

IRISH BRIDGE Journal

Winter 2022-2023

Welcome

JFK in his inspiring Inaugural address, described his election as “symbolizing an end as well as a beginning - signifying renewal as well as change”. That is precisely the sentiment to invoke as we present the CBAI’s first ever online Journal.

Renewal comes first. I and everybody associated with Irish Bridge Journal, stand in awe at the Trojan efforts of the late Paddy Walsh, and his sister Úna, in founding the Journal and keeping it going these many years. A labour of love for sure, and so easy to take for granted. I was honoured to contribute various pieces over the last dozen years, and always found Úna to be a charming and understanding editor. As I succeed her, I hope I’ll be faithful to her legacy.



Irish Bridge Journal Founders Paddy Walsh, and his sister Úna

Renewal and continuity are also to be found in our contributors. Thomas Mac Cormac is here again with his tips for improvers. Fearghal O’Boyle, our world-renowned TD, continues his “How would you Rule?” series. Gay Keaveney, for so long the moderator of the Bidding Challenge, has chipped in with a very insightful selection of deals from the recent World Pairs in Wrocław.



Enda Murphy, Editor

Of course, the Journal must also move with the times. Migrating to a free online quarterly publication, underwritten by CBAI, represents a major vote of confidence in the Journal’s relevance and purpose. I have two particular priorities going forward. The first is to enhance the gender balance. To that end, it is a pleasure to welcome Rebecca Brown and Anna Onishuk as members of our Bidding Panel (now moderated by Bob Pattinson). We also have Italian international Irene Baroni, as well as her husband of one year, French star Thomas Bessis. Irene and Thomas really come courtesy of their good mate, our own Tom Hanlon, who was one of Irene’s witnesses at the wedding. Tom is also joining the Panel – thanks on the double Tom!



Raring To Go! Lily Diamond, member of Sligo and Friends, and just the 80 years young, heads off to her weekly duplicate.

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We are also thrilled to welcome Sabine Auken and Roy Welland, a partnership of the highest international rank. Sabine would be many peoples' idea of the best woman player in the world for many years now.

The Play Quiz, for many years moderated by Paddy's son David Walsh, now passes to one of our most successful players at tournament international level, BJ O'Brien. The CBAI is offering modest prizes to the best performers, in various grades, in the Bidding and Play Quizzes, so please give them a try.

Again on gender balance, you will see articles from top English international Sally Brock, our own international Diane Greenwood and also Sonya Hillis, who registered a significant win in Eastbourne recently with Huey Daly.

My other priority is to broaden the Journal's appeal such that every grade of player is addressed – not just Masters but also Intermediates, Novices and Juniors. In this edition I am delighted to carry a contribution from Nicola O'Dowd, giving an Intermediate's

perspective – which I hope will become a regular feature. There's also a fine piece from Luca Crone, who showed up well in the recent World Junior Pairs.

Another innovation is to report on recent competitions of note. I've mentioned three above – the pieces by Gay, Sonya and Luca. We also have new cap Paul Delaney reporting on the very successful Bray Congress. And Derek O'Gorman tells us about his recent Duais An Úachtaráin win in partnership with BJ O'Brien.

An international flavour is always welcome, and the new additions to the Bidding Panel certainly move us in that direction. We also have "Letter from the Netherlands" by my journalistic colleague Jos Jacobs, which sheds interesting light on just how that nation organises its teams to succeed consistently at the highest international level.

Of course, bridge does not exist in a vacuum. Many of us have to balance work, life and bridge. So I'm sure you'll enjoy and relate to Sally Brock's article "My Leprechaun and I", a personal and poignant telling of her rise to the very top of the Womens' game.

There is one more gem. Best-selling author [Dinner Party] and Junior International Sarah Gilmartin has agreed to have her award-winning bridge-based short story "The Game" serialised in the Journal. Enjoy part 1! The second and final part will appear in the next issue.

Finally for now, let me say that I welcome feedback and suggestions intended to improve the end product. Nobody has a monopoly on knowing what's best. De Valera thought he only had to look into his heart to see what Irish people felt. Steve Jobs famously observed that Apple's customers didn't know what they wanted until he told them. Well, I'm not clairvoyant. Send your thoughts to editor@cbai.ie. In particular if you're Intermediate, Novice or Junior and you'd like to contribute, I'm all ears. I did get married a few months ago and so I cannot promise to respond promptly to all emails, but I will for sure get to them. Eventually. You know how it is.

I hope you enjoy the Journal.

Enda Murphy
Editor

Comyn's Corner

Selected anecdotes from John Comyn's book "Doubled Up".

John has been playing bridge for over 70 years and has been Bridge Correspondent of the Sunday Independent for 59 years. In 2010 he published a personal memoir "Doubled Up", recounting the funniest episodes he'd encountered. John kindly agreed to let us dip into his treasure trove of funny recollections.

In 1980, John had organised sponsorship from Rothmans for a bridge team to be named the Rothmans Kings, who would play in excess of 70 challenge matches around the country.

The squad was John Comyn, Pat Walshe, Donal Garvey, Micheál Ó'Briain, Niall Toibín, BJ O'Brien, Rory Boland. They also played in the famous Caransa tournament in the Netherlands, which routinely drew a host of world stars. The Kings took the lead entering the final round, only to slip to an unlucky defeat – a Dutch opponent doubled a strong NT with a 14-count and hit paydirt.

In the match against Denmark, Pat Walshe propelled himself into 6NT. Steen Moller was on lead with KJ9765 hearts. He decided to trust Pat's bidding and led another suit. His partner had Ax in hearts and Pat had Qxx. 6NT made instead of minus five. Pat insisted, with a straight face, that he only bid 6 because he knew 3 was going down.

Irish Women in 55th European Championships

Madeira, June 2022

Diane Greenwood



It seemed a long time since playing in trials but eventually the postponed European Championships loomed near. Held on the beautiful Portuguese island of Madeira during June 2022, our Irish women's team certainly felt well prepared.

For over two years since the onset of Covid we had practiced against other European womens' teams, thanks largely to Mary Kelly-Rogers and our team-mate Joan Kenny. We also played in many matches organised by our captain Paul Porteous. Our team consisted of Joan Kenny and Jeannie Fitzgerald, Rebecca O'Keeffe and Gilda Pender, Teresa Rigney and myself

The first board I would like to talk about was in our first match of the championships against Hungary. Remembering that our NPC had warned us before the start that no Grand Slams were to be contemplated unless we could count thirteen tricks, after a nice bidding sequence Rebecca and Gilda reached the dizzy heights of 7♠ – a daunting task for Rebecca, the declarer, considering it was the first match in the competition.

All through the bidding our captain, sitting beside the eleven point West hand, was literally sliding off his chair as the auction progressed!

Dealer South. All Vul.

	♠ 9854			
	♥ J974			
	♦ Q96			
	♣ 92			
♠ A10632	N		♠ KQ7	
♥ K52			♥ A6	
♦ 1087	W	E	♦ AJ42	
♣ A10	S		♣ KQJ8	
	♠ J			
	♥ Q1083			
	♦ K53			
	♣ 76543			

There was no opposition bidding at all and Rebecca received a small spade lead from the North hand. As tempting as it was to let the spade run round immediately to your ♠A10, it is important, as ever, to sit back and count your tricks and try to think what can go wrong.

Twelve tricks are certainly available, counting five spades, two hearts, one diamond and four clubs. Your 13th trick has to come by way of a heart ruff in dummy. If on the spade lead you play small, the Jack appears on your right. So now your heart ruff is going to be using up either your King or Queen of spades, leaving you with only two top spades left between the two hands. If one of the opponents has four small spades then their ♠9 or ♠8 will soon grow up, leaving you with a spade loser. Unlikely that the lead would be from Jxxx or a singleton.

So correctly, at trick one, Rebecca rose with her ♠K and immediately played two rounds of hearts, ruffing the third one in the short trump hand with the ♠7. In the other room the contract was also 7♠, and the

lead was also a spade, but declarer made the fatal error of playing small from dummy. 20 IMPs to the girls in green!

The next hand I would like to mention occurred in Round 10 with Jeannie and Joan when playing against the Netherlands.

Dealer East. All Vul.

		♠ -		
		♥ AKJ107		
		♦ AK765		
		♣ A54		
♠ KJ74		N		♠ 10653
♥ Q6				♥ 9532
♦ QJ942	W		E	♦ 108
♣ Q2		S		♣ 986
		♠ AQ982		
		♥ 84		
		♦ 3		
		♣ KJ1073		

After a pass from the East hand Jeannie (as South) decided to open 1♠ – even though only ten points, a good opening bid with good distribution and all her points in her two suits. Joan now bid 2♥ which is game forcing in their system (2 over 1). South now bids 3♣, followed up by 4♣ from the North hand.

W	N	E	S
-	-	P	1♠
P	2♥	P	3♣
P	4♣	P	5♣
P	6♣	All Pass	

On the lead of ♦Q, Jeannie won and cashed ♥AK, getting the good news. 6♣ made. At the other table the hand was played by Carla Arnolds in 3NT from the North hand so Ireland gained 12 IMPs.

After many delicious meals at some of the fabulous restaurants in Funchal, capital of Madeira, we played Round 13 against Germany. The following hand earned us 10 IMPs.

Dealer South. N/S Vul.

			♠ K6542			
			♥ J			
			♦ K1032			
			♣ QJ6			
♠ -		N			♠ AQJ98	
♥ A9875					♥ Q106	
♦ J9764	W			E	♦ A	
♣ K32		S			♣ 10987	
			♠ 1073			
			♥ K432			
			♦ Q85			
			♣ A54			

The contract in both rooms was 4♥ by West but in the Open Room Karin Wenning for Germany led the ♥J, taking away the problem of how to play the trump suit. After a spade lead from myself in the other room, declarer won the Ace and embarked on a spade-diamond crossruff. This left her a trick short, as we collected two trump tricks and two clubs.

After an exciting finish our team unfortunately finished 9th by one point, having needed to finish in the top eight to qualify us for the World Championships next year in Marrakesh, Morocco. However, all is not lost so watch this space...

Editor's note: As Diane comments, the Irish Women's Team's ninth place finish in Madeira is not quite good enough to qualify them automatically for the World Championships. However, historically not all the world's regions take up all their places, so as first reserves there is a pretty good chance the team will be invited to Marrakesh. EM



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Duais an Úachtaráin 2022

Derek O'Gorman



The Duais an Úachtaráin 2022 was hosted by South Munster in mid-September on behalf of CBAI President Pat O'Mahony, taking place in the premises of Cork Marts just outside Fermoy.

A total of 57 pairs entered for the event, which was held over two sessions. It was a very enjoyable event, in an excellent venue which catered very well for all bridge players present.

The event was very well run by TD Brian Lawlor, with President Pat O'Mahony and his South Munster colleagues Regional Secretary Linda O'Riordan and Regional President Bernie O'Halloran assisting with organising the competition.

The prize winners were:

1st	BJ O'Brien & Derek O'Gorman
2nd	Gordon Lessells & Rita Cassidy
3rd	Marie James & Anthony Moloney
4th	Mary & Tomás Roche
Best Area Master	Maura Foley & Oliver Morgan
Best Intermediate	Joan Meagher & Anne Cronin
1st Session	Sean Connor & Jim Doyle
2nd Session	Isabel Burke & Tom Gorey (Junior internationals – well done!)



Winners of Duais an Úachtaráin 2022
BJ O'Brien & Derek O'Gorman

Two hands from the second session proved significant for the eventual winners (we were N/S on hand 7 and E/W on hand 11):

Board 7. Dealer South. All Vul.

♠ QJ95 ♥ K1092 ♦ 72 ♣ 872		
♠ 876	N	♠ K432
♥ AQ73	W	♥ 5
♦ 1083	E	♦ AQ954
♣ A95	S	♣ KJ4
♠ A10 ♥ J864 ♦ KJ4 ♣ Q1063		

This hand was a success for four card major openings. South opened 1♥, pass from West, 2♥ from North, Double (Take Out) from East, which was passed out.

West led the ♠7 which South won in hand with the ♠10, he then ran the ♥8, finishing with nine tricks for a 100% score of +870. The ♣J, ♦A and ♦Q being favourably placed ensured a successful outcome for N/S, but this of course was marked by East's take out double. 18 of 28 N/S pairs got a positive score, mostly defeating E/W in a part score.

Board 11. Dealer South. None Vul.

♠ Q763 ♥ - ♦ QJ1095 ♣ 9863		
♠ 102	N	♠ AK9854
♥ KQ964	W	♥ AJ53
♦ K762	E	♦ 84
♣ 74	S	♣ 5
♠ J ♥ 10872 ♦ A3 ♣ AKQJ102		

Normally competing at the five level is not a good idea, however it worked very well for E/W on this occasion.

South opened 1♣, 1♥ from West, negative double from North, 4♥ from East. South now bid 5♣, passed by West and North. East bid 5♥ which was doubled by South.

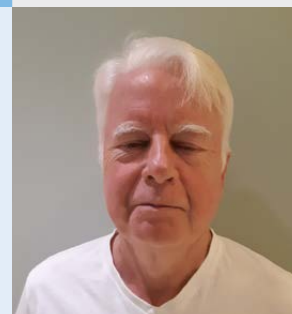
North led the ♦Q, which South won with ♦A and played ♣A and ♣K. Declared ruffed and played the ♥A, noting the four nil trump break. He then cashed the ♠A, followed by a diamond to the K and ruffed a diamond with ♥J. A heart to the 9 followed. He then ran his trumps. North was squeezed in diamonds and spades, because he could not keep a master diamond and ♠Qx.

5♥ making doubled gave E/W a 100% score of + 650.

5♣ making by N/S would have secured a 90% score for them.

Bray Congress Report

Paul Delaney



Bray Congress made a successful return to face to face bridge in Dun Laoghaire Bridge Club over the weekend of 3-4 September 2022. Special thanks to Mairead Haugh (Bray President), the tireless work of Ann Daly and top class TD John Royds.

The prizes were generous and the prizewinners were:

Congress Pairs:

- 1st Ann O'Connell & Valarie Burke-Moran;
2nd Marcin Rudzinski & Wojciech Gorczyca;
3rd Kate Daultrey & Sean Maguire

Intermediate Pairs:

- 1st Fiona McGoldrick & Mary Kane;
2nd John Coulter & Paul Clinch;
3rd Sean & Aine Costello

Congress Teams:

- 1st Martin Brady, David Dunne, Paul Delaney, Tomas Roche;
2nd Carol-Ann Cummins, John Noonan, Sandra Newell, Michael McAuliffe;
3rd Michelle Moloney, Marcin Rudzinski, Brid Kemple, Terry Walsh.

Now let's look at two key hands both played in the last few boards as prizes were decided.

2nd session Congress Pairs

Board 23 Dealer South. All Vul.

		♠ Q764	
		♥ K102	
		♦ 10743	
		♣ 92	
♠ A2	N	♠ KJ83	
♥ AJ54	W	♥ 8	
♦ J8	E	♦ AK65	
♣ AKJ87	S	♣ Q1043	
		♠ 1095	
		♥ Q9763	
		♦ Q92	
		♣ 65	

Ann and Valarie bid to the 6♣ slam and scored 73% on their way to victory in the Congress Pairs. Second place finishers Marcin and Wojciech sat out this board and scored their session average of 59%. Third place finishers Kate and Sean used the Shillelagh Club system to score 100% by bidding to 7♣.

W	N	E	S
1♣ ¹	-	1♠	-
3♣ ²	-	4♣ ³	-
4♦ ⁴	-	7♣	-

¹ 11-14 balanced or 17+
² 5♥+ with 4 hearts 17-20 pts
³ Minorwood - Roman Key Card for clubs
⁴ 1 or 4 (5 aces)

East counts thirteen tricks on a cross ruff even on a trump lead (five top side tricks and eight trumps).

2nd session Congress Teams

Board 23

It is the last round and you are one of two teams running neck and neck to win the event.

What do you bid vul v non vul with this West hand after partner opens 2♥ and South doubles?

♠ 106
♥ K9
♦ AQ653
♣ K642

Your options include some scientific routes – which bid would you choose?

- 3♠ transfer to diamonds planning to support hearts later to show an invitational hand
4♦ fit jump showing a heart raise with good diamonds.
4♥ a simple raise to game not revealing your hand type to N/S

West bid 4♥ to take away N/S bidding space. South doubled again which was passed out.

The full hand

Dealer East. E/W Vul

		♠ J8732	
		♥ 107	
		♦ J2	
		♣ Q1075	
♠ 106	N	♠ 5	
♥ K9	W	♥ QJ8432	
♦ AQ653	E	♦ K1094	
♣ K642	S	♣ 83	
		♠ AKQ94	
		♥ A65	
		♦ 87	
		♣ AJ9	

W	N	E	S
		2♥	X
4♥	P	P	X
P	P	P	

This was the key board to win the teams for E/W with 4♥X making +790 +12 IMPs

At 23 of 24 tables N/S played in 3♠ or 4♥ usually making nine tricks.

A good rule in competitive auctions is to always bid 4♠ over your opponents 4♥ contract with the slightest excuse. Bid confidently and treat their 4♥ bid as a transfer to your 4♠ contract.

World Transnational U-21 Pairs

Luca Crone



The 7th World Youth Transnational Championships were held this summer in Salsomaggiore Terme, Italy in August.

The pairs event was run over the three days, the first two days were qualification for the A final on the last day, which involved the field splitting in two. Matthew O'Farrell and I played in the U21 category.

The days were split in three; 20 boards, lunch, 16 boards, a small break and then 12 to finish out the day. We played two boards against almost every partnership in the first two days not facing only three pairs.

The start of long events is always a bit nerve-wracking trying to judge your opponents and get to know the field. That being said, we started with a bang and we were sitting first after 12 boards with a score of almost 68%. A hand that was interesting to play was board 13 in 4♠:

Board 13. Dealer North. Both Vul.

		♠ AJ962	
		♥ Q743	
		♦ 752	
		♣ 8	
♠ 85	N		♠ Q1073
♥ T9			♥ J652
♦ 43	W	E	♦ K1096
♣ AKJ10742			♣ 3
		♠ K4	
		♥ AK8	
		♦ AQJ8	
		♣ Q965	

We knew we were first going into this round as there was a leader board outside the playing area that you could check between rounds. Here we bid to played by N after a 3♣ bid by the German West. At first glance it doesn't look like the worst

contract, I've certainly been in worse. The lead was the ♠3 to the 10 and the Ace back. At this stage I knew East was out of clubs but have no loser to throw. I didn't want to lose to the ♠3 or ♠5 but couldn't afford to ruff with the 9. So the 6 it was and the 7 from East. Next came the ♦6. If the ♦K was with West that would give him 11 points (♦K+♣AKJ) after pre-empting which is unlikely, so I called for the ♦J. It held, now if spades behave nicely I should be home. I called for the ♠K and played a low spade to the 9 and 10. The defence had done well up until this point but gave me an extra chance when East returned the ♠Q.

Can you see the 100% line from here given the play so far?

The only real worry is if the German East has four hearts and four diamonds. I knew West had seven clubs, two spades and four more cards. If he has three hearts and one diamond I am home no matter what, same if he has four diamonds and no hearts, or one heart and three diamonds. But if he was 7222 (and East 4-4 in the reds) I should be able to squeeze East in hearts and diamonds. I therefore threw a club from dummy as I won the ♠A. When I enter dummy and ruff the last club East will have to discard a red card, to my advantage in both cases. This delivered 4♠ and a 76% score. At the end of the session we were fifth on almost 61%.

In these long events you are always likely to have at least one good session and one bad session. Sadly for us, we now had a poor session and we dropped to 26th on just over 52% overall. We were now on the verge of not being in the top

26 pairs for the A final. Thankfully the last session saw us climb to 23rd. The last two boards were two shared tops which aided our campaign!

The next day was the last day of qualifying. We knew we just needed to make it through and the last day would be a new one with minimal carryover. Unfortunately, our first session of the day left us in 29th spot on 51% and back in the tough battle for qualifying. One decision we did get right was on board 10.

This is your hand:

♠ KQ7642
♥ J
♦ 2
♣ A9764

You are dealer. It is all vulnerable and your opponents are solid Swedish Juniors you have met before. Some would argue to open 3♠ but lacking intermediates you chose to open 1♠. The bidding proceeds as follows:

W	N	E	S
	1♠	2♥	2♠
6♦	?		

Now what are you doing? Passing rapidly? I chose 6♠ which duly got doubled. I knew our opponents were competent and it doesn't look like 6♠ is going to cost much - less than 6♦ making anyway. I was just about right as 6♠ goes for 1,100 vs 6♦ which is cold for 1,370. Many also made 6♥. Unfortunately, it only got us 48% as not everyone was in slam.

Here was the full hand:

Board 10. Dealer East. Both Vul.

		♠ -			♠ KQ7642
		♥ A94			♥ J
		♦ AKQJ10865			♦ 2
		♣ 32			♣ A9764
♠ J105	N				
♥ 8653	W				
♦ 743					
♣ QJ8	S				
		♠ A983			
		♥ KQ1072			
		♦ 9			
		♣ K105			

We now needed two good final sessions, and thankfully we came through with 56% and then 53% putting us in 21st place and qualifying for the A final!

50 boards remained to decide the medals. Our strategy now changed from trying to get tops against weaker pairs to playing solid bridge and being careful in defence. Our aim was to finish in the top half - 14th or higher. After the first final session, we still sat down in 20th place.

The second session had some fascinating hands. It is seldom you see partner underlead his AK to manoeuvre a ruff but that is what happened on board 6.

Board 6. Dealer East. E/W Vul.

		♠ J74			♠ K10983
		♥ AJ64			♥ K7
		♦ 93			♦ Q2
		♣ AJ32			♣ 10987
♠ 2	N				
♥ 10853	W				
♦ AK875					
♣ Q54	S				
		♠ AQ65			
		♥ Q92			
		♦ J1064			
		♣ K6			

W	N	E	S
O'Farrell		Crone	
		P	1♦
P	1♥	1♠	X
P	2♥	All Pass	

Double showed exactly three hearts. I led the ♠10 which went to the Q and A. Declarer took the marked spade finesse, then came a heart to the J and K. I knew partner had a singleton spade as his ♠2 gave count,

showing an odd number. If he had three he would have raised spades [he had to have values, opponents' bidding clearly lacked game ambition]. So I returned the ♠10 as suit preference showing a possible diamond entry. Matthew ruffed and now cashed the ♦A followed by a small diamond to my ♦Q! This meant I could give him another spade ruff and on top of that, a low diamond back gave us a trump promotion. (If declarer ruffs with the ♥A West has 10 8 over Q9 in dummy, or if he ruffs with the ♥6 I can overruff with the 7). 2♥-1 was a complete top! Every other table played in NT with nine tricks making often.

In the last round of the session we met the American pair that had led for the majority of the event. On the first board we made a good 2♦+1 for 110 when the par contract was no trump which had a limit of seven tricks. On board 2 take my seat as North. What would you bid when your right-hand opponent opens 1♦ as dealer, you being non vul against vul?

♠ AKQ106532
♥ 76
♦ -
♣ 984

There is an argument for 5♠ but I chose 4♠ and the bidding proceeded:

W	N	E	S
	Crone		O'Farrell
1♦	4♠	4NT*	5♠
X	All Pass		

*Showing 2 places to play

Board 16. Dealer West. E/W Vul.

		♠ AKQ106532			♠ 8
		♥ 76			♥ KQJ83
		♦ -			♦ 10754
		♣ 984			♣ AK2
♠ J	N				
♥ A1092	W				
♦ AKJ983					
♣ 75	S				
		♠ 974			
		♥ 54			
		♦ Q62			
		♣ QJ1063			

Matthew did really well to sacrifice in 5♠. Opponents only got 300, while 6♦ or 6♥ are cold. We had scored 62.5% in 2♦ and 83% in 5♠x. Ultimately the American pair did go on to take gold. At the end of the session, we had jumped to 12th with a session average of almost 54%.

In the final session there came this beauty:

Board 19. Dealer South. E/W Vul.

		♠ 3			♠ AQ1095
		♥ A8753			♥ Q10
		♦ 652			♦ A3
		♣ J865			♣ AKQ2
♠ KJ762	N				
♥ KJ9642	W				
♦ K4					
♣ -	S				
		♠ 84			
		♥ -			
		♦ QJ10987			
		♣ 109743			

Matthew opened 3♦, West bid 4♦ showing both majors and East jumped to 7NT. I reasoned 7NT-1 would likely be a good board and if I double and East has a long suit to discard dummy's hearts I'll be cursing. So I passed. Matthew led the ♦Q and 7NT-1 was only worth 54%. 6♠ was defeated on ♥A and a ruff, while others doubled and beat slams. We had our ups and downs over the final fourteen boards but finished 15th, such is life.

Overall, it was a wild few days with some hands we will never forget. We also played in the BAM (Board A Match, a matchpoint-teams hybrid) teams with an Indian pair and qualified in a medal position but dropped out of contention on the last day. There was an Individual event run on the last day which was very enjoyable and meant we got to partner World Champions including American superstars like Zack Grossack and Michael Rosenberg.

Overall, a massive learning experience, and we hope to better our performance going forward.

The Summer Meeting at Eastbourne

Floral Hall, Winter Gardens, August 2022

Sonya Hillis

It all started with Huey's Birthday. 'What would you like as a present?' I asked. Hmm... 'How about our first trip away since Covid'.

'Ok', I said... 'Eastbourne Summer Congress' he said. He didn't have to ask twice. Flights and Accommodation duly booked. All set...

Arrived in Eastbourne to 30 degree heat. That's why I prefer skiing holidays!

Found our accommodation and got our bearings. We were looking forward to Thursday night, Mixed Pairs – for the London Duplicate Club Cup.

The venue was big and spacious. A lovely welcome pack was provided and there was free prosecco. Are you kidding me?!?

We came across Brian Senior selling books at a stand. When he heard our accents he warmed up, as he used to play for Ireland when he lived here in the 1980s. A very nice guy! His wife Nevena is a mainstay of the very successful English Womens' team.

We sat down to start play and noticed the field of 38 mixed pairs included a few players who were not exactly novices! This didn't faze us (well maybe not Huey) one bit.

We met a few Irish people along the way, all who are now living in the UK. A lovely friendly game. When I went to check the results at the end I was delighted, especially given the strong field.

Results were:

1st Huey Daly & Sonya Hillis
65.17%

2nd Debbie Sandford & Gad Chadha
64.53%

3rd Louise & Norman Selway.
61.00%

Celebrations began next door and this is where we met lots of top players over the weekend, Norman Selway, Jason Hackett, Andrew Robson to name but a few who were all so kind to sign my card!

This hand helped us on our way...

Board 7. Dealer South. Both Vul.

			♠ Q754		
			♥ J		
			♦ Q97		
			♣ AK1072		
♠ J106		N		♠ 983	
♥ Q1087				♥ A95432	
♦ AK542	W		E	♦ 103	
♣ 4		S		♣ J9	
			♠ AK2		
			♥ K6		
			♦ J86		
			♣ Q8653		

I opened the bidding with 1♣.

Our club might only be one. Huey responded 1♥ [transfer] showing at least four spades. A very aggressive 2♥ by East!! Double from me showing three card spade support. 4♥ by West. 4♠ from Huey, definitely not a shy bid, knowing we've only got seven trumps between us!! 5♥ by West. Forcing Pass from Huey, X by me.

Interestingly, there's 3NT+1 on for N/S with seven pairs bidding and making it, and three pairs making 11 tricks. 4♠ is not on, assuming opponents take their diamond ruff. We put 5♥ down three for 800, thinking we were definitely missing game. A nice top at the start of the round, and it proved the turning point - we scored above 60% on every board after this until the very last board.

I'd tell you more about the celebrations, but for some reason my memory is a bit hazy!! Eastbourne Summer Congress is strongly recommended.



Me and my Leprechaun

Sally Brock



Sally Brock is one of the most successful women in world bridge history. Her achievements include five Women's European Team titles, two Venice Cups [Women's World Teams], two Olympiad Teams and three UK Gold Cup wins.

In this highly personal and revealing piece, Sally describes the inter-twining of bridge life and personal life. A Bidding Panelist for the Journal for a good many years now, she's a real diamond. We're fortunate indeed to have her.

It all started in 1967, when I was 14. We were finally allowed to play bridge.

We (my siblings and I) started with whist, moved on to solo, and only when we were deemed competent at that did we progress to bridge. However, only I was really enthusiastic. I moved from boarding school to the local high school for my A-levels and was a regular third for my parents, playing once a week or so. I thought I knew it all, as I was better than my parents and their friends. But when I went to Nottingham University and joined the bridge club there, I discovered there was so much more, and that I actually knew very little! One of the realities of bridge is that in your own eyes as you improve you make the same number of mistakes – the more you know the more you know you don't know!

I am rather ashamed to confess that I dropped out of uni after a couple years, in order to get married! I was 20 years old and married Tony

Sowter, who had already played an international match and was my mentor. I played my first Lady Milne (women's home international) in 1976, six months pregnant with my eldest child, Ben.

Three years later I played my first European Championship – in partnership with the late great Sandra Landy – which we won with a match to go. That qualified us to play in my first world championship, in Rye, USA, in 1981. We struggled a little to qualify but were always up in the knock-out stages. I learned that sometimes I have a friendly leprechaun sitting on my shoulder!! In those days it was common to play that if you led the King then the Ace (rather than the more normal Ace, then King) it pinpointed the fact that you were switching to a singleton. After the opponents' bidding: 1NT – 2♣ – 2♥ – 4♥, Sandra did just that. Dummy won and played the ♥J from J10xx. For some reason I will never know I played low from Axx. Then, ashamed that I had not won my Ace and given Sandra her ruff, I ducked again. Later I was thrown in with the now singleton ♥A, endplayed to give declarer her contract. Of course I wished the floor would open up and swallow me! However, about ten minutes later, the tournament director came in and announced that that board was going to be scrapped because it had been put down on the table the wrong way around, and someone had looked at someone else's hand. Immediately, my worst error was expunged from bridge history! I've been thanking that leprechaun ever since.

Life continued, husbands changed, and eventually I retired from the women's game in order to try to make the open team in partnership with Steve Lodge. But we never quite made it. Eventually it ceased to matter why – maybe I wasn't good enough, maybe I wasn't given a chance because of my gender – whatever, I clearly wasn't going to get there.

So, I more or less gave up for a while, and on my fortieth birthday I married again – to Raymond Brock this time – pregnant with Toby. Nearly two years later I had Briony and for a few years played very little at top level. I came back for several professional appearances, but my focus was primarily the family. Then disaster struck, and in the autumn of 2007, Raymond was diagnosed with cancer of the bile duct and two months later he was dead. I guess it was a good death, in that he was at home (actually we were all snuggled up on his bed watching Casualty) and not in pain. The night before (New Year's Eve) he had a couple of glasses of pink champagne (courtesy of Janet de Botton) and announced he would not be getting up any more. And that was it. He died the following evening on New Years Day 2008.

I was on my own with a 14-year-old and a 12-year-old. For a while we just grieved. I don't think I prepared the children very well for their father's death and it came as a shock to them. When we first got together I had realised that because of our age difference (Raymond was 16 years older than me) I would probably have to cope

with his death at some time, and struggled with that at the time. At least I felt reasonably well prepared for it when it happened. Still it was not easy.

A few months later I went to a party and sat next to Nicola Smith who asked me if I would like to play with her on the women's team in the world championships in Beijing later that year. Well, that was something of a surprise. I managed to find friends to care for the children while I was away, and off I went. And we won the gold medal.

As an aside ... we played the final against China. We were 80 odd IMPs up with two sets (of 16 boards) to go. The penultimate set was not great and we lost half of our lead. Nicola and I played the last set and it seemed fairly flat. When we finished, the BBO operator announced: 'England win by 1'! It was obviously a lot more exciting for the spectators than it was for us, who had no idea that it was so close.

That was the start of a good run of results in both European and World events. Initially I played with Nicola but in 2016 we decided to go our separate ways and I started to play with Fiona Brown, who is of course well-known in Ireland. But things changed rather with the introduction of Mixed events at international level and Fiona and I played with different people but on the same team in the first European Mixed Championship in Lisbon, and later, in 2019, in the World Championships in Wuhan.

At that time none of us had heard of Wuhan (though it is a city bigger than London), but now everybody has heard of it. In fact, maybe we brought Covid back with us! Everything has gone fairly quiet recently, though it does look as if things are slowly getting back to normal. I have been to a couple of US Nationals with Fiona. Last year, in Austin, numbers were clearly depleted, but in Providence in July it seemed as if there were close to as many tables as before.

In 2010 I met up with Barry Myers and we have been together ever since, both romantically and at the bridge table. In 2017 I moved to London – a lifelong ambition, ever since I was rejected by UCL in 1971! I live in a lovely flat near Holland Park with my daughter Briony.

My latest international tournament was in Wroclaw in September where I won a bronze medal in the mixed pairs with American Chris Willenken. We were in the top few for most of the final, sometimes leading, but in the last 10-board session fell away somewhat and it looked as if we were out of contention for a medal. On the final board my leprechaun returned! Everyone was vulnerable and my right-hand opponent opened 2♦ showing 4-4 or longer in the majors and weak. All we had agreed was that we would treat it like a Multi. I held:

♠ AQ109
♥ QJ
♦ KQ108
♣ 1075

I doubled, my LHO bid 2♥ and partner bid 3♥. I had no idea whether this showed a stopper or asked for one. I temporised with 3♠, doubled by LHO, and partner redoubled. That did not leave me any the wiser! But 3NT seemed the obvious bid now, doubled by LHO and passed out. The whole auction was:

W	N	E	S
		2♦	X
2♥	3♥	Pass	3♠
X	XX	Pass	3NT
X	All Pass		

West led a heart and I won't bore you with the details of dummy's hand, but suffice it to say that all it had in hearts was the singleton ten. I played it from dummy and time stood still ... but my RHO played low, and I had the next nine tricks. 3NT doubled with an overtrick instead of three down. What had happened? East had nothing but six hearts headed by the Ace. He thought his partner had led from Kxx and that the suit would be blocked if he played his Ace at trick one. As we only won the bronze by a small score I'm sure it needed as good a board as this for us to succeed.

So I'll be hoping my leprechaun doesn't desert me in the future!

My Bridge Journey – so far!

Nicola O'Dowd



My mum encouraged me to learn bridge, but I felt the game was for the older generation. However, during the pandemic I googled it and signed up for bridge lessons online in January 2021.

So I enrolled in Declan Byrne Bridge. For the first three weeks, I attended the two-hour class, listened and took notes. I thought I'd never get it. I considered giving up in week three. But then when playing Mini Bridge, it started to finally click, I was not afraid or embarrassed to ask questions. I was interested and I wanted more.

Because the classes were online the people I met were from all over Ireland. I gained a whole new social circle where we all had something in common and could share our experiences, wins and losses.

My teacher's first email said "Bridge is a social game made more enjoyable by the people and characters we meet and the interaction we share at the table be it online or in-person in your local bridge club." He couldn't have explained it better.

We also started playing midweek in Declan Byrne's virtual bridge lounge where we would organise four players to play at an agreed time, similar to a private game for fun or practice.

When the first set of lessons finished in March 2021 I was well and truly hooked. I couldn't wait for Term 2 to start. This brought us up to June and then, though some were returning to golf and other pursuits, a few of us continued playing online during the summer.

By September 2021 came I still had not held or played with real cards. I was too nervous to join any face to face club. My mother and myself booked a bridge holiday in Westport, where I discovered how to play face to face and now saw the differences between it and online. It was now possible to revoke in person, or to pull out a wrong bid from the bidding box! Then there were mysteries such as how to lay down dummy, and avoid facial gestures and movements etc.

I partnered Dara Voyles and we began playing Intermediate events online. Declan advised us that the other players would be glad of the points and we would be glad of the experience! This was so true. We were way out of our depth but thoroughly enjoyed it.

We played online in places like Galway virtual, the Regent, Wexford and Sligo. We also played online Congresses - Malahide, Ballina, and Killarney. There were never enough Novice entries in the Congresses so we found we would pre enter as Novice and then have to play with the Intermediates.

Eventually a Face to Face Novice competition came up in the Regent in March 2022. Dara and I were delighted and surprised to win it!

In March 2022 I partnered Colette Kavanagh in the Malahide Congress Online. There were only four tables entered in the Novice section.

On this board we were the only ones to bid and make slam.

Dealer West. All Vul.

			♠ 6			
			♥ 109			
			♦ AQ1073			
			♣ Q10987			
♠ AQ93		N			♠ J10752	
♥ AQ743					♥ KJ5	
♦ 9	W		E		♦ K62	
♣ A52					♣ K6	
			S			
			♠ K84			
			♥ 862			
			♦ J854			
			♣ J43			

Later I couldn't believe it when I my name was mentioned in the Irish Times for coming 2nd in Intermediate Bs in the Clonmel Congress online [partnering Maura King]. And again in the Yeats Country online congress when our Team came 2nd - Dara Voyles, Paul Dunne, Maria Rusu and myself!

I also played in the Ciara Burns Trophy online with a "stranger" and we came 10th in Intermediate B's. I really enjoyed playing in this and it was a great experience just discussing system for ten minutes in the chat box on BBO before play started. It truly proves bridge is a game for life and a language of its own.

Dara and I still play together but we each also play with an Intermediate partner. This means we can play more often and feel we are constantly learning. After the team competition in Sligo Congress Dara and I were buzzing for days. It was a great feeling to experience doing so well despite being so new to Bridge.

Currently I still play Declan Byrne Bridge Morning games on Realbridge, and face to face in my own clubs in Meath.

I am excited for the season ahead. I have put two different teams together and we are registered to play in the Regent Team League in person and the Cunningham league on Realbridge online.

My first face to face Congress was Bray on the 3 September 2022. Here is a hand where we got a top as Novices up against Inters!

Dealer East. N/S Vul.

		♠ AQ73	
		♥ 3	
		♦ A3	
		♣ AJ10982	
♠ 102	N	♠ J964	
♥ Q8652	W	♥ AJ1074	
♦ 10987	E	♦ KJ6	
♣ 75	S	♣ 3	
		♠ K85	
		♥ K9	
		♦ Q542	
		♣ KQ64	

Dara as South opened 1NT, I bid 2NT - Transfer to minors, Dara bid 3♣.

I then didn't know what to do, I was thinking of cue bidding, but if I bid 3♦ I figured he would take it that he picked the wrong minor.

I had good clubs and a singleton so I punted 6♣.

New players are always afraid to bid slam, but I have been told a slam is likely to appear once in a round. Dara didn't get the killing Diamond lead, so he made 6♣.

I played in the Dundalk Salver on the 2 October. Just one year and nine months after I was introduced to the game, I find myself as an intermediate B2. In this competition we were mostly playing against masters/inter As.

Now that face to face bridge is back this is how I fear most of the competitions/congress will be if more Novice/Intermediates do not enter.

I thoroughly enjoyed the day and the game and definitely learned a lot from all the other players. What I learned most about myself and my partner's play was that we were at best average against them. With more experience, we should be more competitive.

I have such an interest in all aspects of the game, and when an email circulated about the TD course with Bernard Higgins in the CBAI I was delighted to be able to do it.

I was very lucky to find and click with a partner in my local club in Trim, Maria Rusu who is an intermediate A2. I learn so much from Maria at the table. I am currently the scorer in both the Trim Clubs and competition secretary in Trim Bridge Club and am constantly trying to get new members for both clubs and grow them. We were very excited to offer in-person lessons by Declan Byrne in Trim Golf Club and hopefully this will help grow the membership. The existing members seem grateful to have new faces and they in turn have new experiences. They also offer advice and help. Each game, each hand is a different story, some serious and some for laughs.

I love this game!

Comyn's Corner

Recently we lost Seán O'Lubaigh, the "clown prince" of Irish bridge.

John Comyn recounts a few gems.

- ♠ In a World event in Istanbul, Seán butted in vulnerable against a strong club with a three-count. He went for 2,000. When comparing scores, he observed that they'd misdefended - it should have been 2,300!
- ♥ In the European Seniors in Malta, Paul Hanratty psyched an overcall on a void and Seán responded with a 3-small spade bid! They raised each other to 6H on a 4-0 "fit" vulnerable. This made one trick and cost 2,900. Once again, Seán was quick to note the defence should have taken all 13 tricks!
- ♦ And Seán always gave brilliant bid explanations. "We play the Maggie Thatcher and the Aga Systems". When asked to explain - "Trouble with the minors. And wide range"!

World Pairs - Wrocław 2022

Gay Keaveney



When asked by Enda to write an article for the journal I had absolutely nothing in mind. I decided to write an article on the next event I played in, namely the World Championship Pairs in Wrocław in August.

I couldn't have made a better choice. The venue The Centennial Hall was probably one of the best I have ever played in. Having played in USA Nationals a month earlier I have to say the Polish people should be so proud of the way it was organised. It was second to none with excellent catering facilities, personal score available immediately when you finished play (you printed those yourself and so easily!!) and one fee covered all the pairs if you did not qualify for the semi final or the final.

In the article I haven't chosen many really exciting hands but tried to illustrate what good judgement does, when to bid and not to bid, show that top world players do make mistakes, and also give hands where you are in an awkward position with no really obvious solution.

Battle of the Minors

Dealer East. None Vul.

		♠ 9762			
		♥ 5			
		♦ K			
		♣ AKQJ752			
♠ AJ3	N	♠ KQ10	E		
♥ K74	W	♥ 109832			
♦ A107432		♦ Q65			
♣ 8	S	♣ 109			
		♠ 854			
		♥ AQJ6			
		♦ J98			
		♣ 643			

My first offering is a simple partscore hand. If you got away playing in 4♣ you scored well. However a number of E/W pairs made 4♦. Most led a top club and on the face of it to beat 4♦ now you must switch to your singleton heart and partner on winning returns the ♥Q and declarer now has an unavoidable heart loser, or so it seems. After your ♥K is ruffed let's say they switch a spade. Win it in dummy. Ruff the club. Cash two more spades and play a diamond towards the Queen. Singleton King wins and North has to give you a ruff and discard by playing a club. Your losing heart disappears. This play only works if North has a singleton ♦K. If the diamonds are 2/2 the correct play would have been to lead Ace and another diamond to produce the same ending. If you went on to 5♣, this contract was doubled and generally lost 300.

That Pesky Ghestem

Dealer South. N/S Vul.

		♠ K4			
		♥ K5432			
		♦ A			
		♣ A10742			
♠ Q653	N	♠ AJ1098	E		
♥ A6	W	♥ 98			
♦ KJ984		♦ 1073			
♣ QJ	S	♣ K96			
		♠ 72			
		♥ QJ107			
		♦ Q652			
		♣ 853			

The following hand illustrates a difficult decision over an interfering Ghestem bid. West opens 1♦, North bids 2NT showing clubs and hearts. What do you bid as East? What is double? You are not quite

good enough to bid 3♠ and double just showing values might get you into Spades. Now South bids 3♥. (Note some play double as an ability to double one of their suits.) West will either Pass or bid 3♠, North now passes and back to you? If partner passed it is difficult to bid 3♠. If he bid 3♠ you raise to 4♠. The two-level overcall of 2NT made it very difficult. The 4♠ contract depends on the position of the ♦Q and the ♠K. Both are sitting pretty.

To bid or not to bid?

Dealer East. None Vul.

		♠ QJ5			
		♥ J1094			
		♦ 864			
		♣ AQ5			
♠ 63	N	♠ A1087	E		
♥ AK7	W	♥ Q53			
♦ AQ1072		♦ -			
♣ J109	S	♣ K87642			
		♠ K942			
		♥ 862			
		♦ KJ953			
		♣ 3			

In the modern game many players use three weak twos. I am sure you will have played against opposition that have opened them on five card suits and here is another example. East elected to Pass on this hand and South opened a weak 2♦. It went Pass, Pass. Would you now protect with the East hand holding 4/3 in the Majors and make a takeout double? If you do partner will certainly know what to do. Declarer will probably be held to five tricks. I suppose the alternative is to bid 3♣. The hand was generally played in 5♣ or 3NT with NT often making overtricks. This indicates that many East players opened the bidding.

Delusions of Grand-eur

Dealer North. None Vul.

		♠ 3	
		♥ KJ532	
		♦ 43	
		♣ KJ864	
♠ AKQ62	N	♠ 8	
♥ Q7	W	♥ A964	
♦ AKQJ5	E	♦ 1096	
♣ 7	S	♣ AQ532	
		♠ J109754	
		♥ 108	
		♦ 872	
		♣ 109	

I put in the following hand to ask what would you open on the West hand if partner has not already opened as East? I think 1♠ is best and not 2♣. However I suspect East opened 1♣ at every table. A 1♠ response makes you rebid 2♣. Now 2♦ will get a 2NT response from East. 3♦ from West will get 4♦ from East. If you now Keycard you will bid 6♦. 7♦ depends on the club finesse being right. If a diamond is led, you win in hand and immediately finesse the club. Now discard the heart on ♣A. Now play a spade to the Ace and ruff a spade. ♥A followed by heart ruff enables you to ruff the last spade. Now ruff a heart again and draw the trumps. It's a poor 7♦ because it needs both a 3/2 trump break plus a club finesse to be right [a 34% chance overall].

Keep it Simple, Stupid

Dealer North. N/S Vul.

		♠ Q62	
		♥ K1093	
		♦ 10932	
		♣ 94	
♠ KJ85	N	♠ 4	
♥ A64	W	♥ 752	
♦ J	E	♦ K654	
♣ AQ1086	S	♣ KJ753	
		♠ A10973	
		♥ QJ8	
		♦ AQ87	
		♣ 2	

On this hand after a 1♠ opening by South the majority of Wests overcalled 2♣ though quite a few overcalled a wobbly 1NT.

Those who overcalled in clubs scored a lot better as many made eleven tricks. Those who bid 1NT were generally held to seven tricks. North raised to 2♠ and East bid 4♣. If he splintered he would definitely give a hint to North to lead a Heart and not a Spade. Leading a Spade enables West to make 11 tricks as the ♠Q ruffs down enabling a second heart discard to be made from the East hand. On a heart lead it is held to nine tricks.

Judgement Day

Dealer North. All Vul.

		♠ Q9872	
		♥ A1053	
		♦ 7	
		♣ AQ8	
♠ AK1054	N	♠ J63	
♥ J6	W	♥ KQ982	
♦ 1043	E	♦ KQ95	
♣ J95	S	♣ 2	
		♠ -	
		♥ 74	
		♦ AJ862	
		♣ K107643	

This is a difficult hand for your system of defensive bidding. North opens 1♠ and East overcalls 2♥ (I wouldn't) and over to South. If you bid 3♣ it is forcing so the alternative is to make a takeout double. West passes so should North pass the double expecting reasonable values from South or should he bid 3♣ his better minor. I think pass is best at game all. On a club lead it will go two or three off as happened at a number of tables. Many Souths played in 3♣ indicating that East overcalling 2♥ was a rare occurrence. Those who played in clubs made nine or ten (most common result) or eleven tricks.

Defend for your Life

Dealer South. N/S Vul.

		♠ A107532	
		♥ Q10	
		♦ A	
		♣ 10985	
♠ KQ96	N	♠ J4	
♥ 865	W	♥ KJ	
♦ Q2	E	♦ K7543	
♣ AK64	S	♣ Q732	
		♠ 8	
		♥ A97432	
		♦ J10986	
		♣ J	

Well here is an opening lead question plus a defensive poser. Holding ♠8, ♥A97432, ♦J10986 ♣J you open 2♥. It goes double on your left and 3NT on your right. Your lead! Do you lead ♦J or ♥4 or 3 depending on your methods. If you lead ♦J it goes two from dummy and partner's Ace. He switches to ♥Q covered by ♥K and over to you. If you duck, which you should, you will beat the contract. You must hope partner has the ♥QJ or ♥Q10. Since you didn't lead a heart, you must now give a trick to the ♥K, instead of at trick one. If partner has the ♥J the suit is blocked anyway, unless you duck. I think most players on impulse would hit that ♥K which is wrong.

The Miracle of the Six of Hearts

Dealer North. None Vul.

		♠ 652	
		♥ A2	
		♦ A106542	
		♣ J8	
♠ A10874	N	♠ KQJ9	
♥ 1084	W	♥ KQJ97	
♦ 8	E	♦ Q9	
♣ KQ104	S	♣ 93	
		♠ 3	
		♥ 653	
		♦ KJ73	
		♣ A7652	

This is a hand where 4♠ makes. North in many cases opened 1♦. You overcall 1♥ and South bids 2♦ or 3♦ (if 2♦ it is a strong bid). If South bids 3♦ does East bid 3♠?

I think that is impossible so he would have to settle for 3♥. Now the spade fit will not be found. 4♥ was beaten at a number of tables by the lead of the singleton spade. Those who found the save in 5♦ definitely made the right decision. In fact it made at a couple of tables. After the ♠K lead, if a heart is now switched there are three tricks to take when in on the club. At one table a ♦9 was led. After running the ♣8 into the 10 a heart was switched. Ace was taken followed by ♣J to ♣A and a third club ruffed with ♦A. Now a diamond to the King drew the ♦Q and another round of clubs was ruffed setting up the 5th club. Meanwhile East was throwing hearts. A trump to dummy now and North discards his 2nd heart. He now ruffs the ♥5, West having also discarded a heart on the play of a diamond to the dummy. This meant the ♥6 was now set up. Yes that actually happened at the table!!

Silence is Golden

Dealer North. N/S Vul.

		♠ AJ10854	
		♥ QJ	
		♦ A9	
		♣ K76	
♠ 73	N	♠ 9	
♥ A72		♥ 1098643	
♦ K7	W	♦ Q854	
♣ QJ10543	S	♣ A9	
		♠ KQ62	
		♥ K5	
		♦ J10632	
		♣ 82	

The hand above I put in to illustrate the stupidity of bidding on a hand where you should be asleep. North opens 1♠ and South responded 3♠ (game invitational showing a hand worth 11hcp – stretch marks) and now west waltzed in with 4♣ with North going to 4♠. Hand was then passed out. Needless to say East led the ♣A. West was 100% to blame here for bidding without reason. If West didn't bid East almost certainly leads ♥10 and with ♣Q switch it goes routinely one off.

Battle of the Majors

Dealer South. E/W Vul.

		♠ 1065	
		♥ AQ1092	
		♦ KJ6	
		♣ 65	
♠ A98743	N	♠ J2	
♥ KJ6		♥ 73	
♦ 103	W	♦ A7542	
♣ KJ	S	♣ 10973	
		♠ KQ	
		♥ 854	
		♦ Q98	
		♣ AQ842	

On the hand above South opened 1NT weak. West overcalled 2♦ showing one Major and North bid 2♥. It went pass, pass and West bid 2♠. North doubled showing a good 2♥ hand and South bid 3♥. It went pass, pass and East balanced with 3♠. This could have gone two off vulnerable. The general result was +170 to N/S. However now North ventured 4♥ (he should probably have doubled and collected 500) However with ♠J doubleton and both ♥KJ sitting in a favourable position there was no difficulty in making ten tricks. I do not think East should have bid 3♠ (law of total tricks tells you that.)

Cash'em while you can

Dealer West. All Vul.

		♠ Q98542	
		♥ 104	
		♦ A	
		♣ AJ108	
♠ K6	N	♠ A10	
♥ AJ9		♥ Q875	
♦ J9642	W	♦ Q853	
♣ Q62	S	♣ 943	
		♠ J73	
		♥ K632	
		♦ K107	
		♣ K75	

The hand above had ten tricks making in spades about 90% of the time. Leads varied between a club, a diamond and a heart. Even after a heart lead it still made because West did not cash his second heart trick fearing the set up ♥K would give a discard. It isn't that easy.

It Happens to the Best

Dealer East. E/W Vul.

		♠ 1053	
		♥ A72	
		♦ 86	
		♣ K10863	
♠ 9	N	♠ AQJ82	
♥ J86543		♥ K9	
♦ 10432	W	♦ AQ75	
♣ 95	S	♣ Q4	
		♠ K764	
		♥ Q10	
		♦ KJ9	
		♣ AJ72	

What happened on the above hand is amazing. One N/S pair made eight tricks in 2♠. Many Easts were left playing in 1♠ with the number of tricks varying from five to ten with six being the most common. Kind of hard to believe. At the ten trick table South made the lead of the ♥Q beaten by the ♥A and a heart returned with the ♥10 dropping. Declarer played A♦ followed by a low diamond with North revoking playing 3♣ but it was noticed and declarer told North to put it back in his hand. ♦K was now cashed with North discarding ♥2 and declarer throwing ♦Q. Now South switched to a low spade with North inserting the ♠10. Declarer then cashed ♠A followed by ♠J with North again discarding the ♣3. South exited on ♠7 on which ♠5 now appeared with the revoke established. Declarer now had a diamond entry to dummy to discard his two clubs making nine tricks and one extra for the revoke. There isn't any point to be made about this hand except to point out that North and South would have been considered one of the top pairs in the competition with North winning many world championships.

For Beginners and Novices

Thomas MacCormac



Good luck to Enda Murphy, our new editor! Any questions from novices or beginners on any aspect of the game, email tmaccormac@gmail.com

I have been asked by a student of mine to discuss this hand - bidding and play. "Thomas I opened 2NT (see below). Partner bid 3♣ Stayman. I responded 3♥ and then partner bid 3NT which I passed, Was I wrong? Also someone made 12 tricks in Spades - how did they do it?"

North

♠ QT87
♥ KQT2
♦ AQ
♣ AKJ

Answer: Yes, your bidding was wrong. When your partner bids Stayman they must have a Major. When they don't support your hearts and instead bid 3NT, they must have spades. Therefore over 3NT you must bid 4♠.

Recommended bidding:

W	N	E	S
	2NT	P	3♣ ¹
P	3♥ ²	P	3NT ³
P	4♠	All Pass	

¹ Stayman ² I have 4♥
³ I have 4♠ ⁴ I have 4♠ also

Top Tip: to bid Stayman always promises a four card Major, if your partner doesn't support the one you bid, they must have the other. In this auction it enables the 2NT Strong hand to be declarer.

Contract 4♠. Lead ♦2

♠ A432 ♥ J4 ♦ 7654 ♣ 987		
♠ K	N	♠ J975
♥ 9876	W	♥ A32
♦ K982	E	♦ JT3
♣ QT32	S	♣ 654
♠ QT86 ♥ KQT2 ♦ AQ ♣ AKJ		

When we look at the two hands combined it looks most unlikely that 12 tricks are available so something good must be happening!!

Top tricks = just five. One in Spades, two in Diamonds after the lead of a Diamond and two in clubs. Well short of 12!

Losers: If 12 tricks are available I can only lose one, it must be the Ace of hearts, so I can't lose any Spades or Clubs.

Trick 1	Win in hand with Queen of Diamonds
Trick 2	♠6 then King then Ace in dummy.
Trick 3	Small spade from dummy covering easts card. We know the King was singleton.
Trick 4	Small heart to the Jack losing to the Ace and east plays a club
Trick 5	Declarer wins with the Ace
Trick 6	Cash top heart
Trick 7	Cash another top heart discarding a Club from dummy
Trick 8	Top Diamond
Trick 9	Top Club
Trick 10	Club Jack ruffing in dummy
Trick 11	Spade from dummy towards Q 10 finessing east who is marked with spades
Trick 12	Draw final trump
Trick 13	Cash winning heart

Bridge in The Netherlands

By our correspondent Jos Jacobs



Once upon a time, TV was the most influential medium in the western world. In the early 80s, you had to get on TV to spread your ideas.

This was also picked up by the board of the Nederlandse Bridge Bond (NBB), the Dutch Bridge Federation. After a year of negotiations, they managed to convince one of the leading Dutch broadcasting companies to produce and launch a TV bridge instruction course from scratch which proved an overwhelming success. Within a few years, the Federation membership exploded from about 20,000 to over 80,000. By 2000, it had gone up further to over 100,000 but Covid caused serious setbacks. Membership is back to about 80,000 now. A more serious long-term problem is the members' average age which currently stands at 73.

Before the TV course, bridge had been a rather upper-class activity, though in this country, there were hardly any clubs like Crockford's in London, where you might go after your daily work to relax, have dinner and play (rubber) bridge for high stakes. In our major cities (Amsterdam, The Hague and others), there were as many as 25 clubs where you might become a member to be able to play competitive duplicate bridge, against your club members, or against players from the other local clubs in the district's championships, once a week. Many villages even had their own bridge club that would offer the same facilities. Few bridge clubs had their own premises so you often would have to go to a bigger pub where you could rent bigger rooms where

15 to 30 tables could play. In Utrecht, the home city of the Federation, and also in an increasing number of other cities and towns, the local government would help you to establish a "Mind Sports House" where any club could rent space for chess, bridge or draughts. In Utrecht, the Mind Sports House is owned by NBB – which makes it easier. Elsewhere in the country, there are a lot of Mind Sports Houses owned or run by all local mind sports clubs together.

The other side of the bridge coin is the fact that the explosion of membership in the 80s did not automatically cause a rise in the average standard of play. Until a few years ago, mind sports were subsidised by the Dutch government, in principle on the basis of membership, so the NBB decided to focus primarily on membership numbers – not at all a bad idea given the average age. Mental activity is good for you. But this made it hard to make bridge a popular game among younger people. Their attention span is very short and social media dominate.

Still, with about 1,000 local clubs affiliated to NBB, all over the country, and many more active non-affiliated players, there is still some hope for the future. Dutch Juniors have been doing well, of late, at the international level but there are too few of them, I think...

Another reason for the high membership of NBB is the simple fact that for many years, the Federation was the only body to sell and distribute materials, such as scorecards and movement cards, and in more recent years, bridgemates and the software for it. NBB also adopted the policy that all club members would automatically be obliged to join the Federation also.

An important step forward was taken by NBB when Mr Hans Melchers, a Dutch billionaire and bridge addict, entered the scene circa 1990. He offered sponsorship of the Dutch national Open Team but accepting his offer would imply that Hans would also play an important role in decision making. The first success of this professional approach came in 1993 when the Dutch Open Team won their first Bermuda Bowl in Santiago de Chile. After this success, NBB decided to create a special, very much independent, department for its representative teams, i.e. treat the competitive and the "recreational" bridge as separate worlds.

Back in the 70s and 80s, there used to be many open tournaments, mostly pairs but occasionally teams – the latter often with an international flavour, such as the Hoechst tournament and the most famous of them all, the Caransa team tournament in Amsterdam. Later, The Hague hosted a famous invitational tournament for 16 of the world's strongest pairs, the Cap Gemini tournament, based on the same formula as the earlier Sunday Times tournament in London, which later became the Macallan.

In the 90s, we saw a decline in sponsorship. This affected not only the EBL but also many national and local tournaments. The Federation's focus on bridge as a recreational sport and the rise of social media led to a steep fall in interest in for national tournaments.

A few years ago, very old and wise EU judges decided that bridge is not a sport and thus its clubs cannot be exempted from the VAT obligation. This was another serious financial setback for bridge in this country, shortly after the end of the government's support.

Even after the strongest Dutch pair, Sjoert Brink-Bas Drijver, joined Switzerland, the top tier of Dutch bridge did not seem to have a problem. The existing selection system worked well. A weekly training session would take place where four to six invited pairs would appear to play and discuss hands under the supervision of the team coach and the non-playing captain. The latter two are also responsible for the ultimate decisions as to which pairs will make it into the national Open Team. In recent years, with most of these pairs turning professional, their results in the US Nationals would also be taken into consideration. Looking back on the recent Europeans on Madeira, where we narrowly beat the Swiss to the gold medal, there don't seem to be any hard feelings. Just afterwards, Brink/Drijver and Simon de Wijs won the World Open Mixed Teams in Wrocław, with partners from all over the world. The defection of Brink/Drijver does offer the Dutch youngsters better chances to make the Open team.

We need hands! I decided to go for the recent Europeans in Madeira and chose a few deals.

Here is a beautiful throw-in squeeze from the match against Norway.

Dealer West. Both Vul.

		♠ J1053	
		♥ 8	
		♦ AKQ853	
		♣ 103	
♠ 64	N	♠ 9872	E
♥ K7632	W	♥ J1095	
♦ 74		♦ 92	
♣ AJ75	S	♣ Q94	
		♠ AKQ	
		♥ AQ4	
		♦ J106	
		♣ K862	

At the other table, Boye Brogeland had made 6NT by winning the diamond lead and immediately playing a club from dummy to his King. When the Dutch defender in West made the expert play (?) of ducking this (no doubt expecting KQ with declarer), Brogeland was home.

Louk Verhees also landed in 6NT, without E/W intervention. Helgemo (West) led a spade and Verhees decided not to go for a swindle but simply to run dummy's top tricks. This caused some trouble for East who discarded three hearts. This made it pretty clear for Verhees that the ♥K would be with West. This was the situation when the last diamond was played from dummy.

		♠ -	
		♥ 8	
		♦ 3	
		♣ 103	
♠	N	♠	E
♥ K7	W	♥ J	
♦		♦	
♣ AJ	S	♣ Q94	
		♠	
		♥ AQ	
		♦	
		♣ K8	

Both East and declarer discarded a club but what can West do? Helgemo discarded the ♣J but now, Verhees led a club from dummy and ducked it, forcing Helgemo to lead a heart into declarer's tenace for his contract.

Next, we have a beautiful defence, this time by Bauke Muller in the match against Israel. When you are watching the match, a hand like this may be nerve-racking but at the table, the opponents do not know...

Dealer East. None Vul.

		♠ 10986	
		♥ KJ10	
		♦ 73	
		♣ J843	
♠ K	N	♠ AQ53	E
♥ 9862	W	♥ 75	
♦ QJ10954		♦ A62	
♣ Q5	S	♣ AK72	
		♠ J742	
		♥ AQ43	
		♦ K8	
		♣ 1096	

Contract 3NT [East], West has bid hearts.

When was the last time you led a heart from AQxx through the heart bidder? Muller led the ♠10. Dummy won the Queen and next ran the ♦Q which Muller smoothly allowed to hold. The ♦J came next but now, Muller won his King. Time for a low heart, you think? No rush! A low spade kills the dummy because the Ace is still in the way and of course, Muller continued a spade. One down.

If you think you are the victim of a throw-in, you should keep cool. This time, we see Louk Verhees' strengths as a defender.

Dealer East. N/S Vul.

		♠ 65432	
		♥ 72	
		♦ 654	
		♣ J43	
♠ Q	N	♠ J	E
♥ 103	W	♥ AKQJ9864	
♦ QJ9832		♦ 10	
♣ A752	S	♣ Q98	
		♠ AK10987	
		♥ 5	
		♦ AK7	
		♣ K106	

In the Open Room, this had been the auction.

W	N	E	S
Van Lankveld	Bakke	van den Bos	Brogeland
-	-	1♥	X
2♦	Pass	4♥	X
All Pass			

Brogeland led the ♠K and continued a trump. He next took the ♦10 with the ♦K and now Brogeland erred by playing the ♠A, giving a ruff and discard. Declarer was home now, as the run of the trumps squeezed South in the minors.

Verhees was in the same situation as Brogeland at trick three, but he realised that something had to be done. If partner had the ♣J, the ♠K would break the impending squeeze on South because partner would be able to guard the clubs. Well done.

How would you rule?

Fearghal O'Boyle



Problem 1. Teams. Nil All.

		♠ ---	
		♥ 10	
		♦ 7 (4)	
		♣ 85	
♠ 8	N	♠	
♥		♥	
♦ 9832	W	♦ KQJ10	E
♣		♣ 9	
		S	
		♠ ---	
		♥ QJ	
		♦ A65	
		♣ ---	

South is declarer in 4♥ and has made six tricks and lost two tricks. Declarer wins trick eight in hand. The ♦4 is stuck behind the ♦7. Declarer cashes ♦A from hand and then ruffs a diamond in dummy. He then ruffs a club in hand, loses a diamond at the end and makes ten tricks. Now the players discover that there was a revoke in dummy and they call the TD.

Which should the TD rule:

A.	4♥ made by South.
B.	4♥-1 by South.
C.	4♥-2 by South.
D.	4♥-3 by South.
E.	Average Minus to N/S. Average Plus to E/W.

Problem 2. Teams. Nil All.

		♠ 5	
		♥ 10	
		♦ 7 (4)	
		♣ 8	
♠ 8	N	♠ 9	
♥		♥	
♦ 9832	W	♦ KQJ10	E
♣		♣	
		S	
		♠ ---	
		♥ QJ	
		♦ A65	
		♣ ---	

South is declarer in 4♥ and has made six tricks and lost two tricks. Declarer wins trick eight in hand. The ♦4 is stuck behind the ♦7.

Declarer cashes ♦A from hand and then ruffs a diamond in dummy. He discards his other losing diamond on dummy's ♣8 and makes eleven tricks. Now the players discover that there was a revoke in dummy and they call the TD.

Which should the TD rule:

A.	4♥+1 by South.
B.	4♥ made by South.
C.	4♥-1 by South.
D.	4♥-2 by South.
E.	4♥-3 by South.

Problem 3. Teams. Nil All.

		♠ ---	
		♥ QJ	
		♦ A65	
		♣ ---	
♠ 8	N	♠ 9	
♥		♥	
♦ 9832	W	♦ KQJ10	E
♣		♣	
		S	
		♠ ---	
		♥ 10	
		♦ 85	
		♣ 74	

South is declarer in 4♥ and has made six tricks and lost two tricks. He wins trick eight in dummy. He should claim his contract at this point (winning four tricks and losing one diamond trick) but instead he cashes ♦A in dummy and discards a club from his hand. Then he leads a small diamond from dummy, notices his revoke and calls the TD.

Which should the TD rule:

A.	4♥+1 by South.
B.	4♥ made by South.
C.	4♥-1 by South.
D.	4♥-2 by South.
E.	4♥-3 by South.

Suggested Rulings

Problem 1: (Law 64 - Procedure After the Establishment of a Revoke)

Ruling A [4♥ made]

Thinking dummy had a singleton diamond, declarer ruffed the second round of diamonds in dummy thereby causing dummy to revoke.

If any other player had revoked there would be a two trick penalty for the revoke because the offender won the revoke trick however Law 64B3 tells us that there are no penalty tricks transferred for a revoke by dummy. In that case, the Director is asked to make sure that declarer has not profited by the irregularity (Law 64C1).

In this particular case, the declaring side has not gained - they were always going to make ten tricks if dummy had not revoked - so score stands 4♥ made by South.

As an aside, the defenders are not to blame for not noticing that dummy was a card short – they have enough to do looking after their own thirteen cards. If we are in the mood to penalise anybody then the culprit is dummy who has infringed Law 41D by not displaying his dummy correctly.

Problem 2: (Law 64 - Procedure After the Establishment of a Revoke)

Ruling B [4♥ made]

Thinking dummy had a singleton diamond, declarer ruffed the second round of diamonds in dummy thereby causing dummy to revoke.

If any other player had revoked there would be a two trick penalty for the revoke because the offender won the revoke trick however Law 64B3 tells us that there are no penalty tricks transferred for a revoke by dummy. As in the last case, the Director is asked to make sure that declarer has not profited by the irregularity (Law 64C1).

In this particular case, the declaring side has gained. Before the revoke declarer was heading for ten tricks (4♥ made) because he had a diamond trick to lose. The revoke in dummy allowed him to get to dummy's high club and discard his diamond loser. So the Director will adjust the score to 4♥ made – the result that would have occurred if dummy had not revoked.

As an aside, the defenders are not to blame for not noticing that dummy was a card short – they have enough to do looking after their own thirteen cards. If we are in the mood to penalise anybody then the culprit is dummy who has infringed Law 41D by not displaying his dummy correctly.

Problem 3: (Law 64 - Procedure After the Establishment of a Revoke)

Ruling D [4♥-2]

Declarer revokes in his hand and leads a card from dummy to the next trick. Law 63A1 says that the revoke is established and so it cannot be corrected. The footnote to Law 64A1 says that for the purposes of the revoke law, declarer and dummy are treated as two separate players. So the offender (declarer) did not win the revoke trick which means we have a one trick penalty for the revoke.

The Director will ask the players to finish the board - E/W will win two diamond tricks and they will get a further trick for declarer's revoke leading to a final result of 4♥-2 by South.

Face-to-Face and Online Bridge: A Future of Co-Existence

CBAI Working Group

The CBAI's Governing Council set up a working group in May 2022 to examine the future relationship between face-to-face and online bridge in a post-Covid world.

Covid lockdowns had created by default a mass migration to online bridge, but face-to-face bridge was now viable again. The key questions were the nature and extent of ongoing member demand for online play, and how face-to-face and online games might co-exist as part of the overall CBAI proposition to existing and prospective members.

The working group was made up of ten individuals, representing all the main stakeholders – the online bridge proposition, the face-to-face bridge proposition and the CBAI itself. The obvious starting point was to hear what the ultimate stakeholders – the CBAI members – had to say. In addition we looked at how other national bridge bodies were addressing this same issue, which gave us a number of useful starting points.

A member survey was sent out, and we received just over 4,000 valid responses, which was a very satisfactory level.

The key insights we gained from the survey were as follows:

- A. More than 85% of respondents played online, nearly all of them on BBO. 18% played on RealBridge, with smaller mentions for some of the other platforms, mainly robot-partnered games. (This does not, of course, mean that 85% of all CBAI members played online. Separate data obtained directly from BBO suggests that approximately two-thirds of CBAI members played in CBAI-organised virtual competitions on that platform between March 2020 and September 2022, so the online contingent was very considerable).
- B. More than 70% of respondents who played on BBO played in a CBAI virtual club, approximately 19% in national competitions or congresses, and 30% in some form of game with a robot partner. The figures for EBU and ACBL games were small (around 3%).
- C. In terms of future intentions, around 14% of respondents indicated that they would play only (3%) or mainly (11%) online in future, with half of this group stating that this was a permanent decision. An additional 20% said they expect to play 50/50 face-to-face and online, and 40% said they would play sometimes online, so the majority of members expect to play online at least occasionally in future (though most of these people will play face-to-face more often.)
- D. Just over a quarter of the respondents do not see themselves playing online at all more.
- E. Taking those last two points together, the indications are that upwards of 90% plan to play at least some face-to-face bridge. Equally, some 75% see themselves playing at least some online bridge. This makes it clear that the future is one in which both variants of the game will play a part.
- F. The reasons for preferring online were varied: personal health concerns (55%); other health concerns (20%); cost (11%); dislike of going out at night (30%) – respondents could select more than one reason. The biggest scorer was simple convenience (65%), which again demonstrates clearly that online organised bridge should not be regarded simply as a Covid-related phenomenon.

We also invited suggestions on getting as many people as possible playing bridge in the future. Just over 1,000 replies were received. The main ideas were: classes and recruitment of new members; more focus on schools and young players generally; the need to skill up new teachers and TDs to replace those not coming back post-Covid; more use of handicapping; more attention to Novices and Intermediates; shorter games and/or earlier finishes; more fun events; and games during the daytime. There was also quite an interest in short refresher courses for those rusty after not playing face-to-face (or at all) in so long. There is plenty of merit in these ideas and a number already form part of the CBAI's thinking.

The survey also revealed a few issues that did not seem to be well understood by all CBAI members, which we would like to take the opportunity to clarify here. Firstly, we were surprised by the quite large number of respondents who did not identify "Sligo & Friends" or "Galway Virtual Bridge" as a CBAI virtual club (despite the fact that "CBAI" is present in the TD code for their tournaments). All these open

virtual clubs operate under licence from the CBAI and must comply with CBAI regulations. Secondly, some respondents complained that the CBAI was “sponsoring” online bridge at the expense of face-to-face bridge, despite the covering letter to the survey stating explicitly that “Our objective is to encourage as many people as possible back to live bridge”. And finally, there were some very significant over-estimates of the CBAI’s share of the BBO revenue pie – one respondent complained that it was unfair that the CBAI takes 50% of the fee. In fact, the virtual club itself gets the biggest share of the fee (55%) and the CBAI the smallest (7%).

Worryingly, though not entirely surprisingly, the demographics of the responses indicated that fewer than 0.5% of respondents were aged under 45 and fewer than 4% were under 55. This mirrors the general picture in Europe and USA, though some European countries seem to be bucking the trend. Finding out what is working in those countries should be a priority for the CBAI.

Group discussions were frank, cordial, and constructive. Ultimately, we documented the following **core principles**, accepted by Council in September:

1. Online tournament bridge is a positive development, and served our clubs, our members, and our Association well during the pandemic.
2. There will continue to be significant demand for organised online bridge.
3. Online bridge will be an important addition to the CBAI’s overall offering, and should encompass teaching and teams tournaments as well as club duplicates.
4. Going forward, online and face-to-face bridge are not in competition, rather they should form complementary parts of the Association’s proposition to existing and prospective members.
5. It is not the function of the Association to dictate to members how they choose to play their bridge. Its job is to provide members with the options that they want.
6. There is a distinction, philosophically and financially, between member-only virtual clubs (i.e. club-based online games) and open virtual clubs (i.e. those that do not affiliate members), and different responses to each cohort may be required.
4. Masterpoints must be awarded for online games in accordance with the CBAI scheme.
5. A higher CBAI handling charge will be applied to the BBO games of the open virtual clubs than to the member-only ones.
6. Double masterpoints will be offered for face-to-face club bridge for 2022/23, as an additional encouragement back to the table.
7. A strict no poaching rule will apply to all clubs.
8. Open virtual clubs have been requested to remind their players at the start of the new season that they operate under CBAI licence and that all Irish players must be CBAI members.
9. It is mandatory that anyone playing in a virtual club has their full name and NBID in their profile, and virtual club organisers have been asked to enforce that.

Our key proposals, also adopted by the Governing Council, were:

1. The CBAI will undertake extensive activities in support of face-to-face bridge (e. g. new teachers, promotion activities for clubs/regions, promotion of face-to-face bridge classes, TD courses, a campaign aimed at lapsed members). Regions and clubs will be encouraged to take on these initiatives too, informed wherever possible by a sharing of “best practices”.
2. Virtual member-only clubs will be treated exactly as face-to-face clubs and subject to the same rights and responsibilities, while some specific additional requirements will apply to open virtual clubs.
3. Attendance in CBAI-organised virtual games must be limited to CBAI members and overseas visitors. An occasional guest appearance is fine, but any Irish person playing regularly must be a paid-up member of the CBAI. (The overseas visitors are allowed by custom and practice, but the suggestion has been made that, if virtual bridge is here to stay, the CBAI should introduce a specific category for overseas members; no decision has been taken on that for the moment.)

We hope that you have found this brief summary of the CBAI’s working group project interesting and informative. There were strong and well-intentioned opinions across the spectrum on all aspects of the debate, and it was always the case that compromise would be the order of the day. We are confident that the proposals outlined above will enable both face-to-face and online bridge to thrive, and that, in the long run, an equilibrium state will be reached in which both make their contribution to the world of Irish bridge. Hopefully, the combination will mean that bridge can reach more people than before, especially more younger people, for whom online games may be more suitable.

CBAI Working Group:

Anna Carr, Willie Corby, LizAnn Doyle, Rory Egan, Conor Fox, Brendan Martin, Fearghal O’Boyle, Dermot O’Brien, Dan O’Mahony, Trish Stack

CBAI News

Dermot O'Brien



I'd like to start by echoing the Editor's warm welcome to this new version of The Irish Bridge Journal, and to acknowledge again the debt Irish bridge players owe to Úna Walsh, and her brother Paddy before her, for publishing the Journal privately for 42 years.

It was an enormous labour of love for both of them, and the CBAI and our editorial team will do our very best to do justice to the tradition that Úna and Paddy created. As Enda says, we would welcome any ideas from readers on possible new material, especially from Intermediates and Juniors – and particularly if you'd like to write it yourself!

The big news to report is that the return to face-to-face bridge is continuing apace, with clubs continuing to re-open after the long gap caused by the covid pandemic. Most returning clubs find their numbers down quite a bit to start with, but picking up as word gets around. So the more you can do to get that word around, the better. And the feedback is that once players come back to face-to-face bridge, they realise just how much they have missed it, and they keep coming back.

A small number of CBAI clubs have indicated that they are no longer viable, and unfortunately will be closing, and others may be struggling with venues or other issues. If there's anything we can do to help, we'd be happy to – just let us know. A key task in the case of a club closing is to make sure that any members who wish to continue playing can get a game nearby; your regional committee should be able to help in this regard.

By the same token, it is clear that some players, unfortunately, will not be returning to face-to-face bridge for various reasons. So all-in-all, we have a substantial rebuilding job to do within the bridge community. Already, the CBAI and your regional committees are working hard to develop new teachers, new students, and new Tournament Directors, and to give them the support and encouragement that they need, and those development activities will continue. If you're interested in signing up to qualify as a teacher or TD, just let us know and we'll contact you once firm dates for training courses are agreed.

We also ran a national bridge promotion week in late August, ably co-ordinated on our behalf by Seamus Costello, which enabled clubs and regions to promote their presence within the local community, and to try to encourage new members to join or former

members to return. The award for the most innovative promotion to date goes to Nicola O'Dowd for her ingenious use of a camper-van at the Trim Agricultural Show. The CBAI has plenty of stock of the key promotional items – banners, flyers and posters that can be personalised, tee-shirts, and freebies such as pens and cards – that a club will need to run a promotion event. So don't wait for the next formal promotion week to get the news on your club out in the local community. We can, and should, be in permanent promotion mode within the CBAI now.

The return to face-to-face bridge has created a debate about the future role of the online game. As you may know, a CBAI working group has looked at this issue and a report from that group is included as an article elsewhere in this edition.



The award winning camper van stand.

One part of their work was an online survey of member views – thanks again to the more than 4,000 of you who took the time to respond. The survey identified that for many members online bridge is seen as part of the future of the game, and a significant minority see themselves playing mainly online, at least for the moment and perhaps forever. We therefore anticipate that online games will continue to be available for those that prefer to play that way. The challenge, of course, is to ensure that the availability of online games does not hamper face-to-face clubs in their efforts to get up and running again.

All the CBAI's national competitions, and nearly all the congresses, are scheduled as face-to-face events this season, and several have already taken place as I write. It is great to see so many people back, and to be able to meet up and enjoy each others company as we used to.

I'd encourage everyone to play in as many of these events as they can (even in the face of another very obvious challenge – the rising prices within our economy); the organisers deserve our support in re-establishing their events after a two- or three-year gap, and the danger is that some of them may disappear forever without that support.

If you are among the number who have missed the Irish Bridge Diary in the two years when it was not printed, the good news is that it's back this year too, and is available from Regional Secretaries or Head Office for just €6.

Finally, a big thank you to all who have played their part in keeping the bridge show on the road over the past few very difficult years – the club and regional committees and officers, the virtual club organisers and TDs who learned so much so quickly and made sure we were able to enjoy our bridge fix even when we couldn't meet up, the volunteers who have worked so hard to enable clubs to reopen for face-to-face bridge in very difficult and seemingly ever-changing circumstances, and last but not least to the CBAI staff, for whom conditions were also frequently very challenging.

A very happy new year to all CBAI members and here's hoping for a safe, enjoyable, successful, and above all perhaps just a "normal" second half of the season.



BRIDGE TRIPS 2023

CYPRUS & SPAIN



BRIDGE HOLIDAYS 2023

We are delighted to confirm our Spring 2023 programme. Both trips include flights, transfers, 7 nights accommodation based on 2 sharing, breakfast each morning, dinner each day and 5 nights bridge with tournament director Podge Ussher.

PRICES

Both of these trips are priced at just €945 per person sharing. If single occupancy is required, a supplement of €240 will apply.

PAPHOS, CYPRUS - APRIL 2023



Probably in 50 years of travelling, Sean Skehan's favourite hotel! Lovely beach location, superb food and wonderful staff. Yes its a 5 hour flight, but the distance from airport to hotel is just 12 minutes!

CAMBRILS, SPAIN - MAY 2023

Just an hour from Barcelona (where we will have a day trip which is included in the cost), this recently refurbished hotel is only 50metres from the beach and is situated beside many shops and restaurants!



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Results and Upcoming Fixtures

National Results - Sept to Dec 2022

Duais an Uachtaráin Fermoy - 17 Sept

1st	Derek O'Gorman & BJ O'Brien
2nd	Rita Cassidy & Gordon Lessells
3rd	Marie James & Anthony Moloney

Pre-Qualifier Trials - 24-25 Sept

1st	Verna Brownlow & Geoff Roberts
2nd	Deirdre O'Halloran & Orla McEntee
3rd	Ann Burns & Kay Murphy
4th	Betty Cody & Una O'Gorman

Spiro National Mixed Pairs - 22 Oct

1st	Carol Ann Cummins & John Noonan
2nd	Anna Onishuk & Karel De Raeymaeker
3rd	Zrinka Kokot & Pat McDaid
4th	Cass O'Donnell & Ian Hamilton

Coen National Mixed Teams - 23 Oct

1st	Joan Kenny & Enda Glynn, Teresa Rigney & Conor Boland
2nd	BJ O'Brien & Siobhan Part. Mairead Haugh & Justin Corfield
3rd	Mairéad Ní Oistín & Aidan Hodgers Frances Gill & Denis Gill
4th	Luca Crone & Evgenia Gladysheva, Tom Gorey & Isabel Burke

Camrose Trials - 29-31 Oct

1st	Mark Moran & John Carroll, Tom Hanlon & Conor Boland Tomy Garvey & Adam Mesbur
-----	--

Lady Milne Trials - 12-13 Nov

1st	Joan Kenny & Jeannie Fitzgerald. Teresa Rigney & Siobhan Part Rebecca Brown-O'Keeffe & Gilda Pender
-----	---

Master Pairs - 10-11 Dec

1st	Nick FitzGibbon & Adam Mesbur
2nd	Pat Cassidy & Billy Ronan
3rd	Karel De Raeymaeker & James Heneghan
4th	Fred Barry & Paul Porteous

Upcoming Fixtures - Jan to Mid April 2023

Date	Event	Venue
January 2023		
6-8	Camrose Trophy, Weekend 1	Belfast
14	National Pairs Championship <i>Jackson Cup - Women's Pairs</i> <i>Revington Cup - Men's Pairs</i>	Westgrove Hotel, Clane
15	National Teams Championship <i>McMenamin Bowl - Women's Teams</i> <i>Geraldine Trophy - Men's Teams</i>	Westgrove Hotel, Clane
20-22	Cork Congress	Maryborough Hotel, Douglas
22	O'Kennedy Cup Open Teams	Dun Laoghaire BC
27-29	Ennis Congress	Online BBO
28-29	Regional Teams Weekend	Various
February 2023		
3-5	Teltscher Trials 2022/23	Templeogue Bridge Centre
3-5	Galway Congress	Ardilaun Hotel, Galway
6-10	CBAI Simultaneous Pairs Week	Local Clubs
11-12	Holmes Wilson Cup <i>National Open Teams Championship</i>	Mount Wolseley Hotel
17-19	Bankers Masters Congress	25 Waterloo Road, Dublin 4
17-19	Junior Camrose & Peggy Bayer	Manchester
17-19	CBAI Novice & Intermediate Congress	Clayton Silver Springs, Cork
24-26	Tralee Congress	Rose Hotel, Tralee
March 2023		
3-4	Camrose Trophy, Weekend 2	City North Hotel, Gormanstown
3-5	Malahide Congress	Grand Hotel, Malahide
11-12	IBU Burke & O'Connor Trophies <i>Inter-County Open & Intermediate Teams</i>	Cavan Crystal Hotel
24-26	Clonmel Congress	Clonmel Park Hotel
April 2023		
1-2	National Pairs Championships	Falls Hotel, Ennistymon
15-16	Moylan Cup - Invitation only <i>IBU All-Ireland Pairs Championship</i>	Malahide Bridge Centre
18-20	IBU Seniors' Congress	Cavan Crystal Hotel

NIBU News

Michael McFaul

The NIBU is experiencing a gradual return to face-to-face bridge with the larger clubs finding they can muster a respectable turnout. At the same time, weekly NIBU and club online events continue to attract a regular clientele. It is likely that the mixed menu of live and online bridge will be with us for the foreseeable future and it is surely incumbent on bridge players to capitalise on the strengths of both models rather than seeing one as a threat to the other. The NIBU calendar for the current season will feature competitions played on whatever medium is deemed suitable.

A new online Senior League commenced on 4 October. Eleven teams are competing in what is effectively the equivalent of the former Premier 1 and 2 Leagues. Matches are played on fixed dates each month with the former league rules applying in the main. In order to maintain the credibility of the play and results process, all matches will be played on RealBridge.

At the same time an online Intermediate League features nine teams playing on BBO.

Following recent trials, the following teams have been selected:

Camrose

Ian Hamilton & Ian Lindsay
Diane & David Greenwood
Michael Coffey & Fergal O'Shea
NPC: Michael McFaul

Lady Milne

Diane Greenwood & Zrinka Kokot
Sandie Millership & Anne Hassan
Anne Fitzpatrick & Mary Kelly-Rogers
NPC: Alan Hill

The first Camrose weekend will be held at La Mon Hotel, Belfast over the weekend 6-8 January 2023.

New 3-NIGHT
BRIDGE HOLIDAY
AT KNOCK HOUSE HOTEL



KNOCK HOUSE HOTEL

Enjoy an excellent 3 NIGHT Bridge Holiday and expert tuition from
IRELAND'S BEST BRIDGE TUTORS,
MICHAEL & MARLENE O'CONNOR AND MICHAEL O'LOUGHLIN

**All-inclusive
3 night
Bridge Holidays**



Date	Type of Holiday	Rate pp	Single Rate
12,13,14 January 2023	Bridge Holiday	€285	€285 (NO Single Supplement)
2,3,4 March 2023	Bridge Holiday	€285	€285 (NO Single Supplement)
9,10,11 October 2023	Bridge Holiday	€285	€285 (NO Single Supplement)
13,14,15 November 2023	Bridge Holiday	€285	€285 (NO Single Supplement)
29,30,31 August 2023	Beginners / Improvers Bridge Holiday	€345	€375 Single

HOLIDAY INCLUDES: 3 Nights Dinner, Bed & Breakfast
FREE Activities during your Bridge Holiday include... Bridge Every Evening | Bridge Clinics each afternoon | Bingo Bonanza | Table Quiz | Cookery Demo | Flower Arranging Session
NO BRIDGE PARTNER REQUIRED






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Bidding Quiz 1

By Bob Pattinson



Welcome to the new style Irish Bridge Journal and our first Bidding Quiz.

Each issue will contain eight bidding problems, with are ten marks available for each.
The core bidding system is set out on the following page.

Best of luck!

Question 1

Dealer W. All Vul

♠ AJ108
♥ J642
♦ AJ105
♣ 9

W	N	E	S
1♦	P	1♥	P
2♥	P	3♠ ¹	P
?			

¹ 4+ hearts, singleton spade, slam interest

Question 2

Dealer W. All Vul

♠ -
♥ 2
♦ AQJ10653
♣ AKQ87

W	N	E	S
P	P	P	?

Question 3

Dealer E. All Vul

♠ -
♥ KJ843
♦ KJ72
♣ J1082

W	N	E	S
		1♠	P
1NT ¹	P	2♦ ²	P
?			

¹ 6-12: Forcing one round
² 3+ suit (longer ♦ than ♣)

Question 4

Dealer S. All Vul

♠ J
♥ 95
♦ AQJ6
♣ J109754

W	N	E	S
			1♠
2♥	2♠	?	

Question 5

Dealer N. All Vul

♠ AKJ75
♥ A9
♦ A43
♣ J53

W	N	E	S
	1♦	1♥	1♠
P	2♦	P	?

Question 6

Dealer W. All Vul

♠ AQJ107
♥ A2
♦ K652
♣ 75

W	N	E	S
1♥	P	1♠	P
2♣	P	2♦ ¹	P
3♣	P	?	

¹ 4th suit forcing to game

Question 7

Dealer S. E/W Vul

♠ AJ105
♥ 962
♦ 1053
♣ AJ2

W	N	E	S
			P
1♦	1♥	1♠	P
3♦	P	?	

Question 8

Dealer N. All Vul

♠ QJ753
♥ A53
♦ KQ2
♣ Q9

W	N	E	S
	P	1♦	P
1♠	P	2♦ ¹	P
?			

¹ 6+ cards

Entries to:

biddingquiz@cbaire

by 28th February 2023

At the end of the fourth issue a €50 CBAI gift voucher will be awarded to the leading contestant in each of the following categories:

- Best Novice/ Intermediate B
- Best Intermediate A
- Best Master (below Life Master)

Please remember to state your grade in your entry

Bidding Quiz System

General Approach:

Five card majors, three+ minors, 2/1 GF,
1NT = 15-17,
2♣ = art GF with 2♦ waiting response

Balanced Hands

4333, 4432, 5332
(with five minor)

12-14 and 18-19 open 1♣/♦

20-22 : 2NT (may include five card major hence play puppet Stayman)

Major Suit Responses

1NT = 6-10 F1:
2♣/♦ rebid may be three if 5332

2♣/♦/♥ = 2/1 GF

3♣/♦/♥ over 1♠ opening and 2♣/3♣/♦ over 1♥ opening = four card+ trump support:
8-11 : first or second round control in bid suit.

3M = 4-7 and 4+ trumps

2NT = Jacoby 16+:
4+ trumps:

Opener bids a singleton at the three level, a second five card suit at the four level, rebids 3M with 17-19, 4M with 12-14, and 3NT with 15-16.

Responses to 1nt Opening (15-17)

2♣ = non-promissory Stayman

2♦/♥/♠/NT = transfers

3♣/♦/♥/♠ = long suits with slam interest

Two Level Suit Opening Bids

Bid	Meaning	Responses
2♣	23+ or equivalent unbalanced	2♦ = waiting bid
2♦/♥/♠	6-10 : six card suit, using rule of two, three or four depending upon different vulnerability of the two sides	2NT = enquiry: opener signs off with three level rebid of own suit with minimum and bids a new suit to show a feature or 3NT with a feature in the opening suit

Three/Four Level Opening Bids

Bid	Meaning	Responses
3♣/♦/♥/♠	6-10 : six or seven card suit	New suit forcing
3NT	Eight card broken minor suit	4♣ = pass / convert 4♦ = interested in club slam but only part score in diamonds 5♣ = willing to play in game in either minor 4M = asking bid; interest in game in either major: seeks control in bid major 4NT = name suit and quality: 5♣/♦ = confirms suit but denies Ace or King: 5♥/♠ = respective suit and holds Ace or King in that minor
4♣/♦	Namyats: eight card solid major in ♥/♠ : three key cards	Bid of intermediate suits 4♦/♥ asks for shortage and 4M denies any shortage
4♥/♠	Eight card broken suit: less than three key cards	4NT = Roman key card Blackwood : 1430

Opening Side Action over Interference

Bid	Meaning
Negative double	Shows values in the remaining two suits
Support Double	Opener confirms three card trump support, so a raise of the suit shows four card support
4th suit	Forcing: asking for more information
Cue bid	Unassuming and forcing: asks for more information
Jump cue	Has a long running suit: seeks NT stop
2NT	Relay to 3♣: this may then be passed or converted to a new long weak suit; thus a direct new suit at the 3 level is GF
Transfers after own 1NT is overcalled	Double /new suit/2NT are all transfers to the next suit (2NT over 2♠); follow up in second suit is game forcing; transfer to intervening suit asks for NT stop, and now accepting the transfer denies a stop and 3NT confirms one

Intervening Bidding

Bid	Meaning
1NT overcall	16-18
Weak jump overcalls	6-10
Two suited overcalls	Direct cue = two highest suits
5-5 : either 6-10 or 15+	2NT = two lowest suits; 3♣ = two remaining suits
Defence to 1NT	Double = minor two suiter or major two suiter: advancer assumes minors first 2♣ = three suiter with clubs; 2♦ = three suiter with diamonds 2♥/♠ = either six card suit or the bid suit plus a minor side suit: 2NT asks for the minor

Slam Bidding

Roman key card Blackwood (1430) and Kickback in the minors (1430)

Play Quiz 1

BJ O'Brien



Welcome to the new style Irish Bridge Journal and our first Play Quiz.

Each issue will contain four play problems. There are ten marks available for each – seven for your recommended line of play and three for your analysis.

Best of luck!

Hand 1

Contract 3NT. Teams. Lead ♣3

You play ♣Q which wins. Proceed.

Dummy			
♠ 432			
♥ 3			
♦ AQ10952			
♣ Q85			
♠	N	♠	
♥	W	♥	
♦	E	♦	
♣ 3	S	♣	
♠ AKJ9			
♥ K642			
♦ K43			
♣ A6			
Declarer			

Hand 2

Contract 3NT. Teams. Lead ♠3

Dummy			
♠ KQ			
♥ KQJ74			
♦ AQ874			
♣ 3			
♠ 3	N	♠	
♥	W	♥	
♦	E	♦	
♣	S	♣	
♠ A872			
♥ A3			
♦ 63			
♣ Q8762			
Declarer			

Hand 3

Contract 3NT. Teams. Lead ♠J

Dummy			
♠ 832			
♥ 10973			
♦ 954			
♣ AK9			
♠ J	N	♠	
♥	W	♥	
♦	E	♦	
♣	S	♣	
♠ AKQ			
♥ AQ			
♦ AK73			
♣ 7532			
Declarer			

Hand 4

Contract 1NT. Teams. Lead ♦5

Dummy			
♠ J108			
♥ AJ73			
♦ K94			
♣ KJ7			
♠	N	♠	
♥	W	♥	
♦ 5	E	♦	
♣	S	♣	
♠ 9732			
♥ K84			
♦ 1062			
♣ 1064			
Declarer			

Entries to:

playquiz@cbaie

by 28th February 2023

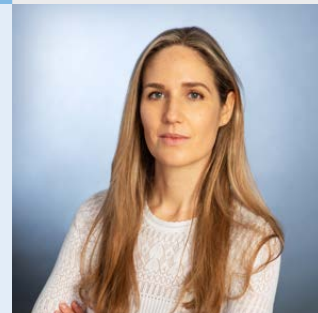
At the end of the fourth issue a €50 CBAI gift voucher will be awarded to the leading contestant in each of the following categories:

- Best Novice/ Intermediate B
- Best Intermediate A
- Best Master (below Life Master)

Please remember to state your grade in your entry

The Game

A short story by Sarah Gilmartin



Two couples form a friendship over regular games of bridge but suspicion clouds it

Editor's note: Sarah learned bridge with her great friend Fionnuala McInerney, and represented Ireland at Junior level. These days Sarah plays less frequently but always to a high standard. Journalism is her professional calling, and she has regularly reviewed books for the broadsheets as well as lecturing at third level. Her first novel, "Dinner Party", was published in 2021 to widespread acclaim. This short story, "The Game", came a couple of years earlier and won a prestigious award. Sarah has kindly agreed to have the story carried over two Journal editions, and we are grateful as well as indebted. Her follow-up book, "Service" comes out in May 2023. EM

We became friends with the Murrays through the Thursday game at the club. In the stuffy basement of a Georgian building on Pembroke Street, we took lessons for an hour at seven, then played cards upstairs in the grand reception rooms for the rest of the evening. After the game, some of us retreated to the basement, to the small members' bar that did a fine trade in subsidised pints and miniature bottles of wine. It was always the same crowd, the bridge fanatics with their fervent arguments, the older players who could sleep late in the morning, some slack-eyed students sniffing about for free booze, or else people like us, in our forties, re-emerging into the world fresh and curious after a decade of dirty nappies and a PhD in chauffeuring.

The men hit it off first, bonding over an absurd ten-card heart suit and the stark fact that neither of them had a clue what to do with it. My husband Bill was a handsome and gregarious man who made friends easily. People were drawn to the arrogance of his gestures, the formidable jaw, the deep colour of his wide, intelligent eyes. His facility for swearing, which had initially threatened our membership chances, was now an accepted part of the camaraderie between players at the end of the night, and it was during one particularly long stream of curses that Gareth came over to where we were standing at the bar, put his bearish arm around Bill, looked at me with a deadpan demeanour and said, I'm sorry for your troubles. In the midst of the laughter, his wife Rachel appeared in a shimmer of grey silk and musk perfume.

We each had a copy of the hands and the conversation flowed, though personally I found it hard to visualise the cards from the tiny numbers and symbols on the sheet of paper. There was something inert about the way a hand looked when all four sides were revealed, no mystery or suspense, just the flat materiality of mistakes made, and lessons learnt—until the next time. It impressed me how invested the others were, Bill with his sardonic comments, Gareth grunting amiably at his own errors of judgement, and Rachel, studying the sheet with an intensity that was both manufactured and beautiful, her long maroon fingernails tracing the game.

'But if you'd led the Jack, Bill?' she said.

'Fuck the Jack,' said Bill. 'Where does that get you?'

Rachel laughed and signalled to the barman with a solitary finger. She had honey-blonde hair, a delicate mouth in a fine-boned, brooding face. He came to take our order, skipping an elderly gentleman who was clearly before us. I tried to acknowledge the oversight, smiling weakly at the barman, before nodding at the poor old codger whose three no-trump I'd brutally knocked in the penultimate round. But the barman was already in some cheerful conversation with Gareth. I sat back on my stool with an apologetic shrug.

'Will we get a big bottle?' Rachel pointed to the empty miniatures.

'Sure,' I said. 'Let's split the hangover.'

She looked at me properly for the first time, tossed her hair to one side. "You're a hoot," she said. "Bill, your wife is a hoot."

'It depends on the time of day,' said Bill.

I gave him a playful shove and the three of us laughed like old friends.

At some point the results were announced. We'd come nowhere but the Murrays were third and they generously put their winnings towards the drinks. A dentist from Rathgar went by and congratulated Rachel. 'That was some hand,' he said. 'I'm still wondering how you made it to four spades.' Rachel smiled shyly. Gareth coughed and said it was better to be born lucky than good. He gave a barrelling laugh that suited his pleasantly heavy-set stature; even his eyes were heavy-lidded, blinking in time to the joke.

After the third round of drinks, we dispensed with the cards. Questions that would have been awkward, nosy, just a short time before were suddenly vital: professions, children, addresses, we got through it all with the alarming speed of semi-inebriated Dubliners.

It was established that Gareth and Bill were both in finance with companies that often did business together and once we'd accepted the fact that their paths had never crossed in almost twenty years of working around the corner from each other, the attention shifted to the wives.

Rachel was a sculptor who ran a gallery off the main street in Blackrock, where she sold mostly the work of other artists. I couldn't tell if she was being modest, or if the gallery was the logical endpoint for someone who'd failed in her career and wanted to remain on the fringes of the arts. We were four or five glasses in at this stage and I knew I was projecting my own failures. I couldn't help it—she was so sleekly dressed, fluid in her movements, with the most charming way of dipping her head when she talked about herself. Here is a woman who understands disappointment, I thought, here is a new friend.

'What about yourself?' said Gareth, excusing himself as he coughed.

'Miriam?' said Bill, who was starting to slur his words. 'She's a writer.'

'I am not,' I said. 'I've written one or two stories, decades ago now.'

'Why did you stop?' said Rachel.

I looked at my glass. 'I don't know, life just—'

'She's the best mother I know,' said Bill.

I smiled placidly, but really I wanted to take the pen attached to Gareth's scorecard and draw a large X over my husband's face.

'How many?' said Rachel.

'Four,' I said. 'For our sins.'

It was such an automatic phrase, like reeling off a licence plate or mobile phone. Usually the number was met with glee or suspicion or the kind of laced compliment that can stick in your gut for days—where do you get the patience?—but Gareth just said, 'Very good,' while Rachel smiled and got up to go for a cigarette.

'You're so lucky,' she said baldly.

I liked her for that.

*

Over the course of the year, we became known as a foursome in the club. The Murrys were punctual people who always had a table ready as we snuck in the galley door a few minutes into the lesson. On a bad night we might only arrive in time for the game and Bill would be like a boar for the initial hands, huffing and puffing

over any perceived mistake, making a show of us to our opponents with his ferociously superior nostrils and the petulant way he would toss down his cards as if the order of them didn't matter a damn. In his head he thought he was some kind of superstar. He was the teenage version of himself, the gifted footballer who'd almost made it, the top goal scorer who would shout at his teammates for giving away a free. Back then, I used to cheer from the sideline in my uniform and knee-high socks, the envy of my friends. Because when you were fourteen years old, that kind of behaviour was cool.

Bill would apologise after the game if he'd been particularly obnoxious—he was good like that, able to climb down quickly from his heightened emotional states—and sometimes I'd accept his apology and sometimes I'd give him a look that said, Don't come near me if you value your testicles. On such evenings, Rachel and I would take our Sauvignon Blanc and huddle in the only corner of the room that didn't have a heater. Still, it would be roasting, for the senior members who had an astounding ability to sit for hours in multiple layers of clothes in sauna-like conditions. It was a constant battle to get air into the club. Some of the seniors might not hear you when you were sitting beside them trying to explain a bid, but they could catch the creak of a sash window lifting two floors away. Looking back, that was one of the great joys of the bridge world, to get so many different generations in the same building week after week, like a vast, continually expanding family, whose strengths and foibles you came to know as well as your own.

In that way of teenage girls or sisters, or any women who become intimate friends, Rachel and I developed a shorthand when it came to the other players, including our own husbands. When Gareth drew the ire of the room for slow play, I'd grimace at her behind his head, watch her shoulders hunch as she tried not to laugh. If Bill's gruff instructions were coming at me too quickly, one after the other like pellets from a BB gun, I knew I could look around the room and find Rachel, her bemused half-smile, the way she could arch one perfectly shaped eyebrow in a quick, comical peak. I knew I could find her at the end of the night, sit into the musky comfort of her, let the tensions and triumphs of the game release. I would follow her to the shed in the back garden where she smoked thin white cigarettes that made her look European. If I was drunk enough I might have one myself, and the next morning, without fail, my eldest daughter Leah would sit across from me at the breakfast table and plead with me not to get cancer. Don't you know how bad it is, Mum? And then the younger ones would join in and I would wish them all back to the age of toddlers, before they had the ability to reason, before myself and Bill had taught them the difference between right and wrong.

*

At the weekends we started to go to congresses that were held in the function rooms of identikit, mid-rate hotels the length of the country. Wexford, Sligo, Drogheda. I'd like to say we got to see some of Ireland in our travels, but generally we arrived on a Friday night just in time for the mixed and rarely left the hotel, except to squeeze in an early-bird Chinese before the final round on Saturday. Sticky ribs and edible nests and sizzling platters of beef in dimly-lit rooms where you had to watch what you were drinking if you were in contention for a prize. No matter how long the break, we were always tight for time, rushing back, playing the first few rounds in a speedy haze of cheap wine and monosodium glutamate before someone, usually Gareth, had the sense to order coffees. Things would get serious for a while, and if we were lucky, one of us would place and the drinks would flow freely into the early hours.

Bill and I rarely did well in the pairs—not disastrously, middle of the pack—but Rachel and Gareth often came in the top three and the more we travelled, the better they became. Outwardly I was happy for them, but I spent many a night in various hotel bedrooms, tossing and turning on saggy mattresses, wishing we could be as good. They had an ease in their partnership that extended beyond the game—the way Gareth had a pen ready before she went looking, the packet of antacids she kept for him in her purse, how he sometimes held a chair for her at the bridge table, while the rest of us scrambled like beetles to our seats. The Murrays had an enviable relationship and secretly I coveted their life. Bill was more direct about his feelings. He bought them rounds, marvelled over their scorecards, belittled our own partnership by highlighting our repeated mistakes. At such times, Rachel came to my defence, painfully excusing my errors, pinning all sorts of logic to decisions I'd made entirely off the cuff.

On the Sundays, the four of us would play together in the teams, a type of game I preferred as smaller mistakes went unpunished. We'd return to the Murrays at the end of the rounds with good scorecards, only to find them with better results. I couldn't understand how they did it. They were decent players, I knew, but it was something more. The Murrays were lucky people—cats that could spring onto walls, hurtle up trees away from danger, and by comparison, Bill and I were slow, flea-riddled dogs, barking at our shadows on the ground. Nevertheless, we began to place in competitions, and it wasn't long before other players took notice. For a while we basked in the congratulations, our four names called out together at the club on Thursdays before play—second in the Kilkenny congress, first in the invitational, top of the leader board in a ruthless competition up North. But winners who always win eventually lose the crowd. At some point, the air in the room changed. Voices dropped; laughter diminished.

Mouths that said hello, eyes that said, look who's back again.

Inevitably, it made the four of us closer. We started to see each other outside of bridge. Gareth and Bill played golf. Rachel would come over for coffee and end up staying half the day. She befriended our youngest daughter, Ava. She took her shopping for her first pair of rollerblades. She helped her with her art project. She bought her ice-cream from the kiosk on the pier.

We lived in Booterstown, barely ten minutes from their house on Carysfort Avenue, and often we would carpool to the weekend competitions. The morning of the Limerick congress, Gareth's silver Mercedes pulled into our drive, followed by a short, polite honk like the noise of a toy car.

Bill rushed me out the door as I was trying to explain to his mother the difference between PG and over 15s. It was futile, I knew, because Leah could convince her grandmother to let them watch porn if she wanted to, but I felt it was necessary to at least feign resistance.

'They're here,' said Bill, from the hall. 'Come on. They're waiting.'

I kissed my children goodbye and turned for my bag, but he had the case gone into the car already and was sitting smugly in the back seat behind Rachel by the time I'd closed the door.

'Sorry,' I said, getting in. 'The kids are a nightmare.'

'Don't blame the kids,' said Bill. 'She was at the hairdresser at eight this morning getting a blow-dry. For bridge!'

I felt a hot flush the length of my body, the sweat bursting in thousands of tiny droplets from my beautifully manicured crown.

'Don't mind him,' said Rachel. 'You look gorgeous.'

'Miriam must have her eye on a sprightly septuagenarian,' said Gareth.

I forced myself to join the laughter but when the talk turned to a recent slam hand, I closed my eyes for a few minutes, relieved. I regretted the blow-dry, a last minute decision to mitigate a prolonged period of greasy skin and lank hair that I feared was the beginning of early menopause. And it was also, I realised now as their voices rose around me, a pathetic attempt to match Rachel's easy glamour, the barely made-up beauty of her face, the musky uniqueness and grace that no amount of hair styling could emulate.

'Then he practically accused us of cheating,' Rachel's voice cut across my depression.

'Who did?' I said, sitting forward.

'Is your belt on?' Bill said.

I hissed at him with my eyes and he held up his hands peaceably.

'The couple from Stillorgan,' said Rachel. 'The ones who barely know their diamonds from their hearts.'

'When was this?'

'Last Thursday,' said Rachel. 'The five clubs hand.'

'Where you should go down,' said Bill. 'Like everyone else.'

'Can I help it if the opposition are useless?'

'There's no point getting worked up,' said Gareth, who was driving at eighty kilometres in the fast lane, somehow blind to the flashing lights behind us.

'Well, it's happened before,' said Bill. 'At the Athlone congress.'

I kicked him just as Rachel turned in her seat. The faulty boiler inside me triggered again and the make-up on my forehead started to slide as she arched an eyebrow.

'What do you mean by that, Bill?' she said.

'He doesn't mean anything,' said Gareth. 'Isn't that right, Bill? Do we have time to stop at Junction 14 for coffee?'

'Not really,' I said, though we probably did. I wanted to get to the hotel and check in. I'd call home, steady myself before the day ahead.

Rachel was still facing us with cool curiosity.

'Bill just means-' I said.

'I mean that people get suspicious if you're consistently beating the odds. Simple as that.'

There was silence for a few seconds, just the thrum of four wheels along the motorway. I pressed the window button but it was child-locked, a fact I would turn over in my mind in the coming months, as if the strangeness of it—this childless couple with their child-locked car—could provide some sort of answer to the rest of the debacle.

'People like to jump on a thing,' said Rachel. 'Once someone complains, it starts to get wings. Completely unfair.'

'No smoke,' said Bill, but he was laughing now, we all were as Gareth finally pulled into the slow lane to take the exit for Junction 14.

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To be concluded in next Issue!



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