

12 May

A multi-faceted deal

Rakesh Kumar

It's not often that a deal raises issues in bidding, play *and* defence. However, this one from Wednesday 11 May certainly did. Before I show you the full deal, here are 2 problems for you to consider. Firstly, you hold:

♠T65
♥AQ2
♦T2
♣AKQ83

With neither side vulnerable, your LHO deals and opens 1D. Partner passes and RHO bids 2D. What will you bid? Supposing RHO had not raised to 2D but instead had also passed. What would you do then?

Secondly, after 1D on your right, you pass, as does your left-hand opponent. Partner doubles, RHO passes and it's your bid:

♠874
♥KT85
♦AK4
♣T65

What will you choose?

Here is the complete deal:

BD: 11 ♠Q932 **Dlr: S**
♥976 **Vul: None**
♦J853
♣42

♠874	♠T65
♥KT85	♥AQ2
♦AK4	♦T2
♣T65	♣AKQ83

♠AKJ
♥J43
♦Q976
♣J97

♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
 T

N	-	-	-	-	3
S	-	-	-	-	10 15
E	3	1	4	2	3 12
W	3	1	4	2	3

Can you see why East's situation is tricky?

Partner did not overcall 1-of-a-major over 1D, so probably does not have a 5-card major suit and 8+ hcp. That doesn't mean West cannot have useful values, but with only 3-card major suit holdings, it does make a takeout double less attractive after 1D-(P)-2D-?. Perhaps East will instead prefer to bid 3C, which must show a reasonably good hand with a decent club suit.

However, after 1D-(P)-P-? a bid of 2C would undersell the hand, because a simple suit bid in the balancing seat is usually limited to about 13 hcp. Holding a significantly better hand, East needs to double first and possibly bid clubs later.

In the first scenario i.e. 1D-(P)-2D-(3C), South will now pass. What should West do? With 10 hcp, a double stopper in diamonds, support for clubs (so there is a good chance they will be worth 5 tricks) and a stopper in hearts, s/he needs to pray for a spade stopper with partner and bid 3NT.

Supposing that second scenario arises i.e. 1D-(P)-P-DbI. Again South will pass. Now West needs to make a jump response in hearts i.e. 2H to promise some 9+ hcp and potential for game. Should East move? In 4H, it's likely that West will be playing in a 4-3 fit, but East does have excellent support and a source of tricks in the club suit, so why not?

At our table, a third scenario occurred! The auction was 1D-(P)-2D-? and partner decided to double anyway. So my jump response now had to be 3H. Partner duly went on to 4H ...

North, who had made a slightly mischievous under-strength raise to 2D, thought he had no problem with an opening lead, but the diamond lead didn't actually create any difficulties for declarer – a spade lead would have been much for challenging. Would North have found a spade lead against 3NT, given that West was clearly ready for a diamond lead? That would hold the contract to 9 tricks, otherwise declarer makes 10 tricks easily.

Anyway, in 4H there is now a play problem on this deal. There is a temptation to take 2 top diamonds and ruff the losing diamond in dummy – but this *must* be resisted, because declarer has no re-entry to hand other than in the trump suit. Therefore, s/he has to immediately set about drawing trumps, hoping either that they break 3-3 or else if 4-2 that ♥J is doubleton. Then if the clubs behave, declarer has 4 hearts, 5 clubs and 2 diamond tricks available for 11 tricks.

On the 3-3 break in hearts, that's how it turned out. Such complexity in an apparently simple deal!



29 May

A Mixed tale ...

Rakesh Kumar

Jenny Michael and I represented SHBC in the Country Mixed Pairs Final at NSWBA on 28/29 May. Much to our surprise, after a lukewarm start and an exciting finish, we discovered we were the winners of this event. Neither of us could claim to have played especially good bridge over the two days – we made lots of avoidable errors and also collected zeros when our very capable opponents found their best contract or the perfect defence against us – but we did get a few things right.

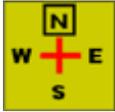
The second last deal of the second session of the Final contributed significantly to getting us over the line. Try it as a problem first. You hold:

♠A
♥J64
♦AKT873
♣AK8

Both vulnerable, your LHO deals and opens 1H. Partner and RHO pass. With such a strong hand, you double first, of course. You expect to hear partner respond 1S, but she surprises you with 2D! Now what will you do?

When I doubled, I had thought that if partner bid 1S, I could rebid 2H, showing a strong hand and asking for a stopper. This might get us to 3NT with the diamonds as a source of tricks. When partner instead bid 2D, things became awkward. With a maximum of 4 spades between us, 3NT was no longer a sensible option. However, 5D might be even less sensible, because partner didn't promise any significant number of high card points and I held what looked like three losing hearts ...

Still, no one ever did well in a bridge tournament by being chicken. Hoping that partner might have a shortage in hearts, I bid 5D. This was the full deal:

Board 29	♠KJT2	
Dealer N	♥KQ832	
Vul Both	♦	
	♣QJ96	
♠A		♠Q3
♥J64		♥AT95
♦AKT873		♦6542
♣AK8		♣532
	♠987654	
	♥7	
	♦QJ9	
	♣T74	

		Makeable contracts				
		♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
12		N	-	-	-	3 -
19	6	S	-	-	-	3 -
	3	E	1	4	2	- 1
		W	1	4	2	- 1

South led her singleton heart and the first trick went ♥7-4-Q-A. Jenny Michael then played the hand beautifully. She led a diamond, South playing ♦J, and learnt about the 3-0 break. Unperturbed, she continued with ♦K and a third diamond won by South. Back came a spade to dummy's ace. Now Jenny played ♥J to North's king, took the club return in dummy and came back to hand to discard a club on ♥10. Making 11 tricks for +600 and a shared top ... shared because the second-finishing pair succeeded in making 3NT despite a spade lead, when North didn't manage to find the necessary unblock of ♠J or 10.

The sharp-eyed among you may have noted that the list of makeable contracts indicates that 5D by East-West should also go down. How come? Well, that requires South to lead and continue clubs! Then North-South win a trick each in clubs, diamonds and hearts. Fortunately, in the real world that was never going to happen.



5 June

Another multi-faceted deal

Rakesh Kumar

About 3 weeks ago I wrote about a deal that raised issues in bidding, play *and* defence. Unexpectedly, another one turned up on Saturday 4 June. I hardly ever play on Saturdays, but it was worth turning up just for the pleasure of this one board. Before I show it to you, though, have you heard of the Lebensohl convention? If you haven't, or if you don't play it, you might have a problem when your opponents interfere over 1NT – for example, after you open 1NT, LHO overcalls 2S and partner bids 3C, do you know if partner has a weak hand with clubs or a strong hand with no spade stopper?

That problem is solved by agreeing that after an overcall of 1NT, if responder cannot bid a suit at the 2-level (which is always weak) then a bid of 2NT is never to play. Instead it forces opener to bid 3C, which subsequently allows responder to take various different actions according to the nature of his/her hand. This agreement is the Lebensohl convention. In its full form it is quite complex, but in its simplest variant, bidding 2NT after a 2H/S overcall allows responder to show a weak hand with a minor suit, to play. In contrast, a direct bid of 3-of-a-minor shows a good hand. The idea can be extended to distinguish between a weak and a strong hand with hearts when the overcall is 2S.

On this board, after I opened 1NT as North, Margaret Hutchison in the East seat quite rightly overcalled 2S. This triggered a Lebensohl sequence for us: partner bid 2NT, I was forced to bid 3C after West passed, and then everyone passed that.

BD: 11	♠K74	Dir: S
	♥A43	Vul: None
	♦J432	
	♣AK3	
♠982		♠AQJT5
♥QJ962		♥K5
♦T7		♦A986
♣964		♣J2
	♠63	
	♥T87	
	♦KQ5	
	♣QT875	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	2 1 - -	1 15
S	2 1 - -	- 3 15
E	- - 1 3	- 7
W	- - 1 3	-

The great benefit of this was that as the contract was being played by North, there wasn't an immediate spade lead through the ♠K. However, there was still the problem of making 9 tricks. Margaret was, of course, far too sensible to lead a spade, instead pushing out ♣2. After drawing trumps in 3 rounds, East showing out on the second round, I led a diamond towards the jack, which was taken by Margaret with ♦A. Continuing her refusal to open up spades for me, she returned a diamond to dummy's queen. I cashed ♦K, hoping for a 3-3 break, but West discarded a heart. From declarer's perspective, the position was now:

♠K74
♥A43
♦4
♣-
♠63
♥T87
♦-
♣QT

By this stage I knew for sure that East had at least 5 spades, exactly 4 diamonds, exactly 2 clubs and therefore at most 2 hearts. If her shape was 5=2=4=2 (or even 6=1=4=2) it might be possible to endplay her. So I led a heart from dummy. This is what Bridge Solver shows will happen:

Optimum: EW 3S; -140
LoTT: 17-16 = 1

Contract: 2♣ by N
NS Tricks: 5
EW Tricks: 1

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

3 15 15
7

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

If West simply plays a low heart, this can be ducked to East. She can get out with a heart to the ace, but declarer can now play a diamond to her, discarding dummy's third (losing) heart – and with only spades left she is endplayed. This was the line of play that led to the contract being made at our table.

However, it's also fascinating to see how things turn out if West *does* play ♥9 or higher. Now declarer must rise with ♥A and then play another heart to East's king. East can attempt to get out by playing ♦9 and hoping declarer will ruff this in dummy. Again, though, declarer can discard the remaining heart loser and East is endplayed.

Is there any escape from this? Yes, an unblock! Here is what Bridge Solver shows us:

Optimum: EW 3S; -140
LoTT: 17-16 = 1

Contract: 2♣ by N
NS Tricks: 5
EW Tricks: 1

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

3 15 15
7

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

When North rises with ♥A, East must play the king under the ace – now West always gets in to lead a spade through. Quite an interesting defensive challenge!



13 June

Bid bravely, play sensibly

Rakesh Kumar

You are the dealer, vulnerable against opponents who are not vulnerable. What would you bid with this hand?

♠AK2
♥Q2
♦AQ852
♣842

Many would say this is a silly question: with 5332 shape and enough high card points to open 1NT, what is there to think about? I'd agree with that, but at our club some (quite a few) folks won't open 1NT when they have an unguarded suit. If you still cling to that view, I really would encourage you to be a little braver. Yes, once a year you will end up in a notrump contract with no stopper in either hand and it might go down, but being able to open 1NT is just so valuable that the opportunity should never be missed.

Alright, let's say you did open 1NT. You are East and your partner has a bit of a problem with her hand, as you can see in the full deal below, from Monday 13 June:

BD: 6	♠J853	Dlr: E
	♥KJ64	Vul: E-W
	♦64	
	♣A65	
♠6		♠AK2
♥AT5		♥Q2
♦KJT9		♦AQ852
♣KJT73		♣842
	♠QT974	
	♥9873	
	♦73	
	♣Q9	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	- - - - -	9
S	- - - - -	12 15
E	5 5 1 1 5	4
W	6 6 2 1 6	

Obviously West wants to be in game, but is worried about spade stoppers for 3NT, as well as being concerned about how to find a minor suit fit and about the lower score for the 11-trick game. There is a convention for a hand such as West's, known

as a fragment bid – if you choose to play it, a bid of 3H/S shows a game-forcing hand with a 3-card fragment in the bid suit, a singleton in the other major and 5/4 in the minor suits, either way. If partner manages to remember the convention, it's pretty good, but it comes up even less often than the problem of being in 3NT with a completely unstopped suit. My partner and I had it in our notes for 2 years and then discarded it because we had never had an opportunity to use it – there are better things to do with the 3H/S responses to 1NT.

So what should West do? The usual – close her eyes, bid 3NT and pray hard. This time, that works just fine as East has a double stopper in spades.

So how should East play 3NT on a spade lead? There are 9 easy tricks and the clubs are an obvious possibility for more, depending on how the missing honours lie. Is it worth ducking a round of spades? Perhaps, although unless North has only 3 spades (i.e. South has a 6-card suit) the duck will achieve nothing much.

Better is to take the first trick and apply pressure to the opponents by running off 5 diamond tricks, discarding a heart from dummy. As it happens, the opponents can handle the pressure – South will discard 3 hearts and North will throw a club, a heart and a spade.

Now it's time to lead a club to the ♣10. When this knocks out the ace, you have 12 tricks if you didn't duck the first spade, or 11 tricks if you did. Easy, isn't it?

Which raises these questions: (1) how come 3 of 8 didn't reach game? (2) how come 3 were in the wrong game? (3) given the lie of the cards, how can one not make a couple of overtricks in 3NT?

FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 6

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
5♦ by EW	-1	100	2
2♦ by EW	=	-90	1
4♦ by EW	=	-130	1
3♦ by EW	+1	-130	1
5♦ by EW	=	-600	1
3NT by EW	+1	-630	1
3NT by EW	+2	-660	1

Don't ask me – we played this board against Fiona Khoo and Margaret Malcolm. Fiona opened 1NT, Margaret pondered for a bit but eventually raised to 3NT, then Fiona played it sensibly and made 11 tricks even after ducking the first spade. That got us a bottom – but it really ought to have been a flat board or even a plus, because to actually hold declarer to 11 tricks, South needs to lead a heart.

All this might tell you something about how you can improve your scores ...



28 June

Handling pre-empts

Rakesh Kumar

A deal that came up on 27 June illustrated several interesting aspects of pre-empting and of dealing with an opponent's pre-emptive bid.

As dealer, what would you bid with the East hand, not vulnerable against opponents who are vulnerable? While many might choose 3S, I would suggest that with only 6 losers and a very good suit, a 4S pre-empt has a lot of appeal. Indeed there are many who assert that any 7-4 hand should bid game without hesitation.

Suppose you don't follow that advice and choose to just bid 3S anyway. South could just try 4H but this hardly seems wise, both because partner may have much better support for diamonds and also because there might be chances for a slam. In any case, with such a powerful hand it makes very good sense to double first, then bid diamonds if partner makes an unwelcome 4C response, thus showing the other 2 suits and extra strength.

BD: 2	♠T543	Dlr: E
	♥J8	Vul: N-S
	♦Q943	
	♣AT9	
♠K		♠AQJ9876
♥Q763		♥95
♦8762		♦
♣Q872		♣J543
	♠2	
	♥AKT42	
	♦AKJT5	
	♣K6	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	- 6 4 - 3	7
S	- 6 3 - 3	7 8
E	2 - - 2 -	18
W	2 - - 2 -	

When the double comes around to North, what should he do? North will in the first instance assume that South has some 14+ hcp hand with hearts. Opposite that, bidding 4D looks like a fairly poor idea: not even game, yet one has to make 10 tricks, but North has only a 4-card suit and South does not promise 4+ support. Plus everything will be breaking badly.

So North might be inclined to pass. I did – it was a very foolish idea. All of South's careful planning was wasted. Although 3S \times went one down, that wasn't worth much.

Takeout doubles are meant to be taken out! When North bids 4D, South has an easy raise to game, which makes without breathing hard – in fact 12 tricks can be made on a cross-ruff.

What about if East opens 4S? Oddly enough, on this deal that makes things easier for North-South. With 4H out of the picture, South can now bid 4NT to show a strong distributional hand with two 5+ suits. North responds in the cheapest playable suit by bidding 5C, which South corrects to 5D showing the red suits. Once again, there is no problem.

So how come the table of results looked like this? Don't ask me ...

4♥ by NS	=	620	1
5♦ by NS	=	600	1
5♣ by EW	-3	150	1
4♣ by EW	-2	100	1
3♣X by EW	-1	100	1
4♣X by EW	-1	100	1
3♣ by EW	-1	50	1
5♦ by NS	-1	-100	1
4♦ by NS	-2	-200	1



11 July

Playing for IMPs

Rakesh Kumar

Monday 11 July was the first qualifying round for the Grand National Open Teams so was scored as IMPs rather than matchpoints. When playing for IMPs, one strives to reach any game contract with a reasonable chance of success. To quote from one of my favourite websites, [Karen Walker's Bridge Library](#):

IMP scoring makes it more profitable to bid thin games, especially vulnerable. At teams, the potential cost of missing a vulnerable game is 10 IMPs (for example, you're plus 170 and your team-mates are minus 620). The cost of going down in game is 6 IMPs (minus 100 and minus 140). The difference means that it will usually pay to bid vulnerable games that have around a 40 percent chance of success.

Not vulnerable, the IMP difference is smaller, so you want to bid only those games that are roughly 50 percent or better.

The results on the deal featured below clearly illustrated that many members of our club haven't yet grasped this concept. The deal is also instructive in terms of how to bid a strong-ish hand that contains a 5-card major suit but has balanced shape.

BD: 20	♠J5	Dlr: W
	♥AQJT	Vul: ALL
	♦T2	
	♣A9853	
♠T6		♠AK9
♥42		♥K8753
♦AJ853		♦KQ7
♣QJ76		♣KT
	♠Q87432	
	♥96	
	♦964	
	♣42	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N		12
S		8 18
E	2 5 2 1 3	2
W	2 5 2 1 3	

West deals and passes, North opens 1C promising 2+ cards in the suit, and East needs to consider her bid. What will most clearly convey the nature of her hand?

The answer is, in my opinion, not in doubt: bid 1NT. "But I have a 5-card major suit!" I hear you cry. So what? You have a 5332 hand in the 15-18 hcp range and just for a change, you have stoppers in *all* suits. Your 5-card major is a miserable thing with only one top honour and no intermediates, so unless partner bids a Stayman 2C and is enthused by your 2H response, it isn't such a significant feature of your hand.

Remember, nothing conveys your strength and shape with as much accuracy as a 1NT opening or overcall. On this deal, when you as East bid 1NT, you make West's life easy. If you play 2NT in response as invitational, he can bid that and with a maximum hand you will go on to 3NT. If you play 2NT as a transfer to diamonds, he can bid 2C (Stayman but not promising a major) and then after your 2H can now bid 2NT, to achieve the same outcome.

No matter what your agreements are, a 1NT overcall gets you to 3NT without breathing too hard. Getting to a makeable game is the whole point at IMPs!! In fact it's easy to make, because when dummy comes down, you discover you have quite a bit more than one stopper in clubs. You have 5 tricks in diamonds on anything but a 5-0 break, at least 2 in clubs after knocking out the ace, and 2 top tricks in spades. Moreover, unless South's opening lead is a heart (not likely!) you will eventually get a heart trick as well (where do you think the ace is anyway?) for a total of 10 (or maybe even 11) tricks.

So why did the table of results look like this?

FREQUENCIES FOR BOARD 20			
Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
3♥ by EW	-3	300	1
4♥ by EW	-2	200	1
1♥ by EW	=	-80	1
2NT by EW	+1	-150	1
2NT by EW	+2	-180	1
2NT by EW	+3	-210	2
2♣ by NS	-3	-300	1
2♥ by NS	-4	-400	1
3NT by EW	=	-600	2
3NT by EW	+2	-660	1

As I've said a couple of times in the recent past, don't ask me ... but once again this might tell you something about how you can improve your scores.



25 July

4333 hands belong in notrumps

Rakesh Kumar

One of the many pieces of excellent advice one can extract from Ron Klinger's numerous books is the notion that balanced hands opposite balanced hands belong in notrumps, even with a major suit fit. That's especially so if a 1NT opener or overcaller has 4333 shape: the same number of tricks is likely to be made in notrumps or in the major suit and if that number is nine, 3NT makes but 4H/S goes down ...

The idea was very well illustrated by a deal on Monday 25 July. This was round 3 of our GNOT qualifying event, so the field was playing for IMPs. My partner showed excellent judgement in the bidding. At IMPs one stretches for thin games – as was discussed in a column a fortnight ago – so when East opened 1D after 2 passes (quite a sensible idea with 4-5 in the minors but insufficient strength to reverse) as South she stretched to overcall 1NT. This notionally promised 15-18 hcp, but what's a jack between friends? Although she had an aceless hand, her honours appeared to be well placed.

BD: 8	♠AJT98	Dlr: W
	♥A98	Vul: Nil
	♦T3	
	♣T65	
♠Q64		♠2
♥T643		♥J52
♦9742		♦AQ85
♣K3		♣AJ872
	♠K753	
	♥KQ7	
	♦KJ6	
	♣Q94	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	1 2 3 3	9
S	1 2 3 3	5 12
E	1	14
W	1	

Of course two can play at the stretching game. As North I bid 2H, a transfer to spades, and over partner's 2S acceptance, jumped to 3NT to show a balanced hand with 5 spades i.e. presumably some 5332 shape. That notionally promised at least 10 hcp, but I had two aces and quite a few 10s, so what's a jack between friends?

Partner now decided that despite a 9-card fit in spades, with her minimal 4333 hand she would pass rather than convert to 4S. On a diamond lead to the ace and a diamond continuation, won with the jack, she could afford to play the king and ace of spades, conceding a spade trick when the queen did not drop, and still make 9 tricks. That was worth quite a few IMPs against the average!

So the next time you have a 4333 1NT opening hand and partner promises a relatively balanced hand with a major suit for which you have 3+ support, consider whether 3NT might not be a better contract for you than 4-of-a-major. Especially at the lower end of the high card point range, it might be the only making game, as attested to on this occasion by the table of results below.

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
3NT by NS	=	400	1
3♠ by NS	+1	170	1
3♣ by NS	=	140	1
2♠ by NS	+1	140	3
3♣ by NS	-1	-50	1
4♣ by NS	-2	-100	1

