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10 July 2018

## Slam Season in the Highlands

Rakesh Kumar

It's winter – but it must also be slam season. The Mondays of 2 and 9 July have been full of potential slam hands. However, despite my exhortations in two recent columns, these seem to have missed by most of the field, except of course when it's our opponents who have the opportunity to do us maximum damage!

On 2 July the boards were played across the country in the Nation Wide Pairs. Rob Ward and Alan Maher distinguished themselves by finishing 13<sup>th</sup> out of over 500 pairs, with a local score of over 70% and a national score of just over 64% – very well done!

This was one of three biddable slams:

<b>BD: 3</b>	<b>♠</b> AQT6	<b>Dlr: S</b>	
	<b>♥</b> AT7542	<b>Vul: E-W</b>	
	<b>♦</b> AQ		
	<b>♣</b> 2		
<b>♠</b> 943		<b>♠</b> 75	
<b>♥</b> 83		<b>♥</b> J96	
<b>♦</b> 2		<b>♦</b> KT963	
<b>♣</b> KJ97653		<b>♣</b> QT8	
	<b>♠</b> KJ82		
	<b>♥</b> KQ		
	<b>♦</b> J8754		
	<b>♣</b> A4		
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N	
		T	
N	- 5 6 7 6		16
S	- 5 6 7 6	4	6
E	1 - - - -		14
W	1 - - - -		

At our table, South opened 1D and West boldly overcalled 3C at adverse vulnerability, despite a very ordinary suit and no outside values. Still, nothing was going to stop North from bidding – the question being whether to double or to show the suit length by bidding 3H. The latter may be a better idea, as partner can then infer suit length given the missing top honours and has a choice of bidding 3S (if confident this will be interpreted as forcing) or raising to 4H. At this point, slam becomes a very good prospect, whether one goes via Roman Keycard Blackwood or simply bids it. In fact both 6H and 6S are cold, but the field mostly didn't get there.

Not long after came this slam hand, also involving quite a bit of competition:

<b>BD: 10</b>	♠J	<b>Dlr: E</b>
	♥T42	<b>Vul: All</b>
	♦KQ75	
	♣T9843	
♠K98743		♠AQT62
♥83		♥5
♦AT8		♦32
♣52		♣AKQJ6
	♠5	
	♥AKQJ976	
	♦J964	
	♣7	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	- 3 4 - -	6
S	- 3 4 - -	7 16
E	4 - - 6 -	11
W	4 - - 6 -	

East would usually begin with 1S and South will of course pre-empt in hearts. Some might settle for 3H but with 7411 shape and a wholly self-sufficient suit, 4H seems entirely reasonable. West has an automatic raise to 4S and now much depends on whether North pushes the auction along with a bid of 5H, in which case East-West are more likely to reach the cold 6S. Also interesting is when the auction begins with 2C or a similar strong bid – now *East* gets to bid 3S/4S over the pre-empt and a raise to 6S becomes even more likely.

<b>BD: 5</b>	♠T	<b>Dlr: N</b>
	♥	<b>Vul: N-S</b>
	♦QJT432	
	♣QT8652	
♠KQ96543		♠J
♥AQ94		♥KJT8753
♦9		♦86
♣K		♣J74
	♠A872	
	♥62	
	♦AK75	
	♣A93	

The excitement continued on 9 July with this next hand. Unless playing a 2NT opening to show both minors, North must pass – obviously with regret. East opens proceedings with 3H and South doubles. West of course raises to 4H. North now has the choice of bidding 4NT (if confident this will be interpreted as showing both minors) or 5D on the grounds of better suit quality. When West comes back in with 5H, what should North do? Points, schmoints ... 6C will be converted to 6D by South, but as the cards lie, both minor suit slams are cold.

The moral of the story remains the same – get your bidding boots on and bid more slams!

15 July 2018

## Good Defence

Chris Bayliss

<b>BD: 4</b>	♠964	<b>Dir: W</b>
	♥J82	<b>Vul: All</b>
	♦9432	
	♣J63	
♠T53		♠QJ7
♥AKQT976		♥3
♦Q		♦KJT85
♣82		♣AT74
	♠AK82	
	♥54	
	♦A76	
	♣KQ95	
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT	
N	- - - - -	2
S	- - - - -	11 11
E	1 2 3 - 2	16
W	1 2 3 - 2	

When your opponents are playing in a part score contract and they make an overtrick it can feel like you have had a bad board. However, such are the vagaries of matchpoint scoring, it can turn out to be a triumph.

Board 4 at Saturday's session is a case in point.

At our table, I sat west and opened 1♥. East responded 2♦. South chipped in with a double but my 2♥ was the final contract. I suspect the auction was similar at most tables although some east-wests got to 4♥.

Most norths led a spade and when dummy went down, my prospects look very good. There are two spade losers along with a diamond and a club. Some of those losers may well disappear on the long diamond suit so it looks like ten tricks may be makeable. I am starting to regret we are not in game.

In fact, half the field made ten tricks but at our table it was not to be. Instead of cashing the second spade, Craig, sitting South switched to the king of clubs. This was a smart move for two excellent reasons.

- 1) It knocks out dummy's entry for the diamonds.
- 2) When dummy has a long running suit, it is often a good idea for the defence to set up their winners as quickly as possible.

The defence now takes two spades, a diamond and a club. Nine tricks to declarer was worth only three match points as half the field made ten tricks. Craig's club switch was well-rewarded when north-south scored more than 80% on the board.

24 July 2018

## Two-bids and the losing trick count

Rakesh Kumar

Before you start reading this column, be warned: I'm still banging on about bidding slams! The reason I'm doing so is that in the session on Monday 23 July, the very first hand that turned up illustrated a couple of important points about bidding effectively to slam.

<b>BD: 1</b>		♠AKQT65		<b>Dlr: N</b>		
		♥5		<b>Vul: None</b>		
		♦A8				
		♣QT32				
♠J3				♠984		
♥QJT				♥K987432		
♦QJT2				♦3		
♣A654				♣87		
		♠72				
		♥A6				
		♦K97654				
		♣KJ9				
				N		
				T		
N	5	4	-	6	3	15
S	5	4	-	6	3	11 3
E	-	-	2	-	-	11
W	-	-	2	-	-	

As dealer, what will you bid with the North hand? Many, perhaps most, would say 1S. But compare this hand with various others that you would be happy to open 1S. This has *much* more playing strength – mostly because it has far fewer losers than the average 1S opening. If you count Q10xx as 2 losers then it's a 4-loser hand and it is certainly no worse than a 5-loser no matter how you look at it. Moreover, it has a more-or-less self-sufficient trump suit.

On the other hand, with only 15 high card points, this isn't even remotely close to a game-forcing bid. If your 2C opening promises at least 9 playing tricks in a major and even more in a minor, what do you do with hands like these?

There are several possible solutions: one of simplest is that if you currently play 2C as strong and other two-bids as weak, you can put the 2D bid to better use. Retain the 2H and 2S weak two-bids, but consider playing some version of what used to be called Benjamin Twos i.e. use 2C to show a near-game-forcing hand (the sort of hand

that was once known as an Acol Two, with about 8 playing tricks or 5 losers) and use 2D as the game-forcing bid. Responses are up to you, but my preference is for 2C to require a 2D waiting bid and 2D to require responder to artificially show top controls.

With a hand such as the one above, after 2C-2D-2S, responder knows that opener has a strong-ish hand with a good suit, 5-loser or better (if better, then opener does not have enough high card points to open 2D) and can evaluate his/her hand in that light.

Now look at the South hand. The doubleton support is nothing exciting, but on the face of it, this is a 7-loser hand. Loser count arithmetic is simple: add your losers to partner's losers, subtract from 24 and this gives you an idea of the potential of the combined hands. In this case the arithmetic is  $24 - (7 + 5) = 12$ . Of course that doesn't mean you *will* make 12 tricks, but you should certainly investigate. When partner shows 3 keycards and you have an ace plus 2 kings, slam prospects look good – just bid it!

On the Monday, only one North-South pair out of 12 reached slam ... they were richly rewarded.