

# The world of bridge

THE first bridge joke I ever heard was: ‘How do you defeat an Irish slam?’. Answer: ‘Cash your two aces and sit back and wait for partner to take his trump trick.’ Since books on Blackwood were removed from the proscribed list (witchcraft and other black arts), Irish slam bidding has improved enormously and Ireland have won the Camrose trophy four times in the past five years.

Next came the Polish Cue-bid. Your right-hand opponent opens 1♥ and you bid 3♥, meaning: ‘I have a running minor, do you have a heart stop?’ Quite a sensible agreement, but in Poland the 3♥ bid means: ‘I have a heart stop, do you have a running minor?’

I spent a couple of weeks in Beijing last October, watching England’s bridge triumphs and collecting material for this article. I asked a number of Poles about the Polish Cue-bid. They sighed and assured me it had nothing to do with Poland and was, in fact, Hungarian.

The Australians told me about the Tasmanian Asking Bid. You open 1♣ and your left-hand opponent shows a good club holding by asking if the 1♣ is natural.

I also learned that Scandinavians use the phrase ‘a Norwegian slam’ for a slam that makes because of a favourable lead, trumps breaking 3-3, and both finesses working. Sounds like sour grapes to me: Norway are the current World and European Champions. The Italians are similarly afflicted: their innumerable title wins are accompanied by mutterings of ‘God is an Italian.’

Italy’s success at bridge has resulted in its being the country with the largest number of exported gadgets, branded as Italian and eagerly adopted by players in the hope that merely using them will improve their game. The most popular of these are Italian Cue-bids (cue-bidding first- or second-round controls), Italian Controls (two for an ace, one for a king), and Italian Discards (odd-even). A 4-3 trump fit is known to some as a Moysian fit, but the

Bulgarians call it an ‘Italian Fit’, dating back to the times when one half of an Italian partnership was playing *Canapé* (opening your shorter suit and rebidding your longer) and the other half wasn’t.

The only country that has tried to compete with Italy is Switzerland. In the days before splinters became popular, Swiss bids of 4♣ and 4♦ over a major-suit opening were good raises to game showing various combinations of controls. There were seemingly endless variations on a theme, including Super Swiss, Control Swiss, Key-card Swiss, Inverted Swiss, plus the more flamboyantly-named Fruit Machine Swiss and Double-barrelled Swiss. Sorry, Switzerland – too much quantity, not enough quality.

Other countries have been even less successful with their designer bridge labels. Some know the Curse of Scotland as the nine of diamonds, but others think the curse of Scotland is that all their best players leave to play in England or America. And as for South African Texas, it sounds as if it was invented by someone as geographically-challenged as Sarah Palin.

A ‘Chinese Finesse’ is where you lead an unsupported honour and attempt a finesse which, if covered, would fail. Where better to see a Chinese finesse in action than in China? I watched this deal in the Round Robin match between Ruritania and Illyria:

E/W Game. Dealer South.			
	♠ J 10 4 2		
	♥ K 7 4 2		
	♦ A 7		
	♣ 10 7 2		
♠ 6		♠ 7	
♥ J 10 9 6		♥ Q 8 3	
♦ K 8 5 3		♦ J 10 6 4 2	
♣ Q 9 5 4		♣ J 8 6 3	
	♠ A K Q 9 8 5 3		
	♥ A 5		
	♦ Q 9		
	♣ A K		



Simon Cochemé

BRIDGE FICTION

West	North	East	South
			2♣
Pass	2♦	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♠	Pass	4♣
Pass	4♦	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♦	Pass	5NT
Pass	6♥	Pass	7NT
All Pass			

West led the jack of hearts and the Ruritanian South studied the dummy. Surely they had agreed that they would show the number of kings in response to 5NT, he thought, not specific kings. He won the lead with the ace of hearts and immediately played the queen of diamond from hand. West played low, the queen held the trick and declarer claimed his grand slam. The Illyrians then had a vigorous exchange of views in which East waved the jack-ten of diamonds under West’s nose and West quoted Andrew Kambites, saying something like (my colloquial Illyrian is a little rusty): ‘But what if declarer has Q-J-10 or Q-J-9?’

I bumped into the Ruritanian declarer later and congratulated him on his play. He thanked me, and told me they were thinking of launching a Ruritanian Club system to boost their image abroad and increase tourism.

‘Only America and Poland have national systems named after the country,’ he said. I told him about Standard English, based on four-card majors, a weak no-trump and strong two bids.

‘That seems very basic,’ he said. ‘What about Full English?’

‘That’s much the same,’ I replied. ‘But with tomatoes, black pudding and extra bacon.’ □