner leads the ♠Q and you see the following cards:

Dummy
♠ 9 3 2
♥ K 10
♦ A K Q 7 5
♣ 10 8 6

You
♠ 7 5
♥ Q 7 6 5 2
♦ J 4 3
♣ K 5 2

Declarer wins with the King, then cashes five rounds of diamonds. You throw a spade and a heart, and partner discards one heart, one spade (after declarer discards one) and one club. Now declarer cashes the ♥K, ♥A, ♠A (you discard another heart) and then the ♣A, bringing you down to:

Dummy
♠ 9
♥ ---
♦ ---
♣ 10 8

You
♠ ---
♥ Q
♦ ---
♣ K 5

Declarer leads a heart to your Queen, throwing dummy's ♠9 while partner throws the ♣J. At this stage, you should lead a small club, not the King. Firstly, you have already seen 15 HCP from declarer. Secondly, declarer would have finessed the clubs if holding the ♣A-Q, given they had top cards in all the suits. Partner has had to retain a high spade to stop declarer's spade from becoming a winner, so has had to discard clubs. If you lead the ♣K, you drop partner's Queen and make dummy's 10 into an extra trick.

Keep counting! And keep thinking about what declarer's line of play reveals to you too.

Finally, a bidding hand to try with your partner:

♠ Q 3 2	♠ A K J 8 6 4
♥ A K 5 3	♥ 4
♦ A 3	♦ K 9 2
♣ A K J 5	♣ 6 4 3

West	*East*
2NT (20-21)	3♥
3♠	?

My partner bid 4NT, but this should be a Quantitative 4NT bid, inviting slam. Regardless, I interpreted it as Roman Key Card Blackwood. So, firstly, let's look at the auction we could have had after 4NT…

West	*East*
2NT	3♥
3♠	4NT
5♦ (1)	5♥ (2)
5NT (3)	6♦ (4)
7♠	

(1) 0 or 3 key cards
(2) Queen ask – don't play RKCB without the Queen ask!
(3) I have the Queen and 2 kings (otherwise I would bid the king I held or 6♠ to deny a king)
(4) Knowing partner has ♠Q, ♥AK, ♦A, ♣AK (20 HCP), partner cannot have a Queen. Counting!
This bid of a new suit at the 6-level asks for third round control of that suit for the grand slam.
If partner holds either the Queen (impossible) or a doubleton, they bid the grand slam.

Having got that out of my system, let's discuss responder's initial bid. It is better to play transfers at the 4-level as well as 'basic' transfers. This means that you can bid 4♥ (transfer to spades), then 4NT, which is obviously RKCB. Transfers at the 4-level (Texas or South African Texas) allow you to differentiate between hands where you want to play at the 4-level, slam invitational hands and slam-going hands, whilst leaving your Quantitative 4NT bid intact.

2NT	4♦	
4♥	Pass	To play

2NT	4♦	
4♥	4NT	RKCB on hearts

2NT	3♦	
3♥	4NT	Quantitative with 5 hearts

2NT	3♦	
3♥	4♥	Slam interest/invitational

Similarly, these agreements can be used over 1NT openings, with 2-level transfers and 4-level transfers:

1NT	4♦	
4♥	Pass	To play
1NT	4♦	
4♥	4NT	RKCB on hearts
1NT	2♦	
2♥	4NT	Quantitative with 5 hearts
1NT	2♦	
2♥	4♥	Slam interest/invitational (no splinter)

Furthermore, these bids can be used after 2-level and 3-level intervention, which allows the contract to be right-sided. *I do recommend the use of 4-level transfers (either version).*

A GAME AT THE CLUB 9

Here's an interesting hand from my most recent game. You are North, East-West vulnerable:

♠ A 10 9 7 5
♥ J 9 4
♦ A Q 6
♣ 6 4

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			1♦ (3+ cards)
Pass	1♠	2♣	Pass
Pass	?		

What is the best bid you can make?
You are playing support doubles, so partner should have doubled 2♣ with three spades. North found a solution by biding 3♣, however this cue bid is game forcing and generally asks for a club stopper. The best option is to double. This double is just a 'Do something intelligent double', and even allows for partner to make a penalty pass; after all, playing support doubles means that opener can't make a penalty double of East's overcall. Obviously, it should show at least invitational values! On this hand, South would have passed. Here's my hand:

♠ J 8
♥ A 10 2
♦ K J 5 3
♣ K 9 7 5

and would have passed 2♣ X very happily. 2♣ X fails by at least two tricks. (The lack of support double can be a good guide on these hands.)

I was fortunate, making 3NT because West didn't lead clubs, even with 10-8.

My final comment about this hand – if I had been East I would have made a takeout double of 1♣ - 1♠, showing both the other suits. East held:
♠ K 4 3
♥ Q 6 5 3
♦ 7
♣ A Q J 3 2

Here's another relevant hand and auction:

	♠ A J 9 8 6 3 ♥ 10 9 8 ♦ K 4 ♣ K 4	
♠ K 4 ♥ J ♦ A Q 6 2 ♣ A J 8 7 5 3		♠ Q 8 2 ♥ A Q 6 4 2 ♦ 5 3 ♣ Q 10 2
	♠ 10 5 ♥ K 7 5 3 ♦ J 10 9 8 7 ♣ 9 6	

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
1♣	1♠	2♥	Pass
3♦	Pass	?	

You can rebid 3NT… However, if partner (West) has a spade stopper, such as K-x, it is preferable to play 3NT from partner's hand. Then the lead is from North, coming around to West's King, and your Q-x-x is a second stopper.

On this hand, it is superior to rebid 3♠, stopper asking for 3NT (and game forcing). That way, if partner holds the doubleton honour, you will 'right-side' your 3NT contract. Most of the field bid 3NT from East, and the spade lead destroyed the contract immediately. Look at the difference if West plays it (except on a heart lead).

Bear in mind, if it is possible that you have honour doubleton (King-doubleton or Queen-doubleton) opposite a similar but 3-card stopper, you are better served to play 3NT from the doubleton side, having the lead run around to the shorter stopper. (And it doesn't matter which hand plays it if you have K-x-x opposite Q-x-x usually.) This is particularly relevant when an opponent has bid the suit.

3NT by West made on a spade lead but 3NT by East went down two tricks.

So, bidding 3♠, and having West rebid 3NT was a far better action.

Now here's a crazy auction:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
	1♦	Pass	1NT
Double	2♠	Double (*)	3♦
Pass	Pass	3♥	Double
All Pass			

North's 2♠ should still be a reverse. East hesitated for ages over 2♠, fiddling with both double and some bid which the other players couldn't see. When 3♥ came back to me, I knew (just from the points around the table) that partner couldn't have a reverse, but I held:
♠ 9 8 7
♥ 7 5 4
♦ A 10 8
♣ A 10 3 2

With my two aces, I decided that this auction was deserving of a double. I followed this up with a heart lead, hoping to limit dummy's ability to trump, since we 'supposedly' had a vast majority of the points. The operation was successful, to the tune of +300, but I still gently reprimanded my partner for her random reverse. (She knows better!)

Here's the full hand:

	♠ A K Q 6 ♥ 9 2 ♦ K 9 6 5 2 ♣ 7 6	
♠ J 10 4 3 2 ♥ K Q 3 ♦ Q J ♣ K Q 4		♠ 5 ♥ A J 10 8 6 ♦ 7 4 3 ♣ J 9 8 5
	♠ 9 8 7 ♥ 7 5 4 ♦ A 10 8 ♣ A 10 3 2	

By the way, note how effective the trump lead proved. When you have the majority of the points, you should lead trumps to restrict the ruffs. In addition, I thought we had all three other suits under control, which further validates the lead of a trump.

On the next hand, I tried using suit preference signals on the trump leads. I'm proud to acknowledge that partner noticed my signals and switched accordingly. I'm sad to say, my carding was inaccurate – for many reasons.

	♠ 9 8 ♥ 9 6 ♦ K 3 2 ♣ Q 9 8 6 5 3	
♠ 6 4 3 2 ♥ K Q 8 4 ♦ A Q J ♣ J 7		♠ K J 10 5 ♥ A J 7 5 2 ♦ 6 5 ♣ A 2
	♠ A Q 7 ♥ 10 3 ♦ 10 9 8 7 4 ♣ K 10 4	

East opened 1♥ and West responded a game forcing 2NT (heart fit), and East rebid 4♥ - a minimum. I led the ♦10. East did well not finessing, because I'm confident partner would have won the King and tried a spade through, receiving a ruff for a quick one down. Instead, declarer won the ♦A at trick 1 to draw trumps, ending in dummy. On the trumps I played the 10, then the 3, showing spade values. When you look at dummy's black suits, it is far more sensible for me to play the 3 then the 10, asking for a club through! My spade winners will not run away.

Having drawn trumps, declarer led a spade towards her hand, finessing the Jack. I won the Queen and led a diamond to partner's King. I have to admit to not stopping to count declarer's points. If I had, I would have assumed she held a 3-5-(2-3) and therefore not 15 HCP (or a 1NT opening bid). Therefore, I would have worked out that partner held the ♣Q too – so a club lead is far better than the diamond.

Partner won the ♦K but continued the spades, in response to my heavy spade signal on the trumps. Declarer now had a club discard available on the top diamond. Sorry, partner!
Your partner opens 1♠ and RHO overcalls 3♦. What would you bid, holding:
♠ A J 5
♥ A 7 5 4
♦ A 9 6
♣ K 9 7

Bidding 4♠ does not do justice to the hand! This is one of the occasions to use a cue raise (unassuming cue bid). Being at the 4-level, the 4♦ bid shows a game forcing raise to 4♠. This is the best you can do to describe your hand to partner.

♠ K 9 7 6 4 ♥ K J 10 ♦ void ♣ A Q 8 4 2	♠ A J 5 ♥ A 7 5 4 ♦ A 9 6 ♣ K 9 7

Imagine you were West and partner cue raises with 4♦. You will head to the good slam. All you have to do is make the contract! North leads the ♣J…

When someone pre-empts then leads another suit, usually the lead is a shortage. However, if they lead their suit, you play for them to be short in trumps! However, I would still look at safety playing this trump suit. This combination entails not leading the King, then planning to finesse. South has far more 'vacant spaces' – North has 7 diamonds, giving South 3 diamonds, meaning the South has 4 more cards to allow for.

Usually declarer should allow for 4-1 spades with either hand, but on this hand I would just think about South holding 4 spades. Lead the ♠A first, then lead the Jack, planning to finesse. You will pick up ♠Q-10-8-2 in South's hand. The reason for this play is that not everyone will reach this slam, meaning that your main focus is on making the contract rather than overtricks. (If you think everyone will be in the slam, play the 'normal' line so that you make 13 tricks if North has the Queen-doubleton or tripleton.)

Remember that, at Pairs (matchpoints), pushing for tight games is not usually winning bridge. Pushing for games at Teams, especially vulnerable games, pays dividends, but not at Pairs. You have this auction:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		Pass	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	2♠
Pass	?		

♠ K J 10 9
♥ 9
♦ K 10 6
♣ K 8 7 6 5

With a fifth spade, looking for game is reasonable. However, with only four spades and partner making a minimal raise (perhaps with only three spades, even), passing is the best action. The singleton may tempt you, but it's in partner's known long suit, so it may not be as useful as it seems. Our outcome in 4♠ was -200, the dreaded Pairs score, and a deserved poor result.

How would you bid this hand, sitting North?

♠ 8
♥ A J 7 5
♦ A 10 8 7 6
♣ A 10 2

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			1♣
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♠
Pass	?		

Bear in mind, if you use fourth suit forcing then rebid 3NT yourself (having had partner deny a heart control), you are showing a better hand. The 1♦ response is fine with enough values to reverse, but once partner shows spades, just rebid 3NT, showing 13-15 HCP and hearts held. It's Pairs, so you want to play in 3NT not 5♣. 6♣ might make occasionally, but you can – and should – explore for those slams at Teams, but not at Pairs, where you target the best-scoring game.

My last offering: North holds:

♠ K 6 4 3
♥ A J 9 5
♦ Q 9 6 3 2
♣ void

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		Pass	Pass
1♣	?		

Would you overcall 1♦ or double? I like double, even with only 10 HCP. You have perfect shape and would like to bring all three suits into the bidding. Anyhow, here's the auction:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		Pass	Pass
1♣	1♦	2♣	Double
2NT	?		

Having overcalled 1♦, which is understandable opposite a passed partner, though you aren't that desperate for a diamond lead, what should you bid now? What does partner's double mean? I think the double shows 4-4 in the majors, with diamond tolerance (2+ cards). I'm perfectly comfortable with passing 2NT, which went down, but you should also consider bidding 3-major, given the club void! Of course, after the 2NT rebid by opener, you are wishing you'd doubled initially; partner would have been able to introduce a major comfortably at the 2-level!

This hand is only included so that you keep thinking about what your partner's bidding is telling you, not just your own cards. A regular weakness in people's bidding is the inclination to think about their hand and not what their partner has told them, or how their hand works with partner's bidding. You should also keep thinking about what you've told your partner about your hand in the context of what you now have (e.g. 4-4 in the majors together with their 4-4 in the majors!).

A GAME AT THE CLUB 10

I was playing with a very capable partner but she doesn't remember to count. My poor partner – I literally pounced on her after this hand, "Did you know I held the ♣K?" She replied, "Yes, you signalled that you held it." "But did you know before my signal?" I'm pretty sure our opponents thought I was being unreasonably pushy, but I wanted to make a point:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
	1NT	Pass	2♥
Double (*)	2♠	3♥	3♠
Pass	4♠		

This is what partner, West, could see:

West
♠ 10 7 2
♥ K Q 9 7
♦ 10 9 2
♣ A 10 8

Dummy
♠ Q J 9 8 6 4
♥ 8 4 2
♦ 8
♣ J 7 3

(*) Partner and I had discussed what a double of 2♣ showed and also doubles of transfers. After a strong 1NT opening bid, these doubles should be lead-directing. They do usually show at least 5 cards in the suit though! If you are a passed hand, these doubles are also lead-directing. However, against a weak 1NT, a double of either 2♣ Stayman or of a transfer bid should show a good hand, the sort of hand with which you would make a "penalty" double of the 1NT opening bid (unless you are a passed hand, when it is lead-directing once more).

I led the ♥5 to the Queen and declarer's Ace. Declarer cashed the ♦A and ♦K, discarding a heart from dummy. (I thought: "Interesting – perhaps partner only has four hearts.") Now declarer ruffed a diamond to dummy, the led the ♠Q, which looked like a finesse. I won the King and led a small heart to partner's King.

Why did I suggest that my partner should already know that I held the ♣K? Counting! North had already shown up with the ♥A, ♦A, ♦K and ♠A. That's 15 HCP. I could have led a small club to partner's Ace too, but I thought I'd see if she was counting…

If she'd held a doubleton club, which I did originally think she had, based on having a 5-card heart suit, then she could easily get a club ruff too. As it was, 4♠ just went down one trick.

You are playing in 4♠, West, after this auction:

West	*East*
	1♦
1♠	2♦
4♠	Pass

North leads the ♦K.

♠ A K Q J 10 2	♠ 9 6 5
♥ Q 10	♥ J 7 3
♦ 6 3 2	♦ A Q 10 7 5 4
♣ K 2	♣ A

You win the ♦A and draw trumps. Your only decision is how to continue? If the diamonds are 2-2, you have 13 tricks, but if they are 1-3 then you should play on hearts, ensuring 11 tricks. If you play on diamonds and they break 1-3, you are restricting yourself to 10 tricks. It's pairs, so you have to make as many tricks as you can on the hand… What's correct?

Personally, I would think that the lead is indicative of a singleton, given East rebid the suit. However, your decision may well depend on your knowledge of your opponent; some people love to lead doubletons.

Working on the basis that it is a singleton lead, I would work the heart suit, ensuring 11 tricks.

My morning's lesson had included a sub-topic about responding correctly to takeout doubles, and I thought we did well when this topic appeared as a bit of a 'theme'.

Sitting West, you hold:
♠ K J 7
♥ A K 10 8 7 4
♦ 3
♣ Q J 4

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
	3♦	Double	Pass
4♥	All Pass		

The hand may almost be too good for a 4♥ bid, but one of the lessons I learnt from Tim Seres, Australia's best player in my youthful years, was to ensure you got your 'plus' score once pre-empted. Pushing for tricky slams in the knowledge there are bad breaks (i.e. after a pre-empt) doesn't pay in the long term.

♠ K J 7	♠ A 8 6 4 2
♥ A K 10 8 7 4	♥ 9 6 5
♦ 3	♦ 2
♣ Q J 4	♣ A K 10 9

Hearts broke 3-1 offside (!), so 11 tricks was the limit of the hand. Mind you, South should probably have been a bit more active, with ♦A-x-x-x and a singleton heart. I'd have upped the auction to 5♦ and let us sort out the impact of the pre-empt then! 5♥ makes, but you may well generate a 6♥ bid now.

Two hands later I held:

♠ Q
♥ K J 10 8 7 2
♦ A Q 6 2
♣ 6 5

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			2♠
Double	Pass	4♥	All Pass

Our hands were:

	♠ J 7 4 3 ♥ 4 ♦ J 9 7 3 ♣ A Q J 9	
♠ 9 8 ♥ A Q 6 5 ♦ K 10 4 ♣ K 8 7 3		♠ Q ♥ K J 10 8 7 2 ♦ A Q 6 2 ♣ 6 5
	♠ A K 10 6 5 2 ♥ 9 3 ♦ 8 5 ♣ 10 4 2	

What is noticeable about this hand? North-South are cold for 4♠ (and East-West are also making 10 tricks in 4♥, as we did). North should definitely be raising partner's weak 2♠ to the 4-level. Firstly, you have a 10-card fit. Secondly, you have a singleton, therefore some ruffing power. And finally, your clubs look excellent, sitting over the doubler.

If 4♠ doesn't make, then East-West will certainly be making their game contract, so it's a good save regardless of the outcome. Only one pair played in 4♠, making – for a top. Another pair must have bid to 4♠, with East-West bidding on to 5♥, going down one trick – for a second top to North-South. It pays to push the opponents around – when you have a known fit and distribution on your side. Even with South having a 6-3-2-2 hand shape, the worst-possible shape for a weak 2 opening bid, it paid dividends.

The third hand on this topic appeared shortly afterwards. You hold:

♠ K J 8 6 2
♥ 3 2
♦ A Q 2
♣ J 8 6

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
			1♥
Double	3♥	4♠	All Pass

Only three pairs (of 15) bid to 4♠. Admittedly, I may have bid only 3♠ if North had not tried to pre-empt us with the 3♥ raise, but his bid made me hope partner's values were better placed. However, if I'd bid 3♠, she would have raised to game anyway. Clearly, many people only bid 2♠ on my hand – not enough!

♠ A Q 7	♠ K J 8 6 2
♥ K 8 4	♥ 3 2
♦ K 8 6 5	♦ A Q 2
♣ Q 10 4	♣ J 8 6

South led the ♦3, so I drew trumps, then checked the diamond suit, which proved to be 5-1 (South led her singleton). Now I switched to clubs, North winning the King. The ♥A was now 'marked' with South, and I played accordingly.

This is what Barry Rigal (journalist) wrote in Bulletin 2 at the Gold Coast Congress this year:
"Pairs is all about protecting the plus score. Don't push to marginal games; if partner makes the overtricks when game is close, he rates to score well."

My final hand falls into this category.

	♠ 7 6 4 2 ♥ 4 2 ♦ Q 7 3 2 ♣ A Q 8	
♠ 9 ♥ K Q J 10 3 ♦ J 9 8 ♣ 9 4 3 2		♠ J 10 8 3 ♥ A 6 5 ♦ A K 4 ♣ K 7 6
	♠ A K Q 5 ♥ 9 8 7 ♦ 10 6 5 ♣ J 10 5	

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		1NT	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♥	All Pass

South cashed the ♠K, then switched to the ♣J which was ducked to my King. While I still had plenty of entries, I decided to 'play' with the spade suit, hoping to dispose of a diamond loser, so I deferred the trumps.

I led the ♠J, covered by the Queen and ruffed. Now I led a diamond to my Ace, then led the ♠8 (equal with my 10, but it couldn't hurt to hide the 10). South played low so I threw the diamond and was pleasantly surprised when my ♠8 won the trick.

Having ensured nine tricks, it couldn't hurt to look for a tenth trick. Rather than draw trumps, I made sure I could trump the long club, in case clubs broke 4-2. I cashed the ♦K, then exited with a club. In due course, I could trump dummy's fourth club with the ♥A, making 6 hearts, 1 spade, 2 diamonds and 1 club.

South asked whether we should have bid the game and I replied, "No". Partner couldn't upgrade her hand, because she didn't know whether I held only two hearts. And I was happy being in 2♥, but my 'job' was to make sure I took as many tricks as possible. With the ♣A onside and all the spades in South, I could make 10 tricks. However, just because Deep Finesse says 10 tricks are cold, it doesn't mean you want to be in the game! The hand and outcome reinforce what Barry said (above) about pairs and close games.