

9 December

SHBC Teams Championship

Rakesh Kumar

The postponed Teams Championship event was finally able to be held on Saturday 7 December. It was a moral victory for the EVANS team (Lynleigh Evans - Chris Bayliss - Margaret Malcolm - Fiona Khoo) who won all 8 of their matches. Unfortunately for them, the winning margin in 5 of those matches was relatively small, so they were overtaken on the Victory Points score by the LYE team (Tony Lye - Stephen Brabyn - Mardi Svensson - Rakesh Kumar).

One of the highlights of the day was seeing Chris at the table again – and in such good spirits!! He and Lynleigh played well too, finishing at the top of the pair datums.

Another highlight was the excellent lunch – many thanks to Margaret Malcolm for organising this. And many, many thanks to Steve Brabyn for undertaking the extremely tedious task of manually scoring the entire event after the BridgeMates had a conniption, as well as to Chris Bayliss for checking all of the scores.

Of course there were lots of interesting deals in the course of 8 matches of 6 boards. Here is one, which I will present to you as a problem. Nil vulnerable, partner is the dealer and after two passes you open 1NT with this hand:

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♠AQ53
♥KJ108
♦A5
♣A63
  
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Your LHO doubles, which is described as showing a 4-card major a 5+ minor suit. Partner bids 2H, a transfer to spades, and RHO bids 3C. You bid 3S, LHO bids 4C, partner bids 4S and after 2 passes LHO now bids 5C! This is passed back to you. What will you do?

Many wildly distributional hands turned up during the day. This was perhaps the wildest of them:

19 S/EW		♠ -	♠ 984	NT	N	S
		♥ AT962	♥ KQJ754	♠		
		♦ KQJ6432	♦ AT7	♥		
		♣ 2	♣ A	♦	4	4
		♠ QJ62	♠ AKT753	♣		
		♥ 8	♥ 3	Opt res: NS 3D; 130		
		♦ -	♦ 985	E W		
		♣ KJ987654	♣ QT3	NT		
		10		♠		1
		7 14		♥		
		9		♦		
				♣	2	3

No game can be made by either side, but the table of results indicates that not too many were about to stop below game! As you can see, there were swings in almost every match:

North-South	East-West	Contract	Score		Imps	
			Lead	Tricks	NS	EW
1 Fisher	5 Hall	3♠ S	H	7	100	-6 6
2 Zaranski	9 Parker	5♦ X N	C	8	500	-12 12
3 Lye	6 McKenna	5♣ W	D	9	200	3 -3
4 Evans	1 Fisher	4♦ N	C	10	130	6 -6
5 Hall	4 Evans	5♦ X N	C	10	100	0 0
6 McKenna	3 Lye	5♣ W	D	10	100	-3 3
7 Minchin	8 McGain	5♦ N	S	10	50	6 -6
8 McGain	7 Minchin	6♦ X N	C	10	300	-6 6
9 Parker	2 Zaranski	5♣ W	D	10	100	12 -12

Meanwhile, back to that first deal. It's hard for North to resist doubling for penalties, but that turns out to be a bad idea, because this was the layout:

11 S/-	♠ AQ53	♠ -	NT		N	S
	♥ KJT8		♠	4	4	
♠ K76	♦ A5	♥ A765	♥	3	3	
♥ Q	♣ A63	♦ K93	♦			
♦ QT742		♣ KQJ985	♣			
♣ T742			Opt res: NS 5SX; -100			
18	♠ JT9842	♥ 9432	NT		E	W
7	♥ 9432	♦ J86	♠			
2	♦ J86	♣ -	♥	2	2	
	♣ -		♣	5	5	

As the cards lie, 5C is unbeatable. What's more, if North bids on to 5S, the only way that can be set is for East to start with ♥A and another heart for West to ruff! Otherwise, 11 tricks are easy when ♥Q pops up.

All in all, it was a thoroughly enjoyable day, with good humour all round and some good results for those trying Teams bridge for the very first time. Which is how it should be ...



16 December

SHBC Christmas Party

Rakesh Kumar

SHBC had a very enjoyable Christmas party in the late afternoon on Saturday 14 December – there was plenty to drink, great food, a President's speech which acknowledged many dedicated volunteers, and the annual awarding of trophies.

Of course before that there was bridge – and one could be forgiven for believing that the dealing computer had also been imbibing the Christmas spirit(s) because some of the deals were extraordinary. Not only were there three 6-5 hands, there was a 7-5 and an extremely rare 7-6 hand, which has a probability of only 0.0056%.

This deal featured two double fits and generated a lot of action:

BD: 21	♠AT9	Dlr: N	
	♥53	Vul: NS	
	♦T8		
	♣AKT875		
♠J64		♠2	
♥KJT962		♥A874	
♦AQ5		♦K976432	
♣3		♣2	
	♠KQ8753		
	♥Q		
	♦J		
	♣QJ964		
	♣♦♥♠	N	
		T	
N	5	5	11
S	5	5	11 7
E	5 5		11
W	5 5		

North of course opens 1C but after that almost anything was possible. At our table East chose to ignore the 4-card heart suit and overcalled 3D. South bid 3S and West raised directly to 5D. With what I thought were 3 likely defensive tricks, I doubled, which stopped partner from bidding on at adverse vulnerability. However, the double turned out to be a very bad idea, as 5D is glacially cold. So is 5H – and sadly, so is 5S ...

The range of results can be seen in the table overleaf:

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
5♠ by NS	=	650	1
4♠ by NS	+1	650	2
3♠ by NS	+3	230	1
4♦ by EW	+2	-170	1
4♦ by EW	+3	-190	1
5♦ by EW	+1	-420	1
5♦ by EW	+2	-440	1
5♥ by EW	=	-450	1
5♥ by EW	=	-450	1
5♦X by EW	=	-550	1
5♥X by EW	=	-650	1

The board with the 7-6 hand was challenging in a different way. South will usually start with a 2NT opening showing a balanced 20-21 (or 22) hcp and West will of course overcall in hearts, but North will now jump to 4S. At several tables, including ours, that was the end of the auction. Reaching 6S is difficult unless West decides to back in with 5C. As it turns out, slam in either diamonds or spades is unbeatable!

BD: 22 ♠AJT8653 **Dlr: E**
 ♥ **Vul: EW**
 ♦T8764
 ♣3

♠		♠9742
♥AKT8542		♥J93
♦		♦932
♣KT8742		♣A96

♠KQ
 ♥Q76
 ♦AKQJ5
 ♣QJ5

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
					T
N	6	6			5
S	6	6		10	5
E	5	6			20
W	6	6			



6 January

Distributional hands opposite 1NT

Rakesh Kumar

When you have 10+ hcp and partner opens 1NT showing say 15-17 hcp, you know you want to be in game. However, which game contract that should be isn't always clear if you have a distributional hand – 3NT may not be the best spot. Finding the right suit contract – if there is one – can be challenging and many, many conventions have been developed to facilitate this.

Of course some hands don't require conventions at all. Say you hold:

♠AQT43
♥K62
♦KJ93
♣T

In response to partner's 1NT opening you can transfer to spades and then bid 3D to show a game-forcing hand with exactly 5 spades (you would insist on the spade game with a 6+ suit) and 4+ diamonds (a transfer to a major suit followed by a minor suit rebid is always forcing to game). Partner can decide what to do based on fit and stoppers in the outside suits.

It's a bit more awkward if you hold both majors. Suppose you instead hold:

♠KJ93
♥AQT43
♦K63
♣T

With both majors, you need to be able to transfer to hearts and then bid spades (or *vice versa* as appropriate) to show an invitational hand (e.g. replace ♥A with a small card in the above hand). Fortunately there is a solution called the [Smolen convention](#) to show the game-forcing hands with 5/4 in the major suits, via Stayman and a rebid of the *short* suit if partner rebids 2D denying a major. You can have a look at the linked web page for more information about this convention.

What about if you have a game-forcing hand with 5/5 in the majors? Say you hold:

♠KQ973
♥AT943
♦Q6
♣T

Now you can bid 1NT-2H(transfer to spades)-2S-4H which asks partner to either pass to play in 4H, or correct to 4S if she has better support for that suit.

That's all well and good, but what if you have a really strong hand with slam potential opposite a 1NT opening? Say something like this:

♠KQ973
♥AK943
♦K6
♣T

If you bid 1NT-2H-2S-4H and partner prefers hearts, she will pass, but 6H might be cold! You need a gadget ... there are quite a few. Do you have a use for 3-level bids in response to 1NT? If not, a simple and useful pair of conventional bids is 3H to show 5+/5+ in the majors with a hand that only has game interest and 3S to show a comparable hand with slam interest. Those bids go well with 3D to show 5+/5+ in the minors with slam interest.

On Monday 6 January, North was dealt a 5+/5+ major suit hand that had great slam potential opposite a 1NT opening:

BD: 10 ♠KQT543 **Dlr: E**
♥KQ862 **Vul: ALL**
♦K3
♣

♠J8	♠A97
♥JT74	♥3
♦Q6	♦98742
♣T8754	♣Q962

♠62
♥A95
♦AJT5
♣AKJ3

♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N
	T
N	3 5 6 6 6 13
S	3 5 6 6 6 4 6
E	17
W	

Partner and I do have agreements for showing such a hand. However, this time around I thought the spade suit was of significantly better quality, so I chose to ignore those agreements. Instead I just transferred, then bid 4NT Roman Keycard Blackwood and on finding partner with 3 keycards, jumped to the slam in spades. With the doubleton jack on side, this posed no real problem – and it's just as well that we didn't play in the 5-3 fit because with the 4-1 break in hearts, it would have taken seeing through the backs of the cards and a repeated finesse for the ♥J10 to make 12 tricks in hearts!



20 January

Strong hands with both minor suits

Rakesh Kumar

Hands with both minors are often awkward to bid. Over an opponent's opening of 1-of-a-major, most players would be familiar with the unusual 2NT bid showing 5+/5+ in the minors and some 7-8+ hcp. This overcall typically aims to interfere with the opposition bidding as well as to find a worthwhile partscore contract. With a stronger hand that has game potential if a worthwhile fit can be found, an even more obstructive overcall is 4NT. Of course this is potentially hazardous, because it means contracting for 11 tricks, but it is nevertheless a recommended bid.

What about showing hands with 5+/5+ in the minors as opener? Some do use a 2NT opening for this purpose, often playing it as weak (say 7-10 hcp) or game invitational (say 15+ hcp) but not intermediate. However, most players prefer to use 2NT as a natural strong opening.

What about a 4NT opening? Is it possible to use that to show a strong hand with both minors? Indeed it is, but the partnership needs to be quite clear about the sort of hand that will be shown. A fairly common agreement is that the bid promises a 3-loser hand, based on the standard losing trick count.

Exactly that sort of hand turned up on Monday 20 January – see the South hand below. After 3 passes, if South opens 4NT, North can see that he covers 2 of South's losers in clubs, so the combined hands must have only one loser – which means a direct jump to 6C is reasonable. This contract proves to be cold.

BD: 16	♠K8	Dlr: W
	♥T876	Vul: EW
	♦632	
	♣AQ95	
♠QJT72		♠A9654
♥KQ94		♥J532
♦J8		♦54
♣T6		♣J7
	♠3	
	♥A	
	♦AKQT97	
	♣K8432	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	6 6	6 9
S	6 6	2 9 6
E	1 1	16
W	1 1	

Things are a bit more complicated if South opens a strong 2C and over partner's 2D waiting bid, rebids 3D. Now North, with sure stoppers in the black suits and a four-carder ♥10, will almost certainly bid 3NT. This rebid will leave South feeling uncomfortable, although as it happens 12 tricks are also cold in this contract if played by North. More likely, though, is that South will rebid 4C. Will slam now be found?

It might be, although it would be somewhat unclear to North whether South was showing 6+/4 or 5+/5+ shape, so perhaps the contract will be 6D. In any case, though, even a game bid would turn out better than playing in a part-score, which was unfortunately a frequent outcome at our club session.

As South, you really don't want that happening to you with such a good hand, so consider adding a 4NT opening to your arsenal – it's easy, as there is no other purpose for the bid. Hands suitable for a 4NT opening aren't that rare, but actually remembering to use the opening when it turns up is the key to success!



29 January

Finding a minor suit slam

Rakesh Kumar

Partner opens the bidding with 1D and you hold the hand below. With the opponents silent, you of course respond 1S. Now partner rebids 2D. What will you do next?

♠KQT82
♥K75
♦AKT5
♣4

Partner has a minimum hand, but you have a strong hand and won't be stopping below game. It's possible that your first concern might be whether partner has 3-card spade support. Finding out about that isn't easy unless you fake a forcing new suit bid such as 2H. But why would you? In diamonds, you have a functional 18 points, counting your club singleton, as well as a guaranteed 9-card fit – in fact it's very likely partner has 6 diamonds. Surely you want to explore the possibility of slam?

Then again, that might be a bit tricky if your bidding agreements don't include suitable methods. If you bid 4NT Roman Keycard Blackwood and partner rebids 5H showing two keycards but no queen, you will be forced to bid 6D anyway. You might get away with it if partner does have 6 diamonds and they break 2-1, but that is a very poor basis for bidding a slam. However, on this deal from Monday 27 January, you really do want to reach the slam, as partner has everything you need:

BD: 6	♠AJ3	Dlr: E
	♥T643	Vul: EW
	♦J6	
	♣QT86	
♠KQT82		♠654
♥K75		♥AQ
♦AKT5		♦Q87432
♣4		♣AJ
	♠97	
	♥J982	
	♦9	
	♣K97532	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	1 1	8
S	1 1	15 13
E	6 4 4	4
W	6 4 4	

What's a better way of finding out whether bidding slam is a good idea? Obviously you need a method to ask for keycards at a lower level than 4NT, so that signing off in 5D is possible. This becomes even more important if the suit fit is in clubs, where there is even less bidding room available after a 4NT inquiry.

You have some options. One is a convention called "Redwood" in which a jump to 4-of-a-red-suit is a keycard ask in the corresponding minor suit i.e. 4D asks for keycards in clubs, 4H for keycards in diamonds. Some extend that idea to include 4S asking for keycards in hearts, using 4NT only for keycards in spades, which is known as "Kickback".

While those methods have merit, they are also accident-prone. A simpler approach is that in any auction where the opponents have not intervened, a jump to 4-of-a-minor, or minor suit agreement at the 4-level, or a bid of 4-of-a-minor after partner has bid 3NT are all asking for keycards in that minor suit. In any of those settings, you wouldn't want to be playing in 4-of-a-minor anyway, would you? This convention is often referred to as "minorwood". The steps are exactly as you would play after 4NT Roman Keycard Blackwood i.e. first step 1 or 4 keycards, second step 0 or 3, third step 2 without the queen, fourth step 2 with the queen of trumps.

On the deal in question, that would lead to the following auction:

1D – 1S
2D – 4D (minorwood)
5C (2+Q) – 6D (easy!)

When the deal turned up at our club session, no one bid the slam ... sigh.



20 February

Re-evaluation revisited

Rakesh Kumar

What is your hand worth? That depends ... there are many tools for hand evaluation e.g. high card points, losing trick count, quick tricks etc but most of these operate in isolation. For anything other than a "brute force" notrump contract, the true worth of your hand is a function of how well it fits with partner's hand, as well as the position of honours in your hand relative to honours held by the opponents. So in a contested auction, it's important to re-evaluate your hand as information becomes available. Consider, for example, this hand:

♠KT
♥Q982
♦A963
♣965

You are the dealer and neither side is vulnerable. With just 9 hcp and no shape, of course you pass. Your LHO opens 2D, alerted and described as a weak two-bid in diamonds (i.e. 6-9 hcp, typically a 6-card diamond suit). Partner overcalls 2H and RHO bids 2S.

What do you think of your hand now? You have excellent support for partner's heart suit. You hold 4 diamonds, so partner may well have a singleton, and because your diamonds are headed by the ace, you probably cover partner's loser in that suit. RHO is likely to have the ace of spades, so your doubleton king should mean there is only one loser in that suit. And if LHO has values in diamonds while RHO has values in spades, partner probably has her values concentrated in hearts and clubs. So what should you do at this point?

Well, if partner has as little as say ♠xxx ♥KJTxx ♦x ♣AKxx, which is not much to ask for a 2H overcall, there should be only 3 losers i.e. one each in spades, hearts and clubs. So it's time to upgrade your previously uninteresting hand and bid 4H!

That turns out to be cold, because this was the full deal from Monday 17 February:

BD: 1	♠KT	Dlr: N			
	♥Q982	Vul: None			
	♦A963				
	♣965				
♠Q87542		♠93			
♥K4		♥63			
♦72		♦QJT854			
♣A32		♣KJ7			
	♠AJ6				
	♥AJT75				
	♦K				
	♣QT84				
	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠	N			
		T			
N	3	4	3	9	
S	3	4	3	9	7
E	1			15	
W	1				

In fact your assumptions about where partner's values might have been were on this occasion completely wrong, but it didn't matter. On the day, only 2 pairs managed to bid the game ...



24 February

Pick your poison

Rakesh Kumar

At our table, the auction on the deal under discussion was vigorous:

West	North	East	South
P	1H	1S	2C
P	2D	P	2S*
P	3D	P	3NT
All pass			

South's 2S asked for a stopper for notrumps. North's 3D rebid showed at least 5/5 in the red suits. South now bid 3NT herself. The lead was ♠10 and this is what South was faced with. Plan the play.

♠86
♥AQJ85
♦KJ853
♣9
♠A74
♥-
♦A764
♣AJT862

It's difficult, isn't it? With the misfit, even if diamonds break there are only 8 obvious tricks – no finesse is possible in hearts and you cannot repeat the split-honour finesse in clubs. What are you going to do?

Well, the first thing is to duck two rounds of spades so that West has no more left after you win the third spade. Then you lay down ♦A. Good news! East has the singleton queen so you are assured of 5 diamond tricks. You run the diamonds, discarding a club from hand. The position is now as below. What next?

♠-
♥AQJ8
♦-
♣9
♠-
♥-
♦-
♣AJT86

Mardi Svensson cashed ♥A and played ♣9, losing to West's queen. However, although West could now cash ♥K, she then had no option but to surrender the last two tricks, because this was the complete deal, from Monday 24 February:

BD: 16	♠86	Dlr: W	
	♥AQJ85	Vul: EW	
	♦KJ853		
	♣9		
♠T92		♠KQJ53	
♥KT963		♥742	
♦T92		♦Q	
♣Q5		♣K743	
	♠A74		
	♥		
	♦A764		
	♣AJT862		
	♣♦♥♠	N	
		T	
N	3 6 2 1 3		11
S	3 6 2 1 3	5	11
E			13
W			

West's last two cards were ♣5 and ♥10 – playing the former gives declarer two club tricks by finessing East's king, while playing the latter gives dummy two heart tricks. A neat endplay that earned partner a well-deserved top!

