

14 October
SHBC on BBO #11
 Rakesh Kumar

If the theme of this column seems familiar, that's because it is. On Monday 13 October there was yet another demonstration of the value of the support double, although unlike in the column from a fortnight ago, this time it wasn't just in terms of competing for the partscore, but rather in terms of getting to a cold game. As the Monday session this week was IMPs, that was of critical importance.

Here's the deal:

BOARD 6			
BD: 6	♠AKQ75	Dir: E	
	♥K2	Vul: EW	
	♦JT432		
	♣Q		
♠832		♠6	
♥AJ974		♥QT8	
♦A		♦K987	
♣J982		♣AKT65	
	♠JT94		
	♥653		
	♦Q65		
	♣743		
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N	
		T	
N	- 1 - 2 -		15
S	- 1 - 2 -	10	12
E	5 - 5 - 2		3
W	5 - 5 - 2		

Whether you open 1C or 1D with the East hand is a personal preference: those who would like to prepare their rebid and don't mind misrepresenting their shape might choose the latter. In any case, partner responds 1H and North overcalls 1S. At this point, absolutely no one playing in our event doubled to show their 3-card heart support ... well, no human at least. The robots who were filling in demonstrated good methods and good hand evaluation by bidding thus:

East	South	West	North
1C	Pass	1H	1S
Dbl (3-card support)	Pass	3H (invitational)	Pass
4H	All Pass		

The contract is unbeatable.

What's perplexing, though, is that 2 Easts chose to raise partner to 2H (which should promise 4-card support) but then after South passed, West did not invite game by bidding 3H, which seems mandatory at IMPs.

Also of some interest is what South should do after a double or a bid of 2H by East. With no defence to anything and 4-card support for partner, at favourable vulnerability a pre-emptive raise to 3S is worth considering – this is discussed in *Better Partnership Bridge* booklet #2. However, with 4333 shape and therefore no ruffing value, I though this seemed a bit of a stretch, so I passed.

Potentially, this was a good decision, because the opponents didn't move towards game. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a bad decision, because partner made a re-opening double, after which the opponents *did* reach 4H. Without an earlier pre-emptive raise by me, partner had no reason to consider sacrificing in 4S. That would have been a good move in a field in which East-West routinely bid to 4H, because -300 in 4S doubled would have gained IMPs against -650 in 4H making an overtrick when hearts break 2-2 and the singleton ♣Q drops.

As it was, after the robots' scores were removed, we were the only pair to lose 9.6 IMPs to opponents making 4H ...

FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 6

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
3♠ by NS	+1	170	1
3♠ by NS	-2	-100	1
4♠ by NS	-2	-100	1
3♣ by EW	+2	-150	1
2♣ by EW	+3	-150	1
2♥ by EW	+2	-170	1
2♥ by EW	+3	-200	1
4♥ by EW	+1	-650	1



5 November
SHBC on BBO #12
 Rakesh Kumar

On Monday 2 November, a board turned up that illustrated several interesting aspects of bidding and play.

As dealer, would you open the South hand below with 1H? Several did not, although I think that it's a perfectly reasonable opening when not vulnerable. On this deal, however, it turns out that to do so may help the opposition more than you ...

If South does open 1H, West has a fairly automatic takeout double (4 cards in the other major, shortage in the opponent's suit, reasonable high card strength) and North will pass. What should East do now?

BD: 11 ♠932 ♥T9 ♦K95 ♣97643 ♠KT87 ♥Q2 ♦AQ42 ♣QT8 ♠Q5 ♥KJ743 ♦T83 ♣AJ5 ♣♦♥♠ N T N - - - - - 3 S - - - - - 13 13 E 2 4 2 4 4 11 W 2 4 2 4 4	Dlr: S Vul: Nil ♠AJ64 ♥A865 ♦J76 ♣K2
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Responding to a takeout double is discussed at some length in *Better Partnership Bridge* booklet #2. A one-level response promises 0-8 hcp, while with an invitational hand and the other major, responder jumps to the 2-level, promising some 9-11 hcp (without the major but with a stopper, responder can bid 1NT with 7-10 hcp or 2NT with say 11-13 hcp). However, this time responder has more – an opening hand. Now what?

With 12+ hcp, the best approach is to first make a cue bid – in this case, 2H. Now if the doubler has a stopper in the opponent's suit, s/he should bid notrump, which may

allow your side to find a 9-trick game; otherwise the doubler can show his/her major suit (or the longer/better suit if the takeout double was over an opening of a minor).

In our event, that auction never happened. At one table, after South's 1H opening, East-West played in a part-score in spades. However, making 10 tricks was now relatively easy because the location of the high card strength was marked, so declarer chose to finesse through South for ♠Q – though the finesse proved unnecessary as the doubleton queen popped up. At another, East responded to the takeout double with 3S (a double jump bid that is best reserved for a weaker shapely hand with a long suit) and thus reached 4S, but stumbled in the play. Yet another declarer reached 4S with North-South silent, but now the location of ♠Q was a complete guess, which didn't work out.

Interestingly, with no opposition bidding, three East-West pairs elected to play in 3NT, despite the 4-4 major suit fit. Potentially, this can outscore a making 4S, but all 3 went down ...

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
3NT by EW	-3	150	1
3NT by EW	-2	100	1
4♠ by EW	-1	50	2
3NT by EW	-1	50	1
3♠ by EW	=	-140	1
2♠ by EW	+2	-170	2



24 November

SHBC on BBO #13

Rakesh Kumar

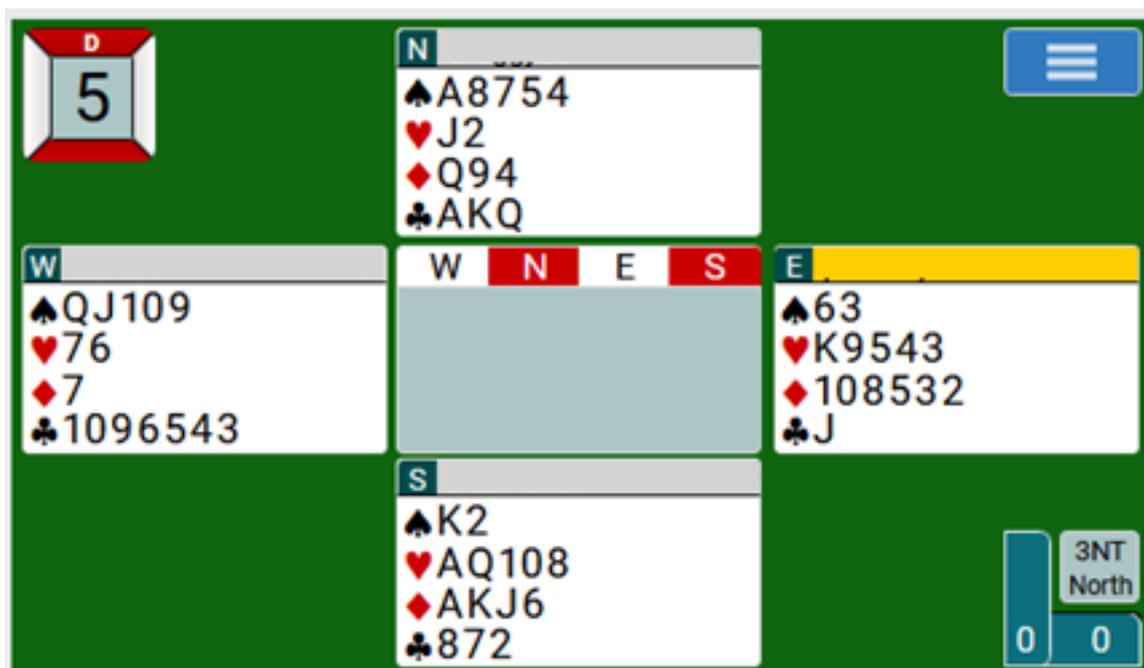
A solid minor suit is not just good for playing in a contract in that suit, it is also valuable – potentially more valuable – as a source of tricks in a notrump contract. That's an idea that is perhaps not emphasised often enough. The point was particularly well made when the board on the next page turned up on Monday 23 November:

5 January
SHBC on BBO #14
Rakesh Kumar

Happy New Year! We're still waiting for COVID to go away and for "real" i.e. face-to-face bridge to re-start. Sadly, the virus doesn't seem to care how much we miss the game ...

Oh well, there's still BBO, so there we were – at least a few of us – back in front of our computers on the first Monday in January. A new year, a new level of vigour? Well, maybe not – in the very first round there was a slam that went a-begging at most tables.

This board raises quite a few issues that are discussed in the *Better Partnership Bridge* booklets. If you still don't believe in opening 1NT with a 5-card major, I suppose that as North you will start the auction with a bid of 1S. Over this, South has to temporise with something like 2D, which although ostensibly showing a 5-card suit is the least of lies at this point. Now, how will you as North show your hand properly?



The only reasonable rebid is 3NT – if South has a 10+ hcp and you have 16, that is in the first instance where you want to play.

Unless South has more ... on this hand s/he does, so now it's South's turn to consider what to do. However, whether North's rebid shows a 15-17(18) hcp hand with 5332 shape or some 16+ hand with shortage in diamonds, there must be a play for slam. In your partnership, is a bid of 4NT by South at this point an ace-asking bid? Or does it ask for key cards? If the latter, in which suit? Or is 4NT quantitative?

If you're not sure, the best bet might be to simply jump to 6NT. However, four of the five tables in play, where North opened 1S, did not reach 6NT – which happened to be cold.

Those BBO robots play very good bridge and they can bid too. Margaret Hibbert was playing with one and the robot unhesitatingly opened the North hand 1NT. Margaret bid 4C (Gerber) which the robot understood correctly, and in no time at all the partnership arrived in 6NT, which comes home on the heart finesse. Even though only 3 heart tricks are available, there is no play involved in the other suits, with top tricks in diamonds (4), clubs (3) and spades (2).

Does any of that persuade you to (a) open 1NT with a 5-card major (b) bid 'em up when you have a promising number of high card points? I do hope so.

Maybe you're still worrying about how to get to a major suit game on a 5-3 fit when you have a good but unbalanced hand and partner opens 1NT with a possible 5-card major suit. If so, take a look at the appendix in *Better Partnership Bridge* booklet #2. There you'll find a discussion of puppet Stayman, a valuable convention that's worth using in that situation.



22 January

The Phoenix Rises

Rakesh Kumar

We're back!!!!

COVID-constrained but still absolutely delighted to see one another, members of SHBC were overjoyed to be able to re-start face-to-face bridge on Monday 18 January. It had been a whole 10 months since my last face-to-face game ...

And our wonderful game remains just as intriguing as ever. In this first session back, there were at least 3 hands that could be described as "mythbusters".

Myth #1: at matchpoint pairs, notrump contracts always score better.

On the very first deal of the session, along came this board:

BD: 1	♠AKQ	Dlr: N
	♥T974	Vul: Nil
	♦8632	
	♣JT	
♠T852		♠J4
♥A32		♥KJ65
♦K4		♦Q95

♠KQ32	♣A975
♠9763	
♥Q8	
♦AJT7	
♣864	
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ </div>	
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> N </div>	
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> T </div>	
N	- 1 - - - 10
S	- 1 - - - 12 11
E	4 - 3 1 2 7
W	4 - 3 1 2

Had my partner and I been bidding the East-West hands, our auction would have been 1C (by East)-1S-1NT-2NT-all pass. However, Gael Golla and Susan Whyte bid 1C (by West)-1H-1S-2C-all pass. Clubs make 10 tricks for +130 if you manage to drop the ♥Q as Gael did, thus outscoring the +120 available to those who played in a notrump contract. I thought we were headed for a zero, so was grateful for 17% on the board!

Two boards later, along came another mythbuster.

Myth #2: at matchpoint pairs, 5-of-a-minor is hardly ever a good contract.

Here's the board:

BD: 3	♠Q72	Dlr: S	
	♥KQJT	Vul: EW	
	♦J65		
	♣T54		
♠96		♠8543	
♥A85		♥932	
♦AQT732		♦K84	
♣92		♣K87	
	♠AKJT		
	♥764		
	♦9		
	♣AQJ63		
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ </div>			
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> N </div>			
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> T </div>			
N	5 - 4 4 -	9	
S	5 - 4 4 -	10	6
E	- 1 - - -	15	
W	- 1 - - -		

Partner opened 1C and Susan Whyte did her best to fix me by making a weak jump overcall (well, not so weak really) of 2D. What does one do after that as North? I had only 4-3 in the majors, 9 feeble high card points, no diamond stopper and no potential for ruffing tricks in a suit contract. However, feeling that I couldn't pass, because partner just might have 4 hearts, I made a negative double.

Jenny Michael didn't have hearts, she had spades. Moreover, because a rebid at the 2-level would only promise an 11-14 hcp hand, she rebid 3S. This gave me another problem. Should I leave her in 3S with a 7-card trump suit, even though we probably had the values for game? Should I raise to 4S? Or should I rely on the implied 5+ clubs and jump to 5C?

I decided that having made what felt like one incorrect call, it was time to follow up with another, so I bid 5C even though it was matchpoint pairs.

With the ♣K on side, Jenny made it without even breathing hard!

Myth #3: When partner transfers over your 1NT opening, you cannot refuse to accept the transfer unless you have a maximum hand with a fit for partner and are bidding a new suit or 2NT as a super-accept. After all, partner might have a very weak hand.

Well, try telling that to Adi Shroff.

BD: 20	♠T86	Dlr: W
	♥A65	Vul: ALL
	♦T2	
	♣J9652	
♠J75432		♠AK
♥T2		♥KQ74
♦764		♦J953
♣K4		♣A83
	♠Q9	
	♥J983	
	♦AKQ8	
	♣QT7	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	2 - - - -	5
S	1 - - - -	4 17
E	- 2 1 2 3	14
W	- 1 1 2 2	

On this board from later in the session, after Maryanne Bawden transferred with 2H, Adi decided he would rebid 2NT anyway. Because they don't play a 2NT rebid as any form of super-accept, that was the contract.

Adi calmly dropped the doubleton ♠Q and made 9 tricks, outscoring everyone else who made 8 or 9 tricks in spades and this time most definitely giving us a zero on the board!

I guess these boards prove that at the (face-to-face) bridge table, the fun never stops ...

