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6 August 2018

Give Yourself a Chance

Chris Bayliss

We all know the basic card play principles such as "second plays low", "third plays high" and "cover an honour with an honour". Still, these are only guidelines. Sometimes, it may be that following these rules can only end in failure. Then, it is time to think of something else.

♠Q32		♠A75
♥A743		♥Q9852
♦KQ		♦AT
♣KT54		♣J96

This was board 4 at Saturday's session. The auction usually started with 1♣ from west, an overcall of 1♠ by north and a response of 2♥ by east. Surprisingly, with a nine-card heart fit and a combined 25 HCP, only half the field reached game. Those who didn't bid game scored well. Most declarers made only nine tricks.

After north's spade overcall, most souths led the ♠J. North is almost certain to have the ♠K along with many of the remaining HCP. Instinct tells declarer to play the ♠Q, covering an honour with an honour. That can only lead to disaster. After north's king and east's ace, declarer has two sure spade losers, a heart loser and a club loser. For those declarers in game, that is too many losers! It is time to throw instinct away and think of something else.

Suppose, we play low from west's hand and win the first trick with the ace. Then, the ♠Q will remain a stopper provided we can keep south out of the lead. For that to happen, we need north to have the ♣A and the ♥K. We also need south to have the ♣Q. That keeps the club losses to one. Maybe this is a bit much to ask but since the "obvious" line ends in failure, why not try it?

BD: 4	♠KT864	Dir: W
	♥KJ	Vul: All
	♦J82	
	♣A83	
♠Q32		♠A75
♥A743		♥Q9852
♦KQ		♦AT
♣KT54		♣J96
	♠J9	
	♥T6	
	♦976543	
	♣Q72	
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT	
N	- - - - -	12
S	- 1 - - -	14 11
E	3 - 4 1 1	3
W	4 - 4 1 1	

This was the full deal and the key cards are just where we need them.

Win trick one with the ace of spades. Play a heart to the ace and another heart back. North will win with the king. If north cashes the SK now, it gives declarer the tenth trick. So, north will most likely return a diamond.

Win the diamond trick in hand and finesse the ♣Q. When that is successful, ten tricks are assured. A losing spade disappears on the fourth round of clubs.

Well done to the two declarers who made ten tricks.

21 August 2018

Counting tricks at Coffs Harbour

Rakesh Kumar

The recent Coffs Coast Gold Congress had good representation from the Southern Highlands. With teammates from Sydney, I played in the Open Teams, which had 70 teams entered – there were another 38 in the Intermediate/Restricted Teams. Our results were fairly ordinary but the bridge was enjoyable. Of course 112 boards over 1 full and 2 half days meant there were *lots* of interesting hands. Here are two that I thought were instructive. They both relate to counting tricks, once as declarer and once as a defender. Let me show them to you as problems:

♠KJT7

♥AQ43

♦973

♣82

Problem 1:

As dealer, you open 1C, LHO overcalls 1D, partner makes a negative double showing the majors and you arrive in 4S. LHO leads the ♥J which you win in hand with the king. You play ♠A and LHO shows out! Now what?

♠A942

♥K92

♦T8

♣AKT6

♠KQT4

♥T84

♦AT6

♣J53

Problem 2:

You are West. After a pass by LHO as dealer, partner opens 2H, showing 5 hearts and 4+ of another suit, with less than an opening hand. RHO bids 5C. You bid 5H and LHO now bids 6C! All pass and you lead the ♥A but declarer ruffs. Next he lays down the ♣A, with both you and partner following suit, and then leads ♠7 towards dummy. What will you play?

Dealer N

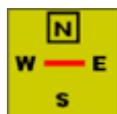
Vul E-W

♠AJ9

♥AJ932

♦QJ53

♣7



On problem 1, the main thing to do is not panic because of the 5-0 trump break. Of course you have to lose a trick to the ♠Q, which sits over the ♠KJ10, but can you still make 10 tricks? The answer is yes, provided RHO has at least 3 hearts and 2 clubs. With those 5 tricks in top cards, your job is to then make 5 trump tricks, which is possible as long as you can ruff twice in your own hand.

Board 16 ♠Q8653

Dealer W ♥875

Vul E-W ♦K64

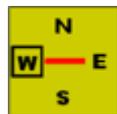
♣Q4

♠KJT7

♥AQ43

♦973

♣82



♠A942

♥K92

♦T8

♣AKT6

♠

♥JT6

♦AQJ52

♣J9753

Makeable contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
7	N	-	-	-	-
10	S	-	-	-	-
9	E	1	-	4	4
	W	1	-	3	4

Here's the full hand – you are East. You need to cash the ♣AK, then the ♥AQ. Once you've got these 5 top tricks, you can play the fourth heart from dummy and all will be well: you will score one diamond and one heart ruff in hand, plus a club ruff in dummy, together with ♠AK. Note that the same outcome is achieved even if EW start by cashing their 2 diamond tricks. Also note that if you play to the ♠K first, rather than cashing ♠A, you must ruff your third club high, otherwise North can over-ruff with the ♠8.

Across the Open field, 4S was bid 22 times. It was made at 11 tables but went down at the other 11.

Problem 2 again involves counting tricks. Declarer has a heart void and must have 8 clubs to the AKQ, because he has only drawn one round of trumps. Does he have any other top cards outside? If he has the $\heartsuit K$ this may be difficult to beat. What about if he doesn't? Then as long as he has 2 or 3 diamonds he is going down, because he will have to lose a diamond and a spade.

What about if he has a singleton spade? Should you grab your $\spadesuit A$? That's the key question. Think about it ... if he has a singleton spade, he has 4 losing diamonds. If you play your $\spadesuit A$, the $\spadesuit KQ$ will drop your jack and the $\spadesuit 10$ will provide declarer a third discard! True, if you don't take your $\spadesuit A$ it will be ruffed out, but that gives declarer only one discard and he will have eventually have to lose 2 diamonds.

So you should duck! Across the field, this obviously didn't happen very often: 6C was made at 9 tables (doubled on 4 occasions) and went down only twice. Here are all four hands:

Board 25 $\spadesuit KQT4$
 Dealer N $\heartsuit T84$
 Vul E-W $\diamondsuit AT6$
 $\clubsuit J53$

$\spadesuit AJ9$ $\heartsuit AJ932$ $\diamondsuit QJ53$ $\clubsuit 7$		$\spadesuit 86532$ $\heartsuit KQ765$ $\diamondsuit K8$ $\clubsuit 8$
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$\spadesuit 7$
 \heartsuit
 $\diamondsuit 9742$
 $\clubsuit AKQT9642$

When East didn't open, South played in 5C, frequently doubled, and this can only be beaten on double-dummy defence – a low diamond lead by West, ducked to East, who must then return a diamond. Now West can grab the spade ace and cash the setting diamond trick. That never happened!

Makeable contracts

	\clubsuit	\diamondsuit	\heartsuit	\spadesuit	NT
10	N	4	-	-	1
13	S	4	-	-	1
9	E	-	-	3	1
	W	-	-	3	1



27 August 2018

GNOT Regional Final

Chris Bayliss

After two changes of venue, this year's regional final ended up at Bundanoon Club. There was a record field of fourteen teams: three from SHBC, three from Bowral, a Goulburn team and seven teams from Illawarra. The usual strong contingent from Illawarra was strengthened even more this year with the presence of the Emerald Grand Master, Paul Lavings.

It was heartening to see many highlanders making their first foray into this event. There is a huge difference between club bridge and competitive bridge and I am delighted that every team managed at least one win. The highlands had three teams in the top six – no mean performance given the strength of the field.

The Most Dangerous Boards of the Day

In any bridge event, the two most dangerous boards of the day are the first board and the last one. Before the first board, you may have been greeting friends and catching up on the latest news, Before the last one you may be thinking what you will be doing after bridge – what is on the shopping list, what is for dinner and so on. Your mind may not be fully focused on bridge and this is a dangerous state to be in. This is especially true on the first board where the result tends to set the tone of the day.

Board 3	♠ AJ8642	
<i>Dealer S</i>	♥ AQJ7	
<i>Vul E-W</i>	♦ 75	
	♣ 4	
♠ T		♠ 953
♥ 853		♥ T6
♦ QT42		♦ K983
♣ J9532		♣ KQ76
	♠ KQ7	
	♥ K942	
	♦ AJ6	
	♣ AT8	
12	Makeable contracts	
3 8	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT	
17	N - - 7 6 6	
	S - 1 7 6 6	
	E 2 - - - -	
	W 2 - - - -	

This was very true for me at the GNOT. After racing round setting up the room at the start of the day, I sat down and picked up north's cards on this deal. I needed to switch rapidly into bridge mode.

As South, Kate opened 1NT and I needed a plan. I decided I would first transfer to spades and then show my heart suit. Kate supported hearts rather than spades, preferring the 4-4 fit. Now, I counted 16 fit points and I decided to try for slam with a Roman Key Card sequence. Eventually, we ended up in six hearts. The full sequence was:

1NT – 2♥
 2♠ – 3♥
 4♥ – 4NT
 5♣ – 6♥

After the club lead, 13 easy tricks rolled in and we were off to a good start. Mind you, it was just as well that we bid the slam because Rakesh and Helen matched it at the other table.

28 August 2018

Bidding big hands in competition

Rakesh Kumar

This Monday 27 August, two consecutive boards illustrated some of the challenges of bidding a really strong hand in competition. The first was this:

BD: 25 ♠ Q76 ♥ Q5 ♦ AK542 ♣ A96 ♠ AK ♥ AJT9872 ♦ Q ♣ KQ4 ♠ J53 ♥ 64 ♦ J9763 ♣ 752 ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N T	Dlr: N Vul: E-W ♠ T9842 ♥ K3 ♦ T8 ♣ JT83																																																		
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;"></td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 10%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="text-align: center;">- - - - -</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="text-align: center;">15</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">S</td> <td style="text-align: center;">- - - - -</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="text-align: center;">19 4</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">E</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4 - 5 3 1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4 - 5 3 1</td> <td style="text-align: center;">-</td> <td style="text-align: center;"></td> </tr> </table>		N									N	- - - - -	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	S	- - - - -	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	19 4	E	4 - 5 3 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	W	4 - 5 3 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-		
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E	4 - 5 3 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2																																										
W	4 - 5 3 1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-																																											

After North opened 1D, followed by 2 passes, what should West do? With only 4 losers, the hand is much, much too strong to just bid 1H or 2H. A bid of 1H in the passout seat shows something like 9-13 hcp with a 5-card suit, while a jump bid of 2H shows a stronger hand, say 11-13 hcp with a 6-card suit, but neither bid would do justice to this huge hand.

I have no argument with a direct bid of 4H, but the modern approach would be to double first. Because a bid of a new suit after a takeout double promises extra strength, a jump rebid (in this case 3H after East's 1S response to the double) shows even more extras, either by way of high card points or playing tricks. With the doubleton king of hearts, East should then have no hesitation raising to game. However, only half the field got to 4H, even though 11 tricks were bullet-proof.

Is there any advantage in not just bidding 4H directly every time? Well, without East's crucial heart honour, declarer might well lose two heart tricks, a diamond and a club. It's much better to be able to show strength and then stop on a dime if necessary.

BD: 26	♠AK63	Dlr: E	
	♥AQ	Vul: All	
	♦KJ6		
	♣A742		
♠QT874		♠52	
♥KJ93		♥42	
♦QT8		♦A9742	
♣K		♣QJ96	
	♠J9		
	♥T8765		
	♦53		
	♣T853		
	♣♦♥♠	N	
		T	
N	2 - 2 - 1		21
S	2 - 2 - 1		11 7
E	- - - - -		1
W	- 1 - 1 -		

That issue became very important on the next hand, on which after 2 passes, West opened proceedings with 1S. North found herself looking at 21 hcp with a double spade stop, so was full of hope that 3NT might be a good contract. But what if partner can offer no help at all? The way to cater for that is again to double first. Given that a direct bid of 1NT over 1S shows 15-18 hcp, double followed by a notrump bid at the cheapest level (in this case 2NT, as partner will respond 2H) shows 19-21 hcp.

That sort of sequence would allow South to pass and would limit the North-South loss to -100, since notrump contracts generally made 7 tricks, while contracts in hearts made 8. Because almost no one stayed out of game, the usual result for North-South was -200 regardless.

So ... double and bid to show strength, then give partner a chance to make the final decision, just in case she/he has nothing to contribute by way of a fit or top tricks.

30 August 2018

Points aren't always that important

Rakesh Kumar

Do you often find yourself worrying about whether you have enough high card points to open a hand that has a 5-card major suit? If you do, I guess you wouldn't open this hand with 1S in first seat:

♠AJT75 After all, it only has 10 points ...

♥Q943

♦T

♣K42

But think again. Try counting losers instead: this hand has 7 losers, usually considered a "normal" opening hand. It has both majors, which means an easy rebid is available over 1NT or a new minor suit bid by partner.

So why wouldn't you open it? Look at what happened on Wednesday evening when South did open this hand with 1S:

BD: 11 ♠962 **Dlr: S**

♥AKT6 **Vul: None**

♦73

♣AT97

♠Q

♠K843

♥875

♥J2

♦AK865

♦QJ942

♣J865

♣Q3

♠AJT75

♥Q943

♦T

♣K42

West overcalled 2D and North bid 3S invitational. Given that West's values are in diamonds, it's a reasonable inference that North's values are not. With South's singleton in diamonds, any values in clubs or hearts will be very helpful. So now, not only is the 10-point hand worth opening, you should upgrade it even further and raise to 4S!

Crazy, you say? Hardly. West led the ♦A and ♦K, declarer ruffing the second round. Crossing to a top heart, declarer now ran the ♠9, which lost to the queen. West returned a club, taken by the ace in dummy, and declarer repeated the spade finesse. This succeeded but West showed out.

With East holding 4 spades, there was now a real risk she might only have one heart, but declarer had little choice: a low heart to the second top honour in dummy, praying hard, did hold. So the spade finesse could be repeated yet again and, as hearts had broken 3-2, declarer now claimed 10 tricks.

				N		
	♣	♦	♥	♠	T	
N	3	-	5	4	1	11
S	3	-	5	4	1	10 9
E	-	2	-	-	-	10
W	-	2	-	-	-	

This was a cold game with only 21 high card points between the two hands, which did not rely on perfect location of adverse honours and could even cope with a 4-1 trump break. Quite a nice demonstration of the idea that points aren't everything ...