

1 April
Tight defence
 Rakesh Kumar

Defence is hard work. However, if one is to score well at matchpoints when the other side holds most of the high cards, it's important to avoid giving declarer undeserved overtricks.

That means not just following "rules" but thinking about the auction before making an opening lead, as well as trying to reconstruct declarer's hand later on.

Here's a board from the session on Monday 1 April, where the opening leader needed to consider options carefully before placing a card on the table:

BD: 17 ♠32		Dlr: N	
	♥Q74	Vul: None	
	♦KQ73		
	♣AKQJ		
♠54		♠AQ7	
♥KT6		♥AJ8	
♦JT5		♦A842	
♣T7632		♣854	
	♠KJT986		
	♥9532		
	♦96		
	♣9		
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N	
		T	
N	- - 1 2 -		17
S	- - 1 2 -	4	15
E	1 1 - - 1		4
W	1 - - - 1		

North would routinely open 1NT and South should transfer to spades, then pass. Now look at the East hand in isolation: there's nothing that's attractive as an opening lead. Obviously you don't want to lead from ♠AQx or to lead an unsupported ♦A. It seems extremely likely that leading one of the club rags will just give declarer a free finesse in that suit. So perhaps the best lead is ♥8 in the hope of finding partner with an honour, perhaps even the king?

Lucy Fisher did just that against me and the defence quickly collected 3 heart tricks. Now there was no way for me to make more than a mere 8 tricks. At other tables, two declarers made 9 tricks and 2 made 10 – the disturbing thing about the latter is that both those Norths were playing in 4S!

Tight defence was also the key to success when Stephen Brabyn and a newly agile Tony Lye combined to give my partner a hard time on the board overleaf. After West passed, North opened 1D, East doubled and South bid a slightly heavy 1NT, which was passed out. However, as long as East-West defend passively and don't waste their high cards, even the combined 23 points in the North-South hands can't salvage this contract: there's only 1 spade, 3 hearts and a trick in each minor available.

BD: 24 ♠KQ5		Dlr: W				
♥KQT8		Vul: None				
♦9542						
♣K5						
♠T43		♠AJ92				
♥97		♥J532				
♦KJ83		♦QT6				
♣JT82		♣A7				
♠876						
♥A64						
♦A7						
♣Q9643						
		N				
♣	♦	♥	♠			
		T				
N	1	-	2	-	-	13
S	1	-	2	-	-	5 12
E	-	1	-	-	-	10
W	-	1	-	-	-	

Far too many East-West players seem to have been busy cashing their top tricks and thus donating tricks to North-South, because at 5 tables, declarer made 7 or 8 tricks, while at one that figure was exceeded. The moral of the story is that if there is no obvious source of cashing tricks for the declarer, make her/him work for each one!

8 April
Thrown in!
 Rakesh Kumar

Much is written about the various kinds of endplays that are available to a competent declarer. Many folks think that such endplays involve fancy advanced techniques that are beyond them – but it isn't so. The most common endplay, known as a "throw in", is quite straightforward.

On Monday 8 April, one of these happened more or less automatically on this board:

BOARD 20			
BD: 20		Dlr: W	
♥5		Vul: All	
♦KQT87			
♣T4			
♠73		♠QT4	
♥QJ963		♥AK742	
♦J64		♦A2	
♣AK5		♣J63	
♠J96			
♥T8			
♦953			
♣Q9872			
		N	
♣ ♦ ♥ ♠		T	
N	- 2 - 2 -		12
S	- 2 - 2 -	11	14
E	1 - 4 - 2		3
W	1 - 4 - 3		

At our table, West chose to pass and I opened 1S. East doubled, I bid 3D along the way, but East-West duly reached 4H and I was on lead. The ♠K revealed the queen in dummy so I switched to the ♦K, taken by the ace. Trumps were drawn in 2 rounds. Then Sally Knackstedt cashed the ♣AK and led her second spade towards dummy.

I could take my ♠A and ♦Q, but that was the end of me – even though I knew Sally still had a club loser, whichever suit I exited in allowed her to win and discard a club from the opposite hand.

Of course simply drawing trumps and leading a spade up would work just fine too, as the ♠Q would provide a discard for the club loser – but it was much more frustrating to find myself comprehensively endplayed!!

Partner had to do a bit of work to pull off the endplay on this next hand, but it certainly made the outcome a sure thing:

BD: 2 ♠AKJ97 ♥AKJ4 ♦KJ3 ♣7 ♠Q2 ♥QT9632 ♦AT62 ♣9 ♠T643 ♥75 ♦87 ♣QJT63 ♣♦♥♠ N T	Dlr: E Vul: N-S ♠85 ♥8 ♦Q954 ♣AK8542 ♠85 ♥8 ♦Q954 ♣AK8542 ♠85 ♥8 ♦Q954 ♣AK8542 ♠85 ♥8 ♦Q954 ♣AK8542
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N	1	-	1	4	3	20	
S	1	-	1	4	3	8	9
E	-	-	-	-	-	3	
W	-	1	-	-	-		

West opened a weak 2H, I doubled, Jenny Michael responded 2S and I duly raised to 4S. The lead was ♣9, which looked like a singleton, so partner was reassured when dummy also turned up with a singleton club. East won the trick and at this point the safest return is a trump. If West ducks rather than playing the queen, although trumps can be drawn in 2 rounds, declarer would be stranded in dummy and unable to lead a heart to finesse the jack.

In fact the only way of now getting to hand is to cash the ♥AK and ruff a heart. How to deal with dummy's potential diamond losers given that declarer has only one trump left, which will be required to ruff the last heart?

The answer is to play the ♣Q from hand, discarding a small diamond from dummy. East can win this, but as she has now holds only clubs and diamonds, whatever she returns assures the contract. In fact a club would allow both remaining diamonds to be discarded from dummy, making 11 tricks, so East will return a diamond and West will take her ace. Note, however, that partner's endplay would have worked especially well if East held the ace and West the queen of diamonds, because the same result would be achieved, with no guessing!

28 April

With no entry ...

Rakesh Kumar

On Wednesday 24 April an interesting defensive problem arose on the hand below. Although the solution wasn't obvious at the time (indeed it wasn't even clear that there was a problem!) it should have been.

BD: 8	♠65	Dlr: W
	♥Q73	Vul: None
	♦AQ5	
	♣AKT42	
♠JT9		♠A874
♥AK854		♥62
♦964		♦KT2
♣J9		♣7653
	♠KQ32	
	♥JT9	
	♦J873	
	♣Q8	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	2 2 1 2 2	15
S	2 2 1 2 2	9 7
E	- - - - -	9
W	- - - - -	

North opened 1NT, South bid Stayman and, hearing 2D in response, rebid 2NT invitational. South optimistically went on to game.

As East, what will you lead against 3NT? I didn't think my 4-card suits would get us very far, so went looking for partner's potential 5-card heart suit and led the ♥6.

Partner took the ♥K and, with no side entry, cashed the ace and played a third heart, more in hope than expectation. However, declarer now had 9 tricks, conceding only the ♠A and ♦K. No one else bid to 3NT, so although all those in part scores also made 9 tricks, we got a perfect zero on the board.

But Deep Finesse says only 8 tricks should be available. What did we do wrong?

It's not immediately apparent, but given that declarer had denied 4 hearts and my opening lead was clearly from 2 or 3 small cards, partner needed to duck the ♥6 while playing an encouraging card. Then when I came in with either honour, I could continue with ♥2 and she could take 4 heart tricks instead of 2!

Ducking to retain communication is important when one has no side entry ...

2 May

Thrown in again ...

Rakesh Kumar

Three weeks ago, I wrote about a type of endplay referred to as a "throw in", which is not at all uncommon.

A hand involving a throw in turned up a few days later:

BOARD 27						
BD: 27		♠AJ92		Dir: S		
		♥876		Vul: None		
		♦AKT7				
		♣74				
♠KT87		♠4				
♥Q3		♥JT92				
♦Q98		♦532				
♣QT32		♣A9865				
		♣Q653				
		♥AK54				
		♦J64				
		♣KJ				
		♣♦♥♠		N		
				T		
N	1	4	4	4	4	12
S	1	4	4	4	4	9 5
E	-	-	-	-	-	14
W	-	-	-	-	-	

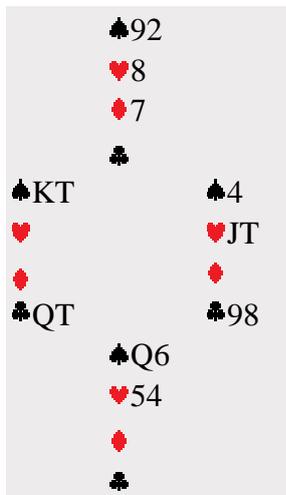
At our table, South opened 1C (showing 2 or more) and as North, I bid 1S. East-West competed in clubs and we finished in 3S.

East opened proceedings with the ♣A and was doubtless disappointed to find the king in dummy. The club continuation was won and a spade finesse successfully taken. However, cashing the ♠A revealed bad news – West now had 2 sure trump tricks.

On the face of it there was still a heart loser as well, plus a potential loser in diamonds, which would mean only 8 tricks and a failing contract. Still, there were chances in the diamond suit ...

So I cashed the \spadesuit A, crossed to dummy with a heart and played a diamond to the 10. This held. After another top heart, which dropped West's queen, and the \spadesuit K, also dropping the queen, it was clear that West had 4-2-3-4 shape.

This was the end position. I could now play the thirteenth diamond, pitching a heart from dummy.



West was stuck: he could ruff the diamond and cash the \spadesuit K, but then had no choice but to give a ruff-and-discard by playing a club, so the heart loser went away. The result was 10 tricks!



9 May

A very interesting hand

Rakesh Kumar

On Wednesday 8 May this quite remarkable hand turned up:

BD: 10	♠AT83	Dlr: E
	♥	Vul: All
	♦AJT7	
	♣AQJ74	
♠QJ9		♠654
♥J43		♥Q765
♦53		♦9862
♣K8652		♣93
	♠K72	
	♥AKT982	
	♦KQ4	
	♣T	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	5 6 5 6 6	16
S	5 6 5 6 6 7 2	
E	- - - - -	15
W	- - - - -	

Sitting South, my partner opened 1H. What would you bid as North? While 2C is perfectly reasonable, I thought I might at least check out the possibility of a fit in the other major, so I bid 1S. However, it doesn't really matter what North bids because South is going to (or at least should) jump to 3H with this excellent 5-loser hand.

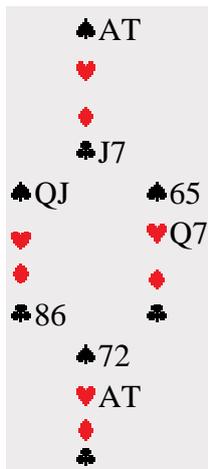
Of course the jump usually also implies 16 or more high-card points, so with nothing to guide me other than simple arithmetic, I decided to just bid 6NT.

East led a heart (a bit dangerous!) and when dummy came down, things looked quite good for this adventurous contract – if clubs broke 4-3 then 12 tricks would be easy. So I took the ♥K, ran the ♣10 and crossed to hand with a high diamond, then cashed the ♣A and played the queen. This lost to the ♣K as East showed out – and things were no longer easy.

What could I do? When in a tight situation, one should cash side tricks and hope either that someone discards incorrectly or that something else useful develops.

On this hand, I have to admit I didn't end up needing to do anything clever, because I got a bit of help from the defence. But suppose that West, having won ♣K, returns a

safe diamond. North can now cash 3 more diamond tricks, throwing a heart from dummy, then go to dummy with the ♠K, leaving this position:



When declarer now plays the ♥A, what is West to do? She has already come down to the queen-jack of spades and if she throws either of those cards, declarer can discard the ♣7 and win the last 3 tricks with the ♠A10 and ♣J. If she discards a club, declarer throws a losing spade and still wins the last 3 tricks.

This simple squeeze happens automatically because poor West is trying to guard 2 suits and has to discard first.

I think I might have found it at the table, but I can't swear to it ...



16 May

Beat it if you can

Rakesh Kumar

In Teams events, an excellent strategy is to vigorously bid to game on even a less-than-50-percent chance, then set the defence the challenge of beating you. As I've observed in these columns before, defence is hard. Given the number of IMPs that may be gained by bidding and successfully making a thin game, it makes sense to "have a go" every time. And if the game goes down, it might be a flat board anyway, as the other team will probably be taking a similar approach.

The situation isn't quite so clearcut at matchpoints, where overbidding is often penalised and the rewards for reaching a thin game are less certain. Nevertheless, during the *Bridge for Brains* event last week, Tony Lye and Stephen Brabyn decided that bidding to game and setting us the challenge of beating them might be good fun. It was – for them!

Here's the hand in question:

BD: 9	♠542	Dir: N
	♥K9765	Vul:
	♦742	EW
	♣A3	
♠KT7		♠J963
♥AJ32		♥QT8
♦AK		♦JT8
♣KQ96		♣T82
	♠AQ8	
	♥4	
	♦Q9653	
	♣J754	
		N
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	T
N	- 1 - - -	7
S	- 1 - - -	20 4
E	2 - 2 1 1	9
W	2 - 2 2 1	

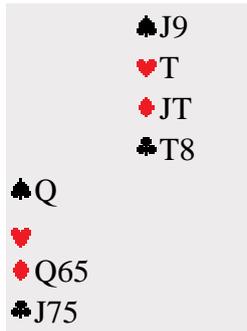
Tony showed a 19-21 hcp balanced hand and Stephen decided to raise him to 3NT because "I liked my tens, partner!"

As North, I led a boring fourth-highest heart. Would you have found a diamond lead? That's what it takes to beat this contract outright, because West has only two stoppers – although South must be mindful not to cover dummy's jack!

Still, even without a diamond lead, declarer needs to play the hand carefully to maximise his chances of making 3NT. Tony did just that. When the ♥8 held, he led a spade towards hand and inserted the ♠10. When this held as well, he exited with ♣K.

I could see no point ducking this, so I took my ♣A and now played ♦7, denying a diamond honour. Tony played the ♦8 from dummy, partner played the ♦9, and he won with the ace. Now he led ♥3 towards dummy and when I played low, the ♥Q won as partner showed out ... declarer has 4 tricks so far and 3 more sure top tricks, plus a virtually certain additional spade trick.

To ensure that spade trick, declarer now led another spade from dummy, and partner took her ace. But now look at the hand from partner's perspective, sitting South ...



Leading a diamond appears to be a gift to declarer, leading the ♠Q doesn't seem to make sense as it will set up dummy's jack, so of course partner exited a club. This allows declarer a finesse he couldn't take for himself and yields a second club trick.

Two spade tricks, three hearts, two diamonds and two clubs makes nine. Like I said, defence is hard. Stephen and Tony seem to love giving us a hard time ... we got a complete zero for that board!!

