

8 August

An interesting little hand ...

Rakesh Kumar

On Wednesday 7 August a rather interesting hand turned up. It was a bit of a challenge for West, who held:

♠JT87
♥A843
♦Q
♣AT92

All vulnerable, South dealt and opened 1D. Will you double?

Say you don't. North bids 1S, partner passes and South rebids 2C. Now North bids 2S, South rebids 3D and all pass.

It's been a curious auction. What will you lead?

I held the West hand and it had already given me two different kinds of headache. Firstly, despite the lack of high card points, the perfect 4441 shape and 2 aces make this hand a more-or-less automatic takeout double of 1D in a teams event. However, especially when vulnerable, it wasn't so clear to me to double at matchpoint pairs. I had only 9 working high card points and the "valley of death" of -200 might await. Secondly, having passed, I was now struggling to find a reasonable lead.

Leading an unsupported ace is rarely a good idea. On this hand, South's bidding strongly suggested a singleton spade or a void, 2 or 3 hearts, 6 diamonds and at least 4 clubs, so leading the ♥A looked especially unattractive – if South turned out to have e.g. Kx or KQx in hearts, this would be a quick donation to the opposition's cause. But the other 3 suits all looked worse, so what else was there to do?

This dummy turned up:

♠KQ643
♥76
♦54
♣K875

Interesting ... I had figured North would probably have 6 spades, but it wasn't so. And North had club support too, so could have passed or raised, yet chose to do neither.

The ♥A holds and partner plays an encouraging card. What will you lead at trick 2?

Time to think some more. Partner seemed to be happy with the heart lead so perhaps she had the king. Then again, maybe she only had the queen and thought I had led from ♥AK.

One thing that was certain was that partner was short in clubs – with four cards in dummy, she could have no more than a singleton. So one possibility was to play a heart to her presumed king and await the return of a club, then give her a ruff.

Hang on ... what if declarer has 5 clubs and partner doesn't have one to return?

Well, that seemed to make it pretty clear what to do: ♣A followed by a low club for partner to ruff. Otherwise if declarer had ♦AKJTxx she could bang down a top honour, draw all of partner's likely four trumps, and we would never get a ruff.

Here's the board:

BD: 13 ♠KQ643		Dlr: N	
♥76		Vul: All	
♦54			
♠K875			
♠JT87		♠A92	
♥A843		♥KJT52	
♦Q		♦T732	
♣AT92		♣6	
♠5			
♥Q9			
♦AKJ986			
♣QJ43			
♣ ♦ ♥ ♠		N	
		T	
N	2 1 - - -		8
S	2 1 - - -	11	8
E	- - 5 1 1		13
W	- - 5 1 1		

As it turned out, all that thought wasn't particularly necessary – partner was always going to get a trump trick as declarer had no entry to dummy to finesse the ♦10, even if the 4-1 break was inferred when the ♦Q fell under a top honour. Therefore South would always lose 1 spade, 2 hearts, 1 club and 1 diamond, finishing one down. The Deep Finesse result of two down requires an opening lead of ♣A, club ruff, heart return to the ace and another club ruff, which won't happen in real life.

But there's more to this little hand – look at what the outcome would have been if I hadn't been such a wimp and had doubled. Partner would of course bid hearts. Although we will never reach game, we are very likely to make 11 tricks on the lead of ♦A and a switch to the singleton spade, losing only a spade and a diamond. That would yield a *much* better score. Note to self: more courage needed!

12 August

Dangerous overcalls

Rakesh Kumar

Bridge players don't pay their table money just to pass. Just because the opponents begin the auction has never been considered sufficient reason for silence – isn't that why overcalls were invented?

Overcalls can, however, be a double-edged sword. I'm sure you know what I mean when I mention the sinking feeling one gets after the overcall is passed by LHO and partner, then RHO makes a reopening double and LHO passes for penalty – it's usually a gruesome outcome. Then there are the hands where one's overcall keeps the opponents out of a bad contract, improving *their* score instead of ours. And the hands where because of the overcall, declarer works out just how to play the hand for maximum advantage to *them!*

Not so common, but nicely demonstrated on Monday 12 August, was another phenomenon – that of the opponents selecting an alternative, better-scoring contract because of an overcall. Here's the board in question:

BD: 24	♠AK93	Dlr: W
	♥A953	Vul: None
	♦3	
	♣AQ53	
♠T87		♠42
♥KQ8742		♥6
♦876		♦AQ952
♣9		♣JT864
	♠QJ65	
	♥JT	
	♦KJT4	
	♣K72	
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N
		T
N	4 2 2 5 5	17
S	4 2 2 5 5	5 7
E	- - - - -	11
W	- - - - -	

If feeling particularly frisky, West could have started proceedings with a weak 2 in hearts. But she didn't, so as North, I opened 1C and heard East overcall 1D. I was now anticipating that partner would bid a major and that I would raise to the 3-level, inviting game. Instead, however, partner bid 2NT, promising 10-12 hcp and stoppers in diamonds.

Somewhat disappointed at partner's apparent lack of a major suit, and feeling that my distributional values had just evaporated, I settled for raising to 3NT, which was passed out.

I was quite wrong about the hand, though, because partner *did* have a major suit. Even though she had a perfectly good 1S bid available, she decided that with a large part of her strength concentrated in the opponent's suit, her hand would play to its full value in notrump rather than in a suit contract.

In fact this very practical decision turned out to be a very rewarding decision as well. Not only would a suit contract have had to contend with fairly wild distribution, on a diamond lead partner in due course made 11 tricks in 3NT, for an outright top.

It sure does help to have a really good partner!



22 August

Ron Klinger's Ferret

Rakesh Kumar

Ron Klinger is pretty much the grand-daddy of bridge teachers in Australia. One of his many excellent books, published back in 1991, is entitled *50 Winning Duplicate Tips*. I have a well-worn copy ...

Tip No 5 from the book is memorable. It reads "Do not commit a hand to a 5-3 fit or a 5-4 major fit if a 4-4 major fit is available" because the long suit may be useful for discards. The tip is summarised thus at the end of the section:

F.F.F.F.: Ferret For the Four-Four Fit.

That was particularly relevant to a hand that came up in the evening on Wednesday 21 August. You hold:

♠K632
♥KT9
♦AJ763
♣6

and hear partner, as dealer, open 1H. You have a game-invitational or better hand in hearts. Should you bother bidding that very ordinary-looking 4-card spade suit?

You most certainly should! At our table, the auction proceeded thus:

1H – P – 1S – 2C

2S – P – 4S – all pass

So here is your hand and the dummy. LHO leads ♣A and then ♣K, which you ruff. You draw trumps in 3 rounds, finishing in dummy, and now have choices about how best to develop the maximum number of tricks. A low-risk approach is to duck a

heart, hoping for a 3-2 break, then ruff the likely club return with your last trump and play to make 4 hearts, 4 spades plus a ruff, and the ace of diamonds.

♠K632	♠AQT5
♥KT9	♥A8743
♦AJ763	♦Q2
♣6	♣Q3

That might be a good safe line at teams, but it doesn't seem right at matchpoint pairs, where overtricks are everything. So instead you play the ♦Q off table. RHO covers with alacrity. That doesn't bode well for establishing diamonds.

So it's back to ducking a heart, leading ♥9 from hand. However, LHO covers with ♥J, so you take your ace and play a heart back to the king, expecting to give up a heart and make 11 tricks.

But that isn't what happens! Here's the full board (the relevant hands were actually North-South):

BD: 11	♠K632	Dlr: S
	♥KT9	Vul: None
	♦AJ763	
	♣6	
♠74	♠J98	
♥652	♥QJ	
♦K984	♦T5	
♣9754	♣AKJT82	
	♠AQT5	
	♥A8743	
	♦Q2	
	♣Q3	
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N
		T
N	- 4 6 6 1	11
S	- 4 6 6 1	3 12
E	- - - - -	14
W	- - - - -	

The ♥AK drop the doubleton queen-jack and you end up with 12 tricks. Definitely a win for the ferret! (yes, Deep Finesse will also make 12 tricks with hearts as trumps, because of the short doubleton honours, but in the real world this is an unlikely outcome; on Wednesday evening, those in hearts made 10 or 11 tricks, whereas those in spades made 11 or 12).



10 September

Territory Tales

Rakesh Kumar

I'm just back from playing in the Territory Gold Congress in Alice Springs – a great destination and the bridge was excellent as well! After 190 boards in just over 3 days there's plenty I could write about e.g. the time I pushed the opponents into a (making) grand slam, the time the opponents forgot their system which led us to make a wrong decision, the time that ... instead I'll share just two boards with you.

The vulnerable opponents have bid 1NT (by LHO) – 2D (transfer) – 3H (super-accept) – 4H. Partner leads ♠K and this is your hand (North) and the dummy:

(dummy)

♠AJ2
♥T9742
♦K9
♣964

(you)

♠9873
♥A65
♦JT875
♣5

Declarer takes the ♠A and leads a small heart from table. How will you defend?

Before we get to the answer to that, though, the first board I'd like to show you is a striking illustration of a point made in the booklet on *Better Partnership Bridge* that is now available through the Club, namely that a weak hand plays better in its long suit. West has a strong hand with a void in spades and a good 6-card heart suit. East, who has one heart, has a good 6-card spade suit but little else.

Board 8 ♠Q652

Dealer W ♥82

Vul None ♦Q3

♣KQ763

♠		♠AKJT97
♥AQJT95		♥6
♦AJ85		♦9742
♣AT4		♣95
		♠843
		♥K743
		♦KT6
		♣J82

		Makeable contracts				
		♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
9		N	-	-	-	-
16	8	S	-	-	-	-
	7	E	1	5	2	4
		W	1	5	2	4

As you can see from the analysis by Deep Finesse, the 6-0 fit plays better than the 6-1 fit! At our table, I was East and insisted on a spade contract. Partner, who was declarer after a transfer sequence, played the hand very carefully and proceeded to make the game, thus gaining us quite a few IMPs. Only 10 of 34 tables were similarly successful.

The second hand, which relates to the defensive problem above, is a straightforward but illuminating exercise in thinking about where the setting trick might come from. If North rises with the ♥A and returns her singleton club to partner's hoped-for ace (or king if declarer finesses) she might get a ruff, or even two as she can then get back to partner's ♠Q.

Board 22 ♠9873

Dealer E ♥A65

Vul E-W ♦JT875

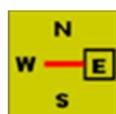
♣5

♠AJ2

♥T9742

♦K9

♣964



♠64

♥KQJ8

♦AQ3

♣KQT7

♠KQT5

♥3

♦642

♣AJ832

		Makeable contracts				
		♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
5		N	-	-	-	1
8	17	S	-	-	-	1
	10	E	1	-	3	-
		W	1	-	3	-

At our table, that's exactly what happened – we were two down, whereas 16 of 36 Easts made 10 tricks in hearts. Of course Deep Finesse has no problem scoring up a game contract, because the computer plays in 3NT. But who would find that?

♣♦♥♠

27 September

Slam bidding ... again!

Rakesh Kumar

I've written several times about approaches to slam bidding, because I remain baffled by the reluctance of our club members to bid slams. There are also sections on slam bidding in both the "improvers" and "intermediates" booklets on *Better Partnership Bridge* – the second booklet will shortly be available through the Club.

In the evening on Wednesday 25 September, a deal came up that illustrated several of the methods covered in the two booklets:

BD: 13 ♠T7		Dlr: N	
♥KQJT5		Vul: All	
♦87			
♣Q865			
♠AJ65		♠KQ932	
♥A9		♥6	
♦Q43		♦AKJ	
♣AT42		♣KJ73	
♠84			
♥87432			
♦T9652			
♣9			
		N	
		T	
N	- - 1 - -	8	
S	- - 1 - -	15	17
E	7 4 - 7 7	0	
W	7 4 - 7 7		

At our table, North passed, a point of interest to which I will return below. Of course East now opened 1S and South passed. How should the bidding proceed from here?

As discussed in the "intermediates" booklet, the West hand is perfect for a Jacoby 2NT response, promising 13+ hcp and 4+ support for partner's major suit, keeping open the possibility of a slam if partner has the right cards. East will rebid 3H, showing a shortage (singleton or void) in that suit. That's useful, but West cannot go charging off towards a slam, because the situation in the diamond suit looks as if it might be precarious – things would have been easier if East had shown a diamond shortage. However, West would surely wonder – could East have a strong hand? If so, slam might still be possible. In the booklet, I've offered a home-grown approach to getting an answer to that question: the Jacoby 2NT responder bids the first step to ask, then the opener rebids the next step to show a minimum hand, or the next+1 step to show a better hand.

On this board, West's 3S (first step) inquiry would yield a 4C (next+1 step) response to show a good hand. Now West can bid 4NT Roman Keycard Blackwood. East replies 5S showing 2 keycards plus the queen. So the partnership has all the keycards and the queen, while 9 of East's high card points have been accounted for. However, East must have a fair bit more to have a better-than-minimum hand, so 6S looks like a very good bet indeed. In fact, on the lead of the singleton club, with North playing the queen, 13 tricks were made.

There are nevertheless a couple of additional things worth considering. Some partnerships play weak 2-bids that show a 5-card major suit and 4+ minor suit. If one did so, the North hand is worth a 2H opening, despite being vulnerable. Indeed that is such a solid 5-card suit that one might consider opening 2H even if it is supposed to promise a 6-card suit. Look at the effect that could have on the auction! Whether East doubles or makes an over-strength overcall, South has the perfect opportunity for a pre-emptive jump to 4H. As discussed in both booklets, this is entirely consistent with a "Law of Total Tricks" approach to jamming the auction. It will now be very difficult indeed for East-West to investigate a possible slam contract and in all likelihood they will stop in 4S.

Of course if the field doesn't bid slam and North-South get doubled to go 3 down for -800 against an average of -680, that will be rather sad ... so perhaps this approach might not be advisable at our club, unless not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents.

In the defence, if South leads 9♣ it should be obvious to North that declarer has both the jack and king of clubs. There is no point inserting the ♣Q if declarer plays low from dummy. This will save the overtrick, because North will eventually have to win a club trick.

You might ask: did we reach slam on Wednesday evening? Partner and I had no agreements about any of the methods discussed above. So after the 1S opening, I bid an exploratory 2C in reply. Partner produced a jump rebid showing 16+ hcp, so I just bid 6S directly. That works too ...

