

7 March

Signalling suit preference

Rakesh Kumar

After partner gives you a ruff, how do you know what to play next? That was a very relevant question on this deal, from Monday 2 March, on which North-South usually bid to either 3H or 4H:

(dummy)	
♠KQT9	
♥K63	
♦JT2	
♣J95	(you)
	♠A876532
	♥85
	♦86
	♣72

West leads ♣A and K, on which East will of course signal encouragement: assuming natural signals, East will play ♣7 followed by ♣2. West now plays ♣3 and East ruffs, with South following each time. What should East do at this point?

Some might think the obvious answer is to cash ♠A. Unfortunately the obvious answer is wrong, because this was the full deal:

BD: 29	♠KQT9	Dir: N
	♥K63	Vul: ALL
	♦JT2	
	♣J95	
♠J4		♠A876532
♥T92		♥85
♦K953		♦86
♣AK83		♣72
	♠	
	♥AQJ74	
	♦AQ74	
	♣QT64	
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N
		T
N	3 3 3	3 10
S	3 3 3	3 11 4
E		1 15
W		1

If East attempts to cash ♠A, South ruffs, then draws trumps finishing in dummy. Because ♠J comes down on the second round of spades, South is able to discard 3 diamonds from her hand, making 10 tricks. On the day, more than half the declarers did indeed make 10 tricks in hearts, but that should never have happened, because East should have returned a diamond at trick 4.

How could East know that was the right thing to do? Firstly, he can see 11 spades between his hand and dummy – if declarer has one or two spades then East will always get his trick, but if South is void then playing the ace could be disastrous. Secondly, aces should be kept for beheading kings, not played on thin air. But thirdly and most importantly, by leading ♣3 for East to ruff, West had denied interest in a spade return – therefore could not be void in spades – and had requested that partner return a diamond.

Really, I hear you ask? Yes indeed. When you expect that partner will ruff the card you are now leading, the rank of the card you lead always indicates suit preference. So in this case ♣3 – which was the lowest card West could have led – asked for the lower of the remaining 2 suits. If you and partner don't play suit preference signals in this way, you should!



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17 March

Slam bidding in Teams

Rakesh Kumar

The hotly contested Autumn/Iredale Teams event was completed last week. After 6 rounds of 8 boards, the LYE Team emerged victorious, having won 5 of their matches.

In Teams events, most significant IMP swings usually relate to bidding and making borderline games. However, pushing for slam contracts is also important, especially in matches as short as 8 boards – a single making slam bid at one table and not at the other can yield a win. Still, it's important not to bid poor slams, because a single failing slam not bid by the opponents can lose a match.

Among the 48 boards of this event, there were a couple of deals where slam was tempting but unsuccessful. This deal featured the only biddable, making slam:

BD: 12	♠Q	Dlr: W
	♥KJT87	Vul: NS
	♦AQ92	
	♣AK7	
♠73		♠KJT962
♥2		♥A63
♦KT8765		♦43
♣T853		♣94
	♠A854	
	♥Q954	
	♦J	
	♣QJ62	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	5 2 6 1 1	19
S	5 2 6 1 1	3 8
E		10
W		

After West passes, North will of course open 1H. East has a choice of overcalling either 1S or 2S – as partner is a passed hand, a weak jump overcall might be more effective interference.

Regardless of what East bids, South should make a cue raise i.e. a bid of 2S over 1S, or of 3S over 2S. This shows a good raise to at least the level of the bid, whereas a bid of 3H would merely be competitive. South certainly has a good raise

because she has a 7-loser hand with 4-card support, the ace of the opponent's suit and an outside singleton.

After that bid, with only a 5-loser hand and a known fit, North has a relatively easy path to slam. Although he does not know about the complementary singletons, he can afford to inquire with 4NT Roman Keycard Blackwood, then continue to 6H when South shows one keycard and the trump queen. The contract is unbeatable.

Remarkably, only one North-South pair found their way to this slam. For those who don't play cue raises, the issue might have been not knowing about the quality of South's raise. That's something to think about ...



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20 March

In support of support doubles

Rakesh Kumar

Over the last few months I have more than once written about the support double. This competitive bidding agreement, invented by the famous American bridge player Eric Rodwell, applies in an auction such as 1C (or 1D)-Pass-1H (or 1S)-any overcall. A double by opener now shows 3-card support, without promising any extra strength. This might be just what responder needs to know if she/he has a 5-card suit. Of course a raise still shows 4-card support.

A fine example of the potential benefit of agreeing to play support doubles turned up on this deal from Monday 16 March:

BD: 19 ♠KQ5 ♥QJ9 ♦T4 ♣QT964 ♠A976 ♥K8432 ♦7 ♣753 ♠J842 ♥T7 ♦K832 ♣KJ2	Dlr: S Vul: EW ♠T3 ♥A65 ♦AQJ965 ♣A8
--	--

♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N			
	T			
N				10
S			7	15
E	3	4	2	2
W	3	4	2	2

After 3 passes, East opened 1D and West responded 1H. North then overcalled 2C. This gave East the perfect opportunity for a support double, but at every table at our club East must have rebid 2D, because at 8 of 9 tables East-West played in a diamond part-score, usually making 9 tricks.

If East-West had found their fit in hearts, it's quite easy to make 10 tricks on this deal unless North chooses to lead a club (unlikely, he will probably start with ♠K). All that declarer needs to do is play the ace and queen of diamonds, discarding a loser from hand. Then after playing the king and ace of trumps, declarer runs the diamonds, losing just one diamond, one heart and one spade.

Of course a support double might find you playing in a 4-3 fit if responder has only a 4-card major suit and not enough support for opener to be able to revert to playing in the minor suit. However, that's not necessarily a tragedy – an example of a successful major suit contract in a 4-3 fit was in the 30 January column, which you can now find in the [February newsletter](#).

By the way, take another look at the East hand on the deal shown. With a 6-card minor, 15 hcp and an otherwise balanced hand, it's entirely reasonable – and tactically very sound – to open 1NT. Unless South can find a very unlikely club lead, East should make at least 9 tricks. Fiona Khoo did!



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30 March

More on doubles

Rakesh Kumar

There have been a couple of columns recently that have focused on the different uses of a double to show shape, strength or support. This column, based on a deal that was played on Monday 30 March, illustrates another type of double – the reopening double, which might just as well be called a "taking out insurance" double.

You are not vulnerable, the opponents are vulnerable. Partner and RHO pass so with this hand of course you open 1H:

♠ Q J 7 6
♥ A K Q 7 6
♦ 3
♣ Q 6 2

LHO overcalls 2D and this is passed back to you. What will you do?

The hand is a perfect candidate for a reopening double, which shows shortness in the overcalled suit, at least 2 quick defensive tricks and tolerance for the unbid suits.

If you make a reopening double, partner will bid 3C, because this was the full deal:

Optimum:
NS 1S+2, NS 1H+2; +140
LoTT: 17-16 = 1

♠ Q J 7 6
♥ A K Q 7 6
♦ 3
♣ Q 6 2

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Bo Haglund

♠ K 8 5
♥ 8 5 4 3
♦ 10 8 4
♣ 8 5 4

♠ 10 9 3
♥ J 9 2
♦ A K Q J 5
♣ A 10

		♠	♦	♥	♣	NT
N	3	4	-	3	3	-
S	14	4	-	3	3	-
E	8	-	1	-	-	-
W	15	-	1	-	-	-

3C makes easily. However, on the day, not one North-South pair played in clubs!

As it happens, if you rebid hearts you can make 9 tricks in that suit, but do you really want to be playing in a 5-1 fit? Besides, partner might not have such a useful hand and/or your best result might be elsewhere.

For example, it's possible that partner has a hand with 4 spades that was too weak to make a negative double at the 2-level, such as this:

Optimum:
NS 2S; +110
LoTT: 16-17 = -1

♠ Q J 7 6
♥ A K Q 7 6
♦ 3
♣ Q 6 2

♠ K 8 5
♥ 8 5 4 3
♦ 10 8 4 2
♣ 8 5

♠ A 9
♥ J 9 2
♦ A Q J 9 5
♣ A 10 4

3 14 16
7

♠ 10 4 3 2
♥ 10
♦ K 7 6
♣ K J 9 7 3

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

Bridge Solver Online:
John Goacher

Double Dummy Solver Module:
Bo Haglund

Now you can't make even 8 tricks in hearts but can readily make 2S.

Or partner may have a hand such as this one:

Optimum:
NS 1N+1; +120
LoTT: 12-14 = -2

♠ Q J 7 6
♥ A K Q 7 6
♦ 3
♣ Q 6 2

♠ K 8 5
♥ 8 5 4 3
♦ 8 4
♣ 8 5 4 3

♠ A 10 9
♥ J 9 2
♦ A Q 10 9 5
♣ A 10

3 14 15
8

♠ 4 3 2
♥ 10
♦ K J 7 6 2
♣ K J 9 7

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

Bridge Solver Online:
John Goacher

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Now she would pass for penalties and you would score +500 for 2Dx going two down, vulnerable!

The reopening double caters for all of these possibilities. Keeping your options open is always a good idea!



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6 April

Leading up to honours

Rakesh Kumar

As South, you are the declarer, playing in 3NT after a straightforward 1NT-3NT auction. Your left-hand opponent leads ♥J. Plan the play.

♠T9
♥Q2
♦KQT53
♣K973
♠K875
♥AK5
♦97
♣AQ62

Quite obviously you have 3 top tricks in each of hearts and clubs. Assuming clubs break 3-2, which is quite likely, you will win another trick in that suit. The position in the spade suit is fragile, but you do have the 8, 9 and 10 so hopefully the opponents won't be able to win too many tricks there. Anyway, you clearly don't want to touch spades and fortunately, no one else has done so – yet.

You need to look to diamonds for your additional tricks. How will you play the suit? You must lead up towards the ♦KQ. If ♦A is on your left this might turn out to be a relatively easy contract ... but even if not, you can hope to develop an additional trick or tricks if you successfully finesse for or drop the jack.

Therefore, perhaps counter-intuitively, you should capture ♥J with the ace or king in hand, to lead a diamond. If you do that and LHO plays low, dummy's queen wins. In that case you should return to hand with a top club and lead your other diamond towards dummy's remaining honour. With ♦K and ♦Q both proving to be winners, you are well on your way to 9 tricks.

The full deal, from Monday 6 April, is overleaf. In its correct orientation, East was the declarer. In fact diamonds were 3-3, so you should have been able to win 4 tricks in that suit. As a result, even though clubs were 4-1, you had 10 easy tricks.

Well, it should have been 10 easy tricks, but in practice it clearly wasn't so on the day. Six of seven declarers played in notrumps, but most of them made either 7 or 8 tricks. That was possibly the result of winning the first heart on table, then erroneously playing a top diamond honour.

BD: 1	♠J42	Dlr: N
	♥874	Vul: None
	♦842	
	♣JT84	
♠T9		♠K875
♥Q2		♥AK5
♦KQT53		♦97
♣K973		♣AQ62
	♠AQ63	
	♥JT963	
	♦AJ6	
	♣5	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N		2
S		10 16
E	4 4 2 3 4	12
W	3 4 2 3 4	

Full credit to Dick Evans, who was the only declarer to make the 10 tricks that the table of double dummy results indicates should be possible.



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14 April

Choice of games

Rakesh Kumar

Between Thursday and Sunday last week, Orange was over-run with bridge players competing in the Central West Festival, an ABF Gold Point event. The Teams was played over the first two days (8 × 14-board matches) while the Swiss Pairs (9 × 9-board matches) ran over the next day and a half.




Here's a deal from the Swiss Pairs that was particularly interesting. You hold:

♠63
♥KQT984
♦AKQJ
♣A

The opponents are vulnerable, you are not. As the dealer, partner opens a weak 2S. You bid 2NT as a strong inquiry. Let's say that you have agreed that partner will rebid 3 of her suit with a minimum hand, while with any 8-10 hcp hand she will show an outside singleton or else bid 3NT. Partner rebids 3H so you know that she has a maximum weak two-bid with shortage in hearts. What will you do now? Keep in mind that the scoring is IMPs so the goal is to reach the safest making contract – there is little interest in overtricks.

Clearly you have a 6-2 fit in spades and with your shortage in clubs plus partner's shortage in hearts, the obvious choice is 4S. But is the obvious choice the right choice? What about 3NT? You have 6 top tricks in your own hand and given partner's rebid, the opponents are quite likely to lead hearts for you. And unless partner hold ♠AK, in which case you will have at least 9 tricks on a heart lead, he must have an honour in clubs.

If you chose to play in 3NT, it would have been a winning decision, because this was the full deal:

Board 3	♠63		
Dealer S	♥KQT984		
Vul E-W	♦AKQJ		
	♣A		
♠-		♠KQT97	
♥J		♥A7652	
♦7543		♦98	
♣QJT98643		♣2	
	♠AJ8542		
	♥3		
	♦T62		
	♣K75		

		Makeable contracts				
		♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
19		N	- 4	4	3	5
4	9	S	- 4	5	3	5
	8	E	- -	- -	- -	- -
		W	- -	- -	- -	- -

With the hideous 5-0 spade break, 4S went down across the field, often doubled. Curiously, a few pairs played in 4H, which made despite the 5-1 break. Absolutely no one in the Open field played in the cold 3NT, but a couple of pairs in the Intermediate and Restricted fields did so!



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28 April

State Teams Qualifying

Rakesh Kumar

The qualifying event for the Bridge NSW State Teams Regional Final was held on Monday 27 April. After 8 matches of 6 boards, the HADDADI team (Rose Massey - Richard Burrells - Leanne Haddadi - Lynne Gilchrist) were convincing winners, finishing 6 VPs ahead of the second-placed KUMAR team, with the MALCOLM team in third spot.

Many of the swings through the day depended on hand evaluation, careful play and thoughtful defence. Others relied on a bit of luck and an error or two by the opposition. Before showing you a couple of interesting deals (there were several!) let me present you three problems. Firstly, with neither side vulnerable, RHO passes as dealer. You hold:

♠QJT864
♥5
♦J3
♣KQJ3

What will you bid?

Secondly, you are not vulnerable against opponents who are vulnerable. Partner passes as dealer and RHO opens 1NT (15-17 hcp). You pass, LHO bids 2NT (described as invitational without a 4-card major) and RHO raises to 3NT. This is your hand:

♠A652
♥AJ53
♦J96
♣97

What will you lead?

And thirdly, LHO opens a weak 2S. Partner doubles for takeout and RHO raises to 3S. You hold:

♠T4
♥Q62
♦Q832
♣KQT2

What, if anything, will you bid?

On the first problem, those who focus on high card points might open a weak 2S on the grounds that it is an aceless hand with only 10 hcp, including a possibly

worthless doubleton jack. That's a conservative or even pessimistic evaluation, with 6-4 shape and only 6 losers if a fit can be found. Holding the boss suit, you can afford to open 1S and then rebid 2S over whatever partner might have to say. That's what happened at our table in Match 3 – our opponents then cruised into 6S, because this was the full deal:

BD: 17	♠K7	Dlr: N
	♥JT92	Vul: None
	♦KT84	
	♣542	
♠A32		♠QJT864
♥AK764		♥5
♦A76		♦J3
♣A6		♣KQJ3
	♠95	
	♥Q83	
	♦Q952	
	♣T987	
		N
	♣♦♥♠	T
N		7
S		19 10
E	4 2 4 6 3	4
W	4 2 4 6 3	

Only 3 of 9 East-West pairs reached the slam.

After a 1NT-2NT (invitational, no major)-3NT auction, or after a 1NT-3NT auction, you should normally lead a major suit. With a choice of 4-card majors, aren't you going to prefer to lead from a suit with 2 honours, hoping to establish some tricks? That's presumably why all 5 Souths defending against a notrump contract led a heart on this deal from Match 6, which is the basis of the second problem:

BD: 9	♠KQ983	Dlr: N
	♥874	Vul: EW
	♦5	
	♣6543	
♠T4		♠J7
♥Q62		♥KT9
♦Q832		♦AKT74
♣KQT2		♣AJ8
	♠A652	
	♥AJ53	
	♦J96	
	♣97	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N	T
N					2	5
S					2	9 16
E	3 4				1	10
W	3 4				1	

At all of those tables, East made 10 or 11 tricks, although game was not always reached.

The third problem is in fact from the same deal. I'm a firm believer in 5-card weak 2-bids. Even if you don't have a method for distinguishing a 5-card from a 6-card weak two, in first seat at favourable vulnerability you have a licence to make mischief. If as North you open 2S on this deal, that's very awkward for East. What can she do? A takeout double is perhaps the most reasonable action, but partner will raise to 3S. Now West has no sensible bid available, so is likely to pass. While 3S is one down, that's a plus against a possible making 3NT.

If East instead chooses to overcall 3D, after South bids 3S West can raise to 4D. This contract just makes, but the light and mischievous 2S opening keeps East-West out of their very-likely-to-succeed potential game contract. The deal is an interesting demonstration of the value of tactical bidding at IMPs ...



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7 May

What could go wrong?

Rakesh Kumar

After three passes, you open 1NT (15-17 hcp) and partner bids 2C Stayman. You rebid 2S and partner raises to game. LHO leads ♥9, which does you no harm at all. RHO plays ♥K and you win with the ace.

♠AT87
♥5
♦AQ84
♣8753

♠KQ93
♥AQ6
♦J753
♣AT

Your plan should in the first instance be to ruff a heart in dummy, draw trumps and take the diamond finesse. If spades and diamonds break 3-2 and ♦K is doubleton on-side, you could even make 12 tricks!

Whenever a hand looks easy, it's a good idea to ask yourself – what could go wrong? On this deal, you've been fortunate that the opening lead wasn't a club, which would have been annoying. However, things could still get awkward if trumps break 4-1 (a 28% chance) rather than 3-2. Without X-ray vision, you can't cater for 4 spades to the jack on your left, but you can cater for that holding on your right if you play correctly.

So you ruff ♥6 in dummy, play a spade to the king and a spade towards the ace. LHO shows out, but you can finesse for RHO's ♠J. There's just one problem: when you play ♠10 from dummy, RHO refuses to cover. Wouldn't it have been nice to have ruffed with the ten instead of ♠7? Anyway, this is now the position :

♠-
♥-
♦AQ84
♣8753

♠Q
♥Q
♦J753
♣AT

RHO still holds ♠J. Do you want to come to hand to take the diamond finesse? What could go wrong?

If you play a club to the ace, draw the last trump and then the diamond finesse loses, you might end up conceding more club tricks than you can afford! So rather than giving up control in the club suit, you should play ace and a small diamond. As it happens, RHO wins this with ♦K and now all you will lose is one club trick at the end, so you make 11 tricks.

This was the full deal, now in its correct orientation:

BD: 7		♠J652		Dlr: S	
		♥KJT87		Vul: ALL	
		♦K9			
		♣QJ			
♠AT87				♠KQ93	
♥5				♥AQ6	
♦AQ84				♦J753	
♣8753				♣AT	
		♠4			
		♥9432			
		♦T62			
		♣K9642			
		♠4			
		♥9432			
		♦T62			
		♣K9642			
		♠4			
		♥9432			
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20 June
SHBC Swiss Pairs 2026
 Rakesh Kumar

The 2026 Swiss Pairs championship was held on Saturday 20 June with 20 pairs competing in the usual format of 6 rounds of 8-board matches, scored as IMPs converted to Victory Points. As in years past, Steve Brabyn did a fine job of looking after the movement and scoring, while Jo Goodacre once again provided an amazing lunch.

At the end of the day, Anne-Marie Hazell and Judy Murray had a convincing victory. They must like IMP Swiss Pairs – they were the winners of our Congress Open Swiss Pairs in November 2025! Having won 5 of their 6 matches, they finished 10 VPs clear of the second-placed pair.

Bidding and making any available slams can greatly contribute to success at IMP Swiss Pairs. However, there were not many slam hands in the course of the day, and when they did turn up slam was not reached at more than 1-2 tables.

This was an example of a slam hand that proved to be tricky, from the third match of the morning session:

BD: 21	♠AKQJ	Dlr: N
	♥3	Vul: NS
	♦T32	
	♣AK952	
♠T98743		♠62
♥QT95		♥A742
♦-		♦8765
♣JT3		♣874
	♠5	
	♥KJ86	
	♦AKQJ94	
	♣Q6	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	4 6 3 2 6	17
S	5 6 3 3 6	3 4
E		16
W		

North will of course open proceedings with 1♣ and South should respond 1♦ because she has sufficient strength to force to game later – if a heart fit can be found it will not be lost, but if the diamonds are not shown that fit might never come to light.

North should now jump rebid 2♠, a reverse promising 16+ hcp and 5+ clubs with 4 spades. South has various options at this point. A crude approach would be to say that with at least 32 hcp between the two hands, 6 likely tricks in diamonds and excellent stoppers in hearts, it's not even necessary to ask for aces and in any case there isn't an obvious suit fit, so just bash 6NT. As it happens, the crude approach would work perfectly well with these hands.

A more scientific approach would be to bid 3♥ as fourth suit forcing to game, which was discussed in the first of 3 recent sessions on better partnership bidding. South has no real expectation that North will be able to bid notrump because having shown at least 9 cards in the black suits, North is unlikely to have a heart stopper. However, North might have more to say about his shape. In fact North will now bid 4♦, which both denies the stopper and promises 3-card diamond support, so North's shape is known to be 4=1=3=5 or 4=0=3=6.

Again, South could just bid 6NT at this point. Alternatively, if the partnership has agreed to play Minorwood, as discussed in the second of the 3 recent sessions, the 4♦ would become a keycard ask and South might then arrive in 6♦, which could well be a safer contract – that's always the preference at IMPs. In practice, only one pair succeeded in bidding to either of the slams available on this deal. More vigour needed!



Some of the bridge columns published on our club website will now appear on the [bridge page](#) of our regional online newspaper, The Southern Wire. In addition, The Southern Wire will publish columns that will not appear elsewhere.

