

11 May

## Being a nuisance

Rakesh Kumar

Life would be simple if the opponents didn't bid. You could delicately invite game when appropriate, stop in a part score when in doubt, and use all your favourite gadgets to reach a borderline game or slam. Bidding systems are designed on the assumption that the other side stays silent.

It follows that the best approach to messing with your opponents' constructive auction is for you to bid early, bid often and bid 'em up whenever it isn't dangerous. That almost sounds like a former Queensland politician's manifesto ...

Anyway, with that background, think about this hand:

♠T5  
♥AT8653  
♦K  
♣KQ73

You are not vulnerable and the opponents are vulnerable. Partner and RHO have passed. What will you bid?

Now think about this hand:

♠752  
♥AJ  
♦J965  
♣J765

Both sides are vulnerable. LHO opened 1C, partner overcalled 1D and RHO bid 1H. What will you bid?

Both of these situations arose on Monday 8 May. Both offered opportunities for those who believe in being a nuisance to practice their skills.

The deal associated with the first hand is on the next page:

|                   |   |                |      |
|-------------------|---|----------------|------|
| <b>BD: 19 ♠T5</b> |   | <b>Dlr: S</b>  |      |
| ♥AT8653           |   | <b>Vul: EW</b> |      |
| ♦K                |   |                |      |
| ♣KQ73             |   |                |      |
| ♠Q762             |   | ♠AK8           |      |
| ♥Q94              |   | ♥K72           |      |
| ♦J6               |   | ♦AQT752        |      |
| ♣T942             |   | ♣6             |      |
| ♠J943             |   |                |      |
| ♥J                |   |                |      |
| ♦9843             |   |                |      |
| ♣AJ85             |   |                |      |
|                   |   | N              |      |
|                   |   | T              |      |
| N                 | 2 | 1              | 12   |
| S                 | 2 | 1              | 5 16 |
| E                 | 3 | 2 2            | 7    |
| W                 | 3 | 2 2            |      |

In principle the North hand is worth a 1H opening. If you were vulnerable against opponents who were not vulnerable, you might consider a "heavy" weak 2H opening, because the value of ♦K is uncertain. But in third seat at favourable vulnerability? To my mind the best way of being a pain in the (insert relevant part of anatomy) is by bidding 3H!

Risky, you say? You have only 6 cards in the suit! What if partner hasn't got anything much and has little heart support? Well, that's exactly the situation here. But unless East-West find the double-dummy defence of leading a club, taking the second heart with ♥K and then putting West in with ♠Q to get a ruff, North will make 8 tricks. Even doubled (and 3H won't be) this is only -100, which is less than the +110 for East-West in 3D. More likely is either that East will pass and North-South will get away with -50, or that East will object to being pushed around and will bid 4D – but this goes down on best defence (♥J led, won by the ace, a suit-preference ♥3 returned for a ruff, underlead of ♣A to North's king enabling a second ruff) and North-South gain a plus score!

The deal associated with the second hand follows. Again, to get a good result some risky bidding is required – rather than a wimpy pass or a feeble 2D, you should raise to 3D! In modern competitive bidding, all this promises is 4-card support, consistent with the Law of Total Tricks. Any good hand will make a cue raise – in the setting of this auction, a 2C bid would show a good raise to at least 2D. OK, you wouldn't raise to 3D with zero points when vulnerable, but you have ♥A so what's the problem?

Now look at East's situation after a raise to 3D. She has only a minimum hand and no effective way of showing her 4-card spade suit. So she has to pass. However, when the 3D comes back to West, the situation hasn't improved in any way. West does not have the strength to reverse into 3S so the least dangerous course is again to pass. But 3D is only one off for -100, which is a better score for North-South than the +140 available to East-West in 3S. Note that West can't afford to rebid 3H in the absence of a fit – in fact this will lead to a negative score for her side.

|               |         |        |                 |
|---------------|---------|--------|-----------------|
| <b>BD: 10</b> | ♠752    |        | <b>Dlr: E</b>   |
|               | ♥AJ     |        | <b>Vul: ALL</b> |
|               | ♦J965   |        |                 |
|               | ♣J765   |        |                 |
| ♠J986         |         | ♠KQ43  |                 |
| ♥KQT92        |         | ♥76    |                 |
| ♦Q4           |         | ♦T8    |                 |
| ♣Q8           |         | ♣AKT94 |                 |
|               | ♠AT     |        |                 |
|               | ♥8543   |        |                 |
|               | ♦AK732  |        |                 |
|               | ♣32     |        |                 |
|               | ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ | N      |                 |
|               |         | T      |                 |
| N             | 2       | 1      | 7               |
| S             | 2       | 1      | 10 12           |
| E             | 3       | 2 3    | 11              |
| W             | 3       | 2 3    |                 |

The moral of the story is that it pays to be a pain ...



18 May

## Matchpoint greed

Rakesh Kumar

At matchpoint pairs, declarer's approach to overtricks often appears to conform to the *Wall Street* credo that "greed is good". Yes, overtricks win matchpoints, but the pursuit of additional overtricks can sometimes lead to disaster. A deal that illustrates the point turned up on Wednesday 17 May.

Before I show it to you, though, how would you bid these two hands? North is first to bid.

♠QJ9  
♥AKJ  
♦AKQJT  
♣73

♠K74  
♥9632  
♦  
♣AKQT94

If you play that a 2NT opening promises something in the range of 20-22 hcp, that seems fairly obvious for North, despite the lousy holding in clubs. After all, partner ought to turn up with something in that suit ...

As South, you know that you want to be in a slam opposite a strong 2NT opening. You might wonder about finding a 4-4 fit in hearts or about playing in clubs, but with an excellent source of tricks and mindful of the matchpoint scoring advantage of playing in notrumps, the sensible action is an immediate jump to 6NT! However, those who play 2C showing some 19+ hand might struggle to get there. I've commented on the flaws of this approach before (see the article about the notrump ladder, now in the September 2022 issue of the Newsletter Archive) so I won't repeat myself here.

Let's say you did get to 6NT and the lead was a diamond. How will you play? You have two possible lines. One is to knock out ♠A and claim 5 diamonds, 3 clubs, 2 hearts and 2 spades in top tricks. The other is to play for clubs to break no worse than 3-2 and aim for 6 clubs, 5 top diamonds and 2 top hearts, thus making all 13 tricks.

Which is better? Well, that depends. Playing Teams or IMP Swiss Pairs, where what matters is making your contract, there is no question about it – the first approach should be automatic. At matchpoint pairs, where overtricks are precious, the answer isn't so clear-cut. You need to ask yourself – am I in a good contract? Will everyone else be in it too? That's when the quality of the field becomes a consideration.

If you anticipate that everyone is going to be in 6NT then you need to try for the overtrick, because if it is available and you don't collect it, you will get a very poor score! On the other hand if you think that at least some won't be in 6NT, it becomes important to ensure that you don't go down. That's when you need to play safely.

In fact on the deal in question, greed was punished and playing for safety was rewarded, because clubs broke 4-1 with no singleton jack and those who tried for 13 tricks in notrumps ended up with only 11! The same fate ought to befall 6C, but if played by South a spade lead is required to beat it and that isn't automatic. On any other lead declarer can cash the top trumps to reveal the bad break, then cross to dummy in hearts to play off five diamonds, discarding all his losers as West ruffs the last diamond winner.

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>BD: 4</b> ♠QJ9<br>♥AKJ<br>♦AKQJT<br>♣73<br>♠T32<br>♥QT<br>♦8653<br>♣J652<br>♠K74<br>♥9632<br>♦<br>♣AKQT94<br><br>♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N<br>T<br>N 5 6 6 5 6 21<br>S 5 6 6 5 6 3 4<br>E 12<br>W | <b>Dlr: W</b><br><b>Vul: ALL</b><br>♠A865<br>♥8754<br>♦9742<br>♣8 |
|--|---|

On the day, most didn't get to 6NT but as can be seen, those in 3NT were greedy ...

| Contract  | Result | Score | Frequency |
|-----------|--------|-------|-----------|
| 6NT by NS | =      | 1440  | 1         |
| 6♣ by NS  | =      | 1370  | 1         |
| 3NT by NS | +2     | 660   | 1         |
| 3NT by NS | +2     | 660   | 2         |
| 5♦ by NS  | +1     | 620   | 1         |
| 5♣ by NS  | =      | 600   | 1         |

♣ ♦ ♥ ♠

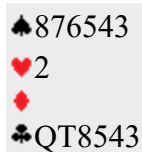
18 July

## The power of shape

Rakesh Kumar

*The Power of Shape* is a very readable book by Ron Klinger, published in 2002 and still as relevant as ever. Chapter 3 focuses on two-suited hands and Klinger says "A two-suiter with a 5-5 or 6-4 or more extreme shape has tremendous playing power if a trump fit exists."

With that in mind, consider this shapely hand:



♠876543  
♥2  
♦1  
♣QT8543

No one is vulnerable and your LHO opens 1H. Partner overcalls 1NT promising 15-18 hcp and a stopper in hearts. What is your plan for the auction?

If RHO passes, you should bid 2H as a transfer to spades (this assumes you play "system on" after a 1NT overcall – surely you do?) while if RHO raises to 2H you could bid 2S (which in principle shows a weak hand with length, but you might take further action later).

Say RHO raises and you do bid 2S, then LHO rebids 3H, passed around to you. Should you bid 3S? You could – but why not bid 4C at this point and ask partner to choose? If you are horrified by the idea of bidding to the 4-level with just 2 hcp, don't be – your playing strength means you might make one or the other contract, or it might be a cheap save.

What about if LHO rebids 4H – should you bid 4S? That's a little more difficult to decide, although again you probably should, as it now seems even more likely that you will have a worthwhile sacrifice available.

The full deal, from Monday 17 August, is overleaf. At our table, RHO raised to 3H and I dared to bid 3S, which ostensibly showed a strong hand. LHO then bid 4H and partner decided to join the party, raising me to 4S which was passed out.

As you can see, 4S could not be beaten, losing just a spade, a club and a heart. That's despite the fact that partner's 1NT overcall was a dead-minimum 15 hcp!!



24 July

## Looking for the setting trick

Rakesh Kumar

On Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> July, the Southern NSW Zonal Championship was held in Mollymook. SHBC had a team entered in the Open section (Stephen Brabyn, Tony Lye, Jenny Michael, Rakesh Kumar) as well as the Improvers section (Kirsten Hartley, Simon Elderfield, Fiona Khoo, Margaret Malcolm). Improvers were defined as a team having <1200 aggregate masterpoints for all team members, with no individual player having >500 masterpoints.

At the end of the day, the Championship was won by the the Illawarra Bridge Association, followed by Nowra and then Southern Highlands. However, the biggest success story of the day was that in fourth place was the Southern Highlands Improvers team! The team members had a total of just over 200 masterpoints between the four of them, but they gave several of the open teams a very hard time, including achieving a 1 IMP winning draw against the champions!!

Here's a defence problem for you from this event – you are looking at dummy's hand (top) and your hand (right):

|        |        |
|--------|--------|
| ♠K6542 |        |
| ♥7     |        |
| ♦KT4   |        |
| ♣KJ76  |        |
|        | ♠      |
|        | ♥AQ962 |
|        | ♦Q87   |
|        | ♣AQ985 |

The auction was 1S by LHO followed by a 4H splinter bid by RHO, promising 4+ spade support, shortage in hearts and a game-forcing hand but limited hand. You doubled to show hearts, then LHO signed off in 4S. Partner chose not to lead a heart, instead starting with ♠3. Declarer played low from dummy as you discarded, then led a club to the jack, which you won. What do you think you should do at trick 3?

Attempting to cash ♣A might come to grief if opener had a singleton. Cashing ♥A might establish declarer's king. You need to think about what other options there could be for a setting trick.

In fact your best hope is in diamonds – if declarer has at least 3 of these and partner has the ace, declarer will have to concede a second diamond trick when partner continues diamonds. The full deal is on the next page ...



With the hands in their correct orientation, you are sitting South:

|               |               |                 |   |       |
|---------------|---------------|-----------------|---|-------|
| <b>BD: 4</b>  | <b>♠T73</b>   | <b>Dlr: W</b>   |   |       |
|               | <b>♥JT5</b>   | <b>Vul: ALL</b> |   |       |
|               | <b>♦A952</b>  |                 |   |       |
|               | <b>♣T43</b>   |                 |   |       |
| <b>♠AQJ98</b> |               | <b>♠K6542</b>   |   |       |
| <b>♥K843</b>  |               | <b>♥7</b>       |   |       |
| <b>♦J63</b>   |               | <b>♦KT4</b>     |   |       |
| <b>♣2</b>     |               | <b>♣KJ76</b>    |   |       |
|               | <b>♠</b>      |                 |   |       |
|               | <b>♥AQ962</b> |                 |   |       |
|               | <b>♦Q87</b>   |                 |   |       |
|               | <b>♣AQ985</b> |                 |   |       |
|               |               |                 |   |       |
|               | ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠       | N               |   |       |
|               |               | T               |   |       |
| N             | 3             | 1               | 2 | 5     |
| S             | 3             | 1               | 2 | 11 10 |
| E             |               |                 | 3 | 14    |
| W             |               |                 | 3 |       |

As you can see, on any return other than ♦7, declarer is able to discard one diamond either from dummy or from hand, so he makes his game. Sadly, I didn't find the diamond return. Nor did most others: in the event, all but one East-West pair made 10 tricks.



1 August

## Another use for fourth suit forcing

Rakesh Kumar

Partner opens 1H in second seat and you hold:

♠ AT854  
♥  
♦ A5  
♣ AKQJ82

It's a very strong 3-loser hand, with considerable slam potential, but how are you going to bid it? One possibility is to start with a bid of 2C, but if partner does something unhelpful like rebid 2H then you could miss a 5-3 fit in spades. Perhaps it's best to bid 1S first and see what happens.

What does happen is that partner rebids 2D. Now what? You could bid notrumps, of course, but partner hasn't yet denied 3 spades and if she does have a useful holding there, slam in spades would be an attractive prospect. How can you find out?

The answer is quite simple: bid 3C. This bid of the fourth suit is forcing to game and is usually used to ask partner for a stopper in the fourth suit, to play in 3NT. On this deal you know for certain that partner will *not* have a club stopper! Once you've forced, though, you have provided partner an opportunity to show 3-card spade support if she has it. She does ... this was the complete deal, from Monday 31 July:

|               |           |                 |
|---------------|-----------|-----------------|
| <b>BD: 30</b> | ♠ AT854   | <b>Dir: E</b>   |
|               | ♥         | <b>Vul: Nil</b> |
|               | ♦ A5      |                 |
|               | ♣ AKQJ82  |                 |
| ♠ 72          |           | ♠ Q93           |
| ♥ 8753        |           | ♥ KJ64          |
| ♦ KQ8643      |           | ♦ T             |
| ♣ 7           |           | ♣ T9654         |
|               | ♠ KJ6     |                 |
|               | ♥ AQT92   |                 |
|               | ♦ J972    |                 |
|               | ♣ 3       |                 |
|               | ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠   | N               |
|               |           | T               |
| N             | 6 2 2 7 6 | 18              |
| S             | 6 2 2 7 6 | 5 6             |
| E             |           | 11              |
| W             |           |                 |

When partner rebids 3S, you can inquire with 4NT RKCB. Once she shows 2 keycards, even without the queen, you can confidently bid 6S.

The only potential problem with this approach to the auction arises when partner has 3=5=5=0 shape, because showing length in the second suit takes priority and she would be expected to rebid 3D, concealing the spade fit. On the auction above, therefore, you know partner has 3=5=4=1 shape.

In 6S, the play is not without interest. On a diamond lead, you win in hand and should ignore the spade finesse altogether. Instead, you should cash  $\spadesuit$ AK, discard your losing diamond on  $\heartsuit$ A, come to hand with  $\clubsuit$ A and ruff a club with dummy's last trump. Now ruff a red suit to return to hand and play top clubs until someone eventually wins  $\spadesuit$ Q. The suggested line caters for a possible 5-1 club break and as it happens, this is necessary!

Note that while 6C and 6NT can also make, both are dependent on the spade finesse. 6S only requires trumps to be 3-2.



*7 August*

## You can't there from here

Rakesh Kumar

This week's column is about a problem in defence, always the most difficult part of the game. Your LHO opened 2C and after RHO's waiting bid of 2D, the opponents settled in 3NT.

In the diagram below, dummy is at the top and you are at the right. Partner led  $\spadesuit$ 2 and the first trick went to the 8, 9 and king. Declarer led  $\diamondsuit$ J, partner played  $\diamondsuit$ 6 and you played ... which card?

|                      |                   |
|----------------------|-------------------|
| $\spadesuit$ 83      |                   |
| $\heartsuit$ JT5     |                   |
| $\diamondsuit$ KQ983 |                   |
| $\clubsuit$ 975      |                   |
|                      | $\spadesuit$ T94  |
|                      | $\heartsuit$ Q976 |
|                      | $\diamondsuit$ 54 |
|                      | $\clubsuit$ QJT6  |

When declarer attacks a long suit and dummy has no obvious outside entries, it's important that you give partner a count signal to allow her to work out how many times to duck if she holds the ace. How does that work?

If you play natural count (high-low=doubleton or other even number of cards) then you should play  $\spadesuit 5$ , but if you have agreed to play reverse (a.k.a. upside-down) signals (which are demonstrably better for signalling attitude) then your count card should be  $\spadesuit 4$ . When you give the correct signal, partner will be able to duck again and when dummy wins with  $\spadesuit Q$ , if declarer was to play a third round of diamonds that would leave dummy's winners isolated because partner would win the trick.

However, after winning a second diamond trick, declarer plays  $\heartsuit J$  from dummy. Do you cover with the queen?

The full deal, from Monday 7 August, is below, now in its correct orientation – you were actually sitting North.

No, you don't cover – can you see why?

|                  |  |                   |      |
|------------------|--|-------------------|------|
| <b>BD: 11</b>    | $\spadesuit T94$                           | <b>Dlr: S</b>     |      |
|                  | $\heartsuit Q976$                          | <b>Vul: Nil</b>   |      |
|                  | $\diamond 54$                              |                   |      |
|                  | $\clubsuit QJT6$                           |                   |      |
| $\spadesuit 83$  |  | $\spadesuit AKQ5$ |      |
| $\heartsuit JT5$ |  | $\heartsuit AK4$  |      |
| $\diamond KQ983$ |  | $\diamond J72$    |      |
| $\clubsuit 975$  |  | $\clubsuit AK2$   |      |
|                  | $\spadesuit J762$                          |                   |      |
|                  | $\heartsuit 832$                           |                   |      |
|                  | $\diamond AT6$                             |                   |      |
|                  | $\clubsuit 843$                            |                   |      |
|                  | $\clubsuit \diamond \heartsuit \spadesuit$ | N                 |      |
|                  |  | T                 |      |
| N                |  |                   | 5    |
| S                |  |                   | 6 24 |
| E                | 4 6 4 4 4                                  |                   | 5    |
| W                | 4 6 4 4 4                                  |                   |      |

If you cover  $\heartsuit J$ , declarer will win, play another round of diamonds to give partner her ace, then re-enter dummy with  $\heartsuit 10$  to cash her winners. Unless you make sure that declarer can't get back to the table by ducking, you will have much cause for regret. I certainly did, as Leanne Haddadi now proceeded to make 12 tricks. Two other declarers achieved the same outcome, but in fact the limit of the hand is 10 tricks: 2 diamonds (after South ducks twice), 3 hearts (after North ducks once), 3 spades and 2 clubs.



# 15 August

## Thinking ahead

Rakesh Kumar

No matter how much work you have put into your system agreements and understandings, there will always be bridge hands that don't fit and thus create problems. Here's one, from Monday 14 August:

♠AQJ  
♥4  
♦QT963  
♣9764

Vulnerable against opponents who are not vulnerable, as dealer your partner opens 1NT, promising 15-17 hcp and possibly including a 5-card major suit in a 5332 hand. RHO passes. What will you do?

Your combined high card points are probably enough for game unless partner has a poor minimum, but which game? If partner has a heart suit, perhaps the diamonds will come in for 9 tricks in 3NT. But if partner has only 2-3 cards in hearts, 3NT is likely to be a disaster. Maybe 4S would have play in a 4-3 fit? Or could you manage 11 tricks in a minor suit contract?

There are lots of possibilities, but now that you have thought ahead, the first step must be to find out if partner has 4+ hearts. However, over your 2C Stayman inquiry LHO enters the auction with 3H! This was the full deal:

|               |        |                |
|---------------|--------|----------------|
| <b>BD: 15</b> | ♠AQJ   | <b>Dlr: S</b>  |
|               | ♥4     | <b>Vul: NS</b> |
|               | ♦QT963 |                |
|               | ♣9764  |                |
| ♠T987532      |        | ♠              |
| ♥A8           |        | ♥KQJT976       |
| ♦74           |        | ♦A852          |
| ♣T3           |        | ♣J8            |
|               | ♠K64   |                |
|               | ♥532   |                |
|               | ♦KJ    |                |
|               | ♣AKQ52 |                |
|               | ♣♦♥♠   | N              |
|               |        | T              |
| N             | 4 3    | 9              |
| S             | 3 3    | 4 11           |
| E             | 2      | 16             |
| W             | 2      |                |

Partner passes, of course, and the bidding comes back to you. Now what?

As you still have little idea about partner's hand, with shortage in hearts and potentially game-going values you can double – with a suitable holding in hearts partner will pass for penalties, otherwise she will take out to a suit, which you think will most probably be spades. In that case you will just have to hope that game can make in the 4-3 fit with the trump suit probably breaking badly ...

However, your prediction doesn't come to pass – instead partner surprises you by bidding 4C! You probably have useful ruffing values plus your diamonds must be worth something, so you happily raise to 5C.

Oddly enough, as you had bid 2C Stayman, you find yourself as the declarer. On a heart lead and continuation, there is nothing to the play – ruff the second heart, draw trumps and concede  $\heartsuit$ A.

Hang on, you say, I can see that 5C isn't supposed to make! True, but unless West overtakes  $\heartsuit$ K and returns a spade, it always will ...



*24 August*

## **Playing in a 4-3 fit**

Rakesh Kumar

You hold:

$\spadesuit$ A92  
 $\heartsuit$ A  
 $\diamondsuit$ AQT97  
 $\clubsuit$ KJ42

After 2 passes, you open 1D, of course. Partner responds 1S. Now what?

You have a powerful hand with useful shape and strength in both minor suits. You surely want to play in game, although slam is unlikely as partner is a passed hand. So you could rebid 3C to show your strength and invite game.

The catch with that is a minor suit game requires making 11 tricks. Of course it's possible that partner might rebid 3NT if she has a stopper in hearts, but a singleton ace in your hand isn't ideal for a notrump contract.

What about hoping that partner has a 5-card spade suit and bidding 4S? Will it be a disaster if it turns out that partner has only a 4-card suit? Not necessarily ...

This was the full deal, from Wednesday 23 August:

|               |           |                |
|---------------|-----------|----------------|
| <b>BD: 19</b> | ♠A92      | <b>Dlr: S</b>  |
|               | ♥A        | <b>Vul: EW</b> |
|               | ♦AQT97    |                |
|               | ♣KJ42     |                |
| ♠543          |           | ♠Q87           |
| ♥T9762        |           | ♥KQ8543        |
| ♦K86          |           | ♦52            |
| ♣Q6           |           | ♣T5            |
|               | ♠KJT6     |                |
|               | ♥J        |                |
|               | ♦J43      |                |
|               | ♣A9873    |                |
|               |           |                |
|               | ♣♦♥♠      | N              |
|               |           | T              |
| N             | 7 7 2 7 7 | 18             |
| S             | 7 7 2 7 7 | 5 7            |
| E             |           | 10             |
| W             |           |                |

Here are some of the reasons you should consider jumping directly to 4S:

1. You have shortage in hearts and two low trumps with which to ruff – that's much better than if you had, say ♠AKJ when you would be "wasting" top honours ruffing.
2. You have plenty of aces.
3. You have a potential side source of tricks in the diamond suit. Even if you can't/don't draw trumps, you can force the opponents to ruff your side suit and therefore avoid losing trump control.
4. At matchpoints, 10 tricks in spades beats 11 tricks in a minor suit.

As it happens, partner has quite a good 4-card spade suit. She doesn't need any heart ruffs! So she can afford to cash ♠A and finesse for the queen. When this works *and* spades break 3-3, she has 13 tricks after dropping the doubleton ♣Q!

The moral of the story is: don't be scared of a 4-3 fit if you have a distributional hand with top controls and a good side suit.

