

8 February

Squeezing Out a Trick

Rakesh Kumar

On Wednesday 7 February a very interesting deal turned up. As North, I opened 1C and when partner responded 1S, I rebid 2H – this is a reverse (it forces partner to give preference to clubs at the 3-level) which shows 16+ hcp. Partner now jumped to 3NT, promising at least 9 hcp. Hoping that she might have good enough stoppers in diamonds, I decided that with my extra values, aces and an obvious source of tricks in clubs, there were good chances to make 12 tricks, so I raised her to 6NT. West led ♥J.

♠A83
♥AQ83
♦
♣AKQJ97
♠KT762
♥65
♦AK32
♣T8

On the face of it, the slam initially had very good prospects: 6 club tricks, the ace-kings in the pointed suits and the ace of hearts adds up to 11 tricks, so all that was needed was for the heart finesse to succeed. However, the lead made that rather unlikely. Partner covered with the queen but East duly won ♥K and returned ♦Q.

Now there were only 11 tricks in sight. Where could a twelfth trick come from? One possibility was that someone might hold ♠QJ doubleton, but the chances of that were remote. A much better possibility was finding West, who surely had ♥10 and probably ♥9 as well, with 3 or more cards in spades. If that was how the cards lay then he would not be able to keep winners in both hearts and spades after all the other tricks were played off.

Lynleigh Evans worked this out and proceeded to play the hand to arrive at the necessary end position if the layout was as hoped. Winning ♦A, she cashed the clubs, discarding two spades and two diamonds from hand, then played ♠A and a small spade to the king. On the second spade trick, East showed out! Now it was absolutely clear that West was hanging on to ♠Q and two hearts, so she had arrived at the position shown on the next page:

	♠8	
	♥A8	
	♦-	
	♣-	
♠Q		immaterial
♥T9		
♦-		
♣-		
	♠T	
	♥6	
	♦K	
	♣-	

Lynleigh played ♦K and West had no good discard. When he threw ♥9, the spade was discarded from dummy and ♥A8 took the last two tricks for a well played slam!

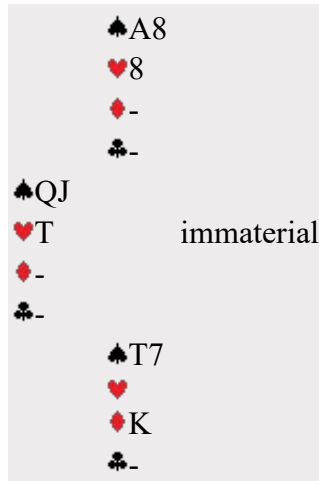
This was the full deal:

BD: 8	♠A83	Dlr: W	
	♥AQ83	Vul: None	
	♦		
	♣AKQJ97		
♠QJ94		♠5	
♥JT92		♥K74	
♦7654		♦QJT98	
♣4		♣6532	
	♠KT762		
	♥65		
	♦AK32		
	♣T8		
	♣♦♥♠	N	
		T	
N	6 2 3 5 6	20	
S	6 2 3 4 6	4 6	
E		10	
W			

The play described above is a simple squeeze, which is possible when you can win all the tricks but one and when one opponent is guarding two suits while you are cashing a trick in a third suit. A couple of other conditions also need to be satisfied, but you get the idea. There's much more to squeeze play – and many other types of squeezes – but this is the most common and most straightforward version.

An interesting question is what might have happened if East had returned a heart at trick 2, instead of the much more attractive switch to ♦Q. In fact the squeeze would

still have worked, except that now dummy's entry in hearts is taken out when this trick is won, so declarer must not cash ♠A. Instead she needs to play off the clubs, then come to hand with ♠K and cash ♦A. This time declarer doesn't know for sure that East has no more spades, but as long as West started with 3 or more spades the squeeze would still work. In fact the end position now would be:



And once again, when ♦K is cashed, there is no escape for West ...



17 February

An awkward hand

Rakesh Kumar

You are vulnerable, the opponents are not; partner as dealer opens 1C and you hold this quite useful collection:

```
♠AT6
♥AQ3
♦84
♣AT874
```

If RHO passes, what are you going to bid?

Depending on your methods, partner promises at least 2 or at least 3 cards in clubs. With no 4-card major, your hand looks like it would be very suitable for a 3NT contract, but there's one big problem – the diamond suit. It's not unreasonable to hope that partner will have a diamond stopper or two, but you really need notrumps to be played from partner's side. So how are you going to head for game while giving partner the opportunity to bid notrumps first? Unless you still play a raise to 3C as strong and forcing, which is a really old-fashioned treatment, it's awkward – and even if you do there isn't much room to work things out.

The solution to this is inverted minor suit responses – the sequences 1C-2C and 1D-2D are played as strong, promising either 10+ hcp or a game-forcing hand, according to partnership agreement. Conversely 1C-3C or 1D-3D are played as weak i.e. equivalent to as simple raise.

Now consider the above hand after partner opens 1C and RHO overcalls 1S. Things have just become a whole lot more awkward! You can't double as you don't have even one 4-card major. You do have a spade stopper for 3NT but the problem with the diamond suit is still a problem. How can you deal with this situation?

That was what faced those in the West seat on this deal from Saturday 17 February:

```
BD: 6   ♠9732   Dir: E
        ♥T8652 Vul: EW
        ♦QT3
        ♣3
♠AT6   ♠K
♥AQ3   ♥K9
♦84    ♦9765
♣AT874 ♣KQJ652
        ♠QJ854
        ♥J74
        ♦AKJ2
        ♣9
```

	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N		
		T		
N			2	
S			14	12
E	5 1 1	3		12
W	5 1 1	3		

The most sensible way forward is to cue-bid 2S. In principle this is either asking for a stopper or a good raise of partner's minor suit. Over a minor suit opening, the priority should be the stopper ask, but it is in any case a useful bid, because it is absolutely forcing – hopefully you will be able to figure out what to do on the next round.

In fact if North doesn't bid, East isn't going to bid notrumps with a singleton king, so will rebid 3C – after that you have to decide whether to gamble 3NT anyway, or try for the 11-trick minor suit game.

However, anyone who practices the modern style of competitive bidding will raise to 3S with the North hand!! After all, North has 4-card support, a singleton, and North-South are not vulnerable. Why not be a pain?

Even if that happens, though, West should be able to sort things out for East. The raise by North makes it clear that East has at most a singleton spade. Therefore it is virtually guaranteed that East has a genuine club suit (on the basis of 1 spade, no more than 4 hearts, would have opened 1D if 1=4=4=4). So rather than playing in 3NT with what may be a single stopper in the suit, West can and should raise to game in clubs.

As you can see, both 3NT and 5C make on this deal, although 3NT only survives because no one has a 5-card diamond suit ...



27 February

Gold Coast goofs


Rakesh Kumar

Last week I played at the Gold Coast Congress, but after a good start, partner and I didn't cover ourselves in glory – quite the opposite. Here are a couple of problems that we faced, which we got wrong. See if you would have done any better. Firstly, this is your hand:

♠2
♥AQJT82
♦JT932
♣9


Neither side is vulnerable and you are the dealer. What will you bid?

Secondly, with both sides vulnerable, South deals and passes, as does West, then North opens 1D. Sitting East, you overcall 1S and partner raises you to 3S, based on the 9-card fit and top honours in the suit. This is passed out. South leads ♦5 to North's queen and your ace. How do you plan to make 9 tricks?

♠KQT3		♠A8762
♥QT8642		♥5
♦92		♦A74
♣4		♣T986

The hand from the first deal is an interesting exercise in evaluation. With only 6 losers (if there is a fit in one or the other suit) and a very good quality heart suit, it is far too good for a mere weak 2 opening. You have a choice of falsehoods – either upgrade a lot to open 1H, or upgrade a little to open 3H.




In any case, you *must* upgrade this hand! And if you do, you will be rewarded, because this was the full deal:

Board 24	♠KQ865	
Dealer W	♥643	
Vul None	♦74	
	♣T76	
♠2		♠AT7
♥AQJT82		♥97
♦JT932		♦AKQ5
♣9		♣AQ53
	♠J943	
	♥K5	
	♦86	
	♣KJ842	

		Makeable contracts				
		♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
5		N	-	-	-	-
8	19	S	-	-	-	-
	8	E	2	7	7	- 7
		W	1	7	7	- 7

On an opening other than 2H, partner will find her/his way to a slam. Both 6H and 6D make 13 tricks because ♥K is on side and drops in 2 rounds. Would you have got there?

The second deal requires a bit of thought immediately after the opening lead – count your tricks! Yes, the hand could be played as a cross-ruff, but if you think about it, 2 ruffs in dummy plus 5 spade tricks and ♦A leaves you one down. What's more, competent opponents will lead trumps at every opportunity – and they will have opportunities because you will have to lose the lead in every other suit.

Board 23	♠5	
Dealer S	♥AK7	
Vul Both	♦KQT63	
	♣KJ72	
♠KQT3		♠A8762
♥QT8642		♥5
♦92		♦A74
♣4		♣T986
	♠J94	
	♥J93	
	♦J85	
	♣AQ53	

		Makeable contracts				
		♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
16		N	4	3	-	- 1
7	8	S	4	3	-	- 1
	9	E	-	-	1	3 -
		W	-	-	1	3 -

A much better idea is to try to establish dummy's long suit – often a good plan when you can do so, even better when you can take two or more ruffs in your own hand and thus achieve a dummy reversal. Play a heart at trick 2 – you will end up with 10 tricks because the suit breaks 3-3!



11 March

Re-evaluating your hand during the auction

Rakesh Kumar

This deal from Monday 11 March is really instructive in terms of drawing inferences from the bidding as the auction develops. Let's see if you can reach the right conclusions while looking at your hand as dealer, not vulnerable against opponents who are vulnerable:

♠5
♥AJT43
♦QT86
♣T95

It's not much of a hand, is it? Unless you play 5-card weak twos (see the 11 November 2023 column in the SHBC [Newsletter Archive](#)) you really can't say anything.

So you pass, your LHO passes and partner opens 1S. Well, that didn't help a lot, did it? You have no fit and might have to respond 1NT, which is unlikely to play well.

Your RHO overcalls 2C. Now do you have anything to say? Of course you do – you need to show your heart suit. You can't bid 2H as that would promise at least 9 hcp, but you can make a negative double, which shows the other major but doesn't guarantee any more than 4 cards in hearts.

LHO raises to 3C. Now partner bids 3H. RHO passes. What are you going to do?

Suddenly, your hand has changed dramatically. You can work out quite a few things:

- i. Partner has 4 hearts, so you have a 9-card fit
- ii. Partner almost certainly has shortage in clubs, because RHO has at least 5, LHO probably has 4 to voluntarily raise to the 3-level, and you have 3 cards in the suit
- iii. Any finesse required in hearts is quite likely to work, because it was your RHO who overcalled – she therefore probably has more high card points than your LHO.

So what should you do? Believe it or not, that's actually quite easy to answer – you should raise to game! Yes, with your mere 7 high-card points, your hand is now good enough to bid game opposite an average opening bid, based on the fit and the complementary shortages in spades and clubs.

If you do bid 4H, you find that the two hands are as shown in the full deal overleaf:

BD: 9 ♠963 ♥K86 ♦A ♣AK8632	♠5 ♥AJT43 ♦QT86 ♣T95	Dlr: N Vul: EW ♠K82 ♥5 ♦K7432 ♣QJ74										
♠AQJT74 ♥Q972 ♦J95 ♣												
<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">♣</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">♦</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">♥</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">♠</td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">N</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="padding: 0 5px;">T</td> </tr> </table>			♣	♦	♥	♠	N					T
♣	♦	♥	♠	N								
				T								
N	1 5 4	7										
S	1 5 4	14 9										
E	3	10										
W	3											

In fact partner had opened a 10 hcp hand based on good shape and excellent options for a rebid, depending on your response. That you had just 17 hcp between the two of you didn't matter in the slightest: with the heart finesse working and ♠K coming down with 2 ruffs in dummy, there were various routes to making 11 tricks without breaking a sweat ...



22 March

Picking up the scent

Rakesh Kumar

In my early days of playing Teams bridge, I was on many occasions fortunate enough to have really good teammates, without whom my results would have been very ordinary indeed. One teammate in particular had a reputation for regularly reaching good slam contracts on relatively few high cards points – my partner described her as "able to pick up the faintest smell of a makeable slam".

How does one do that? The 4 key requirements for bidding a slam without some 33+ high card points (with that much strength it's usually possible to make 6NT on power alone) are (1) a fit with partner (2) an outside shortage (3) lots of top controls i.e. aces and kings (4) a long suit that is a potential source of tricks.

So ... on a deal from Wednesday 20 March, you hold:

♠K832
♥AKJ53
♦A53
♣A

Your RHO passes as dealer and of course you open 1H. LHO also passes and partner responds 2D, promising a 5+ suit and 10+ hcp. Now what?

Partner is an unpassed hand so it's still possible she has 12+ hcp and a 4-card spade suit (with 6-11 hcp it is usually a very good idea to show a 4-card major rather than a minor suit, even if the minor suit is longer) and therefore your first bid should be 2S. This shows extra strength, although as partner has promised 10+ hcp you don't need to have the customary 16+ hcp for a reverse (a rebid of a higher-ranking suit) so perhaps you should promise 14 hcp or better.

Partner now jumps to 3NT, denying spade support and suggesting a limited (10-11 hcp) hand. Is that the end of the auction?

It shouldn't be. Your hand still has considerable slam potential, based on your extra strength and the criteria above. If partner holds something like Axx-Q-KQxxx-Jxxx you are cold for 6D even if trumps break 4-1. If partner has as little as say Qxx-xx-KQxxx-Kxx, you can still make 6D if trumps break 3-2 and partner can do something with the hearts. Really all you need is for partner to hold one keycard and you ought to be fine, unless she has something truly awful like xx-xx-KQJxxx-KQx, in which case you might lose 2 spades off the top – although given that your side has bid hearts, diamonds and spades, the most likely lead is a club, so partner might still be able to establish hearts for a discard.

What happens next in the auction, though, depends on your conventional agreements. To reach a minor suit slam, it's useful to play a convention commonly known as Minorwood (a contraction of minor suit Roman Keycard Blackwood) in which a bid of 4-of-a-minor in an uncontested auction is RKCB in that minor. In the worst case, that allows you to sign off in 5-of-a-minor rather than arriving in a hopeless slam, which might happen if you use 4NT RKCB. The step responses are the same as for regular RKCB – so in the above auction, after 1H-2D-2S-3NT if you bid 4D, assuming you play 14/30 then partner's 4H response is not to play, it shows one keycard in diamonds.

Now you can bid 6D without much concern, and this turns out to be the full deal (see over):

BOARD 15

BD: 15 ♠JT54 **Dlr: S**
♥T96 **Vul: NS**
♦K
♣J9842

♠K832	♠A7
♥AKJ53	♥74
♦A53	♦QJT842
♣A	♣K73

♠Q96
♥Q82
♦976
♣QT65

♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
 T

N					5
S					19 10
E	3	7	7	5	7 6
W	3	7	7	5	7

Declarer will inevitably take the losing diamond finesse, allowing the singleton ♦K to score, but making 6D is effortless.

So next time you have a hand that meets the key requirements listed at the beginning of this column, you should go sniffing for slam!



6 April
Getting a ruff ...
Rakesh Kumar

The SHBC Country Teams Qualifying event was held on Saturday 6 April, with a field of 8 teams taking part. It was a close competition until the very last round, with lots of fascinating boards including wild distributions. I had to limit myself to picking just one board for this column, so I chose this really great deal from the first match of the afternoon. Let me first put it to you as a problem. Sitting South as the dealer, not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, you hold:

♠43
♥A985
♦KQJ854
♣T

W	N	E	S
			1D
P	1H	1S	2H
3H	4H	4S	Pass

With a notional 6-loser hand, excellent shape and better than 2 quick tricks, I hope you would open 1D: you certainly don't need to worry about having 1 or 2 hcp fewer than usual. The auction then proceeds as shown in the table.

Note West's 3H bid – if this isn't something you might have considered, discuss this type of cue raise with your partner. It shows a good raise to 3S, which allows a direct 3S bid to be merely competitive.

It's your lead. Don't peek! After you've selected your lead, you can have a look at the complete deal below:

BD: 3 ♠92 **Dir: S**
♥KJT742 **Vul: E-W**
♦T9
♣A86

♠AQJ8	♠KT765
♥Q6	♥3
♦73	♦A62
♣J9742	♣KQ53

♠43
♥A985
♦KQJ854
♣T

♣	♦	♥	♠	N	
			T		

N	-	3	4	-	1	8
S	-	3	4	-	1	10 12
E	4	-	-	2	-	10
W	4	-	-	2	-	

Did you make the "standard" lead of ♦K? Declarer won the ace, drew two rounds of trumps and knocked out ♣A. She lost just one diamond, one heart and one club, making game for +620 and plenty of IMPs.

Or did you do better and choose to lead ♣10? That approach has much merit. In their book *"Winning Suit Contract Leads"* David Bird and Taf Anthias used computer simulations to assess the relative merits of different "standard" opening leads as compared to short suit leads. At the end of the chapter on leading singletons, two of their very clear-cut conclusions are:

- Side-suit singletons are excellent leads and should nearly always be chosen.
- Side-suit singletons are usually better leads than those from honor sequences such as K-Q-J or Q-J-10.

Those who read the book are often surprised by that latter conclusion, but it is certainly borne out here. Partner will take his ♣A and return a club for you to ruff. However, there is more to think about at this point if you want to set the contract: should you cash ♥A or switch to ♦K now? Unfortunately if you don't take your heart trick first, declarer still makes her contract – she draws trumps, unblocks ♣K and discards her heart loser on the long club. Then she gives up a diamond and is able to ruff her last diamond.

Of course if you are really brave and full of faith in partner's bidding, you might do even better than just cash the ♥A – you might underlead it to partner's ♥K! Then you get a second ruff and *now* you switch to ♦K, to set the contract two tricks. That's the ideal result for the defence, as shown in the table of makeable contracts, but it's difficult for mere mortals to achieve ...

As you can see, the scores across the field varied a great deal, because North-South will always make 10 tricks in hearts, while East-West were usually able to make 10 tricks in spades.

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
4♥ by NS	+1	450	1
4♥ by NS	=	420	1
3♥ by NS	+1	170	1
3♠ by EW	=	-140	1
3♠ by EW	+1	-170	1
3♠ by EW	+1	-170	1
4♠ by EW	=	-620	2

