

## Seven Deadly (?) Sins at the bridge table

Rakesh Kumar

These are notes for those who might have missed the three 15-20 min talks in April, or who might want to revise what was discussed.

Of course there are no deadly sins at bridge, but there are some unwise actions that Chris Bayliss and I have often seen our members take. I had thought of talking about seven of them with this title – Chris then suggested actually relating them to the named sins *viz.* Lust, Envy, Pride, Gluttony, Greed, Sloth and Wrath. Here goes ...

Sitting East, with North-South vulnerable, you hear North as dealer open 1H. What will you bid with this hand?

♠ A73  
♥ A103  
♦ J75  
♣ KJ65

Many at our club chose to double. This is a bad idea, or the deadly sin of **Lust**: an uncontrollable desire to enter the auction, even with a completely unsuitable hand.

Unless you are strong enough to double and bid again (some 16+ hcp and a good suit) your takeout doubles should:

- Promise shortness in the opponent's suit (no more than 2 cards, fewer with only 10-11 hcp)
- Typically promise at least 4-3 in the majors, or 4 cards in the unbid major (there might be some flexibility with a 14-15 hcp hand)
- Also promise tolerance (at least 3 cards) for any unbid suit.

With the hand above, the best call is a pass – as will be obvious when you look at the full deal (overleaf).

Optimum:  
E 1S+1,EW 1H+1; -110  
LoTT: 14-15 = -1

Bridge Solver Online:  
John Goacher  
Double Dummy Solver Module:  
Bo Haglund

♠ K 9 2  
♥ Q J 9 7 6 4  
♦ 10 4  
♣ A Q

♠ Q J 10 4  
♥ K 8 5 2  
♦ K 6  
♣ 10 7 4

♠ A 7 3  
♥ A 10 3  
♦ J 7 5  
♣ K J 6 5

♠ 8 6 5  
♥  
♦ A Q 9 8 3 2  
♣ 9 8 3 2

9 12 13  
6

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

If East doubles, East-West reach a failing 2S, because West with 9 hcp will jump to 2S. If East passes, North-South will instead be the ones in a failing contract: 2H is hopeless and things are no better if South bids on, say 1H-1NT-2H-3D.

Note that if East had one less heart and one more spade, thus meeting the criteria for a sensible takeout double, the deal might be then something like this:

Optimum:  
EW 4S+1; -450  
LoTT: 17-16 = 1

Bridge Solver Online:  
John Goacher  
Double Dummy Solver Module:  
Bo Haglund

♠ K 9 2  
♥ Q J 9 7 6 4  
♦ 10 4  
♣ A Q

♠ Q J 10 4  
♥ K 8 5 2  
♦ K 6  
♣ 10 7 4

♠ A 7 5 3  
♥ A 10  
♦ J 7 5  
♣ K J 6 5

♠ 8 6  
♥ 3  
♦ A Q 9 8 3 2  
♣ 9 8 3 2

9 12 13  
6

	♠	♥	♣	NT
N	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-
E	3	-	1	5
W	3	-	1	5

East-West can now make 11 tricks! Of course game would not be reached, but the contract would be sensible.

On to another hand. You hold:

♠ 104  
♥ 6  
♦ A87  
♣ AJ109832

Again, you are East. North is the dealer and the auction has been:

N E S W  
1H 2C 4H Pass

What will you lead?

Did you lead a minor suit ace? That would have been a bad idea, or the deadly sin of **Envy**: an irrational response to being forced to defend, leading to the foolish cashing of unsupported aces.

I hope you didn't consider leading your singleton trump either. Any of those 3 leads would give declarer the contract:

**Optimum:**  
NS 4D; +130  
LoTT: 18-18 = 0

♠ A 7  
♥ A J 10 4 3  
♦ 9 3  
♣ K 7 6 5

Bridge Solver Online:  
John Goacher  
Double Dummy Solver Module:  
Bo Haglund

♠ K Q J 9 5 3  
♥ K 9 5  
♦ Q 10  
♣ Q 4

♠ 10 4  
♥ 6  
♦ A 8 7  
♣ A J 10 9 8 3 2

13      12      9  
          6

♠ 8 6 2  
♥ Q 8 7 2  
♦ K J 6 5 4 2  
♣

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

In contrast, the lead of ♠10 would work out well. Here's a simple guide to picking your opening lead against a suit contract:

- If partner has bid, lead her suit – this won't always work but it's good for partnership harmony
- Otherwise, against a suit contract, if at all possible lead from two touching honours in an outside suit
- Lead an outside singleton – this is particularly attractive if you have a weak hand – or an outside doubleton
- Failing that, lead something that isn't likely to damage any holding partner might have
- Avoid leading a singleton trump
- Avoid leading an unsupported ace except in special circumstances.

Onwards ... now to a look at declarer play. You are West, in 4H after this auction:

N	E	S	W
2S	Dbl	Pass	4H
Pass			

North leads ♣6 and the dummy comes down:

♠ K 9 7 6  
♥ Q J 10 7 3  
♦ Q 7  
♣ J 3

♠ Q  
♥ A K 4  
♦ K J 8 3  
♣ A 8 7 4 2

How will you play?

Presumably you won ♣A. At trick 2, did you then draw trumps?

If you did, you went down. That's because you failed to do what every declarer should do at trick 1:

- Count the high card points in your hand and in dummy
- Attempt to place the remaining high card points based on the bidding (or lack of bidding)
- Count your obvious winners and your obvious losers
- Assess the opening lead, including what you can infer about the location of missing honours and the risk of bad breaks
- Make a plan for how to reach the required number of tricks (or where to look for overtricks)
- Ask yourself what can go wrong with this plan ...

If you had counted your tricks you would have realised that 5 hearts + 1 spade + 2 diamonds + 1 club = 9. To make game you *had* to ruff a spade in dummy so you needed to play ♠Q early. You could afford to ruff with a top heart and then come back to hand with dummy's ♥4 to draw trumps, succeeding even though hearts broke 4-1. This was the deal:

**Optimum:**  
EW 4H; -620  
LoTT: 17-16 = 1

♠ A J 10 4 3 2  
♥ 5  
♦ A 10 6  
♣ 9 6 5

[Bridge Solver Online:](#)  
John Goacher

Double Dummy Solver Module:  
Bo Haglund

♠ K 9 7 6  
♥ Q J 10 7 3  
♦ Q 7  
♣ J 3

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♠ Q  
♥ A K 4  
♦ K J 8 3  
♣ A 8 7 4 2

	♠	♦	♥	♣	NT
N	-	-	-	1	-
S	-	-	-	1	-
E	2	2	4	-	3
W	2	2	4	-	3

If you drew trumps at trick 2, you were guilty of the sin of **Pride**: an unjustified belief in one's ability as a declarer, leading to playing too quickly without making a plan.

Back to bidding. Neither side is vulnerable. Partner deals and opens 1H. RHO passes. What will you bid?

- ♠ Q63
- ♥ J10942
- ♦ 853
- ♣ K5

Did you jump to 4H? This was the deadly sin of **Gluttony**: overbidding on the basis of a big fit with few high card points and no shortage.

The so-called Law of Total Tricks has its limits. When thinking about the value of a fit, it is worth realising that:

- A 9-card fit is certainly worth significantly more than an 8-card fit in terms of trick-taking potential
- However, additional length doesn't increase trick-taking value to quite the same extent
- What then matters is top controls and shortages.

For example, if partner opens 1S, which hand would you rather hold?

♠109532 ♥2 ♦AQ43 ♣765

♠109532 ♥82 ♦QJ54 ♣K5

You should avoid sacrificing with a weak hand and no shortage, just because you have a 10-card fit. On this deal, your 4H bid would come to grief – even 2H would have been plenty!

**Optimum:**  
S 4S; +420  
LoTT: 17-19 = -2

♠ K J 8 5  
♥ K 7  
♦ Q J 10 2  
♣ Q 9 6

Bridge Solver Online:  
John Goacher

Double Dummy Solver Module:  
Bo Haglund

♠ A 10  
♥ A Q 8 6 5  
♦ K 9 6 4  
♣ 8 3

8

♠ Q 6 3  
♥ J 10 9 4 2  
♦ 8 5 3  
♣ K 5

13      12      6  
9

♠ 9 7 4 2  
♥ 3  
♦ A 7  
♣ A J 10 7 4 2

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	4	1	-	3	2
S	4	1	-	4	2
E	-	-	1	-	-
W	-	-	1	-	-

Mind you, North should probably have made a takeout double, after which you could have bid a weak 3H to get in the way.

Here's another bidding question. You are vulnerable and the opponents are not. RHO deals and opens 1H

- ♠ A73
- ♥ A103
- ♦ J7
- ♣ KJ654

What will you do this time?

If you overcalled 2C, you would regret it, because this was the full deal:

Optimum:  
NS 1S+1, NS 1H+1, NS 1D+2; +110  
LoTT: 16-16 = 0

Bridge Solver Online:  
John Goacher  
Double Dummy Solver Module:  
Bo Haglund

♠ K 10 9 2 ♥ K Q J 7 6 ♦ 10 4 3 ♣ A	♠ Q J 4 ♥ 9 8 5 2 ♦ K 8 5 ♣ 10 9 7	♠ A 7 3 ♥ A 10 3 ♦ J 7 ♣ K J 6 5 4
♠ 8 6 5 ♥ 4 ♦ A Q 9 6 2 ♣ Q 8 3 2	8	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	3	2	2	-
S	-	3	2	2	-
E	1	-	-	-	-
W	1	-	-	-	-

6      13  
8      13

After South and West passed, North would re-open with a double and this would be passed out, leading to -200.

It's worth remembering that not every 5-card suit is worth an overcall. However, far too many of our club members commit the sin of

**Greed:** overcalling on a poor suit because of an overwhelming hunger to bid.

- Overcalls don't just depend on having high card points
- One purpose of an overcall is to find a contract of your own: in that case you need a reasonable suit and you need to find a fit
- Whether your suit is reasonable is best judged by the "suit quality test"
- The number of cards in your suit plus the number of honours (A, K, Q, J and 10, the last two only counted if there is also a higher honour) should equal the number of tricks you are trying to take
- Another purpose of an overcall is to suggest a good lead if your side ends up defending, so suits headed by minor honours or non-touching honours without the ace aren't much good.

In the deal above, East's club suit fails the suit quality test (5+2=7 therefore not worth a 2-level overcall) and isn't much good as a lead-directing bid either.

And so to a defence problem ... you are East and your side is vulnerable. The auction has been:

N	E	S	W
		1D	Pass
2C	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	Pass		

West leads ♠9. When dummy comes down, this is what you see (overleaf).

♠ K 7 4  
 ♥ 10 6 2  
 ♦ 2  
 ♣ A K J 7 6 5

Bridge Solver Online:  
 John Goacher  
 Double Dummy Solver Module:  
 Bo Haglund

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♠ A 8 5 3 2  
 ♥ Q 9 5 4  
 ♦ A 7 6  
 ♣ 9

Declarer plays the king from dummy and follows with ♠6 as you win with the ace. Now what?

Sadly, one of the commonest of deadly sins committed at the bridge table is **Sloth**: failing to think during play and defence – not counting points, opponents' shape, possibilities for the setting trick.

On this deal, if you returned a spade, why? Partner's lead is surely top-of-nothing and declarer's play suggests she must have ♠QJ10. That means that if declarer can run the clubs, you need to get another 4 tricks *now* if possible. Your choice is between returning a heart or a diamond. How can you tell which suit to switch to? Lay down ♦A and look for partner's signal! This was the deal:

Optimum:  
 EW 3Hx, EW 3Dx; +100  
 LoTT: 17-17 = 0

Bridge Solver Online:  
 John Goacher  
 Double Dummy Solver Module:  
 Bo Haglund

♠ K 7 4  
 ♥ 10 6 2  
 ♦ 2  
 ♣ A K J 7 6 5

♠ 9  
 ♥ J 8 7 3  
 ♦ K Q 10 5 4  
 ♣ 4 3 2

25

♠ A 8 5 3 2  
 ♥ Q 9 5 4  
 ♦ A 7 6  
 ♣ 9

♠ Q J 10 6  
 ♥ A K  
 ♦ J 9 8 3  
 ♣ Q 10 8

	♠	♥	♣	NT
N	3	-	-	1
S	3	-	-	1
E	-	2	2	-
W	-	2	2	-

11  
 6      10  
 13

When partner encourages, you can take another 4 tricks and the contract is down 2. If you guess to return a heart, declarer makes 11 tricks!

Incidentally this deal is a good demonstration of the value of playing low to encourage – West can't afford to encourage with ♦10 and it may be too difficult to correctly interpret ♦5 if playing high encourage.

That's all I have to say about bidding, play and defence. However, both Chris and I would like to emphasise that there are many things you should *not* do at the bridge table that are – regrettably – altogether too common at our club. See overleaf for a partial list.

- Sigh or say "I don't know what to do ..." during the auction; say anything else about your bid
- Query whether an opponent's bid is natural, then pass; think for a long time, then pass
- Look meaningfully at partner after making a bid; make faces at partner while defending
- Fail to alert partner's bid; mis-explain a conventional bid
- Fail to call the Director when appropriate.

If you are guilty of any of these, you will – or at least you should – incur your opponents' ***Wrath!***

