

MOSCITO 2005

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Note: This is the first draft of the booklet.

2nd draft is scheduled for September and the book itself will be published by the end of the year.

Any comments will be welcome.

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Introduction

In search of the perfect bidding system

What do you want from a bidding system? You want to bid your partscores, games and slams but that is not all. You also want to make life hard for the opponents.

First, you want to give them as little information as possible to hinder their declarer play and defence. Second, you want to take as much bidding space as you can. Bidding space is like a jar of cookies – the more you take for yourself, the less that is left for them. Without room to exchange information, they have to guess.

So how should the system look?

Since most business is done in the majors, it makes sense to look first at your major suit holdings.

When you know about partner's major suit length you can directly bid to the right level, using the degree of fit as a guide. Yes, I know that Lawrence and Wirgren tell us that the law of total tricks is wrong about half the time and that shortages are the key. But our aim is to take a position before the opponents can get together. With the opponents still on the sidelines, 50% accuracy is just fine. We have no interest in going slowly so that we can discover our shortages and improve the accuracy because that would also allow the opponents back into the game.

For example:

West	North	East	East's hand
1♥(♠)	pass	?	♠K7643
			♥76
			♦J76
			♣J43

Bid 3♠. It may be true that if partner has similar shape you are not going to go too well but you still have a lot going for you. First, partner with a two-suiter might bid and make game. Second, partner might have enough shape to make 3♠ a good contract. It's quite

likely. And third, no matter what the outlook for 3♠, the opponents still have to figure out what to do. They don't know with any certainty whether you are in a good spot or not. All they have to go on is their own thirteen cards. They might pass when they should bid or bid when they should pass. Bidding to your trump length remains an excellent tactical ploy. So what about the Lawrence-Wirgren approach?

It is useful when you are presented with the last guess. When making the last guess 50% accuracy is not good enough because now it is most unlikely that the opponents will save you when you guess wrong. But when you are faced with the last guess you will usually have a good idea about the short suits allowing you to make good use of the added accuracy of the Lawrence-Wirgren approach.

For example, with the hand above, if the bidding had gone:

South	West	North	East
1♥(♥)	Dbl	3♥	?

You expect to have nine spades so the law might suggest you bid for nine tricks but here there is nothing tactical about your decision – it is simply a question of which side can make what. With their fit in hearts, you have no reason to expect that the partnership has working shortages so you should pass and hope that you can beat 3♥.

While showing the major suits on the most common hands is your first priority, you cannot afford to ignore the question of honour strength completely. When faced with ordinary decisions about game and slam you will need to know about the honour strength. The Moscito system presented here is our best effort to meet these design objectives.

While I believe the system succeeds to a large extent, being far ahead of standard and other modern systems, I make no grand claims beyond that. Most of the system is well tested but not all. While I have no doubt that the semi positive concept is correct, the way we go about it still needs to be proven in battle. No matter how good an idea seems, it is only results from the table that prove its worth. In early relay structures we allowed for eight card suits but after a few years we noted that they had never come up so we moved on. Systems and styles also need to change with the market place. For example, following the advent of the law of total tricks, players have become more willing to pass doubles of preempts without good trumps. As a consequence, you shouldn't be quite as gay

with your preempts as you might have been 15 years ago.

Another point I would make is that Moscito is a simple system. While it would take hundreds of pages to fully describe most systems, Moscito is fully described here in just 12 pages. The reason is that most of the bids on ordinary hands are natural and, unlike traditional systems, all the strong hands are developed in the same way.

The design of Moscito has also been influenced by regulations and attitudes to system.

Unfortunately, it is the view of the ACBL and all that she influences that bridge players should be protected from any bid that does not appear in the great American songbook. (See the unfortunate reshaping of the game, for more discussion on this point.)

The Moscito structure

All hands with 15+ HCP are opened 1♣. With a hand of value that has less HCP, say 9-14 HCP, you can open and say something about your major suit holdings at the same time. These are the limited openings.

1. Limited openings

1♦ = four plus hearts

1♥ = four plus spades

1♠ = six plus diamonds or a minor two suiter

1NT = 11-14 HCP, no 5-card major

2♣ = six plus clubs, not diamonds

48% of the hands are opened with a limited opener.

1.1 Strength for limited openings

In essence the limited openings are 9-14 HCP but you need to exercise judgement. As a guide, use the rule of 19 with a 5-card major and the rule of 20 with no 5-card major. In marginal cases, go by the queen points (QPs) A=3, K=2, Q=1. A limited opening will normally have 6 to 8 QPs.

1.2 What shapes go where

In other systems you can pick and choose your opening according to strength of suit. In Moscito in first and second position your choice of opening is pretty much determined by your shape. The reason is that responder may relay for your distribution and all hand patterns are associated with particular opening bids.

Always open in a five card major (1♥ with both).

With 4-4 in the majors, open 1♦.

With four of a major and five of a minor, open in the major but with four of a major and six of a minor, open in the six card suit. For a long time we opened 4-6 hands in the four card major but this leads to problems. When partner raises your major to the two level you are usually in the wrong contract. If you then correct to the minor you will often be too high because the known 4-3 fit on the side is a liability. Also, if the bidding gets competitive the lack of certainty about major suit length can be an issue. For example:

West	North	East	South
1♦	1♠	2♦	3♠
			4♣

If West may be 4-6, you don't know much more about West's heart length. But with 4-6 ruled out, as it is our way, you know that West must be 5-5 plus.

1.3 Opening with a balanced hand

The 1NT opening is 11-14 HCP with no five card major. The trouble with opening a weak notrump with a five card major is that when you buy a worthless dummy you will usually do better in the major.

The 1NT may contain a four card major but in that case it will be 11 or 12 HCP. With a balanced 13-14 HCP, open in the major. By not opening in the major with a balanced 11-12 HCP, you ensure that your major suit openings always have teeth.

In general, we pass with 4333 shape and 11 HCP.

Finally, with 10-12 HCP and 5 (major) -3-3-2 shape we open two of the major. More about that later.

2. Responding to limited openings

2.1 The step bid is artificial and shows strength and other responses are consequently limited. The step shows invitational strength and a balanced hand or any game-going hand. Your next bid shows what type of hand you have.

- Bidding the step again is artificial and forcing to game. In reply, the opener shows his shape in relay fashion.
- Two of partner's major or 2NT (not step bids) are natural and invitational.
- A new suit is natural and game forcing.

2.2 Two level responses to 1♦ and 1♥

In response to 1♦ and 1♥, two of a suit is natural and forcing for one round. It needs to be forcing to allow the responder to describe a second suit or show belated support for the

major. The point count is about 8-11 HCP but it is more about intention. In essence, responder is saying if I buy the right hand opposite there could be a game here. With a good suit and less strength, the responder makes a weak jump response.

Opener's weakest rebid is two of his major. This will a minimum hand with either a six card suit or a five card suit with a four card minor and shortage in partner's suit.

West's hand	West	East
♠Q8652	1♥	2♥
♥2	?	

♦AK65

♣J98

Bid 2♠. This shows that you have five spades and wish you hadn't opened.

Three of a minor shows a five card suit. You could be 5-5 plus or exactly 4-5. In the latter case, you will have 11-14 HCP since the rule of 20 applies.

West's hand	West	East
♠2	1♦	2♦
♥AKJ82	?	

♦65

♣AJ982

Bid 3♣. This shows a promising hand with five clubs.

A jump shift by the opener is a splinter.

West's hand	West	East
♠AJ872	1♥	2♦
♥2	?	

♦KJ65

♣K82

Bid 3♥. This pretty much shows your hand so 3♠ or 4♦ by responder now is not forcing and you would pass such a call with this hand.

Thus, a double jump of responder's minor suggests 6-4.

West's hand	West	East
♠KQ10976	1♥	2♣
♥2	?	

♦65

♣AJ82

Bid 4♣. The singleton heart is not the issue. You want to show a fine major and primary support for partner's minor. The jump raise does this.

A double jump shift is natural.

West's hand	West	East
♠AQJ876	1♥	2♦
♥KQJ82	?	

♦--

♣65

Bid 4♥. This is natural being a double jump shift.

A 2NT rebid by the opener shows a good 2-suiter with at least five in the major and a 4-card minor.

West's hand	West	East
♠AQJ876	1♥	2♦
♥Q2	?	

♦5

♣KJ43

Bid 2NT. Showing five spades and four clubs. The only time the minor is not clear is when the bidding starts 1♥:2♥.

A 3NT rebid by the opener is natural, suggesting 13-14 HCP and a balanced hand.

A single raise of responder's suit will always be based on a useful hand. If it is minimum in points it will have shape on the side.

Apart from opener's jump shift (splinter) and the 2NT rebid by opener, everything is natural in these two over one auctions. This includes fourth suit:

West's hand	West	East
♠AJ876	1♥	2♦
♥KJ82	2♥	3♣
♦3	?	

♣Q43

Pass. Partner doesn't like our majors; we are okay with clubs. No reason to think that game is on.

Examples of two over one

West	East	East's hand
1♦	2♣	♠QJ653
2♦	2♠	♥6
		♦2
		♣AQ8743

West	East	East's hand
1♥	2♦	♠K53
2♥	2♠	♥42
		♦AJ876
		♣Q93

West	East	East's hand
1♥	2♣	♠6
2♥	3♣	♥Q5
		♦Q92
		♣AQJ9843

West	East	East's hand
1♥	2♣	♠53
2♦	2NT	♥QJ86
		♦76
		♣AKJ98

2.3 1♦/♥: 1NT and 1♦:1♠

The auction, 1♦:1♠ is 4+ spades and 6-12 HCP.

The 1NT response to 1♦ or 1♥ is simply 6-10 HCP and no fit.

2.4 Other responses to 1♦ and 1♥

2NT shows a limit raise to three of the major based on four trumps.
 3NT shows a game raise of the major based on a balanced hand of about 12-15 HCP.
 Over both of these responses a new suit by the opener is a shortage.
 The raise of the major to three is based on four card support and about 6-9 HCP.

2.5 Limited responses to 1♠

The attraction of the 1♠ opening is that it takes so much space away from the opponents. The drawback of the 1♠ opening is that it takes so much space away from you!

So the cheapest responses show the majors – like this:

1NT = the step bid. All strong hands go through here.

2♣ = 5+♥

2♦ = 5+♠

2♥ = 5+♣

2♠ = limit raise in either minor (at least 3-3 in the minors). Then 3♣/♦ are to play. 2NT shows clubs and a maximum and 3♥/♠ shows a shortage with diamonds and a maximum.

2NT = limit raise in diamonds (at least 4 diamonds)

3♣ = pass or correct

3♦ = to play

Note there is no way to directly get out to partner's minor at the two level but in practice such a takeout is unnecessary.

West	East	East's hand
1♠	?	♠J87 ♥9843 ♦K72 ♣J65

Bid 3♣. You are sure to reach an eight card fit, at least, in one of the minors. You will also reduce the opponent's bidding to guess work and even the best sometimes guess wrong.

2♣/♦ promise no great strength. In reply, opener accepts the transfer with Hx or better and bids the step with less, or bids a good six card minor.

West	East	East's hand
1♠	?	♠87 ♥AQ843 ♦972 ♣J65

Bid 2♣. If West bids 2♦ showing no fit with hearts you can bid 3♣, which is pass or correct for West's longer minor.

With interest in game, responder can continue with 2NT. In reply, opener bids:

3♣/♦ = long suit and minimum

3 of the major = three cards in the major but minimum

3 of the other major = long clubs maximum, not three cards in the major

3NT = long diamonds maximum, not three cards in the major

4 major = three cards in the major maximum

West	East	East's hand
1♠	2♦	♠KJ653
2♠	?	♥K65
		♦Q2
		♣Q65

Bid 2NT. You don't want to play game unless partner has a maximum. West's next bid will basically decide the contract.

2.6 Limited responses to 2♣

2♦ is the step. 2NT is an invitation to game.

The opener rebids 3♣ with a minimum and a short suit or 3NT with a maximum. Change of suit responses are not forcing.

2.7 Responding to 2♥ or 2♠

2NT asks for the doubleton and begins a relay. All other bids are non-forcing and promise nothing.

West	East	East's hand
2♠	?	♠53
		♥65
		♦KQ876
		♣9865

Bid 3♦ and see what happens. It's not easy for them because it is dangerous to come in.

3 When responder bids the step

The opener's rebid is basically natural though 1NT is an exception.

1♦:1♥

1♠ = spades (not necessarily 2-suited)

1NT = balanced, three suited with short spades or four hearts and five diamonds.

2♣ = clubs, may be 4-5

2♦ = five hearts and four diamonds

2♥ = six or seven hearts, no other suit, and minimum

2♠ and up = six or seven hearts, no other suit, and maximum (see one suited resolution).

1♥:1♠

1NT = balanced, three suited with short hearts or four spades and five diamonds.

2♣ = clubs, maybe 4-5
 2♦ = five+ spades and four+ diamonds
 2♥ = five+ spades and four+ hearts
 2♠ = six or seven spades, no other suit, and minimum
 2NT and up = six or seven spades, no other suit, and maximum (see one suited resolution).

1♠:1NT
 2♣ = 5-4 in the minors
 2♦ = six diamonds, no other suit, and minimum
 2♥ = six diamonds and four hearts
 2♠ = six diamonds and four spades
 2NT and up = six diamonds, no other suit, and maximum (see one suited resolution).

2♣:2♦
 2♥ = six clubs and four hearts
 2♠ = six clubs and four spades
 2NT and up = six clubs, no other suit (see one suited resolution)

In all but two cases the opener's rebid shows the exact hand type. That is, one, two, three suited or balanced. The exceptions are after the rebids of 1♠ and 1NT. In these cases, the opener could still be 2 or 3 suited or balanced. After 1♦:1♥, 1♠, 1NT asks again. The opener bids:

2♣ = clubs
 2♦ = diamonds
 2♥ = 4432 or 4423
 2♠ = 5♠ and 6♥
 2NT and up is four spades and five hearts (see two suited resolution)

After 1♦:1♥, 1NT, 2♣ asks. Opener bids:
 2♦ = five diamonds, four hearts
 2♥ = balanced with four hearts
 2♠ = 5332
 2NT = 3-suited short spades

After 1♥:1♠, 1NT, 2♣ asks. Opener bids:
 2♦ = five diamonds, four spades
 2♥ = balanced with 4♠, not 4♥
 2♠ = 5332
 2NT = 3-suited short hearts
 3♣ = 5404
 3♦ = 5440

4. Relaying out the shape

After you bid the step and the opener rebids, you know whether he is one, two, three suited or balanced; admittedly it took a second step from you when the rebid was 1♠ or 1NT. You

can now continue to bid the step to find out the exact shape.

The reason that the complete Moscito system can be described in so few pages is that all strong hands are developed using the same four routines as described in this section. These routines are the essence of symmetric relay.

4.1 One suited resolution

After you have shown a one suiter, you next identify any short suit then you show the exact pattern in numerical order, treating the hand pattern as a four digit number.

Step 1 = no singleton or void (6322 or 7222)

Step 2 = shortage in the highest ranking side suit

Step 3 = shortage in the middle ranked side suit

Step 4 = 6331

Step 5 = 7321

Step 6 = 7330

After opener bids steps 2 or 3, you can relay for the precise shape in the same vein.

After opener bids step 1, you can relay for opener's exact shape, which is once again done in numerical order....

6223

6232

6322

7222

4.2 Two suited resolution

Once you have shown a two suiter, you must next clarify whether both suits are at least five cards, if not, which suit is longer then any short suit followed by the exact pattern. Once again, this is done in numerical order.

Step 1 = lower ranking suit is longer

Step 2 = 5-5 at least

Step 3 = shortage in the higher ranking suit

Step 4 = 5422

Step 5 = 5431

Step 6 = 6421

Step 7 = 6430

Step 8 = 7411

Step 9 = 7420

Often you would already know which suit is longer. You might also be able to rule out 5-5 shape. In these cases you simply drop the first one or two steps from the resolution. For example, after 1♥:1♠, 2♦:2♥ you would skip step one.

4.3 Three suited resolution

When you come to resolve the three suiters, you know the short suit – it only remains to

show the exact pattern, which is once again done in numerical order.

1♠:1♥, 1♣:1NT, 2♣:2♦...

2♥ = 4414

2♠ = 4405

2NT = 4504

Similarly after 1♦:1♥, 1♣:1NT, 2♦:2♥.

1♦:1♥, 1NT:2♣, 2NT:3♣...

3♦ = 1444

3♥ = 0445

3♠ = 0454

3N = 0544

Similarly after 1♥:1♠, 1NT:2♣, 2NT:3♣.

4.4 Resolving the balanced hands

First identify the suits then show the pattern in numerical order.

1♦:1♥, 1♠:1NT, 2♥:2♠...

2NT = 4423

3♣ = 4432

1♦:1♥, 1NT:2♣, 2♦:2♥...

2♠ = 4♥ and 4♣

2NT = 2443

3♣ = 3442

3♦ = 3433

Similarly after 1♥:1♠, 1NT:2♣, 2♦:2♠.

The 4333 shape is put at the end instead of in strict numerical order because it is generally the worst news.

5. 1♣ auctions

The responses of 1♥, 1NT, 2♣, 2♦, 2♥ and 2♠ are used to show the shape of semi positive strength hands, that is about 6-9 HCP.

This is not the usual way – other strong club systems respond 1♥ up with game going hands and 1♦ with the rest. This approach is clearly wrong. About 19% of responding hands are junk, 45% are semi positives and the remaining 36% are positives. Besides this, the semi positive hands are the ones that are most likely to be contested.

The 1♦ negative says nothing about semi positives - it doesn't even distinguish between semi positive and junk.

You might be thinking, if the semi positive approach is so superior how come no one is using it? I think the reason is that it takes quite a bit of work and understanding to get it all going and there is no body of experience or literature to help you.

The responses of 2NT to 3NT show 5440 shapes apart from 3♣, which shows a solid seven or eight card suit. It is important to know when you have such a great source of

tricks. Instead of thinking about fit you start counting controls. It also helps to know that partner's seven card suit is not solid, which you do when he doesn't respond 3♣.

It is no loss to be unable to respond at the three level or higher with a preempt – it makes no sense to grab all the bidding space with a weak hand when your partner has a random 15+ HCP.

Indeed, the semi positive responses are set up the way they are to ensure that responder gets in opener's way as little as possible.

Here is the full scheme:

1♦ = any positive apart from those from 2NT up.

1♥ = 6-9 HCP. Either balanced or unbalanced without a five card major.

1♠ = 0-5 HCP any shape

1NT = 6-9 HCP, six diamonds, five hearts and a minor, or five of a major 4-4

2♣ = 6-9 HCP, six hearts, or five spades and a minor

2♦ = 6-9 HCP, five spades and four hearts

2♥ = 6-9 HCP, exactly four spades, and five plus hearts

2♠ = 6-9 HCP with six spades

2NT = 9+ HCP 5440 with a major suit void

3♣ = a solid 7 or 8 card suit

3♦ = 9+ HCP 5440 with a void diamond

3♥ = 9+ HCP with 4450

3♠ = 9+ HCP with 4540

3NT = 9+ HCP with 5440

5.1 1♣ - 1♦ auctions

With 12+ QPs (about 18+ HCP), opener bids 1♥ to find out responder's shape. With 9-11 QPs (about 15-17 HCP), opener uses the bids from 1♠ up to show his shape.

1♠ = two suits without spades or a minor one suiter

1NT = balanced or 4441

2♣ = clubs and spades or just spades

2♦ = diamonds and spades

2♥ = hearts

2♠ up is both majors, using the normal two suited resolution. So 2♠ is second suit (♥) longer, 2NT is 55, 3♣ is high shortage etc.

That the 1♣ opener can choose whether to ask or show (a by-product of the 1♦ positive) gives the system a significant advantage. It allows auctions to often be cut very short, minimising the information that is conveyed to the opponents.

West's hand	West	East	East's hand
♠J43	1♣	1♦	♠752
♥KQJ765	2♥	4♥	♥A92

A limited opening = 6+ QPs
 A 1♣ opening = 9+ QPs
 A positive response to 1♣ in first or second position = 6+ QPs
 A semi positive response to 1♣ in first or second position = 3-5 QPs
 After a 1♣ opening in third or fourth position, deduct one QP from the base for the positive and semi positive.
 Also, deduct one QP from your base if you have ten cards in two suits and add one if you have shown a maximum.
 The first step shows you have the base QPs (or occasionally less), step +1 = base +1 etc. Count nothing for singleton kings and queens.
 This is the most common way to continue after shape because you get a snapshot of partner's strength. There are 24 QPs in the deck.
 Ordinary hands need a total of about 19 or 20 QPs to be serious about slam.

West's hand	West	East	East 1
♠AJ6	1♣	1♦	♠KQ732
♥AK5	1♥	1NT	♥Q4
♦AQ82	2♦	2NT	♦K54
♣654	3♣	3♦	♣J98
	3♥	3♠	
	?		
	East 2	East 3	
	♠KQ732	♠KQ7632	
	♥Q4	♥Q42	
	♦K54	♦K54	
	♣KJ9	♣J	

West knows that the partnership has 18 QPs so 6 QPs are missing. There is clearly no chance for slam so West should sign off. If East had shown 8 QPs (East 2), West would have soldiered on.

To make slam with less than 19 QPs you need to have some shape working for you – either long suits with nothing wasted in the off suits or well placed shortages. For example, opposite East 3, West would be happy to bid slam with just 18 QPs. The QP ask works best when it is a relatively balanced hand that is doing the asking. Here West can see that the singleton club is well placed because he has nothing in clubs. East 3 would not be so well informed.

Denial control bids

Once you have found out partner's QPs, the next relay is to show where they are. Look at the suits in length order; where the length is equal, look in numerical order (♣♦♥♠). Bid the step to show that you have no honour in the suit you are looking at, or the A, K, Q.

With one or two honours, bypass the step and look at the next suit. With no honour or A, K, Q, bid the step plus one. With one or two honours in that suit, bypass the next step and so on.

An example might help:

West's hand	West	East
♠AK854	1♥	1♠
♥93	2♦	2♥
♦Q983	3♣ = 5242	3♦
♣K7	3NT = 8 QP	4♣
	4NT = hons in ♠,♦,♣ not ♥.	

To spell it out, over 4♣, 4♦ would deny an honour (A, K, Q) in spades; 4♥ would show an honour in spades but deny one in diamonds; 4♠ would show in spades and diamonds but deny in clubs; 4NT shows in spades, diamonds and clubs but denies in hearts.

On the second pass, return to all the suits where you showed one or two honours. Stop if you only have one honour and bypass the suit if you have two. At the end of the second pass, look at any singleton. Stop unless you have a bare K or Q. On the third pass, if it should go that far, look for jacks in all non-singleton suits.

In each case, the step relays for more information. Any bid that is more than the step is to play.

Exclusion Queen Points

When the asker has a singleton or void and is not interested in the K or Q in the short suit – this is generally the case when you are planning to play in a suit contract - exclusion QPs (EQPs) is the answer.

Step plus one to step plus four ask for QPs excluding the K or Q in a particular suit. Exclude suits in length order and where equal in ascending order. The QP base is minus one when a suit has been excluded.

West	East	East's hand
1♦	1♥	♠AK76
2♠	2NT	♥QJ5
3♣	?	♦A9764
		♣5

West has shown 2623 shape and a maximum hand. Slam will be good if West has enough of ♥AK, ♦K and ♣A, not the ♣K,Q.

East continues:

West's hand	West	East
♠93	...	3♠
♥AK9843	3NT	4♥
♦Q3		
♣KQ3		

West shows at most 6 QP, not including ♣K,Q, so East knows to sign off.

West	East
♠Q9654	♠--
♥AK65	♥82
♦A5	♦KQJ984
♣K2	♣QJ103
1♣	1♦
3♦ 5422	3♠
4♦ 8 EQPs	4♥
5♥	6♦

5♥ shows two heart honours, one club and one diamond so West has either:

♠?xxxx, ♥AKxx, ♦Ax, ♣Kx or
 ♠?xxxx, ♥AQxx, ♦Ax, ♣Ax

Either way, slam is fine.

Of course, West's 5♥ drove the bidding to slam but West only responded this high because his hand was so suitable.

Switching to natural

In relay before the shape is complete, any non step game bid is to play and any non step bid below game switches the bidding to natural.

For example:

West	East
♠AKJ43	♠Q9
♥754	♥92
♦AJ9	♦K763
♣65	♣AKQJ3
1♥	1♠
1NT	2♣
2♠	3♣
3♦	3♠
4♠	pass

It is clear to West that East has a problem with hearts.

Once you have no interest in slam you will often be wise to switch to natural.

West	East
♠A984	♠Q9
♥K54	♥AQJ92
♦KQJ2	♦A63
♣62	♣873
1♥	1♠
1NT	2♣
2♥	3♥
4♥	pass

Switching to natural with 3♥ is best. Another relay would needlessly reveal West's hand.

Knowing opener is in the 15-17 HCP range allows responder to cut short many auctions. In fact, it is only when slam is in the air that relay is usually employed.

One other special situation:

West	East	East's hand
1♣	1♦	♠K875
1NT	?	♥AQ3

♦85
 ♣J984

You have no ambition beyond game but you don't know which game. Opener could have a five card major or 4441 shape. To investigate further while revealing as little as possible to the opposition, respond 2♦. In reply, opener bids: 2♥/♠/NT/3♣ = 4441 shape, 3♦ = at least one four card major, 3♥/♠ = five, and 3NT = no major.

The unfortunate reshaping of the game

As I mentioned in the introduction, the administrators are reshaping the game by deciding what methods you can use and when. Of course it makes sense to protect beginners from bids they do not understand but nowhere in the Laws does it suggest that experienced players should have the same protection. Despite this, the ACBL shelters its experienced players from methods they do not play themselves. For example, in 2003 an ACBL committee that included Chip Martel and Jeff Meckstroth decided that you could not open 1♦ to show hearts in the Reisinger. By any measure, this was less about bridge and more about hegemony.

In a free world I would systematically open with any hand that I judge to be worth an overcall. If overcalling good-looking hands of modest HCP is a winning strategy then opening them will be an even more effective strategy because you are in first.

I would make my limited openers 8-12 HCP so that I can open any hand of value and prevent the likes of Meckwell from using their well-oiled system but the ACBL has rules to prevent us from doing this. They let us overcall on nothing but we can only open if we are within a king of normal.

This is also the case in the WBF. Okay, they occasionally let you play what you like (in keeping with the laws of the game) but even then they burden you with so much bureaucracy and attitude that all but the strongest will buckle.

I am talking primarily about the categorisation of systems and conventions by the ACBL and the WBF. Allowing this system or convention here but not there is the root of the problem. It has changed the essential nature of the game. Now the game is about how well you do using the approved methods. Gone are the days when bridge was a no-holds-barred contest, and, I might add, when it was popular. Some people argue that you have to keep the game simple so the general public can

understand. Not true. Right now the game is coloured green and the public couldn't give a damn.

The WBF and the ACBL would say that they are protecting the players. They would say it is unfair to confront players with unfamiliar methods in, say, a pairs event, where they may not have time to prepare their defence.

This may be the case if you adopt the Chinese Menu approach to defensive methods. That is, list every possible combination in detail. But this is a very silly way to tackle the problem. Instead the partnership should have a set of generic agreements that will allow them to face anything with little or no discussion.

If the WBF and the ACBL freed up the market, those weighty Chinese Menus would soon disappear. The bridge community is very clever and its theoreticians would soon work out effective generic agreements.

The real point is that bridge players do not need protection from bids. The last thing they need is for administrators to decide what bids they can and can't use in what events! All they really need is proper disclosure. Of course, this is a real problem in itself but that is not a reason to outlaw the methods.

Making whatever bid you like and ensuring that it is fully explained is the very essence of our game.

If you don't want to play bridge like this, you don't belong in open competition.

One day a leader with vision and courage will come along and he or she will tear down all this senseless red tape. No more mid chart, no more brown sticker, no more green systems, no more HUM systems, etc – just bridge. The game will flourish and we will remember these red tape days in much the same way that we remember Communism.

Maybe that's a bit tongue in cheek but I long for the time when we can try to solve the bridge puzzle with only the laws of the game to concern us.

Sadly, I am not holding my breath. Right now there is little resistance to the WBF/ ACBL line. This is because most players are happy to choose their methods from the official list. The mood will only change when a high profile body of players decides to strive for something better.

System genesis

My interest in relay was triggered by the success of a relay system in the bidding challenge in the Bridge World Magazine in the mid 70s.

I developed a relay system that I played with Malcolm Sims in the New Zealand team in the late 70s. Around this time I approached Roy Kerr about solving the relay problem. He put his considerable weight into the project and came up with symmetric relay, which remains the engine of our relay approach.

Around 1980 Sims and I adopted a forcing pass style.

From 1981 until 1984 I played forcing pass with Stephen Burgess and from 1985 to 1990 we played Moscito. This was a variation on forcing pass, designed to minimise the hassle from administrators.

In the 15 years that have followed, the system has gone through radical change and many people have made contributions. They include Richard Willey, Bob Richman and Matthew Thomson.

To come

Putting it all together

In competition

Defending against 1♦/♥/♠