

*During the COVID-19 shutdown of SHBC, a club newsletter entitled "The Advancer" has been circulated by email. The following hands have featured in this newsletter.*

**27 March**

## **Hands from The Advancer issue 1**

Rakesh Kumar

For a series of hands for these newsletters, I thought I might go back several months and look at Saturday sessions (in which I almost never play) searching for hands where there was quite a lot of variation in the score achieved, then examine why that happened.

This turned out to be quite easy because I started with Sat 7 September 2019 and struck gold immediately on board 1. Most Norths declared 4H on this deal (there were a couple in 3H) but the majority made only 8 or 9 tricks. Deep Finesse says one should make 10 tricks. How hard is this in the real world when it turns out there is a 5-0 trump break?

<b>BD: 1</b>	♠2	<b>Dir: N</b>
	♥AQ972	<b>Vul: None</b>
	♦86	
	♣AK864	
♠KQT7		♠AJ3
♥T8543		♥
♦T4		♦AQJ952
♣JT		♣9532
	♠98654	
	♥KJ6	
	♦K73	
	♣Q7	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	4 - 4 - 2	13
S	3 - 3 - 2	6 12
E	- 2 - 1 -	9
W	- 2 - 1 -	

The most common lead was club, which is sensible as East shouldn't lead an unsupported ace in either of the other suits. North's first reaction should be to count potential tricks. On the face of it, there are 3 top clubs plus a club ruff in dummy, plus 5 hearts assuming trumps break normally. If clubs are no worse than 4-2 then the fifth club will be established, but otherwise a 10<sup>th</sup> trick will require the ♦A to turn up on side.

So ... you take the club on table and lead a heart to the ace, getting the bad news. Now it's time to think again. You need to play for 2 ruffs in dummy and to prevent West from leading a trump to stop this.

So have to play for the on side diamond ace and you have to do it right now, by leading a diamond up immediately. East is likely to rise with the ace and return  $\heartsuit Q$ . After taking this with the king, you play dummy's low club towards hand and as West does not ruff, you can win and now ruff a low club on table with  $\heartsuit J$ .

At this point you play dummy's last remaining diamond and there is nothing much that West can do – if s/he discards another spade, you ruff low and ruff your last low club with dummy's  $\heartsuit K$ . Now you lead a spade off the table and West is endplayed with only trumps in his/her hand. When you come in again you play the  $\clubsuit A$  and West is stuck once more. All you will ever lose is one trump trick, one spade and one diamond. Making 10 tricks – whew!

Here is another hand from the same session. Again, there was a surprising amount of variation in the score achieved on an apparently simple part-score deal.

Looking at it a bit more closely, however, reveals that the hand illustrates several interesting issues in relation to both bidding and play.

<b>BOARD 14</b>											
<b>BD: 14</b>	$\spadesuit 83$ <b>Dlr: E</b>										
	$\heartsuit 983$ <b>Vul: None</b>										
	$\diamondsuit J5$										
	$\clubsuit KQJ972$										
$\spadesuit AK4$	$\spadesuit QT952$										
$\heartsuit AJ42$	$\heartsuit Q76$										
$\diamondsuit A9763$	$\diamondsuit K8$										
$\clubsuit 6$	$\clubsuit 853$										
	$\spadesuit J76$										
	$\heartsuit KT5$										
	$\diamondsuit QT42$										
	$\clubsuit AT4$										
	<table border="0" style="margin: auto;"> <tr> <td><math>\clubsuit</math></td> <td><math>\diamondsuit</math></td> <td><math>\heartsuit</math></td> <td><math>\spadesuit</math></td> <td>N</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td>T</td> </tr> </table>	$\clubsuit$	$\diamondsuit$	$\heartsuit$	$\spadesuit$	N					T
$\clubsuit$	$\diamondsuit$	$\heartsuit$	$\spadesuit$	N							
				T							
N	1 - - - - 7										
S	1 - - - - 16 7										
E	- 4 4 5 1 10										
W	- 4 4 5 1										

After 2 passes, West will of course open 1D. Assuming no brave (crazy?) person sitting North overcalls 2C (for the lead, partner ...) the auction will commence: P-P-1D-P-1S by East-P.

West now has an easy reverse bid of 2H, promising 5+ diamonds, 4 hearts and 16+ hcp. However, East has only 7 hcp and cannot make a move towards game, so should simply rebid 2S promising a 5+ suit (with 8 hcp or better, East would make a jump rebid or bid fourth suit forcing). West will pass this.

South doesn't have any good obvious lead, but with dummy's announced strength, can choose between laying down the ♣A or leading a trump – I'd prefer the latter.

East should count tricks. On normal breaks there are 5 spades, 2 hearts even if the finesse fails, and 2 top diamonds. It shouldn't be too difficult to establish a long diamond as well, or one could play for a club ruff in dummy, especially if South leads ♣A. In any case, 10 tricks should be straightforward. There's even the possibility of making 11 tricks, especially if one plays for 3-3 hearts.

Clearly this outcome wasn't achieved very often, because the frequency table was as below. That some of those in a spade contract did not make at least 10 tricks is disappointing, but the real puzzle is what was half the field doing in a diamond part-score with a 5-2 fit ...

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
2♦ by EW	=	-90	1
3♦ by EW	=	-110	2
2♦ by EW	+1	-110	1
3♠ by EW	=	-140	2
3♠ by EW	+1	-170	1
2♠ by EW	+2	-170	1



*7 April*

## **Hands from The Advancer issue 2**

Rakesh Kumar

From the same Saturday session on 7 September 2019, here is another board, this time illustrating hand evaluation and the approach to matchpoints.

Half the field did not reach game on this deal, while one East-West pair played in 5C rather than 3NT.

How does one sensibly bid to 3NT with the East-West hands? The first question is whether West should open as dealer. West's hand is actually fairly awful, with 4333 shape and 9 losers. However, it's hard to pass a hand with 12 hcp, an ace and two kings, plus some reasonable intermediates.

**BOARD 20**

**BD: 20** ♠5432    **Dlr: W**  
♥A7653    **Vul: All**  
♦T63  
♣Q

♠J98	♠AKQT
♥KJ9	♥8
♦K54	♦Q9
♣AT92	♣KJ8743

♠76  
♥QT42  
♦AJ872  
♣65

			N
♣	♦	♥	♠
T			

N	-	-	1	-	-	-	6
S	-	-	1	-	-	-	12 15
E	5	1	-	5	5		7
W	5	1	-	5	5		

Let's assume, then, that West opens 1C. East of course responds 1S and West rebids 1NT. It's time for East to put her/his thinking cap on.

What sort of hand must West hold? Certainly a balanced hand which, given the 1C opening and the failure to raise spades, must have no more than 3 diamonds and no more than 3 spades. While it's possible West has 4 hearts, it's a sure thing that s/he has 3+ clubs, even if you only promise 2+ for your 1C opening.

So having worked out that there's at least a 6-3 fit in clubs, which is thus a potential source of tricks in notrumps, East should simply raise to 3NT. This is right both on the grounds that 9 tricks are a lot easier to make than 11 and on the grounds that you are obeying Hamman's Law viz. "if you have a choice of reasonable bids and one of them is 3NT, then bid it".

North is most likely to lead a heart, after which declarer has 11 very quick tricks. While 5C turns out to be makeable as well, playing in notrumps yields a much better matchpoint score!

Next, from a Saturday session on 19 October 2019, here is a fascinating board that firstly demonstrates an important aspect of successful defence and secondly illustrates the effective use of "modern" weak 2-bids.

It's no surprise that the entire field was in a contract in spades, usually 4S but occasionally 5S and occasionally doubled. A common auction is likely to have been P – P – 4S – all pass.

BOARD 6			
BD: 6	♠A8	Dlr: E	
	♥A8	Vul: E-W	
	♦AQJT		
	♣K7432		
♠QJT96543		♠K72	
♥KQ2		♥JT4	
♦K8		♦63	
♣		♣QT865	
	♠		
	♥97653		
	♦97542		
	♣AJ9		
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N	
		T	
N	4 5 4 - 5		18
S	4 6 4 - 5	11	6
E	- - - 3 -		5
W	- - - 3 -		

What is surprising is that 8 out of 9 declarers made 10 tricks. How did this come about given that Deep Finesse suggests only East-West can only make 9 tricks in spades?

The answer is fairly obvious: North cashed 3 aces. As it happens, West cannot develop a trick in a side suit for a discard and must lose 2 diamond tricks, although this requires North to hang on to ♦AQ until the very end. But why wouldn't you? Is it really necessary to cash ♦A before the rats get at it? Will they?

Back to that auction – South passed. However, given the 5/5 shape, even with only 5 hcp it is possible for South to consider opening a weak 2-bid, not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents. For that, you need to have a bid that shows a 5-card major and a 5-card (or 4+ if you dare) minor suit. Many now play 2H/2S as showing this type of hand, with traditional 6-card weak 2-bids included within a multi-2D bid.

If you had that agreement, South could open 2H and North, over West's 4S bid, would bid 4NT asking for South's minor suit. Now one of two good things would happen. Either North-South would get to play in 5D, which happens to be cold; or East-West would go on to 5S, which if doubled should go for –500 provided North doesn't cash ♦A. It's worth thinking about whether you could play more aggressive weak 2-bids ...



25 April

## Hands from The Advancer issue 3

Rakesh Kumar

Continuing this series for these newsletters, based on interesting deals from Saturday sessions in which I noticed considerable variation in the score achieved, here are 2 boards from 26 October 2019.

This one was mostly about hand evaluation. Would you open the North hand with 1H? It has 11 hcp but 8 losers, short honours in 2 suits, no intermediates and no good rebid if partner responds 2C or 2D. There is much merit in passing!

<b>BD: 5</b>	♠J764	<b>Dir: N</b>
	♥AK753	<b>Vul: N-S</b>
	♦Q9	
	♣J9	
♠AT		♠Q95
♥T6		♥J82
♦T7632		♦AK84
♣Q874		♣T63
	♠K832	
	♥Q94	
	♦J5	
	♣AK52	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	- - 3 3 1	11
S	- - 3 3 1	6 10
E	1 1 - - -	13
W	1 1 - - -	

If you do pass, partner opens 1C, you respond 1H and then depending on your methods, partner either rebids 1S or 1NT. You are most likely to end up playing in either 2H or 2S, both of which make. Even if you get excited and raise partner's 1S to 3S, that won't do any great harm, as you can make 9 tricks without much difficulty.

On the other hand, if you open 1H in first seat, chances are that partner will drive to game and most probably you will end up in a doomed contract of 4H. That certainly seemed to be the outcome on the day, as revealed by the frequency table below:

**Contract Result Score Frequency**

4♥ by NS	=	620	1
2♠ by NS	+1	140	1
2NT by NS	=	120	1
1♥ by NS	+1	110	1
4♥ by NS	-1	-100	2
3♠ by NS	-1	-100	1
4♥ by NS	-2	-200	2

The bottom line is that you don't *have* to bid on everything that resembles an opening hand!

This next board, also from 26 October 2019, is more about the play of the cards, although bidding methods also come into the story.

If playing a range of 15-18 hcp, South will kick off with 1NT. In that case, nothing good can happen as the cards lie. However, if playing a 15-17 hcp 1NT opening, South's first bid will be 1D and it will be West who bids 1NT. Not the worst contract in the world, but the table of results shows that no one made it. It's worth looking at how declarer should play this.

The usual lead was either ♦8 or, if North decided that leading partner's suit into the 1NT bidder was a bad idea, a low heart.

<b>BD: 31 ♠76</b>	<b>Dlr: S</b>
♥J643	<b>Vul: N-S</b>
♦865	
♣9853	
♠AQ3	♠JT84
♥AT9	♥8752
♦K92	♦74
♣AT42	♣QJ7
♠K952	
♥KQ	
♦AQJT3	
♣K6	
♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N
	T
N - - - - -	1
S - - - - -	17 4
E 3 1 3 3 2	18
W 3 1 3 3 2	

On a diamond lead, South should play  $\spadesuit Q$  to force West to take her/his trick. On a heart lead, West gains nothing by ducking South's  $\heartsuit Q$  and as the cards lie, it's a good idea not to do so.

In both cases, though, declarer's objective should now be to concede one black suit king, to gain an entry to dummy and finesse the other. My preference (although on this hand it doesn't matter) would be to play  $\spadesuit Q$  next. If South ducks this, declarer should switch to playing on clubs.

No matter what else happens, West has 3 spade tricks, 3 club tricks, a diamond and a heart, so should finish with 8 tricks. Obviously this didn't happen on the day!

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
2NT by EW	-3	150	1
1NT by EW	-2	100	2
3 $\spadesuit$ by EW	-2	100	1
2 $\spadesuit$ by EW	-2	100	1
2 $\heartsuit$ by EW	-2	100	1
1NT by EW	-1	50	1
1NT by NS	-1	-100	1
3NT by NS	-4	-400	1



15 May

## Hands from The Advancer issue 4

Rakesh Kumar

The third issue of *The Advancer* referred to just how much online bridge our members are playing, mostly on BBO. So just for a change, for the fourth issue I thought I might discuss a couple of interesting hands that have turned up in the BBO games I've been playing recently. The first of these focuses on bidding.

You hold:

$\spadesuit J8$   
 $\heartsuit K52$   
 $\diamondsuit AK8$   
 $\clubsuit AQ762$

Partner opens the auction with 1C, promising 2+ cards. What do you bid?

With this hand, you have an assortment of things to worry about. Firstly, you need to establish a game force. Secondly, you would like to know whether partner has a stopper or stoppers in spades, for a possible notrump contract. Thirdly, you would really like to know if partner has a minimum or better-than-minimum hand, because there might be good chances for slam in clubs or notrumps.

The first issue is the easiest to deal with if you play the convention known as inverted minors (see *Better Partnership Bridge*, booklet 2) in which a raise of 1m-2m is stronger than 1m-3m. Then 1m-3m is usually used to show a hand with 6-9 hcp, 5+ support and no 4-card major, while 1m-2m shows similar shape and is *either* played as showing 10+ hcp *or* as a game-forcing bid. If you adopt the latter, a jump in the other minor is used to show the 10-12 hcp hand of this shape.

I'm firmly in the "1m-2m=game forcing" camp and with that approach, the hand above poses no initial problem as you simply bid 2C. However, now you need to have good agreements about what happens next. Fairly normal is to bid 2NT with stoppers in both majors, or else to bid the major suit in which you do have a stopper, and pass the notrumps question back to partner. You don't/can't worry about the other minor!

A somewhat better approach is to rebid 3NT with stoppers in both majors and a minimum hand (fast arrival = no slam interest) and 2NT with stoppers in both majors but significant extras (typically this shows an 18-19 hcp balanced hand, if you normally bid such hands 1m-1x-2NT).

Now if I haven't already got you completely confused with so many different bidding ideas, let's take matters a little further, because we still haven't solved the problem of finding a minor suit slam when opener has a better-than-minimum hand (with a real club suit after an opening of 1C) and responder has a good hand such as the one above.

There's no generally accepted method for tackling this, but with one of my partners I have agreed that after 1m-2m, a bid of the other minor at the cheapest level has nothing to do with a stopper, but instead shows a better-than-minimum hand (say 14+ hcp, 6 or fewer losers). Thus 1C-2C-2D or 1D-2D-3C would show this sort of good hand.

That would have worked very well on the deal that turned up on BBO. Here's the board:

Dlr: S  
 Vul: Nil

♠109732  
 ♥Q103  
 ♦Q432  
 ♣3

♠AKQ6  
 ♥A96  
 ♦J  
 ♣J10954

♠J8  
 ♥K52  
 ♦AK8  
 ♣AQ762

♠54  
 ♥J874  
 ♦109765  
 ♣K8

West	North	East	South
			Pass
1C	Pass	2C*	Pass
2D*	Pass	4C	Pass
4S	Pass	6C	All pass

If partner can show a good hand with 4+ clubs via the 2D rebid, East's hand becomes a powerhouse. Now all that's needed is a keycard inquiry, with the ability to stop in 5m if there is an unexpected problem. A method that works well for this purpose is Minorwood (also discussed in *Better Partnership Bridge*, booklet 2) in which 4-of-a-minor in an uncontested auction is Roman Keycard Blackwood in that suit. With the above West hand, opener shows 2 keycards without the queen by bidding the third step (4S in this case) and slam is easily reached.

As it happens, the spade intermediates on this hand are so good that 6NT is also readily makeable, but 6C is a far more sensible contract. Unfortunately for me, when this hand turned up, partner and I weren't playing the above methods so we didn't get to slam at all ... a pity!

What about if opener rebids the other minor to show a good hand, but responder really only wants to play in 3NT, provided that's a safe spot? Then responder can show a major suit stopper, asking opener to convert to 3NT with a stopper in the other major, so the bidding comes to a halt in good time. Say East's hand lacked the ♣Q and was instead as below:

♠J8  
 ♥K52  
 ♦AK8  
 ♣A8762

Now after 1C-2C-2D, East bids 2H, promising a heart stopper but denying a spade stopper (with both, East would bid 2NT). With the West hand shown, the bidding comes to a halt in 3NT, which is safe enough because of East's double diamond stopper.

Here is another recent deal from BBO, this time with the focus on card play. You are East. Partner commences proceedings with 1D, promising 4+ cards. You respond 1S and partner rebids 2H, a reverse promising 16+ hcp and either 5+ diamonds/4 hearts or exactly 1-4-4-4 shape.

♠A	♠Q942
♥K1065	♥92
♦AJ742	♦63
♣KQJ	♣A10975

What are your agreements after a reverse? There's a discussion of a simple approach in *Better Partnership Bridge*, booklet 2. If playing as suggested there, your hand is suitable for a 2NT rebid, showing a minimum response (say 6-7 hcp) with a stopper in the unbid suit. Undeterred, partner raises you to 3NT.

South has heard spades bid on the right, diamonds and hearts on the left, so produces a top-of-nothing ♣8 for the opening lead. This does you no harm at all, but where are you going to find 9 tricks? You have 5 club tricks and 2 outside aces for sure. You could try leading up to the ♥K, hoping for the ace on side, or perhaps the opponents will attack spades for you and set up the queen ... but these are really not very promising lines of play.

It always makes sense to try to set up a long suit if you can and with these hands, there is some hope that West's diamond suit could prove useful. However, at notrumps it also makes sense not to give up control of a suit prematurely.

So rather than trying for a finesse (hoping for onside ♦KQ) or giving up control of the diamond suit by cashing the ace, a worthwhile line of play is to take the opening lead in dummy and play a *low* diamond from dummy towards your hand. South wins this and returns another club (the passive return now making it very likely that s/he holds ♥A, useful information if diamonds don't break) and you cash ♦A to play a third diamond. With all following, you now have 9 tricks!

Here is the full board:

	♠K10763					
Dlr: W	♥Q873					
Vul: All	♦985					
	♣6					
♠A		♠Q942	West	North	East	South
♥K1065		♥92	1D	Pass	1S	Pass
♦AJ742		♦63	2H	Pass	2NT	Pass
♣KQJ		♣A10975	3NT	All		
				pass		
	♠J85					
	♥AJ4					
	♦KQ10					
	♣8432					

As the cards lie, there are other successful lines, but trying to develop tricks in diamonds (while keeping control) is the least risky way of approaching the play of this contract.



8 June

## Hands from The Advancer issue 5

Rakesh Kumar

SHBC members have been playing some teams bridge lately (my favourite form of this wonderful game) and so I thought I'd share with you some BBO hands in which teams tactics applied (these aren't from actual teams events, but from sessions in which scoring was IMPs against the datum i.e. average score).

Playing in IMPs events, you definitely want to bid to any game contract that has a 50% chance of making. Especially when both sides have distributional hands, there may even be some merit in treating the opposition's game-forcing bid as forcing to game by your side ...

If that sounds like a crazy notion, here's the story of what happened on two consecutive boards played on BBO with my partner Julian Abel from Sydney (I have not shown the names of our opponents, who probably wouldn't want to be reminded of the outcome on these deals).

On this first one, as you can see, partner kicked things off with a thin 1S opening and RHO overcalled 2H. We play that a cue bid of the opponent's suit in this situation shows an invitational-or-better raise, so with 4-card support and an 8-loser hand, I bid 3H. LHO now decided to bid 4H on the basis of 5-card support (possibly unwise with no shortage). This was passed back to me.

The screenshot shows a bridge hand interface with the following details:

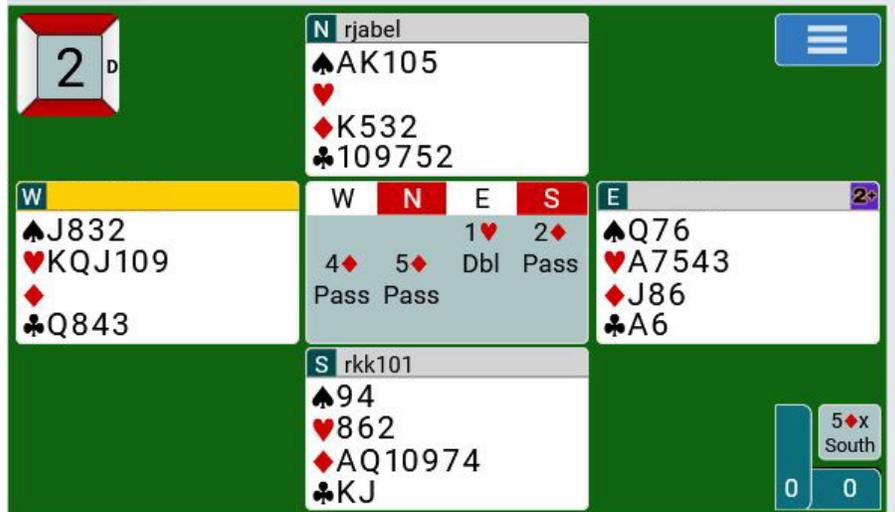
- Board:** 1
- North (N):** rjabel. Cards: ♠AQ542, ♥2, ♦1092, ♣A1075.
- West (W):** Cards: ♠93, ♥A10975, ♦865, ♣963.
- East (E):** 2♥. Cards: ♠J6, ♥KQ863, ♦AQ43, ♣K2.
- South (S):** rkk101. Cards: ♠K1087, ♥J4, ♦KJ7, ♣QJ84.
- Bidding:** W: 1♠, 4♥; N: Pass, Pass, Pass; E: 2♥, Dbl; S: Pass, Pass.
- Contract:** 4♠x North.
- Score:** 0-0.

Under normal circumstances I wouldn't have bid game (if LHO had passed and partner had simply bid 3S) but as it seemed possible they could make 4H, I went on to 4S, more or less as insurance. RHO figured this wasn't going to make, so he doubled. However, RHO proved to be wrong, because his double persuaded me to place him with ♦AQ and all I lost was a heart, a diamond and a club.

The chat bar exchange after this hand was thus ...

LHO: Maybe I shouldn't have bid 4H  
 Me: I treated your 4H as forcing to 4S  
 LHO: LOL!!

The very next board was this:



As you can see from the bidding shown, East as dealer bid 1H and I overcalled 2D. LHO showed a game-forcing raise of hearts with shortage in diamonds by bidding 4D. Partner promptly bid 5D and RHO, perhaps trying to compensate for the loss on the previous board, once again expressed his disapproval of the contract.

In the chat bar, I wrote: Looks like Julian treated your bid of 4D as forcing to 5D!

LHO led ♥A. This was ruffed in dummy and a small club led. Although RHO took the trick with ♣A and returned a trump, it was now possible for me to ruff all 3 of my hearts in dummy and claim a doubled overtrick.

Maybe there's something to the crazy notion after all ...



## 19 July

### Hands from The Advancer issue 6

Rakesh Kumar

As BBO is the "scene of the action" these days, here are a couple of instructive deals I've played on BBO in the last little while. Both relate to re-opening doubles.

"What *is* a re-opening double?" I hear you ask. It's a double you make after you opened the bidding, your left-hand opponent overcalled, and the next two players passed.

When should you make a re-opening double? When 2 conditions are satisfied (i) you believe that your outcome on the deal will be improved if you don't allow LHO to play in the current contract (ii) you have shortage (e.g. a singleton) in the overcalled suit. Many would also recommend that you should have 3+ cards in the other 2 suits.

When you make a re-opening double, partner will usually either raise your original suit or bid a new suit. However, every now and then, partner will pass your double for penalties, in search of a bigger score.

That's what happened on the first deal below. As West, I opened 1D and North made an entirely reasonable overcall of 2C. When the auction came back around to me, I could have rebid 2S to show 5+ / 4 shape and 16+ hcp (i.e. a reverse bid) but with tolerance for both majors and shortage in clubs, a double was by far the more appropriate call.

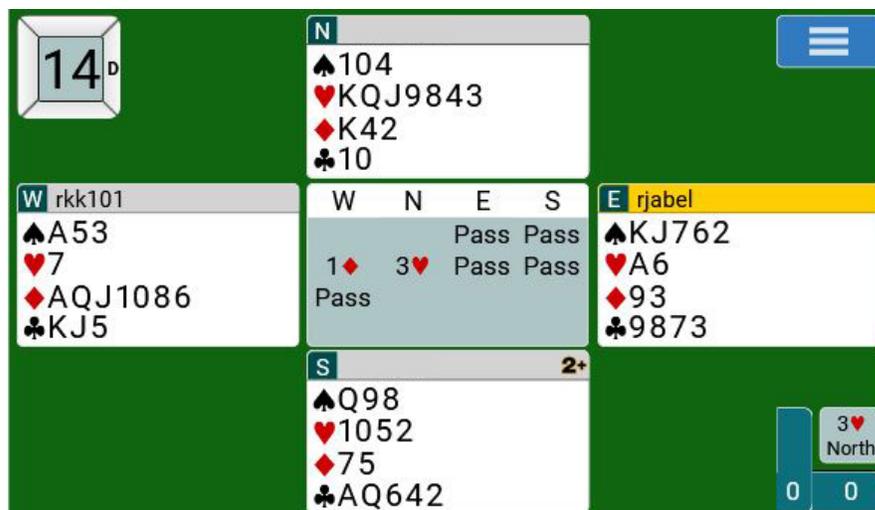
Partner figured his hand was worth at least 3 tricks in defence and that this ought to work out better than playing in a part-score in hearts, so he passed. Shortly afterwards, we scored up +800!

The screenshot shows a bridge hand interface with the following details:

- Board:** 7 (Diamond)
- North (N):** ♠ 965, ♥ 9, ♦ KQ6, ♣ AQ8742
- West (W) rkk101:** ♠ AK74, ♥ A75, ♦ AJ1072, ♣ 6
- East (E) rjabel:** ♠ 1082, ♥ QJ83, ♦ 54, ♣ KJ93
- South (S):** ♠ QJ3, ♥ K10642, ♦ 983, ♣ 105
- Bidding:**
  - West: 1♦, 2♣, Pass, Pass, Dbl
  - North: Pass, Pass, Pass, Pass
  - East: Pass, Pass, Pass, Pass
  - South: 2+
- Contract:** 2♣x North
- Score:** 0-0

The moral of this story is: just because you think you have an "obvious" rebid in the pass-out seat, don't simply bid, consider a double.

The next deal, only a few boards later in the same set, should also have featured a re-opening double, except that it didn't happen. Once again I opened 1D and this time North made a pre-emptive jump overcall of 3H. By the time it came back to me, North's action had given me a headache. With shortage in hearts, I wanted to make a re-opening double, but partner would surely bid 3S even with a 4-card suit. However, because trumps were very likely to break badly, it seemed this wouldn't play at all well opposite my 3 not-so-great spades.



So in genuinely lily-livered fashion, I passed, hoping to beat the contract by a trick or two rather than go down in 4D. That decision did not turn out well ... 3H could not be beaten, but unless South found the magic lead of ♣A and another club for North to ruff, 4S would have made. Even going one down in 4D would have been a better score than defending 3H proved to be.

The moral of that story is: just because you don't have the perfect hand doesn't mean you shouldn't double!

On to a quite different theme: have you heard about safety plays? They involve taking a line of play that gives up on overtricks but ensures the safety of a contract even if the relevant suit (often the trump suit) breaks badly.

Safety plays don't come up very often. Moreover, because they involve giving up on the chance of an overtrick, they are often ignored at matchpoints. However, when playing Teams or IMPs Swiss Pairs, it helps to know about some of the basic safety plays. Unfortunately they are not always intuitively obvious, so it helps to learn the common card combinations that can be played for safety. If you would like an introduction to "standard" safety plays, have a look at this link:

<https://www.bridgewebs.com/eden/Suitplay%20etc.pdf>

A deal involving a safety play came up in a BBO game the other week:



North was in 4S on the lead of ♥K. He took the ace, cashed the ♠A and noticed the fall of the ten. This raised the possibility that trumps might break 4-1. Of course East might also have ♠Q10 doubleton.

If playing for overtricks, you could hope for the latter and cash ♠K, but you will then go down if West does indeed have ♠Q9xx. If overtricks don't matter, what can you do to ensure the safety of the contract?

The key play is that for the second round of trumps, North must lead *low* towards the jack. When East shows out, West can win this, but cannot hurt declarer any further. West will no doubt return a heart to East. Say East then switches to ♦9. North must finesse, then the marked finesse in trumps allows North to draw trumps. The club finesse loses, but declarer still comes home on the clubs while the ♦A remains in dummy.

North can of course take the losing club finesse at trick 3, then play trumps a little later for the same outcome.

It's hardly relevant in the real world, but in the world of the all-seeing computer, Deep Finesse and Bridge Solver know not to cash a top spade at all – instead the machine leads ♠J from table, pinning ♠10 and making 11 tricks!

