

7 December

In pursuit of no-trumps

Rakesh Kumar

Pairs can be a cruel game. Considerable numbers of matchpoints can swing on apparently trifling decisions in the bidding, play and defence. Then of course there's the 10-point bonus for playing in no-trumps, which means that getting in first with a no-trump bid is important. Indeed the pursuit of no-trump contracts sometimes leads to rather odd actions ...

Quite a few decisions around no-trump contracts came up on Wednesday 5 December, the first night of the Bong Bong Cup. The first one was mainly a matter of system:

BD: 1	♠75	Dlr: N
	♥9653	Vul: None
	♦T982	
	♣K84	
♠QJ82		♠A963
♥KQ84		♥7
♦KQ3		♦J74
♣A7		♣T9632
	♠KT4	
	♥AJT2	
	♦A65	
	♣QJ5	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	- - - - -	3
S	- - - - -	17 5
E	2 1 1 3 1	15
W	1 1 - 3 1	

After 2 passes, South opens 1NT if playing 15-17 or 15-18 hcp. West is in trouble immediately – with so many points concentrated in her hand, her defensive prospects actually diminish quite a lot, so even if a double would be for penalty, it's risky. Therefore West is likely to pass and South will get to play in 1NT, making 6 tricks for -50, which is better than -90 for West making 1NT. If you still play a 16-18 hcp range for 1NT, this hand is a good argument for shifting down a point.

The next hand is also about grabbing the no-trumps contract. West opens 1S and North doubles. If East assumes 22-24 hcp between those two hands, he can now place just about every point in the pack. So even though the diamond holding is a

little threadbare, at matchpoint pairs the bid simply has to be 3NT: as it turns out, both spades and no-trumps make 11 tricks but the 10-point bonus earns a better score.

BD: 12	♠T9	Dlr: W
	♥KT85	Vul: N-S
	♦AKJ7	
	♣974	
♠A87532		♠KQ
♥A73		♥QJ42
♦2		♦Q63
♣KT6		♣AQ53
	♠J64	
	♥96	
	♦T9854	
	♣J82	
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N
		T
N	- - - - -	11
S	- - - - -	11 16
E	6 1 5 5 5	2
W	6 1 5 5 5	

However, chasing no-trumps doesn't always work. This final hand (next page) caused much discomfort for two declarers, who as East quite reasonably rebid 1NT after a 1H opening and a 1S response. If South leads a top-of-nothing ♦8, declarer will inevitably take the losing heart finesse and N-S will have 9 tricks shortly thereafter ...

BD: 20 ♠J7 Dlr: W

♥K842 Vul: All

♦KJT972

♣J

♠T982

♠K64

♥A5

♥QJT93

♦Q3

♦A6

♣QT863

♣K92

♠AQ53

♥76

♦854

♣A754

♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
T

N - 4 - - 1 9

S - 4 - - 1 8 13

E 2 - - 1 - 10

W 2 - - 1 -

13 December

The power of long suits

Rakesh Kumar

The second night of the Bong Bong Cup was all about bidding decisions – and then if one got those right, there were challenges in the the play of several hands. Here's one on which most North-South pairs reached 4H, but remarkably, no one made it.

BD: 9	♠K	Dlr: N
	♥KQJ5	Vul: E-W
	♦AT9865	
	♣QJ	
♠QJ864		♠952
♥98		♥T76
♦K4		♦Q732
♣AK83		♣T75
	♠AT73	
	♥A432	
	♦J	
	♣9642	
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N
		T
N	1 4 5 - 3	16
S	1 4 5 - 3	13 2
E	- - - 1 -	9
W	- - - 1 -	

Why not? Well, the key to the hand is North's long diamond suit, and it seems most Souths failed to capitalise upon this as declarer. After the likely lead of a top club and a possible switch to a trump, a count of tricks reveals that if hearts break 3-2 there are 5 trump tricks, 2 spades and a diamond readily available – but that's simply not enough.

To make the contract, the long diamonds need to be established for the loss of one trick. A good approach is to take the trump in dummy and play a *low* diamond towards the jack in hand, losing to the king. Win the trump return in dummy, draw trumps, then cash the ♦A and take a ruffing finesse of the ♦Q. Return to dummy with the ♠K and make 4 diamonds, 5 trumps and one spade (the play will be slightly different if West cashes another top club and then plays a third one, forcing dummy to ruff).

The power of the long suit is also relevant to the bidding of the next hand. After West's pass, North opens 1D and South bids 2C. Depending on your methods, North may now bid 2NT (with some discomfort about the hearts) and South should raise to 3NT because of the long suit.

Your RHO opens 1D, you overcall 1S and LHO bids 2H. After your partner's pass, RHO rebids 3C and LHO now jumps to 4H. Partner leads a low spade and this is what you see:

♠6
♥7
♦AKJ964
♣AQT95
♠AK982
♥K8
♦75
♣J876

You take your ♠K. What now?

To answer that, ask yourself what declarer's hand might look like. She can't have much in diamonds or spades, so to jump to 4H she ought to hold at least ♣K and ♥AQJ in a seven-card or longer suit.

Your heart holding is very vulnerable indeed: if declarer can reach dummy to lead the singleton heart for a finesse, your king will come down on the next round. Declarer might then make 7 hearts, the ♦AK and the ♣AKQ, which adds up to 12 tricks i.e your spade trick might be the only trick you win! That would certainly be an unhappy outcome at matchpoints.

Is there some way of ensuring another trick for yourself? Yes there is – play another top spade and force dummy to ruff. Now you will inevitably win the ♥K and hopefully some matchpoints as well ...

But what if declarer has the ♠Q, I hear you cry? Well, what if she does? It isn't worth anything if she has the expected honours in the major suits: she will still make no more than 11 tricks.

It seems not everyone worked this out in the heat of battle, because North-South scored +480 on three occasions. Here is the full hand: as you can see, South does not deserve to make more than 11 tricks.

<p>♠6 ♥7 ♦AKJ964 ♣AQT95</p> <p>♠T754 ♥T93 ♦QT832 ♣3</p> <p style="margin-left: 40px;">♠QJ3 ♥AQJ6542 ♦ ♣K42</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Dlr: N Vul: None</p> <p>♠AK982 ♥K8 ♦75 ♣J876</p>
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	♣	♦	♥	♠	N		
					T		
N	5	4	5	1	5		14
S	5	4	5	1	5	2	11
E	-	-	-	-	-		13
W	-	-	-	-	-		

Even if giving dummy a ruff might seem like doing declarer's work for her, sometimes it is just what's needed to destroy finesse possibilities. That's an idea worth remembering.



20 January

Counting tricks in Canberra

Rakesh Kumar

Several SHBC members made the trip south to take part in the Summer Festival of Bridge in Canberra last week – some with notable success! For those with the stamina, there was a *lot* of bridge on offer. I played for 6 days straight and thoroughly enjoyed myself.

As you might expect, after 350 hands there were many I could have written about, but I'm going to select just one, from day one (Monday) of the South-West Pacific Teams and the Canberra Rex Under 750/Under 300 Teams. It's nice demonstration of some key considerations for declarer.

♠AKJ53

♥QT8

♦5

♣KJ54

♠6

♥AK743

♦AK862

♣83

Partner (North) deal and opened 1S, then raised your 2H and you got interested in slam. However, a couple of inquiries later, you rapidly lost interest and stopped in 5H. LHO led ♦7 which wasn't the worst thing that could have happened. What should you do at this point?

You could make optimistic assumptions about finessing in clubs. But suppose the ♣AQ are both sitting over dummy's honours – can you still make the contract? If so, how?

Ruffing a couple of diamonds in dummy and then drawing trumps is unlikely to work because it appears LHO has led from shortage. However, in that case the hearts in dummy will allow you to over-ruff all your low diamonds, so you should be able to make 3 ruffs in dummy. Therefore, perhaps the best idea is to play the hand as a complete cross-ruff.

If that's going to be the approach then you *must* cash your outside top tricks before the opponents discard in those suits and are able to ruff in at the end. You're going to have to rely on LHO having led from a doubleton diamond. The sequence then is: two top diamonds, ruff a diamond, two top spades pitching a club from hand, then a low club from the table. As you can see when looking at all 4 hands, the defence now has no winning options. South scores 2 ruffs in hand to go with the AKs and the ruffs in dummy, so the contract comes home despite the 4-1 trump break. However,

making 11 tricks was a minority result in the SWPT and only achieved once in the Rex Teams.

BD: 5 ♠AKJ53 **Dlr: N**
 ♥QT8 **Vul: N-S**
 ♦5
 ♣KJ54

♠T94	♠Q872
♥J962	♥5
♦73	♦QJT94
♣T972	♣AQ6

♣6
 ♥AK743
 ♦AK862
 ♣83

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N	
					T	
N	3	3	5	4	4	14
S	3	2	5	3	4	1 11
E	-	-	-	-	-	14
W	-	-	-	-	-	

The moral of the story is: count your tricks and make a plan at trick one!



21 January

Too much excitement?

Rakesh Kumar

In the post-Canberra return to Planet Earth, the fun didn't stop. On Monday 21 January, on our last board, I found myself looking at this:

♠
 ♥KQT98753
 ♦A642
 ♣4

Not your average hand ...nil vulnerable, partner passed as dealer and Patricia Phillips, sitting on my right, opened 1S. There didn't seem to be any point being subtle, so I overcalled 4H. Eric Lindh on my left was completely unfazed by this and bid 4S. My partner wasn't too troubled either and went on to 5H. Patricia now bid 5S.

I had no defence to this so figured it couldn't hurt to save ... so I continued to 6H. And Eric bid 6S!!

This was now a game of poker, with no one having any real idea of who could make what. Might partner have raised on the ace of hearts and not much else, with no heart tricks able to be cashed? This seemed entirely possible, so I took out insurance and bid 7H. Unsurprisingly, Eric doubled this, perhaps in part to prevent his partner from bidding on. Here are all four hands:

BOARD 27						
BD: 27	♠			Dlr: S		
	♥	KQT98753	Vul: None			
	♦	A642				
	♣	4				
♠	AKJ97		♠	QT432		
♥			♥	J42		
♦	T87		♦	Q3		
♣	AKQ76		♣	T85		
	♠	865				
	♥	A6				
	♦	KJ95				
	♣	J932				
	♣	♦	♥	♠	N	
					T	
N	-	5	6	-	-	9
S	-	6	6	-	-	17 5
E	3	-	-	5	-	9
W	3	-	-	5	-	

Remarkably, 6H is in fact cold, while 6S should always be beaten on the lead of the diamond ace and a diamond continuation when partner signals encouragement. But who knew who was bluffing?

Even more remarkably, almost all other pairs avoided these stratospheric levels and the usual outcome was +450 or better to East-West. So our -100 earned 75% on the board, proving once again that matchpoint pairs is a weird game.