

2 September

## Bidding strong 4441 hands

Rakesh Kumar

As we all know, high card points don't tell the full story of the trick-taking ability of any given hand. So it remains a mystery to me why so many of our club members choose to open 2C – a space-wasting bid that needs considerable justification before it is deployed – to show just about all hands with 19+ (or 20+) hcp.

The modern standard "notrump ladder" has ample space for 19-21 (or 22) hcp balanced hands i.e. open 1x and rebid 1NT = 12-14 hcp; open 1NT = 15-17 hcp; open 1x and rebid 2NT = 18-19 hcp; open 2NT = 20-21 (or 20-22 if you prefer) hcp. Stronger balanced hands can open 2C and rebid 2NT; some also use a 2D opening followed by a 2NT rebid to further stratify very strong balanced hands.

What about unbalanced hands? Ask yourself whether you would open 2C with this hand:

♠Q  
♥AKQ4  
♦QJT7  
♣AQ65

If you said yes, why? A 2C opening is, at the very least, a near-game-forcing hand. Say 19+ hcp and 4 losers with a very good 5-card major suit or (preferably) a good 6+ major suit; or 3 losers with a long, strong minor suit. The above hand has no long suit, so if you open 2C, where are your tricks going to come from? You need a fit and a few values with partner for this hand to become useful, otherwise you have losers everywhere ...

That's a consistent feature of strong 4441 hands – they play poorly without a fit, but very well indeed if a fit is found. So if partner has as little as the hand below, you will probably succeed in making 4H:

♠875  
♥T765  
♦A53  
♣JT7

However, with no fit you will have to work hard *and* get lucky to make 3NT even if partner holds a better hand such as this:

♠A7543  
♥65  
♦6532  
♣K7

The bottom line is: don't open 2C with a strong 4441 hand. You might consider faking 2NT if your singleton is an ace (or even a king) and your strength is within the high card point range for your 2NT opening. Otherwise, open one of a suit.

On Monday 2 September there was an extreme example of the virtues of not opening 2C with a strong 4441 hand. East held the above hand, while West had absolutely nothing – almost a genuine Yarborough, except for ♣10.

<b>BD: 26 ♠KJ9</b>		<b>Dlr: E</b>				
♥JT983		<b>Vul: ALL</b>				
♦A94						
♣J8						
♠87543		♠Q				
♥65		♥AKQ4				
♦6532		♦QJT7				
♣T7		♣AQ65				
♠AT62						
♥72						
♦K8						
♣K9432						
		N				
♣ ♦ ♥ ♠		T				
N	2	2	2	1	10	
S	2	2	2	1	0	20
E	1				10	
W	1					

As you can see, if East started the auction with 1D, there was a chance for good things to happen – if the opponents passed, 1D could be made and indeed was the only sound contract for East-West. However, if East started with 2C there was no hope. The table of results tells the story:

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
2♥ by EW	-2	200	2
2NT by EW	-1	100	1
3♦ by EW	-1	100	1
2♥ by EW	-1	100	1
1♦ by EW	=	-70	1
2NT by NS	-1	-100	1
2♦X by EW	=	-180	1



10 September

## Getting to a grand slam

Rakesh Kumar

On Monday 9 September this monster hand turned up:

♠AK962  
♥AK  
♦AKQ9  
♣J5

After West had re-counted her points three times to confirm that she really was looking at 24 hcp, she had to deal with a surprise of almost equal magnitude – as dealer, partner had opened the bidding with 1H!

What would you do at that point? One possibility is to be crazy brave and just bid 7NT. However, that's unsound – give partner an average opening of 12 hcp and it's just possible that the club ace is missing, in which case you would look pretty stupid. There must be a better way ...

Unfortunately your suit is spades and if you bid 1S (forcing) and partner rebids 1NT (quite a good chance) then you will really be stuck. Even though you have no intention of playing in hearts (6NT must surely make even if you are sleepwalking) you could try immediately bidding Roman Keycard Blackwood in opener's suit, then perhaps use additional bids to look for more information.

Say you bid 4NT and partner responds either 5C (if you are playing 14/30) or 5D (if you are playing 03/14) to show that he holds that missing ♣A. What next?

In fact your best bid is the next non-trump step to ask for the trump queen. If responder holds it, he should bid his lowest-ranking king, otherwise he signs off as cheaply as possible. Why would you bid this way? Well, if partner has ♥Q and ♣AK then 7NT must surely be a good bet. Indeed it was – no betting involved as there were 13 top tricks!

<b>BD: 6</b>	♠J87	<b>Dlr: E</b>
	♥7654	<b>Vul: EW</b>
	♦T872	
	♣T3	
♠AK962	♠Q4	
♥AK	♥QJT98	
♦AKQ9	♦543	
♣J5	♣AK4	
	♠T53	
	♥32	
	♦J6	
	♣Q98762	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N	
					T	
N						1
S					24	12
E	4	6	7	7	7	3
W	4	6	7	7	7	

Note that if playing 14/30 the next non-trump step inquiry is 5D, which is much more user-friendly than 5S, which is what you need to bid if playing 03/14. If you were looking for a borderline slam in hearts on a quite different hand, you might be in trouble if responder didn't have the queen, because you would be committed to slam anyway. That's why all expert players have switched to 14/30.

On the day, no one bid a grand slam. Sigh ...

