

1 July

Stretching ...

Rakesh Kumar

Sometimes, you have to stretch to show your hand because it has potential even though you have limited high card values. On Wednesday 1 July the dealing computer generated quite a few distributional hands with potential. This was one of them:

♠K942
♥T7642
♦A84
♣6

Not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, you see partner open 1D (promising 4+ cards) and RHO overcall 2C. What will you do?

In terms of high card points you really don't have a bid. But you do have both major suits, shortage in the opponent's suit and a fit for partner's diamonds. Why shouldn't partner have a major suit? You're only going to find out if you make a negative double, so despite having just 7 hcp, you should stretch and do just that.

If you do, LHO bids 2S, which doesn't help your cause much. But then to your surprise partner rebids 3H. RHO raises to 3S. What will you do now?

Partner has enough values to bid 3H in this auction, so must have a good diamond suit. You have a 9-card fit in hearts, the opponents are bidding spades so partner must have shortage in that suit, while you have shortage in clubs. From that perspective, raising to 4H seems quite reasonable. Yes, it's an even greater stretch, but your hand has improved considerably!

In fact 4H was unbeatable, because this was the full deal:

BD: 22	♠K942	Dlr: E
	♥T7642	Vul: EW
	♦A84	
	♣6	
♠AQJ3		♠T8765
♥Q		♥K83
♦T76		♦3
♣AK874		♣QJ53
	♠	
	♥AJ95	
	♦KQJ952	
	♣T92	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N	T
N		4	4		1	7
S		4	4		1	16 6
E	3			2		11
W	3			2		

At the table, West led ♣A and then quite rightly switched to diamond, hoping East could ruff. However declarer could win, then play ♥A and a heart to dummy's 10, ruff the spade return and draw the last trump, making 11 tricks. The double-dummy result of 4H just making can only be achieved if West leads a diamond, but that is never going to happen in real life.



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9 July

Tales from Canberra

Rakesh Kumar

SHBC sent a club team (Steve Brabyn-Tony Lye-Mardi Svensson-Rakesh Kumar) to compete in the very first Sean Mullamphy Australian Country Clubs Championship, held as part of the Australian National Championships in Canberra this month.

There were 12 teams in this first iteration of the competition (the organisers had anticipated more – hopefully the event will grow) of which 8 were from regional NSW and 4 from smaller ACT clubs (city clubs with <150 members were eligible to participate). Teams of 4 players would have found the format gruelling – a round robin of 11 matches × 16 boards over 3 days meant 64 boards on each of days 2 and 3 – and several clubs did indeed send teams of 6.

Notwithstanding that, the SHBC team did well, staying in the top 4 for the first 8 rounds and actually leading the field after rounds 3, 4 and 6. Unfortunately we were smashed by the 3 strongest teams (which included Mollymook and Ballina, who finished first and second respectively) so were eventually 6th with 6 wins, 1 draw and 4 losses (one was only small). We did, however, beat the two Canberra teams who finished ahead of us (this included a 20-0 win against the team that finished 4th and beat two of the top-rated teams, as well as a 14-6 win against the team that beat all three of them).

Here are some interesting deals from the event. I'll present two of these to you as problems. Firstly, you are West with neither side vulnerable. South deals and opens 1S. With your 8-card suit, you decide to overcall 4D. North jumps to 6S! You lead ♦A and this is what you see:

	(dummy)
	♠A874
	♥AK87
	♦8
(you)	♣KQ95
♠63	
♥2	
♦AKT96532	
♣63	

Partner follows with ♦4 and declarer with ♦7. What will you play at trick 2?

Secondly, you hold:

♠A
♥8
♦T98752
♣96532

The opponents are vulnerable and you are not. You pass as dealer and LHO opens 1S. Partner overcalls 2S, a Michaels cue bid showing 5+/5+ in hearts and a minor with some 10+ hcp. RHO bids 3H, a cue raise showing good support for spades. What will you bid?

Below is an exciting deal from an early match – a 31 combined hcp grand slam that was only bid at 2 of 12 tables. All it needed was for clubs to break 3-2 – they did.

BD: 17	♠QJ752	Dlr: N
	♥Q654	Vul: None
	♦95	
	♣J4	
♠9		♠AKT43
♥KT7		♥AJ83
♦AK		♦872
♣AKQ8765		♣2
	♠86	
	♥92	
	♦QJT643	
	♣T93	

At our table, after a 1S opening by East, the auction was 2C-2H-4NT (keycard ask in hearts, a good strategy as West held ♥K and would also find ♥Q useful)-5H (two keycards, no queen)-7NT. That was a significant swing against us, although we still managed to win the match, which was against the team who eventually finished third.

On the first problem hand, did you continue with another diamond, hoping partner might over-ruff dummy? That would have given declarer a terrible headache, because the full deal was as below:

BD: 11	♠A874	Dlr: S
	♥AK87	Vul: None
	♦8	
	♣KQ95	
♠63		♠QT
♥2		♥QJT9653
♦AKT96532		♦4
♣63		♣T42
	♠KJ952	
	♥4	
	♦QJ7	
	♣AJ87	

It is still possible to make 6S by ruffing with the ace, then taking the spade finesse and successfully praying for trumps to break 2-2. Fortunately for us, West switched to a heart, so all was well.

This was the full deal for the second problem hand. At our table, I bid 5C as pass-or-correct and we played there. The contract can't be beaten. Meanwhile Steve and Tony played in 4SX, also cold, so this was worth 15 IMPs against the Monaro team, whom we beat by 17 IMPs.

BD: 25	♠A	Dlr: N
	♥8	Vul: EW
	♦T98752	
	♣96532	
♠Q53		♠KJT9874
♥AQ753		♥J9
♦QJ6		♦A43
♣T4		♣Q
	♠62	
	♥KT642	
	♦K	
	♣AKJ87	

The deal led to a double game swing at several tables. So much excitement!!



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19 July

Overcaller's reverse

Rakesh Kumar

If partner opens 1C, you respond 1S and partner rebids 2H, what is she showing?

The answer is that for partner to bid in this way (i.e. to rebid at a level beyond 2 of the suit that she initially opened, thus forcing you to give preference at the 3-level) she must have both extra distribution and extra values. Typically this means a hand with 5+ cards in the first suit and 4 cards in the second suit, as well as 16+ high card points. True, partner may have a 6-5 hand in which case she can bid like this with fewer hcp, but your initial expectation should be that she holds a hand such as e.g. ♠A6-♥KJ82-♦J7-♣AKJ95. It follows that if you hold ♠106-♥AK102-♦J107-♣KJ75 you cannot – *must* not – rebid 2H no matter how much you like your heart suit, because you will be promising shape and values you simply haven't got.

This type of bid is called a reverse, because it is the opposite of the "normal" order of showing suits viz. first the higher-ranking, then the lower-ranking. A reverse is absolutely forcing for one round.

While it's not that uncommon for opener to have a hand suitable for a reverse, it's rare for an overcaller to have a hand worthy of bidding in this manner. However, just such a hand turned up with North on this deal from Wednesday 15 July:

BD: 4		♠K875	Dlr: W	
		♥AK764	Vul: ALL	
		♦AK7		
		♣T		
♠AQ		♠J3		
♥J3		♥QT5		
♦J832		♦QT654		
♣AQJ43		♣862		
		♠T9642		
		♥982		
		♦9		
		♣K975		
	♣♦♥♠	N		
		T		
N	4 5		17	
S	1 4 5		15	5
E	2		3	
W	3			

West opened 1C and North overcalled 1H. East passed, as did South. West rebid 2C and now North bid 2S, showing values sufficient for a reverse and at least 5/4 shape. What should South do after East's pass?

It's true that South has a hand with just 3 hcp that are quite possibly worthless after clubs have twice been bid over her, but in this auction her hand has suddenly blossomed. Why? Because she has a double fit with partner: not only has she got 3-card support for his first-bid suit, she has 5-card support (!) for his second suit *and* she has an outside singleton (!!*)).

The reverse is forcing and the very least she can do at this point is bid 3S, but I wouldn't argue with a jump to 4S (given that she passed on the first round, this can only mean an excellent fit and ruffing values in a spade contract). Anyway, even if South bids just 3S, North has an automatic raise to game.

As it turns out, the contract is cold for an overtrick – on a club lead West wins ♣J but dare not continue the suit, so say she switches to a diamond. Declarer wins, ruffs his low diamond and leads a trump towards the king. West rises with ♠A and perhaps returns a heart now, but again declarer wins, then cashes ♠K drawing trumps and plays his other top diamond to discard a heart from dummy. Now declarer cashes the other top heart and ruffs a heart, to establish that suit for 11 tricks.

The deal is quite a nice demonstration of the notion that shape, a good fit and a couple of aces and kings can allow you to successfully bid and make a thin game.



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28 July

GNOT Club Qualifier 2026

Rakesh Kumar

On Saturday 25 July SHBC ran its GNOT Club Qualifying event. There were 7 teams entered so the competition was played as a round robin of 8-board matches. Steve Brabyn successfully deployed an American Whist movement, while Jo Goodacre provided yet another amazing lunch!

As usual, there were some instructive deals. Here are 3, of which I will present 2 as problems. Firstly, you hold:

♠ 3
♥ K
♦ A Q 8 7 6 4 2
♣ J 9 8 6

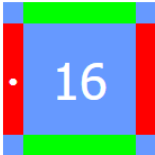
You are vulnerable against opponents who are not vulnerable. Partner is the dealer and opens 1H. Your RHO overcalls 1S, you bid 2D, LHO bids 2S and partner rebids 3H. What are you going to do?

Secondly, this is your hand:

♠ A K J 8 4
♥ 3
♦ A K Q 2
♣ K 8 2

With both sides vulnerable, your LHO is the dealer and passes. To your surprise, partner bids 1H. You respond 1S, partner rebids 2H and you continue with 3D. Partner ponders this and eventually bids 3NT. Your call?

Here is a deal that illustrates how your system/methods can have quite an influence on the outcome of a board:

Optimum: NS 3N+1; +430 LoTT: 16-16 = 0		♠ K Q 8 7 3 ♥ Q 6 4 ♦ K 7 ♣ 10 8 4	Bridge Solver Online: John Goacher Double Dummy Solver Module: Bo Haglund																													
♠ 6 ♥ A J 7 3 ♦ A 10 5 4 3 2 ♣ 7 2		♠ 10 9 5 4 2 ♥ 10 ♦ J 6 ♣ K J 9 6 3																														
10 9 5 16	♠ A J ♥ K 9 8 5 2 ♦ Q 9 8 ♣ A Q 5	<table><tr><td></td><td>♣</td><td>♦</td><td>♥</td><td>♠</td><td>NT</td></tr><tr><td>N</td><td>1</td><td>1</td><td>4</td><td>2</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>S</td><td>1</td><td>1</td><td>4</td><td>2</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>E</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr></table>		♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	N	1	1	4	2	4	S	1	1	4	2	4	E	-	-	-	-	-	W	-	-	-	-	-
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT																											
N	1	1	4	2	4																											
S	1	1	4	2	4																											
E	-	-	-	-	-																											
W	-	-	-	-	-																											

At 4 tables, North-South played in 4H while at one they played in 4S. None of these contracts was successful, even though 4H is makeable double dummy. Life is much simpler if you play that a 1NT opening can include a 5-card major: the auction is then a very straightforward 1NT-2H-2S-3NT-All pass. 3NT is a much easier contract to play, demonstrating yet again that with sufficient high card points, a balanced hand opposite a balanced hand often does better in 3NT, even with a 5-3 major suit fit.

Below is the deal associated with the first of the problems. It turns out that raising partner with your singleton king is the best move, because 4H cannot be beaten despite the 4-1 trump split.

Optimum: EW 5Sx; +300 LoTT: 19-17 = 2	♠ 3 ♥ K ♦ A Q 8 7 6 4 2 ♣ J 9 8 6	Bridge Solver Online: John Goacher Double Dummy Solver Module: Bo Haglund																														
♠ Q 9 7 5 2 ♥ 2 ♦ J 10 9 5 ♣ A K 2		♠ K J 8 6 ♥ 9 7 6 5 ♦ 3 ♣ Q 5 4 3																														
10 10 6 14	♠ A 10 4 ♥ A Q J 10 8 4 3 ♦ K ♣ 10 7	<table><tr><th></th><th>♣</th><th>♦</th><th>♥</th><th>♠</th><th>NT</th></tr><tr><td>N</td><td>1</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>-</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>S</td><td>1</td><td>3</td><td>4</td><td>-</td><td>4</td></tr><tr><td>E</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>3</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>3</td><td>-</td></tr></table>		♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	N	1	3	4	-	4	S	1	3	4	-	4	E	-	-	-	3	-	W	-	-	-	3	-
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT																											
N	1	3	4	-	4																											
S	1	3	4	-	4																											
E	-	-	-	3	-																											
W	-	-	-	3	-																											

Hoping for a diamond fit and trying 5D instead is a terrible idea. I got this one wrong and it cost us 13 IMPs!

This next deal is the one associated with the second problem. Interestingly, the issue turns out not to be the strain in which you play the contract but whether you have the courage/methods to bid a slam, because both 6H and 6NT are unbeatable.

Optimum: EW 7S; -2210 LoTT: 14-14 = 0	♠ 10 9 2 ♥ 7 6 2 ♦ 6 5 4 3 ♣ 7 6 4	Bridge Solver Online: John Goacher Double Dummy Solver Module: Bo Haglund																														
♠ A K J 8 4 ♥ 3 ♦ A K Q 2 ♣ K 8 2	45	♠ 7 6 ♥ A Q J 10 8 4 ♦ 9 8 ♣ A J 5																														
0 20 12 8	♠ Q 5 3 ♥ K 9 5 ♦ J 10 7 ♣ Q 10 9 3	<table><tr><th></th><th>♣</th><th>♦</th><th>♥</th><th>♠</th><th>NT</th></tr><tr><td>N</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>S</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr><tr><td>E</td><td>6</td><td>6</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>6</td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td>5</td><td>6</td><td>6</td><td>7</td><td>6</td></tr></table>		♣	♦	♥	♠	NT	N	-	-	-	-	-	S	-	-	-	-	-	E	6	6	6	7	6	W	5	6	6	7	6
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT																											
N	-	-	-	-	-																											
S	-	-	-	-	-																											
E	6	6	6	7	6																											
W	5	6	6	7	6																											

Just a reminder that this has been the auction so far: 1H-1S-2H-3D-3NT. Will you simply jump to 6NT? Or will you bid 4NT – and if you do, will partner interpret this as

RKCB in hearts or as a quantitative raise? If East believes it's the former, she will bid 5S so you will automatically reach slam – after learning that partner has two keycards and the heart queen, West will of course bid 6NT rather than 6H, on the assumption that partner has ♣Q to go with ♥AKQ. However, if East believes 4NT is quantitative she might pass, which could explain why two East-West pairs stopped in this contract.



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4 August

Inverted minor raises

Rakesh Kumar

With neither side vulnerable, partner opens 1D, promising 4+ cards. You hold:

♠95
♥AQJ
♦AK743
♣K94

What are you going to bid? Clearly you have the values for game, but which game? How can you make a forcing bid – ideally a game-forcing bid – to find out if partner has a hand suitable for notrumps? You really don't want to bypass 3NT to play in 5D at matchpoints, do you?

This hand turned up on Monday 3 August. In fact it is exactly the sort of hand that was discussed in the session on Monday 4 May, about "Getting to the right game", the notes for which are on the Lessons page of our website.

If you agree to play inverted minor raises with partner, in which 1m-3m promises 5+ support and 6-9 hcp while 1m-2m promises support and 10+ hcp, you don't have a problem. You can bid 2D as a one-round forcing bid and when partner rebids 2NT showing stoppers in both majors, you can raise to 3NT. That works well because this was the complete deal:

BD: 1	♠AQ	Dlr: N
	♥T964	Vul: None
	♦QJT8	
	♣QJT	
♠KJT872		♠643
♥875		♥K32
♦52		♦96
♣83		♣A7652
	♠95	
	♥AQJ	
	♦AK743	
	♣K94	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	4 6 6 2 6	12
S	4 6 6 2 6	4 7
E		17
W		

A variation on this theme is to play 1m-2m as showing a game-forcing hand, with a jump shift to the other minor (1C-2D or 1D-3C) showing a 10-12 hcp hand (so-called criss-cross raises).

If you reach 3NT, how are you going to play it? With North as the declarer, the likely opening lead is ♣5. North wins with the queen and plays a heart. When the finesse succeeds, declarer can return to hand with ♦Q to repeat the finesse, then drop ♥K on the next round for 4 heart tricks. Another club forces out the ace and declarer ends up with 5 diamond tricks, 2 club tricks and the spade ace, so no spade finesse is needed!

On the day, however, half the field played in a diamond contract and most did not make the 12 tricks available in 3NT.



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13 August

Hearts then spades

Rakesh Kumar

Partner opens 1NT showing 15-17 hcp and you hold this:

♠T954
♥Q
♦AQ963
♣J93

How do you propose to bid the hand?

Well, obviously the first step is to bid 2C Stayman, hoping that partner will show 4 spades (or 4+ if you open 1NT with a 5-card major and a balanced hand, which you should). However, partner rebids 2H. Now unless you are playing extended Stayman (which you shouldn't, because it ruins some constructive sequences, as well as "garbage" Stayman escape sequences) you don't know whether partner might also have 4 spades. What next?

You can show you have 4 spades and give partner the choice about what to do in one of two ways. If you bid 2S over partner's 2H, you are showing exactly 4 spades and an invitational hand. That might be appropriate for this hand with 9 hcp, because while ♥Q is probably useful given that partner has 4 hearts, you don't have extra playing strength if partner doesn't have 4 spades. After a 2S rebid by you, partner can look at her hand and decide what's best. Then again, if you're feeling optimistic, you can bid 3NT over 2H. This shows exactly 4 spades and a game-forcing hand without 4 hearts. How does partner know you have 4 spades on this auction? Because if you didn't have either major, why would you bother to bid 2C in the first place? You'd just bid 3NT directly ...

In fact 4S was indeed the best contract on this deal, from Wednesday 12 August:

BD: 7	♠AKJ8	Dlr: S
	♥A842	Vul: ALL
	♦T8	
	♣KQ7	
♠62		♠Q73
♥K9765		♥JT3
♦J		♦K7542
♣AT862		♣54
	♠T954	
	♥Q	
	♦AQ963	
	♣J93	

		♣	♦	♥	♠	N	
						T	
N	1	3			5	3	17
S	1	3			5	3	8 6
E							9
W							

How should North play the contract on the lead of one or the other minor suit? Declarer needs to dispose of losing hearts, so drawing trumps is *not* a good idea. Instead as soon as he gets in (either with ♣Q if the defence starts with ace and another club, or with ♦Q if a low diamond is led and the finesse is taken) he should play ♥A and get to work ruffing hearts in dummy, eventually conceding only ♠Q and ♣A. As the cards lie, the finesse for ♠Q was always going to lose, so playing for ruffs in dummy gains a trick.

♣ ♦ ♥ ♠

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22 August

Finding an opening lead against 1NT

Rakesh Kumar

Defending against a 1NT contract is difficult. That's particularly true if you have a strong hand with no long suit and have to make the opening lead. Then there's every chance that your lead will donate a trick to declarer, plus that you'll get endplayed repeatedly and have to keep leading away from your honours.

That was the situation on this deal from the final of the Min Grey Pairs on Saturday 22 August. With both sides vulnerable, East passes and South opens 1NT. As West, you hold:

♠K65
♥KJ92
♦AT9
♣A32

You must not double – where are your defensive tricks coming from? However, if 1NT is now passed out, what should you lead?

There's no easy answer. Leading from the king in either major suit has the potential to be straight into declarer's ace-queen and you might never win a trick in the suit. How about leading from one of your 3-card minor suits? Both are headed by the ace and at least the ace will always win a trick eventually ... but which minor?

With little to guide you, my rule of thumb is that if you lead from your worse suit there's a marginally greater chance that partner will have something useful. On this deal, that means leading a low club. The rule of thumb turned out to be true:

BD: 26 ♠T432 Dlr: E
♥QT53 **Vul: ALL**
♦753
♣T9
♠K65 ♠QJ
♥KJ92 ♥764
♦AT9 ♦K64
♣A32 ♣J8654
♠A987
♥A8
♦QJ82
♣KQ7

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N	T
N				1		2
S				1	15	7
E	3	1	1	1		16
W	2	1	1	1		

It's very difficult to achieve the perfect defence to set the contract by two tricks, but one down is certainly feasible after attacking clubs at trick one. On any other lead, declarer has a reasonable chance of making 1NT.

However, South really should not have been playing in a 1NT contract. North has a rotten hand, only a doubleton club and both 4-card majors, so assuming that North-South are playing simple Stayman, North should bid 2C and pass whatever South rebids. This approach is known as "garbage" Stayman and this time around would find a 4-4 fit in spades, with good prospects of making if the defence doesn't get everything just right.



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25 August

A flat board

Rakesh Kumar

As dealer, you hold:

♠A3
♥Q94
♦QJ952
♣AJT

You open 1D. LHO overcalls 1S and partner bids 2C. RHO passes. Your bid?

Partner has promised 10+ hcp and a 5+ club suit. She does not have 4 hearts as she didn't make a negative double. It's quite possible that she has a fit with diamonds. Meanwhile, you have a fit with clubs. So with a sure stopper in spades and at least a half-stopper in hearts, a rebid of 2NT seems quite reasonable. Certainly at matchpoints you want to keep open the option of a game in notrumps – almost always a much easier proposition than 5-of-a-minor.

If you do rebid 2NT, what happens next on this deal may in part depend on whether your 1D opening promises 4+ cards. If it does, with ♦AK, a respectable club suit and 12 hcp, partner ought to be happy to raise to 3NT. This makes easily – in fact it makes 11 tricks on the likely spade lead, because this was the full deal:

BD: 9	♠A3	Dlr: N
	♥Q94	Vul: EW
	♦QJ952	
	♣AJT	
♠T84		♠KQJ92
♥K7632		♥AJT
♦83		♦T76
♣874		♣53
	♠765	
	♥85	
	♦AK4	
	♣KQ962	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	5 5	4 14
S	5 5	2 3 11
E	1 2	12
W	1 2	

However, on Monday 24 August when this deal turned up, it was an absolutely flat board across the field:

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
4♣ by NS	+1	150	1
3♣ by NS	+2	150	1
3♦ by NS	+2	150	2
2♣ by NS	+3	150	1

Not one pair reached a contract in notrumps, but everyone made 11 tricks in a minor suit part-score!

Of course as the cards lie, 3NT makes only 10 tricks on the double-dummy lead of ♥J, while if the East-West heart holdings had been reversed the contract could go down. However, timidity achieves nothing. Bidding on in the minors when notrumps is a live possibility is not the way to earn matchpoints ...



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