

4 May

Deals from the ANOT

Rakesh Kumar

Last weekend, I flew to Adelaide to play in the Autumn National Open Teams: at the moment I am heading off to just about every face-to-face national event that I can attend, as I have missed them so much! Although my team finished poorly, mostly because the souffle subsided altogether on the second day, I enjoyed myself. I also kept an eye open for instructive deals that might be worth sharing with SHBC members. Here are a couple.

Firstly, you hold:

S♠	T94
H♥	AT2
D♦	QJ43
C♣	T64

You are vulnerable, the opponents are not. Your LHO deals and opens 1C. Partner doubles and RHO raises to 2C. You pass, not altogether happily; but after LHO also passes, partner now bids 2S. What will you do? It's a teams event so you are playing for IMPs, which means that vulnerable games are worth a lot – although the approach would really apply in a club matchpoints game as well.

Secondly, sitting North with both sides vulnerable, you hear partner open 1NT, showing 14-17 hcp (you may not agree with this range, but let's say it applies for this deal). Your RHO overcalls 2D, showing a 6+ major suit. You pass and your LHO jumps to 4H (pass or correct) which is passed out. Partner leads the ♦K and this is what you see:

	(You)	
	S♠	K42
	H♥	975
	D♦	AT972
	C♣	86
(Dummy)		
	S♠	97
	H♥	AQJ642
	D♦	85
	C♣	JT9

You play an encouraging card and partner continues with ♦Q. How are you going to defend?

Here is the full board for that first hand. You are East. Although you might have considered bidding 2D over North's 2C bid, with 4333 shape and only 7 hcp, a pass was entirely reasonable. However, partner has backed in. What does her/his 2S bid show?

To double and bid again must promise a 5+ suit (usually 6+) and 16+hcp. That means your hand is now not too bad at all. Perhaps not good enough to raise to game, but certainly good enough to invite with a bid of 3S.

Board : 6	S♠ J87	Dlr: E
	H♥ 954	Vul: E-W
	D♦ K9	
	C♣ J8532	
S♠ AQ653		S♠ T94
H♥ KQJ8		H♥ AT2
D♦ AT5		D♦ QJ43
C♣ 7		C♣ T64
	S♠ K2	
5	H♥ 763	
16 7	D♦ 8762	
12	C♣ AKQ9	

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

Partner has no hesitation in raising to game and despite holding a rather ordinary spade suit, has more than enough side values to make it. Your ♥A and ♥10 provide entries to finesse in spades and diamonds, so the only tricks lost are one club, one diamond and one spade.

The second problem is fairly straightforward, but if you don't get it right, there will be a huge IMP swing – the full deal is on the next page.

Board : 7	S♠ K42	Dlr: S
	H♥ 975	Vul: Both
	D♦ AT972	
	C♣ 86	
S♠ 97		S♠ AQJT5
H♥ AQJ642		H♥ T3
D♦ 85		D♦ J43
C♣ JT9		C♣ K74
	S♠ 863	
7	H♥ K8	
8 11	D♦ KQ6	
14	C♣ AQ532	

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

As there are only 2 diamond tricks for the defence, the critical move is to overtake partner's ♦Q and play a club through. Partner can win 2 top tricks, then give you a ruff for 2 down.

If you don't overtake, the best partner can do is to cash ♣A. In fact, holding ♣AQ, s/he will be very reluctant to do so. If instead partner plays a third diamond, you will watch with horror as declarer makes 6 hearts and 5 spades for an overtrick!



18 May

Can you beat it?

Rakesh Kumar

On Monday 17 May, this very interesting deal turned up:

BD: 8	♠T	Dlr: W
	♥K9542	Vul: None
	♦KT2	
	♣KJ63	
♠AKJ865		♠Q973
♥T		♥J
♦76		♦QJ9854
♣QT74		♣A8
	♠42	
	♥AQ8763	
	♦A3	
	♣952	
		N
	♣♦♥♠	T
N	2 - 4 - -	10
S	2 - 4 - -	10 10
E	- 2 - 3 -	10
W	- 2 - 3 -	

It's interesting firstly because there is some judgement and perhaps some conventional bidding involved. What will you open as West? One possibility is to open 2S, promising a 6-card suit. However, by any standards this is a very good weak 2-bid so you do run the risk of missing a game. Another is to count your losers and say that this is a 6-loser hand if played in spades, so even if it is a point or two short, it is better opened 1S.

The subsequent auction will then depend on what opening bid is selected. If West chooses 2S, then with 4-card support and a 6-loser hand, East has an automatic raise to 4S. If 1S then East might choose to respond with 2D first, in which case the auction might proceed 2H by South, 2S by West, 4H by South and 4S by East. However, if East-West are playing splinter bids to show a game forcing hand with 4+ support and a shortage, then East might bid 4H. From West's perspective, that is likely to be more than a little perplexing – how is it that partner is showing a shortage in hearts when s/he has only a singleton? Still, after the splinter bid a signoff in 4S is the only available option.

So now, let's say you are North and need to find a lead. If the auction has been 2S-4S then from your selection of kings, a fourth-highest heart seems the least bad idea. If partner had the opportunity to bid hearts then of course that will be your lead.

If East has splintered in hearts, though, you might choose a low diamond. It matters not, in either case you find partner with the ace.

And now you're South, and you are in. What will you return? If partner led a diamond you can cash the heart ace, or vice-versa – but then? Surely you don't want to set up dummy's diamond suit by continuing with a low diamond, do you? The suit will at best be distributed 6-3-2-2 so even if partner can win another diamond trick (which is by no means guaranteed) you won't win a trick with a ruff – declarer will over-ruff.

By elimination, then, it's time to lead a club. Partner might have as much as ♣KQ or might have the ♣KJ over declarer's queen – this return will only work out badly if declarer has ♣QJ and partner has just the king, but in that case declarer could (and would) take the finesse anyway.

In fact the club return was the only way to beat the contract – otherwise declarer has only 3 losers in hearts in diamonds, with the club losers in hand being discarded on the established diamonds.

The club return wasn't often found on Monday ... in the Restricted Pairs event 4 of 8 reached game and 2 made it, while all those who played in part-scores made 10 or 11 tricks. In the Open section, game was reached at all 3 tables, but at one of those it was 4H by South, which cannot be beaten! At the other 2 tables, East-West played in 4S but the club switch was not found and both declarers squeaked home.

There's always plenty to think about in defence!



7 June

Country Teams Regional Final

Rakesh Kumar

On Sunday 6 June, the Southern Highlands Bridge Club hosted the Tablelands-Illawarra regional final of the NSW Country Teams Championship. Three teams each from Illawarra Bridge Association and SHBC, plus 2 teams each from Bowral and Nowra, played a round-robin of 9 × 6-board matches. The event was very ably directed by Ian Lisle, who maintained his good humour throughout, despite getting a disproportionate number of calls from our table!

At the end of the day, the winners were Illawarra 1 (Stephen and Liz Hurley, Steven Szatmary and Philip Barker) from Illawarra 2 and Nowra 1 (see [full results](#)). As is usual in Teams events, doing well required aggressive bidding, careful play and tight defence. Here are three illustrative deals. I'll start by presenting them to you as problems.

Firstly, you hold:

♠ AKQ942
♥ AK10
♦ 872
♣ 4

Not vulnerable against vulnerable, you open 1S, your LHO overcalls 2D and partner makes a negative double promising 4+ hearts. What will you rebid?

Secondly, after partner opens 1C and you respond 1H, partner deposits you in 4H. LHO leads ♥9 which runs to your jack. How will you play the hand?

♠ J103	♠ K95
♥ AJ105	♥ K762
♦ 9754	♦ A
♣ 52	♣ AJ1084

Thirdly, your RHO opens 1H, raised to 2H by LHO. RHO now bids an invitational 3H which is passed out. You decide to lead ♠10 and see this dummy:

♠ A953
♥ Q54
♦ J752
♣ 103

♠ 10876
♥ K10
♦ AQ84
♣ 752

The trick goes ♠A, ♠2, ♠4. Declarer leads ♣10 off dummy and partner rises with the ace to return ♠J, won by declarer with the king. Now declarer cashes ♣K, ruffs ♣J and plays a low heart to her/his jack and your king. What will you return?
Here's the board associated with the first problem:

19	♠ J7	<i>Dir: S</i>	
	♥ 9874	<i>Vul: E-W</i>	
	♦ Q1096		
	♣ AQ8		
♠ 1063	♠ 85		
♥ J5	♥ Q632		
♦ AKJ543	♦		
♣ 65	♣ KJ109732		
	♠ AKQ942	♣♦♥♠NT	
9	♥ AK10	N	- 3 3 5 5
9 6	♦ 872	S	- 2 3 4 4
16	♣ 4	E	1 - - - -
		W	1 - - - -

Partner surely has at least 6-7 hcp to make a negative double and you have a good 5-loser hand with a more-or-less independent spade suit. Anything less than a 3S rebid doesn't do justice to it. If you do rebid 3S, partner has a choice of raising you to 4S or converting to 3NT, both of which make. However, only 5 of 10 North-South pairs reached game.

This was the deal for the second problem. Only one East had the courage to raise to 4H, but now West had to make it ... the opening lead didn't hurt as it meant that provided hearts were 3-2 there would be no losers in the trump suit.

12	♠ AQ8	<i>Dir: W</i> <i>Vul: N-S</i>																														
	♥ 94																															
	♦ Q632																															
	♣ Q973																															
♠ J103		♠ K95																														
♥ AJ105		♥ K762																														
♦ 9754		♦ A																														
♣ 52		♣ AJ1084																														
10	♠ 7642	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>♣</th> <th>♦</th> <th>♥</th> <th>♠</th> <th>NT</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>N</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>S</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> <td>-</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E</td> <td>3</td> <td>-</td> <td>5</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>W</td> <td>3</td> <td>-</td> <td>5</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	N	-	-	-	-	-	S	-	-	-	-	-	E	3	-	5	2	2	W	3	-	5	2	2
	♣		♦	♥	♠	NT																										
N	-		-	-	-	-																										
S	-		-	-	-	-																										
E	3	-	5	2	2																											
W	3	-	5	2	2																											
6 15	♥ Q83																															
9	♦ KJ108																															
	♣ K6																															

When trying to make a thin game, the first task is to assess obvious losers and then to see whether it's possible to generate enough winners to make the contract. On this deal, there is the possibility of 2 spade losers, depending on how the outstanding honours are placed, and one club loser. That looks promising enough, but where are the winners going to come from? A cross-ruff probably won't work because when you concede a club, there will surely be a trump return (in fact it can work because of the favourable lie in spades, which can be played for only one loser).

However, a better bet is to work on setting up the clubs, by taking the split-honour finesse twice and then ruffing a low club. This works even though the suit doesn't break 3-3. However, this line wasn't found at the table.

On the third deal, should you return a trump to cut down on any further club ruffs? No ... partner's return of ♠J denies the queen, so declarer has it. That means partner started with a doubleton spade and can ruff, so you should return a spade, bringing down declarer's queen and leaving her/him a trick short.

13	♠ J2	<i>Dlr: N</i>	
	♥ 872	<i>Vul: Both</i>	
	♦ K103	♠ KQ4	
	♣ AQ964	♥ AJ963	
♠ A953		♦ 96	
♥ Q54		♣ KJ8	
♦ J752			
♣ 103			
10	♠ 10876	♣♦♥♠NT	
7 14	♥ K10	N	2 1 - - -
9	♦ AQ84	S	2 1 - - -
	♣ 752	E	- - 3 1 1
		W	- - 3 1 1

Across the field, half of the declarers made 9 (or even 10!) tricks in hearts.

Thanks to Steve Brabyn for excellent organisation and an endless supply of excessively tempting cakes and muffins!



16 June

Bidding 'em up with shape

Rakesh Kumar

Here you are as dealer, with neither side vulnerable, and this is your hand:

♠
♥52
♦KQT98
♣QJT763

If you play a weak 2NT opening for the minors, you would be happy to open this. If you don't, however, you have no choice but to pass. As it happens, your LHO bids a weak 2S and this comes back to you. Now what? Well, you are a passed hand, so a 2NT bid at this point cannot possibly be strong with stoppers in spades. That means you get to show your minors anyway. But what about if it goes 2S on your left, raised to 3S on your right? That's what happened at our table on Monday 14 June:

BD: 1	♠	Dlr: N
	♥52	Vul: None
	♦KQT98	
	♣QJT763	
♠KJ42		♠AQT653
♥K764		♥J93
♦J53		♦42
♣A8		♣92
	♠987	
	♥AQT8	
	♦A76	
	♣K54	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	5 5 2 - -	8
S	5 5 2 - -	12 7
E	- - - 2 1	13
W	- - - 2 1	

If 2NT by a passed hand after a weak 2S has to be for the minors, would 3NT by a passed hand after 2S-3S also be for the minors?

Of course it would! As North, I wish I had had the courage to bid 3NT, because with partner holding top honours in each of the suits that mattered to me, both 5C and 5D were absolutely cold. But I didn't, instead passing feebly. We defeated 3S by one trick for a boring 50% score on the board.

You might have thought I would have known better after what had happened just the day before. In an online Teams event on RealBridge – which is a wonderful platform that's a bit like a cross between Zoom and BBO – after we had reached 4S as North-South, my RHO, who had passed as dealer, backed in with 4NT for the minors:

BD: 14 ♠T65	Dlr: E
♥AT72	Vul: Nil
♦63	
♣AKJ3	
♠A4	♠9
♥J6543	♥98
♦KT72	♦AQJ98
♣97	♣Q8654
♠KQJ8732	
♥KQ	
♦54	
♣T2	
♣♦♥♠	N
	T
N - - 1 4 1	12
S - - 1 4 1	8 9
E - 3 - - -	11
W - 3 - - -	

Even if it had been doubled – which it wasn't – defeating the sacrifice in 5D would have been worth only +300 when we were cold for +420.

Back in 2002, Ron Klinger wrote a book entitled *The Power of Shape*, which remains one of my favourites. These two deals illustrate that power very well indeed.



27 June

Playing for IMPs

Rakesh Kumar

The annual SHBC Swiss Pairs championship is an IMPs event. In 2021, there was a good turnout, with 20 pairs taking part in a thoroughly enjoyable day of bridge. What made it even better was the delightful lunch, for which all the players were once again grateful to Lyn Curry.

The tournament was played as 6 rounds of 8-board matches, scored as Victory Points (VPs) on the 20 VP decimalised scale. The movement and scoring were very efficiently looked after by Chris Bayliss.

Doing well at IMPs involves bidding every thin game contract, reaching for slam whenever possible, and defending carefully so that the opposition isn't allowed to get away with their overbidding. In match 2 of the morning session, most North-South pairs had difficulty reaching game on this deal:

BD: 13 ♠AQ82 **Dlr: N**
 ♥AQJ2 **Vul: All**
 ♦6
 ♣KT74

♠JT	♠954
♥K987	♥4
♦T2	♦AJ9853
♣A9862	♣QJ5

♠K763
 ♥T653
 ♦KQ74
 ♣3

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N	
					T	

N	2	1	4	5	4	16
S	2	1	4	5	4	8 8
E	-	-	-	-	-	8
W	-	-	-	-	-	

After 1C by North and a 1D overcall by East, South should make a negative double to show some values and interest in a major suit contract. However, South doesn't promise 4-4 in the majors (4-3 or better would be suitable for the double) so how does North best resolve the question of which suit to bid?

The answer is that with only 5 losers and strong interest in game, North can bid 3D, asking South to choose the major suit. When this elicits a preference to 3S (but no jump bid, suggesting only minimum values) North now needs to show some courage and bid 4S anyway. As it turns out, this is not a difficult contract on a diamond lead.

You hold:

♠T
♥QT5
♦Q95
♣AKJ762

Partner opens 1H and RHO overcalls 2D. What will you bid?

You have a very good raise in hearts with only 7 losers and a source of tricks in clubs. The modern approach in a competitive auction is to bid 3D to show a good raise, so that jumping to 3H is merely obstructive. After 3D, partner with a minimum will rebid 3H and with a better-than-minimum hand will rebid 4H, possibly enabling exploration of a slam.

However, the time-honoured approach is to bid your suit and then jump to game later. On this auction, bidding 3C will in any case show a good hand. But what will you do if LHO now bids 4S, which comes back to you?

On the deal below, at our table, after 1H-2D-3C-4S and 2 passes, South declared there must be at least 63 high card points in our deck and also passed. As it turned out, 4S could not be beaten.

BD: 13	♠A74	Dlr: N
	♥AKJ94	Vul: All
	♦32	
	♣Q93	
♠KQJ986532		♠
♥		♥87632
♦T4		♦AKJ876
♣T5		♣84
	♠T	
	♥QT5	
	♦Q95	
	♣AKJ762	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	2 - 5 - 5	14
S	2 - 4 - 5	6 8
E	- - - 4 -	12
W	- - - 4 -	

However, had North-South had the agreement that a bid of 3D would be a good raise, North-South could/should have found their way to 5H. This is also unbeatable, despite the 5-0 break in trumps – there are actually 12 tricks available after East-West have cashed the ♦AK (5 hearts, 6 clubs and the ace of spades). Curiously, the 2 North-South pairs that did bid to 5H somehow went down.

The following deal from the last round had the potential to generate plenty of excitement:

BD: 17	♠862	Dlr: N
	♥QJT32	Vul: None
	♦542	
	♣87	
♠AK		♠QJT93
♥K		♥A8764
♦AQJ3		♦
♣AT6543		♣K92
	♠754	
	♥95	
	♦KT9876	
	♣QJ	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	- - - - -	3
S	- - - - -	21 10
E	7 4 4 7 7	6
W	7 4 4 7 7	

Whether there actually was excitement may have depended in large part on whether East chose to open his/her hand with a 1-level bid. Yes, East has only 10 hcp, but the hand notionally has 6 losers with both majors, so this is an exceptionally good sub-minimum. If East does start proceedings with 1S, a reasonable auction thereafter is 1S-2C-2H-6NT!

The opening lead will probably be ♥Q, which declarer will take in hand with the king. How should one play from here? At IMPs, making one's contract is all-important. A count of certain tricks indicates declarer has 2 top hearts, 5 spades and a diamond, so does not need 6 tricks from clubs.

That means it not necessary to rely on a 2-2 break in clubs. Of course there is no way to handle 4-0 clubs, but to guard against a 3-1 split the best line is to unblock ♠AK and play a small club from both hands! Then win any return, cross to dummy with ♣K if necessary, to cash the remaining winners, and finally return to hand with ♣A for 12 sure tricks. I wish I had done that, but I was allowed to get away with playing clubs from the top – the bridge gods were kind to me and the outstanding clubs were in fact 2-2.



12 July

A fascinating little part-score

Rakesh Kumar

Well, here we are, back in pseudo-lockdown, with no face-to-face bridge once more. There aren't many who want to play bridge while wearing a mask and in any case, why take a risk?

So instead, the enthusiasts and the desperate are back on BBO, taking their risks there instead! On Monday 12 July, some of the risk-takers landed in very thin games and even thinner slams. And most of them made!

However, the board that generated the widest range of results, which is therefore the one I want to discuss in this column, involved a very little part-score. Nevertheless, it was quite fascinating.

You are North and open 1D after 2 passes. Your LHO has nothing to say and partner responds 1S, so you bid 1NT. Now what should partner do?

It's often suggested that when playing IMPs, you should go for the safest part-score, but when playing matchpoints (i.e. regular duplicate pairs) your goal is to maximise your score by playing in notrumps whenever that seems like a viable option, so South might pass.

♠Q72
♥K982
♦K542
♣A7

♠K984
♥AJ5
♦J876
♣94

On this deal, shown in full on the next page, that would not have been a good idea. East would lead a club: from ♣QJ62 the standard lead is a fourth highest ♣2 (you would lead the queen if holding ♣QJ10 or QJ9) and West will play the king. If declarer ducks, West returns ♣5, also fourth highest. East needs to work that out and, to make sure that all the available club tricks are cashed, *must* unblock by playing ♣Q or J under the ace, otherwise only 3 club tricks will ever be available and the 1NT contract will make.

27 July

Courageous? Or crazy?

Rakesh Kumar

Towards the end of the BBO session on Monday 26 July, I found I had been dealt one of the most distributional hands I had seen in a while:

♠
♥9765432
♦Q
♣AJT85

We were vulnerable, the opponents were not. LHO was the dealer and opened a weak 2S. Partner passed and RHO raised to 3S. What would you do?

Well, you could spend some time cursing and muttering under your breath (or, being on BBO, even out loud) but it wouldn't do you any good. You have no defence against 3S (although partner might have) and no certainty you can make anything in hearts (let alone 4H) plus if you go down, even undoubled, it will be –100 per undertrick and could be very expensive indeed, even if the other side can make 3S.

So ... will you make a *Yes Minister*-style "courageous" decision and bid 4H?

Having written recently about how shape beats strength, I chose to practice what I preach and did bid 4H. LHO now bid 4S, partner raised to 5H (gulp!) and everyone passed. This was the deal:

BD: 25	♠AQ8753	Dlr: N
	♥JT	Vul: E-W
	♦3	
	♣Q932	
♠		♠K92
♥9765432		♥AQ8
♦Q		♦JT9642
♣AJT85		♣7
	♠JT64	
	♥K	
	♦AK875	
	♣K64	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	- - - 3 -	9
S	- - - 3 -	7 10
E	- 2 5 - 3	14
W	- 2 5 - 3	

The play was not without interest. At the table, having been raised, North chose to lead ♠A. Then it was fairly straightforward: ruff, cash ♣A, ruff a club, discard ♦Q on ♠K, ruff a diamond to hand, ruff another club with ♥Q noting the fall of ♣K, and cash ♥A. With hearts breaking 2-1, at this point there is only a heart and a club to lose, so 5H makes.

What if North had instead led the singleton diamond? Let's say South wins ♦K and returns a spade, declarer ruffing. Now a heart to the ace and a ruffing finesse of ♦A, with North over-ruffing, allows declarer to take 2 ruffs in dummy and two discards on diamonds, so again 5H makes.

Was bidding 4H courageous? Or insane? At the bridge table, sometimes it's hard to tell the difference ...

