

AN HONORS eBook FROM MASTER POINT PRESS

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# Winning at the Club

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# Club Bridge in 2020

Bridge in 2020 went online at the club. Running the online games presented a looking glass opportunity to understand how a myriad of club players embraced their bridge. Daily opportunities observing club players making bids and plays that surprised me, started me on a crusade to understand the why. And then onto, "how can I help the club player?"

Club players want rules, they want to be able to remember the rules, and then by following these rules provide themselves with contentment with their bridge prowess. Through their rule competency they can justify each of their bridge actions. Their classic rule is "points". They count their points, maybe adding points for suit length or for suit shortness, and then that magic number is the sole determiner of their bid.

However bridge is about thought and judgment, not the application of rules. Bidding is about evaluating how many tricks your side might win in a contract and then bidding that contract. Learning a bidding system and remembering how many points and the suit length, bids show, gives you a seat at the bridge table. It enables you to participate in the "mechanics" of a bridge game but it does not make you a "winning bridge player". Many club players get stuck in the mechanics and make limited progress towards becoming a "winning bridge player". Tragically, newer players are advised by experienced "mechanical players" to follow the rules they are stuck on, and not to deviate.

"Winning bridge players" are constantly thinking and visualising what they might be able to bid and then make. As we mature in our years it becomes more of an effort to think and to seek out opportunities. There is a strong tendency for older bridge players to revert to playing on auto-pilot and become more mechanical as a player.

My challenge to all club players is yes to have processes and guidelines, but also to be able to think and to always be questioning themselves about how many tricks they might win? No rules. Just thought about tricks.



If you are able to stop and think about the possibilities of a bridge hand rather than laze into a mechanical, auto-pilot mode, apart from exercising your cognitive self, your enjoyment and results will flourish.

## **Winning at the Club – the Menu**

Whilst overseeing each online club game I selected a hand for my “Hand of the Day” lesson that I shared before the following day’s online game. Seeing the full results from each table, for each board enabled me to identify the competency gaps prevalent in club players. Immediately I could see how I could target my advice and best assist their understanding and knowledge. These lessons populate this book which will help club players to evolve into “winning bridge players”.

My guidance takes a pragmatic focus on what works at the club. “Winning at the Club” bridge, is different from expert bridge. It is achievable by all club players willing to think and to challenge themselves.

I capture myths and mis-advice commonly espoused in the “Club Chat” paragraphs. I’m sure all club players will be able to relate to and learn from these “chats”.

## **The Journey**

I kept the hands in chronological order rather than group them into subject chapters. This way readers can share in the journey; hands that are dealt at the club are not grouped into themes. Digest one or two hands each day and store away my advice to draw upon for future hands whilst playing at the club.

Follow my crusade, that starts in early June and culminates in mid December. If you can apply much of my advice, and then store the experienced gathered, winning at the club will be yours to enjoy.

As the hands are in chronological order I have included a Thematic Index so that readers can review hands on a subject basis. Plus there is a short summary of our Club bidding system in the Appendix.



**Hand 1:** Thursday 4 June. East deals, all vulnerable.

East opens 2♥(weak), what does South bid?

♠ A7  
♥ 103  
♦ AKJ108732  
♣ 9

Let me do some thinking for South. Eight card suits are trumps, however diamonds is a minor suit so 3NT may be best. I will assume my diamonds will win 8 tricks (♦Q will fall under ♦AK), however bidding 3NT without a heart stop is high risk. I could bid 3♦ and optimistically hope partner can respond 3NT. I could jump to 4♦, showing a strong hand and strong diamonds. As East's 2♥ is a weak bid, any jump by me is strong. Holding two small hearts is a poor holding if I declare the hand, so how can I make North declarer? My best try is to cue-bid 3♥ forcing North to bid, asking North to bid 3NT if they have a heart stop. Yes after this thinking, South bids 3♥.

North held:           ♠ KJ842  
                          ♥ K642  
                          ♦ -  
                          ♣ K8629

Over South's 3♥, North bids 3NT as they have a heart stop.

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
-	-	2♥(weak)	3♥
pass	3NT	all pass	

South's clean living is rewarded when the diamonds run for 8 tricks and 3NT makes 10 or 11 tricks. Note that North does not bid 3♠ over South's cue-bid of 3♥, because South's cue-bid asks North if they have a heart stop, North co-operates by bidding 3NT.

Club Chat: Joyce says "even if North has a stop in hearts, I can't stay in 3NT when I have a singleton club, I'm bidding my diamonds. The club suit may be wide open, and East who opened 2♥ may lead a club." But that is two big "maybes", the likelihood in practice is tiny. Joyce, rarely wins; winners at the club play hands like this in 3NT rather than a minor suit.

Club Results: No pair at the club played 3NT. Most played in a contract of 4♦, and no declarer shone in the play:

South declares 4♦:

♠ KJ842  
♥ K642  
♦ -  
♣ K8629

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A7  
♥ 103  
♦ AKJ108732  
♣ 9

West leads ♥7 (it's obviously a singleton as East opened 2♥), South plays ♥2 from dummy and East wins ♥J. East cashes ♥A (West discards) and then leads ♥5, what does South play?

Every club South trumped the third heart and made at most 9 tricks. South should discard ♣9, West will ruff, but South will claim the remaining 10 tricks when the ♦Q falls.

Not one declarer made 10 tricks when East continued with a third heart. South's club is a loser, throw it away and force East to ruff. Simple when you see it!

Summary:

Think tricks. South should assume they have 9 top tricks and seek North's co-operation to bid to 3NT. Bridge is not about counting points, it's about counting and winning tricks.



**Hand 2:** Friday 5 June. North deals, all vulnerable.

♠ Q1094  
♥ 9  
♦ KQ976  
♣ QJ9

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
-	pass	pass	1♥
pass	?		

What does North bid? Bidding by a passed hand after partner opens 1♥ or 1♠ is different. Many play the Drury convention in this position, a response of 2♣ = three card major support, 9-11 points, and 2♦ = four card major support and 8-11 points<sup>1</sup>.

However if you are not playing Drury, I recommend to reply 2♣ or 2♦ should show six card suits. If you cannot respond 1♠ (to 1♥) and do not have a six card minor, respond 1NT. On this hand, North best responds 1♠, not 2♦.

If North's hand were: ♠ Q94  
♥ 9  
♦ KQ976  
♣ QJ109

North would respond 1NT, not 2♦.

If North's hand were: ♠ 984  
♥ 9  
♦ KQ10976  
♣ QJ9

North would respond 2♦. But if a 2♦ opening is a weak two in diamonds, why didn't North open 2♦ with this hand?

If your 2♦ opening is a weak two, then there is little use for a natural 2♦ response to 1♥ or 1♠ after you have passed. So smarties, play 2♦ as the Drury convention showing at least three card support for partner's major and 9-11 points. So then if you are a passed hand, and you raise partner's opening of 1♥ to 2♥, or 1♠ to 2♠, you'll have only 6-8 points.

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<sup>1</sup> Classic Drury is to play only the 2♣ response as Drury which doesn't differentiate between 3 or 4 card support. The purpose of Drury is to check if partner has possibly opened light in 3<sup>rd</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> seat. If partner has opened light it allows you to stop in two of your major suit fit.

Back to the actual North hand, North responds 1♠ (looking for the major suit fit) which South raises to 2♠. North's bid?

♠ Q1094  
 ♥ 9  
 ♦ KQ976  
 ♣ QJ9

<u>West</u>	<u>North</u>	<u>East</u>	<u>South</u>
-	pass	pass	1♥
pass	1♠	pass	2♠
pass	?		

Does North try for game (bid 3♠<sup>1</sup>) or pass?

With no aces and a singleton in South's five card suit, it's close but with these drawbacks, I might pass. However North does have the magic "5431" shape, so I might raise to 3♠. Answer, either pass or raise to 3♠, do whatever seems best at the time. As is the case here, sometimes there is no definitive answer, but when you make a choice make an informed choice.

South held:

♠ A852  
 ♥ AK1054  
 ♦ 854  
 ♣ 2

North makes 10 tricks comfortably on the actual hand. If North does raise 2♠ to 3♠, South would continue to the making 4♠.

Wait, do you agree with South's raise of 1♠ to 2♠? I do not. Those who have read my book, "How to Be a Lucky Player" would have jumped raised 1♠ to 3♠. South has my magic hand shape "5431" with four trumps, and two aces, one with its king. If South does jump to 3♠ over 1♠, North has an easy raise to 4♠.

Introducing "5431" Magic:

Anytime you have "5431" shape, with a trump fit in your four card suit and a source of tricks in your five card suit, bid up. You'll often win two more tricks than your points suggest.

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<sup>1</sup> Experienced players may choose to make a trial suit bid over 2♠, as a way to invite South to bid game in spades. For example; North could bid 3♦.

Bridge in 2020 went online at the club. With daily opportunities to observe players while running games, teacher Matthew Thomson started on a quest to understand why players were so often making bids and plays that surprised him. This led him to ask the question, “How can I best help the club player?”

Selecting a daily hand for lessons shared before each online game saw immediate results, allowing Thomson to refine his advice to best assist his players. This book collects these daily lessons together, and it will help club players develop into winners.

Thomson’s guidance takes a pragmatic approach to what works best at the club. Winning club bridge is different from expert bridge. It’s achievable by all club players willing to think and to challenge themselves. In sections of real-life discussions that he titles “Club Chat”, the author captures myths and misadvice so often present at the club, which all players can relate to and learn from.



**MATTHEW THOMSON** is a former member of the Australian Bridge Team, and has been a finalist in both the Olympiad and the World Bridge Teams. A bridge professional and teacher, he lives in Sydney, Australia with his wife, Cathryn, and with “Chubba”, his Welsh Terrier.

