Not necessarily balanced …

Rakesh Kumar

The dealing computer was having a fine time during the Bong Bong Cup, spitting out some highly distributional deals. Over the two sessions, there were many hands with 7-4 or 6-5 shape, several of which were also quite strong in terms of high card points. Plus the second session featured two hands with strong 8-card suits! One was this beauty:

♠A9
♥A
♦Q3
♣AKQJ6543

It's hard to imagine opening this 3-loser hand with anything less than a strong 2C. Let's say you've agreed to play that partner must bid 2D, waiting. What now?

You might make 6C if partner has the right cards, but if partner has just a smattering of queens and jacks, even 5C may not make. However … this hand will almost certainly make 3NT. True, your diamond "stopper" is a bit of a joke, but even if the opponents do find a diamond lead, all you need is for partner to hold Jxx and you will have no trouble at all. Anyway, with your singleton heart ace, surely the opponents are going to lead a heart. Then you will win the ace, cash 8 club tricks and finish with the ace of spades i.e. 10 easy tricks.

So what will you rebid after 2C-2D? Why, 2NT of course! Assuming you play a 2NT opening as 20-22 hcp, this promises 23+ hcp and is forcing to at least 3NT. But you can't do that, I hear you say, that's all wrong because a 2NT rebid is supposed to be balanced!! Well, not necessarily …

On the deal in question, shown on the following page, if you do rebid 2NT, partner will go looking for a possible 4-4 heart fit, but will then pass your rebid of 3NT. On the predictable heart lead, you win and cash 8 club tricks. North will almost certainly come down to the bare diamond ace, the spade king and another, and one remaining heart, probably the queen. You cash ♠A and then exit with a diamond, eventually winning an eleventh trick with ♥K.

Now take a closer look at the deal. On best defence, ♥K should never win a trick, so 5C should go down but 3NT should always make 10 tricks. However, even if 5C makes on a misdefence and 3NT is held to 10 tricks on best defence, that's a matchpoint win. The moral of the story is quite simple: long minor suits are a great source of tricks at notrumps. If you have a long, strong minor suit, unless you are fairly sure that slam is in the offing you should look for the possibililty of overtricks in a notrump contract, rather than playing in the minor suit game.

BD: 16	♠K65 ♥QT762 ♦AT8 ♣82	**Dlr: W** **Vul: EW**
♠A9 ♥A ♦Q3 ♣AKQJ6543		♠JT87 ♥K943 ♦J764 ♣7
	♠Q432 ♥J85 ♦K952 ♣T9	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N T
N		1			9
S		1			20 5
E	4	1			4 6
W	4	1		1	4

And not every successful notrump contract involves a balanced hand!

♣♦♥♠

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