

Why Simple System?

I am often asked by those who do not play at the club why we keep to a relatively simple system with few permitted conventions, and, indeed, occasionally the same question is asked by those within the club. So let me explain.

I have devoted something like thirteen years to teaching this fascinating game, predominantly to those learning the game for the first time. In my early days of teaching students were forever asking me if there was anywhere they could go to play in a club. Sadly, the answer was No. I even telephoned clubs some miles out of Hastings and Bexhill to see if they would accommodate beginners. Again, the answer was No.

And so I joined forces with Brian Gould and we started the original East Sussex Bridge Club somewhere about 1989/90.

Everything went fine for some years, but then we started getting players who played all sorts of complicated systems and conventions and slowly they took over. Not only that but what made matters worse was that it became regular practice for some of the 'better' players to keep on at me about how dreadful was the bidding and play of many of my students. At the same time there were those of the relative newcomers to duplicate who found it becoming more and more stressful playing against those who showed little understanding and respect for their obvious lack of experience. It was time to call it a day.

But having called it a day I much regretted that somehow I had failed to provide what I had set out to do, namely, give everyone the opportunity of playing and enjoying this game of duplicate bridge, irrespective of their standard and experience.

Some years passed, and although I never stopped regretting what had happened to the original East Sussex I never really intended to start up another club. A number of my students then started asking about the possibilities of a club, but I said I had no premises and that was that.

But then, the late Margaret McCrorie told me about Whatlington Village Hall. I went to have a look, and from the outside decided it was not on. But Margaret insisted that I should have a look inside, which I did, and thus started the original Whatlington Bridge Club. This time I was determined I would not make the same mistakes.

When we started at Whatlington it was very simple system but when we opened up on a Wednesday evening I wilted, and said we would allow any systems on a Wednesday. I think that lasted two weeks! On the second Wednesday I remember very clearly playing against the late Barry Styles, and Barbara opened 2 Diamonds, which I alerted. Barry asked what it meant and I explained it was the Multi 2 Diamonds, being a weak two in a major, a strong 4441 hand, or a 20-22 balanced hand. At each of their turn to bid both Barry and his partner scratched their heads and passed. I finished up playing in Two Hearts going four off whilst Barry could have made Six spades. And I felt dreadful! What is this game all about? I asked myself.

And so our relatively simple system policy came into being.

Yes, I know, there are those who insist on playing something more complex, and for those there are other clubs to go to, but the East Sussex will remain as it is for I am convinced this is how most players want this game to be played.

Just when we came to introduce the Zero Tolerance Policy I cannot remember, but any doubts I had as to the wisdom of doing so were quickly dispelled. It is not always easy maintaining it, but maintain it we will.

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