

6 October

So many slams!

Rakesh Kumar

SHBC has acquired a new dealing machine. I found myself wondering whether it came with a mischievous software upgrade as well, because in the evening on Wednesday 5 October there were 6 slam deals in the one session! A couple of those were probably too difficult to be bid in real life, but 4 did get bid and at least two were of interest in terms of the approach to reaching a slam/the right slam.

Let's start with this deal:

Optimum:
EW 7N; -2220
LoTT: 17-19 = -2

♠ 8 7
♥ 9 7
♦ 10 9 8 6 4 3
♣ Q 9 4

Bridge Solver Online:
John Goacher
Double Dummy Solver Module:
Bo Haglund

♠ A K J 10 6 4
♥ K 6
♦ Q
♣ K 6 5 3

♠ Q 9 2
♥ A Q J 4
♦ A K
♣ A 10 8 7

♠ 5 3
♥ 10 8 5 3 2
♦ J 7 5 2
♣ J 2

	♠	♦	♥	♣	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	6	2	6	7	7
W	6	2	6	7	7

16 2 20
 2

After North passes, if your notrump openings are stratified according to the "ladder" discussed 6 weeks ago, East will open 2NT showing 20-21 hcp. West now knows there is a sure slam somewhere, but is it in spades or notrumps? And is it a small or a grand slam?

As a first step, West should bid 3H as a transfer to spades. Now if you have sensible agreements about rebids after a 2NT opening, East should bid 4S, promising good 3+ support and an outside doubleton (with such a hand, East can make 4S opposite almost any miserable West hand). This makes life very easy for West, who can be sure East will have ♠Q to be able to promise "good support". Then 4NT makes it clear that no keycards are missing and a king ask shows one (or the diamond king specifically if that's how you respond to the inquiry). At this point 7NT should be automatic.

Full credit to Steve Brabyn – Paul McLean, the winners of the session, who were the only ones to play in the optimal contract.

Note that even if you don't play super-accept rebids after a 2NT opening and a transfer to a major, the grand slam should still be reached after this auction: 2NT-3H-3S-4NT-5D (0 or 3 keycards – or 5C if you play 30/14)-5H (or 5D) (queen ask)-6D (♠Q and ♦K)-7NT.

Another slam deal in the same round illustrated that sometimes, one can push the opponents too far in a competitive auction:

Optimum:
NS 6Sx; -800

LoTT: 20-20 = 0

♠ K Q J 8 7 3
♥ 3
♦ A Q 8 7 2
♣ 2

Bridge Solver Online:
John Goacher

Double Dummy Solver Module:
Bo Haglund

♠ A 5
♥ Q J 10 8 4
♦
♣ Q J 10 8 7 5

♠ 6
♥ A K 7 6 2
♦ K 10 9 6
♣ A 9 4

10 12 14

 4

♠ 10 9 4 2
♥ 9 5
♦ J 5 4 3
♣ K 6 3

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	2	-	2	-
S	-	2	-	2	-
E	6	-	6	-	1
W	6	-	6	-	1

West opened 1H – eminently sensible with so much playing strength, irrespective of having just 10 hcp – and North overcalled 1S as the hand is too strong for a Michaels cue bid. Now East has choices – if a 2S bid is a strong raise of hearts then that's a sound approach, but perhaps an immediate 4H is perfectly reasonable in competition.

When this comes back to North, though, with a very shapely hand a sacrifice in 4S appeals. East has no hesitation in bidding 5H and now what should South do? Pass might be best, but if South yields to temptation and bids 5S West may well decide that 6H is as good a shot as anything. That's what happened at our table – for a quick zero for us as the North-South pair!



16 October

SHBC Teams Championship

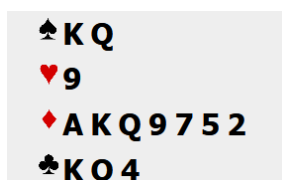
Rakesh Kumar

Our annual tournament was held on Saturday 15 October and although the field was a little smaller this year, it was a thoroughly enjoyable event. A commendation goes to Steve Brabyn for organising an excellent lunch for all of us. And particular thanks go to Chris Bayliss, who was a most able and efficient playing Director.

However, the enthusiastic participants caused the Director quite a few problems, because at the end of the day it became apparent that the movement in the afternoon's triangle had been comprehensively stuffed up by the players. You'd think 6 pairs of at least moderately intelligent adults could work out who belonged where in a movement involving just 3 tables. You'd be wrong ...

Despite all of that, in the (very) early hours of Sunday morning, Chris managed to sort everything out and post the finalised scores. However, the quirks of the software associated with the new dealing machine still cause him to mutter under his breath. If you've noticed the absence of complete deals associated with results on the website, or the absence of a table of makeable contracts even in the PDF files, that demonstrates a couple of the sources of his frustration!

Anyway, here's a bidding problem for you. Remember that it's Teams so the goal is always to try to get to a makeable game. With both sides vulnerable, your RHO opens 1C. Your hand is below – what will you do?



♠KQ
♥9
♦AKQ9752
♣KQ4

You have a very strong hand. There's no need to jump about in diamonds, you can show it even more effectively by doubling and then bidding diamonds later.

Let's say you do double. Your LHO bids 1S and partner passes. RHO raises to 2S and it's back to you. What will you do now?

Think about it ... both opponents have values and partner, who almost certainly has length in hearts, couldn't find a 2H bid over 1S. It seems very likely you are missing not only the aces of both black suits but also ♥A.

That means you won't make 5D. However, long suits are a great source of tricks in notrumps and you do have stoppers in both the suits your opponents have bid. Maybe they will lead one of them and you can get a trick in the other ... why not be brave and bid 3NT?

If you do, this is what you see after LHO leads ♠10:

♠ K Q
♥ 9
♦ A K Q 9 7 5 2
♣ K Q 4

23

♠ J 8 6
♥ J 8 7 5 3
♦ J 8 6
♣ 10 6

RHO takes the ace as you drop ♠K, attempting to sow the seeds of confusion. When RHO returns a spade, you win with ♠Q. What next?

It's Teams – forget about overtricks. Because dummy has ♠J, you don't need a trick in the other black suit. Indeed if you play on clubs, the opponents might grab their ace and switch to hearts – then you go down. Just cross to dummy with ♦J, cash ♠J and claim another 6 tricks in diamonds. This was the complete deal:

Optimum:
NS 3D+1; +130

LoTT: 18-18 = 0

♠ K Q
♥ 9
♦ A K Q 9 7 5 2
♣ K Q 4

[Bridge Solver Online:](#)
John Goacher

Double Dummy Solver Module:
Bo Haglund

	♠ A 7 2		♠ 10 9 5 4 3
	♥ A 10 6		♥ K Q 4 2
	♦ 10 4		♦ 3
	♣ A J 5 3 2		♣ 9 8 7

	♠ J 8 6
	♥ J 8 7 5 3
	♦ J 8 6
	♣ 10 6

	♠	♦	♥	♣	NT
N	-	4	-	-	1
S	-	4	-	-	2
E	3	-	1	2	-
W	3	-	1	2	-

It's a fascinating board, both in terms of drawing inferences from the bidding and of making use of the so-called "declarer's advantage" in the card play. This simply refers to the fact that especially during the first few tricks, declarer knows more about what's going on than the defence does ...



1 November

Thinking at the bridge table

Rakesh Kumar

At the AGM on Monday 31 October, those involved in teaching – including Judith Capps, Chris Bayliss, Kirsten Hartley and Wendy Wurfel – were quite rightly praised for their considerable efforts. They have already organised a program of teaching activities for beginners and developers in 2023. A possible addition to that might be some advanced-level sessions on "thinking at the table". As it happens, the post-AGM game included a couple of deals that were quite good illustrations of what to think about and how to arrive at a reasonable approach in play and defence.

Here's a straightforward one. As South, after 3 passes you open 1D. Partner bids 1H, you jump to 2NT showing 18-19 hcp (remember the notrump ladder? if not, have a look at the newsletter archive) and partner raises to 3NT. West leads ♠4 and this is what you see:

♠A9
♥JT42
♦JT52
♣Q96

♠T73
♥AQ9
♦AKQ4
♣A87

What should you be thinking about? Your first task as declarer is to count your winners and losers. On this deal you have 4 sure tricks in diamonds plus 3 outside aces. To make 3NT you will need another 2 tricks, for which hearts are the obvious source. You are going to need to take the heart finesse.

What if it loses? Well, provided spades are 4-4 you are still OK because you will lose just 3 spades and a heart. But if West led from a 5-card spade suit, you will almost certainly be one down – there will be no escape unless the suit is blocked.

What if it wins? If East has 3 or fewer hearts you will have 10 easy tricks. However, if East has 4 or more hearts and does not play her/his king, you will still have only 9 tricks.

How will you play the hearts? After you take ♠A you need to lead ♥J or 10, so that if the finesse wins, you are still in dummy. Then you can play a small heart to the queen and cash ♥A.

If hearts are 3-3, how will you get back to dummy to cash the thirteenth heart? Via ♦J of course, so don't even think about playing diamonds until you've sorted out the heart position.

It's not a difficult deal at all – you should always make 10 tricks in 3NT as the hearts are 3-3 and the king is on side. However, only half of those in 3NT managed to do so. And curiously, half the field didn't get to 3NT in the first place ...

BD: 4	♠A9	Dlr: W	
	♥JT42	Vul: All	
	♦JT52		
	♣Q96		
♠KJ64		♠Q852	
♥853		♥K76	
♦983		♦76	
♣J42		♣KT53	
	♠T73		
	♥AQ9		
	♦AKQ4		
	♣A87		
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N	
		T	
N	3 5 4 2 4	8	
S	3 5 4 2 4	5 8	
E	- - - - -	19	
W	- - - - -		

Now for some thinking in defence – almost always a bit more challenging. Let's put you in the West seat. After 2 passes, partner opens 1H, your RHO overcalls 1S and you raise to 2H. When the music stops, RHO has contracted for 3S. You lead ♥2 and see this dummy:

	♠93
	♥7654
	♦KT52
	♣JT2
♠8542	
♥K92	
♦64	
♣K954	

What should you be thinking about? Shape and the location of high card strength. RHO has obviously bid on based on a 6+ spade suit and some extra strength. Plus

RHO has some useful shape – with 4 hearts in dummy, declarer may well be ruffing partner's top heart, or if s/he has a singleton it might be the ace.

In practice, partner's ♥A holds, declarer following with ♥8. Partner returns ♣6. Declarer plays ♣7 and you win your king. What are you thinking about now?

It seems partner's club return is either from a doubleton or is the middle card from 3 small, rather than an unwise return from the queen. So ... partner started with ♥AQJ but where are his/her remaining high card points? Surely in diamonds, perhaps even ♦AQ.

Once you work that out, you should switch to ♦6. If partner can win the queen and cash the ace, you will get a ruff and take the contract down.

Here's the complete deal, now in its correct orientation. Across the field, only 4 of 13 declarers were held to 8 tricks.

BD: 23 ♠6		Dlr: S	
♥AQJT3		Vul: All	
♦AQ83			
♣863			
♠93		♠AKQJT7	
♥7654		♥8	
♦KT52		♦J97	
♣JT2		♣AQ7	
	♠8542		
	♥K92		
	♦64		
	♣K954		
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N	T
N	1 - 3 - -		13
S	1 - 3 - -	4	17
E	- - - 2 -		6
W	- - - 2 -		

On the heart lead and club return, declarer could have made sure of her/his contract by rising with ♣A, drawing trumps and then conceding 2 diamond tricks. Of course if you had produced ♦6 for your opening lead, declarer would have had no escape. Also, if partner had set up a forcing defence by continuing hearts, the 4-1 trump break would have proved to be declarer's downfall – but that was not obvious.



7 November

A grand idea

Rakesh Kumar

Over the weekend, SHBC held a very successful Congress at the Moss Vale Services Club. It was great to be able to have it face-to-face after a gap of 3 years! Table numbers were reasonable (27 for the Swiss Pairs on Saturday, 24 for the Teams on Sunday) but of course these numbers were lower than in times past. At the moment, this reduced turnout seems to be a problem for f2f events around the country and around the world. Hopefully things will get better.

SHBC members did well in both the Open and Restricted Swiss Pairs. In the Open, Stephen Brabyn and Tony Lye finished third, while in the Restricted, Rose Massey and Megan Kunkler finished fourth. There will be an article about the Congress in the NSWBA eCongress Newsletter in November (do you subscribe to this? if not you can click [here](#)).

Meanwhile, I thought this deal from Match 4 of the Swiss Pairs was truly instructive and worthy of discussion. Not vulnerable against opponents who are vulnerable, you hold:

♠KT97
♥AKJ963
♦Q
♣A3

As dealer, partner opens 1NT and RHO passes. What should you do with this powerful hand?

Start slowly. Of course a contract in hearts will be excellent, with a slam entirely possible, but it may well be that partner has 4 spades (or even 5, depending on your 1NT style) and that spades will be better as the trump suit, with hearts as a source of tricks. So a simple 2C will do in the first instance.

Things take an interesting turn when partner replies 2H! Now it's time to bid 4NT as Roman Keycard Blackwood. When partner responds 5S (2 keycards + queen) you know that 6H should be absolutely cold.

But what about 7H? If you play that 5NT now asks partner to bid her/his lowest-ranking king, this will get you a 6C response. Partner's answers to your inquiries have shown 13 hcp (♠A, ♦A, ♥Q and ♣K) but s/he still has another 2-4 hcp unaccounted for (assuming your 1NT is 15-17 hcp). With ♠Q or ♦K as well, 13 tricks ought to be a walk in the park. Should you bid on? You can't actually count 13 tricks, but faint heart never won anything much ...

In the Open field, 5 of 20 North-South pairs reached 7H, while in the Restricted, 1 of 7 bid the grand.

This was the full deal:

BD: 3	♠KT97	Dlr: S	
	♥AKJ963	Vul: EW	
	♦Q		
	♣A3		
♠5		♠J642	
♥7		♥42	
♦KJT9543		♦72	
♣Q742		♣JT985	
	♠AQ83		
	♥QT85		
	♦A86		
	♣K6		
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N	
		T	
N	7 7 7		17
S	7 7 7	6	2
E	1 2		15
W	1 2		

There's more to it, though! Firstly, West has to choose a sensible lead. Against a small slam, there might be some point in leading her singleton spade, hoping for a ruff. However, against a grand slam, the opponents will not be missing ♠A so all this might do is trap a minor honour in East's hand. The only sensible lead is a trump, which is usually the recommended lead against a grand slam anyway.

Secondly, let's look at things from declarer's perspective. The ♠J is a possible loser if that suit breaks 4-1 or 5-0. The latter will quickly be revealed after cashing one top honour in the South hand, but what about 4-1 breaks? Is it a guess who might have length in spades?

Not if you embark on a discovery play. Win the trump lead, draw another round, cash ♦A and ruff a diamond. Back to hand with ♣K and ruff another diamond – as East shows out. Now you know West started with 7 diamonds (something of a surprise) and one heart, plus has already followed to one club. When you cash ♣A and West follows again, you have accounted for 10 of her cards. So she can't possibly have 4 spades, only East can. A spade to the ace and another to the king in dummy reveals that in fact East does, but allows you to run ♠10 on the third round and claim.

An interesting deal in terms of bidding methods, the opening lead (a spade, or any diamond other than the king, gives the contract away immediately) and the play!



22 November

Missed slams

Rakesh Kumar

Successful slam bidding is winning bridge – but at our club sessions a lot of slams are missed. On Monday 21 November there were 3 opportunities to bid a slam, which mostly went begging. Two were a bit tricky to find but the third should have been easy.

This was the first of the difficult ones:

Optimum:
EW 7N; -2220
LoTT: 18-17 = 1

Bridge Solver Online:
John Goacher
Double Dummy Solver Module:
Bo Haglund

♠ 7 3		
♥ 5 4 3 2		
♦ K 8 6 4		
♣ 10 9 6		
♠ K Q 6 4 2	10	♠ A J
♥ A Q J		♥ K 10 9 7 6
♦ 7		♦ A J 3
♣ K 5 3 2		♣ A 8 7
15	3	17
	5	
♠ 10 9 8 5		
♥ 8		
♦ Q 10 9 5 2		
♣ Q J 4		

	♠	♦	♥	♣	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	6	1	7	7	7
W	6	1	7	7	7

Interestingly, if you don't play that a 1NT opening can include a 5-card major, the East hand isn't that difficult to bid at all – open 1H and then in response to partner's 1S, rebid 2NT, after which West must surely find 6H. However if you do open 1NT, West will start with 2H (transfer to spades) and over the 2S rebid, should follow up with 3C (4+ suit, forcing to game). Now East needs to bid 3H along the way (which has to be a 5-card suit, otherwise why bother?) for a slam to be reached without a lot of guesswork. Only 3 of 9 pairs bid 6H.

This was the second awkward deal:

Optimum:
N 6N; +1440
LoTT: 18-18 = 0

Bridge Solver Online:
John Goacher
Double Dummy Solver Module:
Bo Haglund

♠ A J 10 6 4		
♥ K J 9 7 2		
♦ K Q 10		
♣		
♠ 9 5	12	♠ K 3 2
♥ 10 5 3		♥ Q 8 4
♦ 7 3 2		♦ 9 8
♣ Q 10 9 4 2		♣ A J 7 5 3
2	14	10
	14	
♠ Q 8 7		
♥ A 6		
♦ A J 6 5 4		
♣ K 8 6		

	♠	♦	♥	♣	NT
N	1	6	6	6	6
S	1	6	6	6	5
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

After 1S by North, South bids 2D and then in response to North's 2H rebid, jumps to 4S. Whether playing 2/1 game forcing or not, this implies 3-card support and a 7-loser hand, so North should look at his/her 5-loser hand and think that $24 - (7+5) = 12$ tricks possible, so some investigation would be appropriate. Then again, South needs to have specific values with not too much wastage in clubs, which is going to be difficult to determine, so perhaps it makes sense for North to settle for game – at least that's my excuse for passing 4S. No one bid this slam.

There was very little excuse for missing slam on the third board:

Optimum:
EW 7N; -1520
LoTT: 16-17 = -1

Bridge Solver Online:
John Goacher
Double Dummy Solver Module:
Bo Haglund

♠ 6 3 ♥ K 10 4 2 ♦ J 2 ♣ K J 9 5 4	♠ Q J 10 ♥ J 8 7 3 ♦ 9 6 4 3 ♣ 6 2	♠ A K 5 ♥ A 9 ♦ A K Q 8 ♣ A Q 7 3
8	27	
4	♠ 9 8 7 4 2 ♥ Q 6 5 ♦ 10 7 5 ♣ 10 8	
2		

	♠	♦	♥	♣	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	7	7	5	4	7
W	7	7	5	4	7

The East hand is a rare bird with 26 hcp. However, if you have worked out your notrump ladder (remember the column about that? if not, go back to the Newsletter Archive and have a look at 22 August 2022) then this can be shown as a 24+ balanced hand without too much trouble. Assuming that your 2NT opening is 20-21 hcp, you can either open 2C and rebid 3NT (if your 2NT rebid shows 22-23 hcp) or, if you play a multi-2D opening, open 2D and follow up with 2NT. Now West, with 8 hcp, two kings and a good-looking 5-card suit, can (and should) bid 6NT reflexly. Once again, though, only 3 pairs did so. They included the East-West winners for the session, John Biffin and John Philp – well done!



24 November

Pre-empting partner?

Rakesh Kumar

One of the so-called "rules" of constructive bidding is not to pre-empt partner. Then again, many pairs routinely play weak jump shifts to a major suit in response to 1-of-a-minor, to show a 6-card suit and a very limited hand, say 3-5 or 4-6 hcp. That is a pre-empt of partner, as well as of the opponents. Would it apply to a jump shift to a minor suit at the 3-level? Let's say you hold the hand shown on the next page:

♠ 9 8
 ♥ 5
 ♦ A 10 9 8 5 3 2
 ♣ 10 9 7

Not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, your partner opens 1C as dealer and next hand overcalls 1S. What, if anything, are you going to bid?

Well, that depends – if you have agreed that a double jump shift in response to 1C/1D, including in a contested auction, is pre-emptive with a 7+ suit, you can bid 3D. Otherwise, however, you have to pass. If you do have the agreement, you have done a very good job of getting in the way of the opponents, because this was the full deal, from the first evening of this year's Bong Bong Cup on 23 November:

Optimum:
S 3D; +110
 LoTT: 17-16 = 1

♠ 9 8
 ♥ 5
 ♦ A 10 9 8 5 3 2
 ♣ 10 9 7

Bridge Solver Online:
 John Goacher
 Double Dummy Solver Module:
 Bo Haglund

♠ Q 10 6 5 3
 ♥ A J 8 2
 ♦ K
 ♣ K 6 2

♠ J 4 2
 ♥ K 10 6 3
 ♦ Q J 7 4
 ♣ 8 5

13 4 7
 16

♠ AK7
 ♥ Q974
 ♦ 6
 ♣ AQJ43

	♠	♦	♥	♣	NT
N	2	2	-	-	-
S	2	3	-	-	1
E	-	-	2	2	-
W	-	-	2	2	-

East-West can make 2S, so 3D by North going down one (losing two high diamonds, a heart, a club and one more trick to ♦7 on a trump promotion) is a very good result at matchpoints. Not so good is if North doesn't pass but tries to bid 2D and then 3D in an attempt to play there. That would explain the various notrump contracts going down a few, resulting in a greater loss than the -50 in 3D.

Another way of getting to 3D is to pass initially and then bid 3D in the pass-out seat after 1C-1S-P-2S-P-P. That should be to play – after all what sort of hand couldn't find a bid over 1S and now comes back in at the 3-level? Partner has to be weak with length!



10 December

Bidding 19 hcp balanced hands

Rakesh Kumar

Recently, I've discussed the "notrump ladder" a few times in these columns. Just as a reminder, you should have agreements that allow you to show big balanced hands in steps of 2 hcp, for example something like this:

Open 1-of-a-suit, rebid 1NT	12-14 hcp
Open 1NT	15-17 hcp
Open 1-of-a-suit, rebid 2NT	18-19 hcp
Open 2NT	20-21 hcp
Open 2C, rebid 2NT	22-23 hcp
Open 2C, rebid 3NT	24+ hcp

There are lots of possible variations on this structure, but the point is not to open all sorts of 19+ hcp hands with 2C, because partner then struggles to work out just what you have. In the evening on Wednesday 7 December, there were two 19 hcp balanced hands on which the results were dramatically influenced by what you opened. Here's the first one:

BD: 5	♠854	Dlr: N
	♥9	Vul: NS
	♦9654	
	♣T9762	
♠KQ62		♠AT93
♥AJ7		♥85432
♦AT3		♦Q8
♣543		♣J8
	♠J7	
	♥KQT6	
	♦KJ72	
	♣AKQ	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	2 2	0
S	2 2	14 7
E	2 3 2	19
W	2 3 2	

After 2 passes, if South starts with 2C, West will have nothing to say. Now there is no good outcome possible for North-South. In contrast, if South starts with 1D, West

will (should) double for takeout, showing at least 4-3 in the majors. North will pass and East will bid 1H. South has excellent defence against hearts and will (should) pass, in which case with only 3-card support and a limited hand, so will West. Now North can back in with 2D and that is likely to buy the contract. In fact 2D is the last making contract for North-South and would yield an excellent result for the partnership. However, on the Wednesday, only one pair stopped in a part-score in diamonds.

Here's the second 19 hcp balanced hand:

BD: 8	♠Q3	Dlr: W
	♥JT32	Vul: Nil
	♦T8765	
	♣T8	
♠K8642		♠AJ7
♥987		♥AQ
♦		♦A943
♣A7432		♣KJ96
	♠T95	
	♥K654	
	♦KQJ2	
	♣Q5	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N		3
S		7 19
E	7 1 3 6 6	11
W	7 1 2 6 6	

If East starts with 2C, there is once again insufficient bidding room to work things out. However, an opening bid of 1D gets a 1S response, after which if East rebids 2NT to show the big hand, West can bid 3C as checkback, asking for 3-card support. When East rebids 3S to acknowledge possession of three cards in the suit, West's hand improves out of sight – the distributional values make it easy to bid 4S. In fact with all the cards lying favourably, 12 tricks are not a problem. Again, only one pair played in the major suit game.

(Of course if West opens the bidding with a weak 2S showing 5 spades and a 4+ minor suit, none of the above considerations arise – East simply jumps to 4S!)

Overloading any opening bid – including a strong 2C – tends to give rise to difficulty untangling partner's holding on at least some hands. Re-jigging your system to avoid that might be a very good idea.



17 December

Xmas Party Pairs

Rakesh Kumar

The Southern Highlands Bridge Club had its Christmas party and awards ceremony on Saturday 17 December: there was much to celebrate because, unlike many other bridge clubs around the country, SHBC is thriving.

The party was preceded by a well-attended session of bridge at which an interesting deal turned up. You are vulnerable, the opponents are not and this is your hand:

♠AK84
♥JT
♦Q854
♣QJ8

Don't peek – what if anything will you do after your LHO as dealer opens 1C (2+ cards) and, following a pass by partner, your RHO responds 1H?

Sure, it's potentially dangerous to bid in the "sandwich seat" at adverse vulnerability, but you do have reasonable 4-card holdings in both the other suits and this will be your last chance to say anything about them. So you should double, promising 4 spades and strongly suggesting 4 diamonds as well.

That works out very well, because this was the full deal:

BD: 2 ♠AK84 ♥JT ♦Q854 ♣QJ8 ♠T9 ♥K8742 ♦KJ93 ♣95 ♠7653 ♥A3 ♦T6 ♣AT632 ♣♦♥♠ N T N 3 4 2 13 S 3 4 2 7 12 E 1 2 8 W 1 2	Dlr: E Vul: NS ♠QJ2 ♥Q965 ♦A72 ♣K74
--	--

With two aces, partner of course bids 2S over East's 2H. Moreover, she should be prepared to compete to 3S if necessary. A part-score in spades is an excellent contract, but was only played by 3 of the 9 pairs who got their hands on this board.

How will you play it? As you can see, the table of makeable contracts indicates that 10 tricks are possible. My partner played it perfectly – she won the heart lead, cashed the ♠AK leaving the queen outstanding, and took the club finesse. When this worked, she continued clubs to discard dummy's second heart on the fourth round. East could ruff with his winning ♠Q and cash two diamond tricks, but that was that!

It's quite often the case that drawing all the trumps isn't the best line to maximise your score – leaving a trump winner out may enable more tricks to be won on a cross-ruff.

I'll take this opportunity to wish all of you a very Merry Christmas and a safe, healthy and happy New Year!!



9 January

Revisiting the splinter bid

Rakesh Kumar

The first Monday session of 2023 featured some interesting slam deals. However, the glacially cold slam on this board was bid by only 2 East-West pairs:

BD: 18 ♠		Dlr: E	
♥KT93		Vul: NS	
♦T95			
♣KQT987			
♠JT764		♠AKQ832	
♥8		♥AJ42	
♦KJ32		♦Q8	
♣A53		♣4	
	♠95		
	♥Q765		
	♦A764		
	♣J62		
			N
	♣♦♥♠		T
N	2	1	8
S	2	1	9 16
E	1	6 2	7
W	1	6 2	

How should one reach 6S? The West hand is an excellent candidate for a splinter raise. I've discussed splinter bids by responder and splinter rebids by opener in a couple of previous columns, but it seems not many players at our club are fans of this approach. I'd like to try to change your mind ...

To start with, let's revisit the definition of a splinter bid. This is a double jump bid or rebid, promising 4-card support for partner's suit and shortage in the bid suit i.e. a singleton or a void. Splinters by the responder to a 1-of-a-major opening typically show a limited range of high card points, say 10-13, so that stronger hands with a shortage must go via some other forcing response e.g. Jacoby 2NT, which is unlimited and not necessarily balanced.

The West hand in the above deal actually has only 9 hcp, but it does have a fifth trump so an upgrade is reasonable. Therefore West can bid 4H in response to 1S.

Now provided East doesn't manage to completely forget that the partnership is playing splinter bids (yes, it happens!) this really changes how she/he would view the trick-taking potential of the combined hands. East is short in clubs, there is at least a

10-card fit, plus West must have outside values in clubs and diamonds because he/she is short in hearts and cannot have more than 1 hcp in spades. So provided West has at least one keycard, surely 12 tricks ought to be possible, either on a cross-ruff or by setting up an outside suit. A quick 4NT confirms that West does indeed possess one keycard, so East can promptly bid 6S. The extra trump in the West hand enables 3 heart ruffs, which means the slam is a no-brainer despite the 2-0 trump break.

You really should incorporate splinter bids into your system. As a start, perhaps just try splinter responses to 1-of-a-major, so that 1H-3S/4C/4D and 1S-4C/4D/4H are all artificial bids showing 4+ support and shortage in the bid suit (usually a singleton, rarely a void). You will get to thin games (for example opposite the West hand above, even a feeble opening hand such as ♠KQ532 ♥A106 ♦Q54 ♣J9 will easily make game) and good distributional slams on relatively few high card points.



North had passed, wouldn't you respond 1S with a sure trick? So what's the difference?

At our table, South now made an limit raise to 3H. Whether that's what 3H means for you depends on your partnership agreements – some would treat 3H as pre-emptive and would therefore bid 2D to show 10+ hcp and support, or perhaps bid 3D to show a good raise to the level of the cue bid.

Anyway, North-South have arrived at the 3-level and it's over to you as West. Should you bid 3S? You know for certain that you have only an 8-card fit and it's therefore likely that you won't make this contract – but that's not the point. If North-South can make 3H and you go one down – or even two down undoubled – that's less than the value of their partscore, so bidding on is worthwhile at matchpoints.

In fact 3H is quite an easy contract, losing only 2 clubs, a diamond and a spade. Playing in 3S isn't quite so much fun, but it's possible to make 8 tricks – and a score of -50 is a whole lot better than -140. However, on the day, the contracts mostly belonged to North-South. Will you compete next time?

