

2 February

Five-card majors and NT openings

Rakesh Kumar

Somewhat belatedly, here is an interesting deal from Monday 25 January.

BD: 10	♠J954	Dir: E
	♥52	Vul: ALL
	♦K8432	
	♣98	
♠AKQT3		♠87
♥A96		♥83
♦QT		♦AJ65
♣AK3		♣Q7654
	♠62	
	♥KQJT74	
	♦97	
	♣JT2	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	- - - - -	4
S	- - - - -	22 7
E	7 5 2 5 7	7
W	7 5 2 5 7	

East will of course pass. Vulnerable, with 6322 shape and prospects for no more than 5 tricks at best, South really doesn't have a hand worth a weak two-bid in hearts. Still, this may not have stopped some from bidding anyway.

Supposing South does the sensible thing and passes: what should West open? With 22 hcp and balanced 5332 shape, the hand cries out for a 2NT bid. However, many will not contemplate opening either 1NT or 2NT with a 5-card major, especially one as strong as this spade suit. To my mind, that's not a good idea at all.

If you worry about losing a possible 5-3 fit by opening in notrumps, consider learning a convention described in the appendix to Booklet 2 of *Better Partnership Bridge* known as puppet Stayman. This guarantees that you can find both 4-4 and 5-3 fits and ensure that the strong hand gets to play the contract.

After a 2NT opening by West, East-West will of course play in a contract in notrumps. Reaching 6NT is unlikely and somewhat frightening on a heart lead, because it requires both a diamond finesse and a spade-diamond squeeze on North (!) which then brings in all 13 tricks. However, 3NT is absolutely cold.

If South does open 2H (or a multi-2D showing an unspecified weak 6-card major suit) then West needs to show strength by doubling first. A subsequent rebid in notrumps then shows a hand too strong to merely overcall 1NT i.e. at least a 19+ hand. Indeed with 22 hcp West might double and rebid 2NT, or at the very least double and jump rebid 3S. Thus some worthwhile game contract would be reached.

It seems that none of the above happened most of the time last Monday, because the table of results indicates that most East-West pairs languished in a part-score:

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
3♠ by EW	=	-140	1
2♠ by EW	+1	-140	1
2♠ by EW	+2	-170	2
3♠ by EW	+2	-200	1
2♠ by EW	+3	-200	1
5♣ by EW	=	-600	1
3NT by EW	+4	-720	1

Only one pair played in 3NT and they did in fact make all 13 tricks. That was Margaret Hibbert and Kate Kerr. Well done!



9 February

What's a biddable suit?

Rakesh Kumar

On Monday 8 February, a deal turned up that that challenged what might be your concept of what constitutes a biddable suit:

BD: 3	♠A4	Dlr: S
	♥Q8754	Vul: E-W
	♦KJ7	
	♣962	
♠QJT6		♠9853
♥AT32		♥9
♦T854		♦A2
♣7		♣AKQJ83
	♠K72	
	♥KJ6	
	♦Q963	
	♣T54	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	- - 1 - -	10
S	- - 1 - -	7 14
E	3 1 - 4 2	9
W	3 1 - 4 2	

After 3 passes, East will of course open 1C and West will respond 1H. What should East rebid?

It seems that most of those playing on the Monday afternoon didn't feel able to bid 1S. Why not? Sure, it isn't much of a suit, but even if partner raises with Qxxx it means you will have found your best fit, in a major rather than a minor suit, with the potential for a better score.

Indeed if partner does raise your 1S bid, your hand improves a great deal: now that you have found a fit you should have bigger ambitions, because you can now think in terms of a 5-loser hand, which has potential for game opposite most minimum responders. So you should at least invite with a bid of 3S.

Partner may have a problem deciding whether it's a good or a bad thing to have a singleton in your first bid suit, but with quite solid spade support and an outside ace, there's no good reason to decline the invitation. If you believe in using the losing trick count to evaluate, West now has an 8-loser hand. Assuming that partner has a

6-loser or better hand to invite, the LTC arithmetic says $24 - (6+8) = 10$ so you should bid game.

In fact game is cold – indeed if the defence does not attack diamonds you could end up with 11 tricks. However, a diamond lead ought to be obvious after the auction.

None of this happened on 8 February. Only one pair played in spades, but they were not in game, as you can see from the table of results:

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
2♣ by EW	+1	-110	1
4♣ by EW	=	-130	1
3♣ by EW	+1	-130	1
2♣ by EW	+2	-130	1
1NT by EW	+2	-150	1
3♠ by EW	+2	-200	1

Shape beats points almost every time. Showing your shape is important. Would you rebid 1S if you held J853? If your answer to that is yes, ask yourself: what's a missing jack between friends?



16 February

What's a biddable suit? Take 2 ...

Rakesh Kumar

Last week's column featured a deal from Monday 8 February in which I suggested that the only way to reach the optimal contract was to be prepared to bid a suit of ♠9853, which would make some folks shudder.

The theme of "shape beats points" was reinforced on Monday 15 February in the Mixed Pairs Qualifying event – not once but twice. Firstly there was this board:

BD: 13	♠9653	Dlr: N
	♥AK	Vul: ALL
	♦T2	
	♣AK752	
♠AQJT2		♠K84
♥T432		♥8765
♦AK74		♦J963
♣		♣96
	♠7	
	♥QJ9	
	♦Q85	
	♣QJT843	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	4 - - - -	14
S	4 - - - -	14 4
E	- 4 4 3 -	8
W	- 4 4 3 -	

North opened 1C and at our table, South raised pre-emptively to 3C, promising 6-9 hcp with 5+ clubs and no 4-card major. West doubled for takeout.

If bidding a suit of ♠9853 would make you shudder, would you feel more comfortable about bidding a "solid" suit such as ♥8765?

Well, after a takeout double, you don't really have much choice ... but how comfortable would you then feel after partner raised you to 4H??!

South led ♠7, which was taken in dummy and a small heart led to North's king. A spade was returned and South ruffed. Back came a club, ruffed on table, and another heart was led, with the ace and queen crashing. East claimed.

Points, schmoits ... as Marty Bergen would have said (in case you're wondering, that is the most popular book written by the man who invented Bergen raises; it's [available](#) from The Bridge Shop).

Not long after, this board turned up. East passed and South opened 1NT. West passed and the spotlight was on North.

BD: 26		♠Q83		Dlr: E	
		♥T76		Vul: ALL	
		♦2			
		♣J98654			
♠T964				♠52	
♥AQ4				♥8532	
♦AQ53				♦JT984	
♣T3				♣AK	
		♠AKJ7			
		♥KJ9			
		♦K76			
		♣Q72			
		♣♦♥♠		N	
				T	
N	2	-	-	-	3
S	2	-	-	-	12 8
E	-	4	3	-	3 17
W	-	4	3	-	3

In *Better Partnership Bridge* booklet 1, there is a discussion early on about the value of being able to transfer in all 4 suits, because a weak hand always plays better in its long suit. If North can transfer to 3C, that's where North-South will play.

As it turns out, 3C is only one down for -100, despite a notable lack of high card points. Meanwhile 1NT goes down at least 2 and possibly 3 tricks. In fact East-West can make 3NT!!

Shape beats points, all day, every day.



25 February

Counting it out

Rakesh Kumar

On Wednesday 24 February, an absolutely fascinating deal turned up. Let's start the story from the perspective of the defence. After 2 passes, your partner opens 1S, RHO bids 1NT (15-18 hcp and a spade stopper) and LHO raises to 3NT. What will you lead from this?

♠T
♥JT93
♦KT8
♣T9654

The singleton ♠10 is almost certainly going to achieve nothing, so you have a choice: top of a sequence in hearts or fourth highest of your longest suit. As you hold 4 hearts, it's less likely that partner will have much in that suit, and you probably can't develop more than 2-3 tricks there. So the hopeful lead would be a club.

Against me, Peppy Evans got her side off to the best lead with ♣5. Now let's change to declarer's perspective. This is what I was looking at – for convenience, in this diagram South is declarer and North is dummy:

♠AQ87
♥Q864
♦J76
♣82

♠K53
♥K5
♦AQ432
♣A73

On a low card from dummy, Steve Brabyn played ♣J. My thoughts were along the following lines: if Steve has only 3 clubs, I can duck 2 rounds of the suit, cross to dummy in spades and take a diamond finesse. Then if this works I might be able to drop a doubleton king, or else concede a diamond and a heart as well as the 2 club tricks, but I will still be able to make my contract.

When I ducked the first club, Steve continued with the king. Without undertaking any further re-assessment, I ducked again, then took the third round of clubs and tried the diamond finesse.

It failed.

However, by that stage I had failed as well. Here's the full deal, now with the correct directions – the declarer is actually North:

BD: 18		♠K53		Dlr: E		
	♥K5		Vul: N-S			
	♦AQ432					
	♣A73					
♠J9642			♠T			
♥A72			♥JT93			
♦95			♦KT8			
♣KQJ			♣T9654			
	♠AQ87					
	♥Q864					
	♦J76					
	♣82					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	N	
					T	
N	-	3	1	2	3	16
S	-	3	1	2	3	11 4
E	1	-	-	-	-	9
W	1	-	-	-	-	

You will note that the table of makeable contracts says 3NT should come home on any defence. At first, I couldn't see how, so I clicked on "Replay with Bridge Solver" on our website and discovered that what needed to be done was to take the first or second round of clubs and then try the diamond finesse. When that failed, East could return a club, but the suit would be blocked and only 4 tricks would have to be lost ...

Should I have figured that out? Well, yes ... what club holding could Steve have where he played first the jack and then the king? Obviously he held ♣KQJ. If he had a fourth club there would be nothing I could do about it (I would always lose 3 clubs and ♥A) but if he had just the tripleton, there was a genuine chance. And if I counted up the missing points, with the tripleton club honours plus ♥A and ♠J he would have just enough for a minimum opening. Playing him for ♦K would give him a good 14 hcp hand if he had ♥A, but would not be compatible with an opening hand if he didn't.

I didn't stop to think, let alone succeed in working it out, so I duly went 2 down for an absolute zero on the board



30 March

Distributional misfit

Rakesh Kumar

The deal being discussed in this column turned up on Monday 29 March. It raises interesting questions both about bidding methods and bidding mindset.

Let's start with mindset. You pick up this hand:

♠KQJT842
♥6
♦J3
♣K53

If you were the dealer, with both sides vulnerable, what would you bid?

My answer would be an automatic 4S. You have a much better than average preemptive hand with an excellent suit and notionally only 6 losers, which is what a 4S bid purports to show.

Now for methods. Your RHO as dealer opens 1D. Regardless of the vulnerability, what will you bid with this hand?

♠
♥KQT982
♦96
♣QJT86

That depends in part on your agreements, but if ever there was a hand for a 2NT overcall over a minor suit, this is it. Most play such an unusual 2NT overcall as showing at least 5/5 in the lower 2 unbid suits. Some who play the full version of Michaels cue bids play 2NT as showing 5+ in the other minor suit and an unspecified 5+ major suit, which advancer can inquire about by bidding opener's minor suit. In any case, you can show both suits and get the hand off your chest in one bid: where you land is now partner's decision.

Now consider your approach if you hold the powerful pre-emptive spade hand above but are in fourth seat. Your LHO opens 1D and you hear partner bid 2NT. What will you bid in this situation?

Well, one thing that should be obvious is that 4S is no longer a sound choice. The deal is clearly a distributional misfit for playing in spades. Given your strong suit, you could still consider ignoring the known 5-3 club fit and bidding spades regardless, but anything more than 3S is a silly bid.

That didn't stop me – being stuck in the original mindset of a 6-loser hand with great spades, I bid 4S anyway. I duly paid for this and went 2 down for –200, which earned our side all of 7% but really deserved a complete zero.

This was the full deal:

BD: 26 ♠KQJT842		Dlr: E
♥6		Vul: All
♦J3		
♣K53		
♠9753	♠A6	
♥J3	♥A754	
♦A742	♦KQT85	
♣A74	♣92	
	♠	
	♥KQT982	
	♦96	
	♣QJT86	
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N
		T
N	3 - 2 1 -	10
S	3 - 2 1 -	9 13
E	- 4 - - 2	8
W	- 3 - - 2	

Once partner bids 2NT, the sensible approach is to invoke plan B and just settle for 3C. This turns out to be the only 3-level contract that North-South can make on sound defence. Remarkably, no one in the field was in it! Here is the table of results:

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
3♥ by NS	=	140	1
4♠ by NS	-1	-100	1
3♠ by NS	-1	-100	3
3♦ by EW	+1	-130	1
5♣ by NS	-2	-200	1
4♠ by NS	-2	-200	1

Perhaps some South players were unable to show both their suits because they initially overcalled 2H and were then shut out by North's spade bid. That's a good reason to adopt the unusual 2NT (or the full version of Michaels cue bids) over minor suit openings as well as over 1-of-a-major. Of course it helps if partner doesn't then stay locked into a no-longer-relevant mindset!



6 April

Dealing with a multi-2D opening

Rakesh Kumar

The multi-2D opening is a more effective pre-emptive bid than a simple weak 2H/2S opening, plus it frees up those bids for other uses, notably 5-card pre-emptive openings. Increasingly, members at our club are starting to use a multi-2D bid, but not everyone knows how to deal with it when on the receiving end.

That certainly appeared to be the case when this deal came up on Monday 5 April. When South as dealer opened 2D, showing either a weak 2 in a major or a strong balanced hand, after West's pass, North bid 2H as "pass or correct" and on more than one occasion, was allowed to play in that contract – undoubled! Of course 2H cannot make, but -100 was a very small price for North-South to pay when East-West are glacially cold for 3NT.

BD: 19 ♠T876	Dlr: S
♥865	Vul: E-W
♦94	
♣KT53	
♠QJ9	♠AK32
♥KJ2	♥9
♦QJ52	♦AKT87
♣A42	♣986
♠54	
♥AQT743	
♦63	
♣QJ7	
	N
♣♦♥♠	T
N - - - - -	3
S - - - - -	14 14
E 3 5 1 4 4	9
W 3 5 1 4 4	

So when the opponents open 2D, what should you do to ensure not missing out on a making contract? Three aspects need consideration:

1. Overcalls – you should overcall in a suit with 10+ hcp and a good-quality suit; and should overcall 2NT with 15-18 hcp plus stoppers in both major suits, after which your normal methods should apply
2. Takeout doubles by second hand – these are not so straightforward, so have a look at the idea below

3. Action by fourth hand after a 2H/2S pass-or-correct bid – again, not straightforward, so read on.

When you are in second seat (over the 2D bidder) and hold a reasonably good hand but do not have an obvious overcall, you should assume that the multi-2D opening is indeed a weak 2 in a major and make a takeout call or bid to find your potential contract in the other major. However, because the 2D bidder's suit is not known, you need to be able to clarify your shape for partner.

The recommended way to do that is to double as a takeout of spades (i.e. the doubler is short in spades) and bid 2H as a takeout of hearts (i.e. the 2H bidder is short in hearts). Obviously you and partner need to be on exactly the same page about this or you could get into serious trouble! However, used correctly, this method is very effective.

When you are in fourth seat (under the 2D bidder, over the responder who makes a pass-or-correct bid) your double should be for takeout of the correctable suit i.e. when the bid is 2H, your double should show values and 4 spades. If you instead have values and 4 hearts, you should pass. Now it's likely that the 2D bidder will turn out to have spades and will correct to 2S. When this comes back to you, *then* you can double for takeout.

On the deal shown above, all of this would have worked just fine: West with 14 hcp is not strong enough to bid 2NT so passes, then East doubles North's 2H bid for takeout. With only 3 spades but a double stopper in hearts, West now happily converts to 3NT and 10 tricks are duly made. However, on Easter Monday only 3 of 9 East-West pairs played in this contract.

A complete set of methods for dealing with the multi-2D opening includes several additional refinements, but if you add the above to your system agreements, it will do well for a basic approach.



18 April

April Club Swiss Pairs

Rakesh Kumar

The full-day Swiss Pairs event on 17 April was well supported, with 22 pairs taking part. Some were experienced campaigners, but it was also great to see so many who were quite new to bridge. For the bridge tragics, yours truly included, the fact that the competition was being held was a highlight in itself – after all this the first such face-to-face event in a *very* long while! Everyone had a good time, not least because of the excellent lunch and the quick, error-free scoring – special thanks to all those who made things work.

As is always the case, there were many interesting deals. I've picked out two that I thought were of interest because of the variety of scores that were posted. Here's one from the morning session:

BD: 11	♠K983	Dlr: S
	♥JT94	Vul: None
	♦AK	
	♣A97	
♠QT7654		♠2
♥A		♥Q632
♦J9532		♦QT74
♣Q		♣JT53
	♠AJ	
	♥K875	
	♦86	
	♣K8642	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	4 - 4 1 3	15
S	4 - 4 2 3	9 5
E	- 2 - - -	11
W	- 2 - - -	

At many tables, South would have passed, even though I think it's quite reasonable to open this 7-loser 11 hcp hand, which would make the subsequent auction a lot easier. Anyway, assuming South does pass, West in second seat has a fine hand for a weak 2-bid in spades. Now what should North do?

There doesn't seem to be any sensible alternative to bidding a somewhat marginal 2NT, showing 15-18 hcp and a stopper in spades, after which you might end up in 3NT or use whatever Stayman-like methods your partnership has agreed on to arrive in 4H. A 3NT contract is relatively straightforward. In 4H, on the lead of ♠2, the contract is safe enough provided North first runs ♥J and then ♥10.

However, almost half the field wasn't in game. Three pairs made 3NT and one went down in this contract, while one made 4H and another failed. It's worth going to the Results page on our website, finding this deal (Round 2, Board 11) and replaying it via Bridge Solver (linked from the deal on the web page) to examine the alternative approaches.

This second deal from the afternoon session also yielded a variety of results. West will almost certainly kick off proceedings with 1D, but what happens next depends on partnership agreements. Mine are that any hand with an ace or a king-queen in the same suit must respond to one-of-a-minor even with no particular shape and fewer than 6 hcp, simply because 1m openings often conceal quite strong hands. So our auction was 1D-P-1S-2H-3C (now promising some 16+ hcp)-all pass. As it turned

out, 11 tricks were easy, but it's almost impossible for East-West to bid game of their own volition.

BD: 16	♠KT52	Dlr: W
	♥932	Vul: E-W
	♦A9652	
	♣3	
♠A6		♠9873
♥T		♥A85
♦KQT74		♦J3
♣AKJ76		♣T985
	♠QJ4	
	♥KQJ764	
	♦8	
	♣Q42	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	- - 4 1 -	7
S	- - 4 1 -	17 5
E	5 3 - - 1	11
W	5 3 - - 1	

However, many West players must have chickened out, because 5 North-South pairs played in contracts from 2H-4H. In fact having North-South bid to 4H is probably the only way East-West will get to their making game. As it turns out, therefore, a sacrifice in 5H (costing only –100 even if doubled) is much cheaper than the –600 for 5C making, but the one pair who did sacrifice found themselves losing a couple of IMPs against the datum ... such is Swiss Pairs!

