

ONE NIGHT STAND

OR: "How I learnt all I know about bridge in one night of play"

Narrated by Dolly Barton

Friends, this story is true. The hands are REAL, and only the identities of some of the players have been altered to protect the innocent.

The other night was the most amazing session of bridge I have ever experienced in my lifetime of bridge, which stretches all of a year and a half, including the learning phase. The session was amazing because literally every hand had something of interest in it, and I was lucky to have had a visiting 'guru' staying with me, with whom I could go over the hands. Yes, I learnt a heap of things I had not even thought about, but I can truly say that it was as close to everything I know about bridge as I can imagine. So why don't you join me and look at the hands as they happened at the club, in the lowest grade of three, and see what you can learn that will give you that extra edge over the opponents.

This night, I was South, and my partner was Wally Watts. Not that either my name or Wally's means anything much to you. Maybe you'll recall us having been mentioned by Simon or Vera Simple.

The 'guru' shall also remain nameless but I hope his wisdom will live in our readers' memories.

If you doubt the story, you can verify the authenticity of the hands as they indeed occurred at the time by referring to the club's archives, available on request. I hope you enjoy them and the guru's advice and analysis.

Part 1

BOARD 1 DLR N NIL VUL

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

Wally opened 1H, East passed, and I bid 2H. That is where we played it and East led the five of diamonds. Wally played low, West the king and Wally won the ace, played on trumps and later lost two clubs and two spades to make his contract. No big deal, but apparently things could have been different.

Guru: Let's look at East's lead. The lead of fourth from a low honour (jack or ten) can often work out badly. West was in a spot and had to play the king, though 'slotting' the nine is what I would have done if playing with a partner who knows not to underlead aces against a suit contract. The play of the king gives declarer an extra diamond trick, but on this hand it doesn't matter. Look at the club suit. If declarer has to play it himself, there are almost certainly no tricks in clubs unless the same opponent has both ace and king. Declarer will normally lead towards either of the honours and when that loses, try to lead towards the other. Luckily on this hand, both top clubs are in the same hand, a 25% chance.

(hands repeated for convenience)

BOARD 1 DLR N NIL VUL

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

A much better lead is a trump, but not the ace. When the bidding has gone 1H-2H from opponents, it is dangerous to open up a dubious side suit unless there is a good reason. Normally, you would lead a from a good suit and attack declarer, or from a short suit and look for ruffs. Neither is the case here, so looking to prevent any possible 'cross ruff' by declarer, East should lead a trump.

The low trump is best because it keeps control and still gives partner the chance to make an honour, e.g. a singleton queen. Leading the ace and dropping partner's king or queen does not make for a happy partnership! I wouldn't expect anyone in this grade to find a low trump lead, but you may consider it in a similar situation next time.

But there's something even more interesting than the play on this hand. As you can see, apart from the aberrations in 1NT, nearly all Norths played in 2H. However, West, at Match Point scoring, has a perfect Double of 2H. This is for Takeout and suggests to East that EW can compete in any other suit.

The reasoning is clear enough: with a likely fit in one of the other three suits, and with South having made a weak raise, the chances of EW making something are not bad, and if they don't make, the chances of NS making 2H are pretty good.

For 2H, NS will score 110, but even if whatever contract East ends up in is two down, at the given vulnerability NS will score 100 only. NS need to be either psychic, or very clever bidders to be able to penalise EW with any certainty in any suit that East has four cards in. And if North has a better hand, competing may drive them to a level where they may have more difficulty in making the contract.

As you can see, 3D can be made if East plays North for the ace of diamonds, and even one down doubled is only 100. Pushing NS to 3H down one will also score EW a lot of match points.

BOARD 2 DLR E NS VUL

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

East opened 1C, I overcalled 1D, West bid 2C and Wally bid 2S. East bid 3C, I bid 3D, West 4C and Wally 4S. East bid 5C and everyone passed. I started with the ace of diamonds and switched to my singleton spade but East ruffed, drew trumps and ruffed out my king of diamonds, then later discarded a heart on the jack of diamonds, losing just one heart and one diamond. We could have made 5D.

Guru: I quite like Jump Overcalls. This can make bidding understanding easier, though on this hand I wonder whether it would make much difference. Often it comes down to judgement as to how far to bid when both sides clearly have distributional hands. I prefer to make jump overcalls with certain hands, and to base my jump overcalls on the actual number of tricks that I expect to make with my suit as trumps. As well as that, I like to take strict account of the Vulnerability.

There are three vulnerability 'phases': Equal vulnerability (both sides Vulnerable, or both sides Not Vulnerable), adverse (we are but opponents are Not Vulnerable) and favourable (we're Not Vulnerable and opponents are). At adverse vulnerability I like to be within TWO tricks in playing strength of what I bid, at equal vulnerability within THREE, and at favourable vulnerability, within FOUR tricks of what I bid. That way, partner knows that I have at least a six card suit, as well as what my trick expectation is. That makes partner's bidding very much easier. On your hand I would have jumped to Two Diamonds. Based on the expectation that you had a six or seven playing trick hand in diamonds, Wally would have bid immediately to 4S, but after East's 5C bid (West presumably would have bid 3C over your 2D jump) Wally would more than likely have bid 5D. Note that after you had made a STRONG jump overcall and then passed East's 5C bid, Wally would be obliged not to pass the hand out, since your Pass over 5C would be forcing.

Such forcing passes at high levels when opponents compete are also things which I would not expect your grade to be familiar with, and neither would I expect them to have heard about TNT which is another very useful thing that you should learn before I leave here.

TNT is the theory of Total Number of Tricks. I won't go into the intricacies of the full theory, and all you need to know is the very basis of it: *whatever the total number of TRUMPS is between your two hands, that is the total number of TRICKS that you might expect to make with that suit as trumps*. That is on the assumption that your side has the same number of high card points as the opponents. Sometimes it is very easy to tell how many trumps you have between you, other times it is more difficult, but amazing how this theory can help your bidding.

Look at the EW hands: Eleven clubs between them and they can make eleven tricks. No, don't blame yourself for leading a top diamond which allowed your other one to be ruffed out for a heart discard. Declarer can always make 5C on any lead. Remind me to go over the play later, it's worth doing.

NS have nine spades OR diamonds between them but would appear to be able to make 11 tricks in diamonds. Yes, "appear" if you look at some of the results, but that in fact is not the case if you look at the hand "double dummy". Try 5D on a spade lead from West, ruffed by East and the queen of diamonds continuation!

Interesting theory, TNT, isn't it? Doesn't always work, but certainly works a lot of the time. And the great thing about it is that it is quite simple to remember in its rudimentary form: Number of TRUMPS, number of TRICKS.

(Hands repeated for convenience)

BOARD 2 DLR E NS VUL

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

Oh yes, the play in 5C: that, too, is simple, whatever you lead. Declarer leads a diamond (not the eight because Wally can win that with the NINE and break up the end play by a heart switch), and you win your king. Then, whatever you do, declarer draws trumps when necessary as well as ruffs a spade in hand and two diamonds in dummy, ending in dummy, and leads the ten of hearts. When YOU win, you either have to lead a heart round to declarer's AJ, or give declarer a 'ruff and slough' by leading a diamond. The ruff and slough allows declarer to throw a heart from dummy, ruffing in hand, and then play ace of hearts and ruff out your king. The result is the same if North has either or both honours, but the play is not 100% because the ruff and slough will run you out of trumps in dummy and if North has four hearts, declarer may lose another heart.

You should practice such elimination plays, they come up more often than you think, and sometimes even when they don't exist, the opponents will give you a ruff and slough and help you make an impossible contract.

BOARD 3 DLR S EW VUL

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

I opened 1H and West bid 1S. 2C from Wally, 2S from East. I now bid 3H and Wally raised to game in hearts. Despite East's support for spades, West led the ace of clubs! I ruffed, drew just two rounds of top trumps and discarded two spades on the clubs, then gave East the lead with her top trump. She now tried the king of spades and I won the ace. On the run of the hearts, East discarded a diamond. Clearly she had little faith in her partner's overcall, or had she forgotten the bidding by then? I ended up making Six.

Guru: It was certainly abominable defence to lead the ace of clubs. Firstly, North had bid 2C, a 'free bid' which showed a good enough hand to bid at the Two level (generally 10+ HCP) as well as a club suit, more than likely. An ace not supported by the king is generally a very bad lead against a suit contract (as it is against No Trumps also). Aces are meant to take kings, queens, and jacks, not collect twos and threes, which is what happens if you LEAD them. On this hand it was almost certain to set up any clubs in dummy before the spade tricks were set up for EW. Declarer's void was unfortunate and added insult to injury, but no less than West deserved. West also had a pretty pointless overcall, with such a poor spade suit.

The MICHAELS cue bid would have been ideal at a different vulnerability, but this hand is too weak to bid a Michaels on if you adhere to the same trick taking guidelines I suggested to you for jump overcalls on the previous hand. West can count only about four tricks if spades or diamonds are trumps, and that means a Michaels at favourable vulnerability only.

I broke in and pointed out that I did not know what a Michaels cue bid was.

Guru: Oh, a Michaels cue bid is a direct bid in opener's suit, e.g. 1C-2C or 1H-2H. Over a Minor it shows a two suited hand, preferably 5-5, in both Majors; and over a Major, it shows a two suited hand in the other Major and an unspecified Minor. Add this to the Unusual No Trump, which you presumably do play, and you have some useful competitive bidding armoury, as long as you do it according to agreed guidelines and not on any old hand like a lot of people I know seem to do. The West hand is, according to my guidelines, perfect for a Michaels at favourable vulnerability, and a good hand to keep quiet on at unfavourable. The lead should still be a low spade because the ace of clubs is quite silly for the reasons I have just outlined. A singleton trump is normally a bad lead also since it can often pick up a trump honour in partner's hand, as it in fact does this time as you can see, and a doubleton jack is also not good. On this hand the jack of diamonds may work out if declarer thinks West has jack-TEN but not if declarer thinks it is from a doubleton, or singleton. Without a diamond lead declarer almost certainly has a diamond loser if East hangs on to all of them, which they should: West can keep spades and clubs, and East should protect the only suit that declarer might make an extra trick in.

Discarding is often very bad by new players, but all they need to think about is that they should not discard from declarer's second suit, or dummy's long suit. And if PARTNER discards a suit, you should try to guard it at all costs. Amazing how often both defenders hang on to the same suit, totally unnecessarily. Just watch your partner's discards and don't discard the same suit!

BOARD 4 DLR W ALL VUL

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

West opened 1NT and Wally bid 2S. Everyone passed and East led a club, the TWO of all things. West won the king and continued with another. Wally ruffed, played out all the trumps and then overtook the king of diamonds in dummy to make twelve tricks. Not a success, apparently, but clearly others had the same problem in the bidding and many did much worse in the play.

It is amazing to see that half the field could not manage the simple play of overtaking their king with the ace when the queen and jack were also in dummy. So many learners have a distinct aversion to overtaking any trick, even when it is such an obvious case as this. Sometimes it is necessary to overtake partner's trick on defence, but it is more common to see learners overtaking partner's trick, or even ruffing partner's trick, totally by mistake. Maybe that is why they make a rule not to? Overtaking cards in order to effect communication with the other hand is an important habit to cultivate, even I know that.

Guru: The bidding does not surprise me at all. People in your grade do not appear to have the word Double in their vocabulary.

When West opens 1NT the obvious thing for North to do SHOULD be to double. The Double of a 1NT opener is essentially a Penalty Double, and is made on hands of 15+ HCP. Why 15? Because THAT is at least one point better than the 1NT opener, so you would hope to defeat 1NT if partner has enough points to give you the balance of power.

You CAN double 1NT with fewer HCP on hands which have 7 or more potential tricks. With nine near certain tricks, surely North has a fair sort of double? North even has a sixteen count as well. Personally, I would double a 1NT opening with KQJ10xxx and an outside ace unless I was waiting for them to get to Three No Trumps first!

Not that North would expect the bidding to end in 1NT doubled, but if it doesn't then North can bid 3S (or 4S) to show the true strength of the hand. North cannot expect South to work out or guess that e.g. the king of hearts or ace of clubs with nothing else is enough to help North make game, so North must make every effort to get that message across. And if by some miracle 1NT doubled is passed out, NS can look forward to a huge score.

Even a bid of THREE Spades does not do the North hand justice, and South in most cases would not be impressed with their void, though with at least one trick they should raise partner to game, but it helps if North doubles 1NT first.

As it happens, no one has anywhere to go and if North takes the first nine tricks on defence and South overtakes the king of diamonds, NS will score 1700 for six down, maybe even 2000 for taking all the tricks if declarer has discarded wrongly! Don't forget: a Double of a One No Trump opening is for PENALTIES!!!

BOARD 5 DLR N NS VUL

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

After two passes, I opened 1C and West doubled. Wally bid 1H and East passed. I rebid 2C. West now made the mistake of bidding 2NT. I would have thought he'd done enough already, but he was under the mistaken impression that he should rebid No Trumps to show he had 15-16 points. With partner passing, surely West should have kept quiet. Everyone passed and Wally led the seven of clubs, the correct lead from three to an honour in partner's suit.

Declarer did have an entry to dummy in diamonds, and could have picked up my doubleton queen of spades by finessing the JACK after leading a low one from dummy, but chose to LEAD the king immediately and ended up two down. Perhaps Wally should have doubled?

Guru: The bidding by West was certainly very bad, but Wally could not be blamed for thinking that YOU were weaker and that WEST had more like a 19 count, which they should have to bid like that. 'Third in hand', you might well have opened with an 11 or even 10 count, so it would be risky for Wally to assume that you would defeat 2NT. You are the one who should double, if anyone, since Wally had responded 1H.

Over the double of a One level opening bid, I expect that you play the same way that most of the more experienced players do: bid a suit at the One level, in essence ignoring the double, with 6-9 HCP, or 1NT with a more balanced 6-9, and Redouble with 10+. If you knew that Wally had at least a 6 count, and West looked like he or she didn't know what they were doing, perhaps you should double.

West, of course, should have bid One No Trump in the first place, instead of doubling. This shows 16-18 HCP plus a stop in the opened suit, which is exactly what West had. Whether Wally now bids 2C or not, East can remove to 2S which is where the contract should be played. With the ace of clubs in your hand and the queen of spades doubleton, East would probably make Three!

After West's double and Wally's 1H, East clearly thought they did not have enough to bid 1S, though West might have tried once more by doubling your 2C rebid. 2NT was certainly the wrong bid. East, I think, should have bid 1S. When partner makes a takeout double, all that an unforced bid of 1S says is that you think you can make 1S opposite a normal takeout double. It certainly helps to bid 1S in case West wants to compete.

I also must say I have a sneaky preference for a 2C raise over the double rather than 1H. That would probably cut even a more experienced East out. Presumably you play 'Truscott' and 2C is a weak raise. It is just enough to mess up the opponents, though with four card support and the same number of points I would be inclined to bid Three. Wally also could have considered a 1NT bid as a preemptive measure.

In normal circumstances you should always bid your suit, but with West doubling for takeout, a bid of 1NT with North's holding is certainly a good tactical bid.

BOARD 6 DLR E EW VUL

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

I opened this hand 1NT and everyone passed. West led the three of clubs. Clearly they just lead their lowest rather than fourth highest. East won the ace and returned the queen. When the heart finesse worked, West actually covering the queen when I led it, I was able to take ten tricks. Lucky since the defence could have taken the first six tricks and kept me to one.

Guru: Lucky indeed, since in my opinion you should have been playing in Hearts. When you open 1NT, despite his balanced hand, Wally should remove to 2H. It doesn't always produce the best result, but I make a practice of always removing a 1NT opening to a five card Major, irrespective of distribution or suit quality. I've found it produces far more Match Points in the long term. A five card diamond suit is different, the value of diamonds does not make it worth removing to 2D unless you have strong evidence that diamonds will play better. As for the defence, that too left a lot to be desired. West should start with the ace of diamonds before deciding what to do next. A club lead may be best in some circumstances, but that is only when you need to set up clubs AND keep your diamond entries for them.

The big advantage of cashing a top diamond is that you can 'take a look' at dummy, as well as your partner's reaction. If EW play normal signals, East will signal with the eight of diamonds (sufficient, though the queen would be quite unequivocal) and West continue with the ace then the ten which East will overtake to cash two more diamonds. Now ace of clubs followed by the queen does little harm because EW have taken their available tricks before declarer can take theirs.

Against a 3NT contract, West's lead of a low club may well work out best depending on the bidding and any information they have gained from it, but against 1NT passed out I think the top diamond is a standout at pairs OR teams scoring.

In Hearts, of course, there are ten tricks available no matter how opponents defend and I have difficulty in working out how so many made fewer.

Don't your lot know how to finesse? The queen of hearts picks up the king and a club towards the king allows it to make also. Before the club play, declarer can even draw trumps and run spades, discarding a club from hand on the thirteenth spade when they break, or can't they count either, and then try a club from hand trying to sneak the king.

I see someone managed to go to sleep with the ace of clubs, though with that holding what is the point of playing the nine or queen when declarer leads the jack or a little one? How can some make eleven and others eight tricks on this hand?

No, bidding to 4H is overoptimistic on this hand. There are times, but few and far between, when the 1NT opener should raise a 'weak' takeout, but for the time being, I suggest that you a) always take out to a five card or longer Major with UP TO TEN HCP, and b) never raise it, because your 1NT opening has defined your hand sufficiently already.

BOARD 7 DLR S ALL VUL

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

West opened 1D and Wally doubled. East passed and I bid 1S, Pass from West and Wally bid 3S and everyone passed. West chose the two of hearts lead and I ran this round to East's jack and my queen. West won the second lead of trumps and belatedly switched to a diamond, the king. I came back to hand with the queen of spades, which I had carefully preserved, and led a club to the queen which held but then I realised I was short of entries to hand and had to lay down the ace of clubs. When the king didn't drop, I ended up making ten tricks.

Guru: A number of interesting things about this hand. Firstly, the bidding. When Wally doubled West's 1D, East should have bid at least 2D to make life difficult. Such preemptive raises, with good fits and few high card values, are frequently used by the more aggressive and experienced players to good effect. But East passed and you bid 1S and Wally now raised to 3S. This raise should show an even better hand than he had because his double forced you to bid and you might have had a complete Yarborough for your 1S response. Since you had five more points than you did, maybe you should have bid on to game.

Actually, Wally does have a 3S bid, but only just, whereas in an uncontested auction he would definitely have a 3S bid or even 4S bid since your response would have GUARANTEED at least six points. You see the difference? That is why after a Takeout Double, you have to bid less when partner is forced to respond. I note that only one pair bid to 4S. Yes, you were helped by the lead, but there are ten tricks there on any lead, and YOU should have made twelve on the heart lead.

The normal play in clubs is to lead LOW towards a combination like AQx or AQ10x in case a singleton king pops up if you were to lead the jack. Just like you did. And you did have an entry to hand: a heart ruff with your last trump. But even if you hadn't, it's worth noting that this case was different because if you lead the jack and a singleton king does pop up, you can still overtake dummy's three later to get to hand and cash the fifth club. And if West fails to cover, you can play the ten under the jack and repeat the finesse, with the same result. This manoeuvre only works because you have nine clubs between your two hands and is better because of the shortage of entries. Had you followed that course, you would have made all five club tricks and dummy's losing diamond would have gone on your fifth club, the last two tricks being a diamond ruff in dummy and a heart ruff in hand.

The bidding might have been different at other tables, and it is difficult to get to game and probably not even worth it in C-Grade at Match Point scoring.

Had you made Six you would have scored over 90% of the Match Points anyway, but it's interesting to look at how the bidding might go if East bids just 2D over North's Double. South does not have enough to do anything and the bidding is passed back to North, who doubles again. South knows that the double shows extra strength and that South has five more points than they might have, but still not really enough to jump to 3S, so bids 2S. North now has a close decision and will probably pass, but if North does bid 3S then South should certainly bid game now. They can't keep showing a Yarborough when in fact they have a five count and reasonable distribution as well.

BOARD 8 DLR W NIL VUL

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

West passed and Wally opened 1NT and that was the end of the auction. East led the four of spades and Wally played dummy's jack, covered by West's queen and won by the ace. Spades were continued and East switched to a heart. Wally now ducked a diamond and East won and continued hearts. Another diamond ducked and East persisted with hearts but Wally now played the spades and then the diamonds, which fell helpfully, and at the end he led a club towards his king to make a total of nine tricks.

Guru: Wally did well, by not just cashing his tricks but trying to set up more. With the club holding that he has, it is quite safe to lose the lead since the opponents cannot open up the suit without giving him a trick in it, so he is quite safe to play on diamonds and duck twice.

East, however, did not get off to the best start. A spade from three to the king looks unlikely to achieve anything. Better to lead from the four card suit, which is also unlikely to give much away: any high hearts in partner's hand are more than likely finessible anyway since North has the points. Leading, and continuing, hearts may have been better.

You will note that by playing the spades correctly, which is running the jack if West does not cover, declarer can always make eight tricks even if East hits on a club lead to start with. West can take four clubs but declarer makes three spades, three hearts, a club and a diamond for 120 anyway. And that is better than all those people who played in spades.

If all you people play Acoll, I can't understand how everyone isn't playing in 1NT. No, I wouldn't open the West hand. Opening a flat 11 count with clubs, first in hand, is too likely to give partner the wrong impression.

I would, however, have bid 2C after 1NT from North and two passes, as long as we play natural overcalls, and I'm afraid that the people I play with like to show at least two suits over opponents' 1NT. Let me tell you about that some other time though, but if that is the case, then West can also Double the 1NT. Yes, that normally shows at least a 15 count and is a Penalty Double, but West has passed once already so can't have more than 11, can they? East will certainly bid with the hand they have, because they know that NS have the balance of power, but bid what? 2H is all they can bid I suppose unless they uncover the psychic master bid of 2C.

Even 2H may look awful but is likely to scramble out for -100 if NS don't double, and I don't see how they can do that. But then, NS may double for takeout and find 2S, which should make nine tricks if declarer runs the jack of spades and then drops West's queen if they haven't already covered. So it looks like NS should always come out on top if they know what they're doing but there's often much more to bridge hands than first meets the eye.

BOARD 9 DLR N EW VUL

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

Wally opened 1H and I bid immediately to 4H, not wanting to make things easy for West if she had a decent spade bid. She didn't and everyone passed. East led the four of clubs and Wally should, of course, have made all the tricks when he covered with the seven and West produced the ten. But, he only made Five. At least some others had made even fewer tricks on the same lead.

Guru: Yes, he should have made all the tricks. The lead is likely to be a singleton if he thinks about it. When he wins the jack of clubs and leads a heart to the jack and West shows out, as long as he's not put off by the bad break and has diagnosed the lead, the play is easy: draw all of East's trumps, ending in dummy, then lead the queen of clubs and finesse. Whether West covers or not, Wally can now take the top spades, discarding dummy's diamonds (he could have done that at any time) and return to dummy with a spade ruff and all the clubs are good. I really don't like leading singletons when I have long trumps, but with four small trumps it is not such an unattractive lead as to deserve the fate of having declarer make Seven.

BOARD 10 DLR E ALL VUL

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

East opened 1S and West bid 3S. East thought for a while and bid 4S. It seemed like a fairly routine auction to me and I led the ten of hearts; jack from dummy, queen, king. Declarer now played three rounds of spades and Wally was in. He led the eight of hearts, declarer winning. The jack of diamonds was run but lost to Wally's king and he now led his third heart and I won the nine and switched to the king of clubs and declarer could not avoid a club loser also. One down. At least that's what I would like to think, but in reality I started with the king of clubs and declarer did lose a club, but not a heart, thereby making his game.

Guru: Don't blame yourself. The king of clubs is a perfectly reasonable lead. It sets up a club trick immediately. The only clue you might have had may have been gained from the bidding. An auction of 1S-3S-4S suggests that if you are to do the contract any damage, you may need to develop deep tricks rather than one quick one. West clearly has a 'limit' raise of 10-11 HCP and spade support, but East could of course be quite strong. If East thought about it, they could be thinking about two things: whether to bid game, or whether to look for slam. If it is the latter, then the king of clubs is a better lead at Match Points as another lead may allow a club to run away.

If on the other hand it was the former and the contract is marginal, then you should lead the heart, which you should always do at teams where it is most important to defeat the contract if at all possible.

No, I don't blame you for the lead, and in any case declarer could still have made the contract. All he has to do is to take two rounds of trumps and immediately finesse the diamonds. Wally would return a heart but declarer can now run the diamonds and even if the hand with the outstanding trump ruffs the fourth diamond, a heart can be discarded on it. I know your imagined scenario does occur often enough, but declarer should never (well, almost never) lead a trump in order to remove a defender's high trump if it's the only one left.

How you hoped the defence would go is reasonable enough, but declarer would have had to play badly. Nevertheless I'm glad you were thinking about whether you could have made a better lead, and I agree, you could have.

(hands repeated for convenience)

BOARD 10 DLR E ALL VUL

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

Gosh, look at all the 3NT contracts! How on earth could that happen in Acol?? I suppose East opens 1NT despite the 15 count, or opens a 'prepared club' and rebids 1NT when West responds 1D. I don't believe that East should hide the spade suit twice, though I do agree with a 1NT opening. A 1NT opening in Acol shows 12-14 HCP, but I fully agree with the theory that dead flat hands should be devalued by a point. That would make no difference here, since West would bid Stayman and raise East's 2S to 3S invitatively and East be delighted to accept.

Good to see at least two of the No Trumpers biting the dust though the third one, also with a club lead, appears to have got undeservedly lucky when the defence must have defended abominably after making the correct lead.

Hold on! There is another thing I should mention in view of the fact that some EW pairs did play in 3NT. After the auction 1S-3S or 1H-3H, a bid of 3NT is an offer to play there and shows a balanced 15-16 count. Maybe your declarer was not thinking about slam or game in spades but about bidding 3NT. No, that is probably a bit too advanced for C-Grade. But if East does bid 3NT in such an auction, West might pass because of their poor spades, though they should not do so because of the doubleton club. In any case, a 3NT bid in such an auction normally shows a poor potential trump suit and East's suit is good, so they should bid to 4S without mincing around with 3NT. That is how wrong contracts are reached and misunderstandings occur.

Why not just play the simple game and if you have a major fit, play in it.

BOARD 11 DLR S NIL VUL

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

I opened 1NT and West bid 2S. Wally had a problem and didn't know what he should do. He passed. I had a maximum but couldn't do anything so West played in 2S. Wally led the ace of clubs but did not continue despite the fact that I 'echoed' with the six. Instead, he switched to a diamond, but when I led a third diamond declarer ruffed with the eight and eventually escaped for down one.

Guru: You were lucky not to get a worse result, thanks to all the NS overbidders, but you should have defeated declarer by two tricks. If Wally thinks about it, the play of your six must be either from a doubleton (6-3) or from 10 9 6, in which case declarer still has the three. Therefore cashing the king next is safe enough. When you follow with the three, Wally knows you can ruff the next club. You do so, and repeat the exercise in the diamond suit. You cash your king and Wally encourages with the ten to show his doubleton. You now continue with the ace and another, which declarer will probably discard his losing heart on, but a heart switch will leave declarer in hand with a trump to lose since he can't get to dummy to finesse.

Note that Wally led the ACE of clubs from AK at trick one, but that YOU should lead the KING holding AK when you get the lead. That is because a lot of the time after the initial lead you will not have the king to back up the ace, and it may be important to try to cash your tricks. If you cash an ace during the play, you are clearly doing this to see if your partner has the king, in which case he will encourage. If he does not, you may switch. But if you lead the king, partner knows you have the ace, and will give you a COUNT, in this case to tell you that you CAN cash another and lead a third one if you like. The same thing applies when your partner has led a low one and you have the ace and king as third person to play. If you play your ace, as a lot of inexperienced people still do, partner will not expect you to have the king as well, unless you follow with it immediately. Slightly different with a holding of KQ and QJ. You LEAD the top one at all times but you play the lower one third in hand to tell partner what you DON'T hold, or what you MIGHT hold. If partner leads low and you play the king, declarer winning the ace, partner will never play you for the queen. Or, if you play the queen from QJ as the third hand to play and declarer wins the ace, partner will never lead his king but instead wait to capture declarer's non-existent jack with it!

You know, the reason why the Weak No Trump was invented in the first place was so you could catch your opponents if they ventured in to the bidding at the Two level. On this hand, Wally has a balanced ten count which means that your side has at least 22 HCP between you. It is your hand and you expect to make some sort of contract, maybe 1NT, maybe 3C. Letting West play in 2S is unlikely to help your side, so Wally should do something other than Pass. One alternative is to bid 3C, the other is to Double. 3C is in fact quite an interesting contract but nobody played in it. The Norths who tried it clearly did not have trustworthy partners. A bid of 3C in a competitive sequence should not be forcing, in fact it should not even be invitational. Problems do arise when people play a double of 2S for takeout but most people, over their 1NT opening, only double 2C or 2D overcalls for takeout, and a Double of 2H or 2S is for penalties. These things should be discussed with partner if you play a Weak No Trump.

(hands repeated for convenience)

BOARD 11 DLR S NIL VUL

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

In the play of 3C, as long as declarer 'guesses' everything correctly, they can make 3C. Firstly, declarer doesn't cover the nine of spades lead, secondly declarer leads towards the queen of hearts and then on the way back, ducks, setting up the KJ when West has the doubleton ace. That is, after three rounds of trumps and East exiting safely in diamonds.

Difficult card reading for sure but when East has turned up with the singleton spade (why switch if they have another), and not the ace of hearts (they would almost certainly win the ace when declarer leads to the queen) and when trumps have been shown to be 3-3, West's hand is an open book to an expert. You'll be in that category one day, Dolly, if you keep getting hands like this on Wednesday evenings!

Did you say you saw a line to defeat 3C? Yes, you're right. West can overtake the spade lead, cash ace of spades and give East a ruff. Now back to the heart ace, and that is four tricks. A further spade lead and it promotes East's queen of trumps! Now really, you wouldn't expect that sort of defence on Wednesday evenings, would you?