

4 June

Country Teams Regional Final 2025

Rakesh Kumar

This year's Tablelands-Illawarra regional final of the NSW Country Teams Championship was played on Saturday 1 June. The HURLEY team from the Illawarra Bridge Association took the lead after round 1 and never relinquished it, winning all 6 of their matches. Meanwhile teams from SHBC and IBA did battle for the next few places, with our HUTCHISON team in second spot coming into the last round. However, as is often the case, there was much movement up and down the ladder in that final round. Quite a bit of it related to slam bidding, which as mentioned in the last column in May can be critical to success, especially in Teams events. Two boards generated most of the action ...

The first should have been a relatively straightforward auction to either 6H or 6NT after East opens a strong 2C and rebids 2NT to show some 23+ hcp. Surprisingly, only 4 of 12 East-West pairs bid to a slam. Of many possible auctions, one that appeals is 2C-2D (waiting)-2NT-3D (transfer)-3H-5NT (pick a slam)-6H but overall, the critical issue is sufficient definition of the strength of the 2NT rebid.

BD: 21	♠JT93	Dlr: N
	♥T2	Vul: NS
	♦94	
	♣A9853	
♠762		♠AK5
♥QJ854		♥AK3
♦KJ52		♦AQ7
♣Q		♣KJ64
	♠Q84	
	♥976	
	♦T863	
	♣T72	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N		5
S		9 24
E	3 6 6 4 6	2
W	3 6 6 4 6	

Reaching slam on the next board, however, required both aggression and optimism. After North's 1S opening, East has a choice of ways to show a good hand: either overcall 2C and later reverse into diamonds, or double and then bid 2C to show strength, which runs the risk of losing the diamond suit altogether.

BD: 25 ♠KQT98 **Dlr: N**
 ♥AKQ76 **Vul: EW**
 ♦J8
 ♣9

♠43	♠AJ5
♥T9853	♥
♦7643	♦AKQT
♣AK	♣QJT842

♠762
 ♥J42
 ♦952
 ♣7653

♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
 T

N	2	15	
S	1	7	17
E	6 6	3	1
W	6 6	3	

Mardi Svensson chose the latter approach, then had no hesitation about subsequently rebidding diamonds at the 4-level! The auction was as shown below:

West	North	East	South
	1S	Dbl	P
2H	2S	3C	P
3H	P	4D	P
5C	P	6C	P
P	Dbl	P	P
6D	Dbl	All pass	

North can hardly be criticised for doubling both 6C and 6D, but there was no defence to either contract. This swung a *lot* of IMPs because no one else bid slam on the board – indeed only 2 other pairs got to game. As a result, the WEATHERALL team leaptfrogged into third spot, behind LISLE who also had a strong last round. The full results are [here](#) together with the listing of all team members.



11 June

"Rules" made to be broken

Rakesh Kumar

With both sides vulnerable, partner deals and passes. Your RHO opens 1NT, promising 15-17 hcp, so you pass. LHO responds 2C, opener rebids 2D and LHO jumps to 3NT. What will you lead from this hand?

♠J976
♥AT92
♦A43
♣K2

Before making up your mind, it's worth asking yourself – what sort of hand might partner have? Responder clearly has at least 10 hcp and opener presumably at least 15 hcp, which doesn't leave more than 3 hcp for partner. In addition, responder presumably has at least one 4 card major, otherwise he would have bid 3NT directly.

All of which means that the usual approach of leading away from an ace, hoping to establish the suit, is a waste of time and likely to be a gift to declarer. You won't, of course, lead a club from this holding, so all that leaves is a spade.

A lead from a jack is usually strongly discouraged, but this might be one time to break that particular "rule" because any other lead would be worse. So you lead ♠6. That should work out well, because this was the full deal, from Monday 9 June:

BD: 7	♠J976	Dir: S
	♥AT92	Vul: ALL
	♦A43	
	♣K2	
♠KQ		♠AT
♥K75		♥Q843
♦KQT986		♦2
♣A6		♣QJT973
	♠85432	
	♥J6	
	♦J75	
	♣854	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	1	12
S	1	17 9
E	3 3 2	2 2
W	3 3 2	2

In fact it's quite a complex deal – BridgeSolver indicates that even if declarer wins the first trick in hand with ♠Q, so you know she also has the king, on the play of a low heart at trick 2 you must counter-intuitively rise with the ace to continue a *high* spade to unblock. In the real world, that's not going to happen, but in the real world declarer is much more likely to play ace and another club. Now when you return a spade, taken in dummy, you should know from the fall of ♠K that your ♠J9 are high. Therefore as long as you cling to your remaining spades on the run of the clubs, you can set the contract.

On the day, four declarers played in 3NT. Two received a heart lead so had no real problem. However, ♠6 was led against the other two, but one declarer still managed to make it.

By the way, note West's opening of 1NT rather than 1D. A 6-card minor suit can be a great source of tricks in notrumps, while the rest of your hand is balanced and within the hcp range for a 1NT opening, so why not make the most descriptive bid you can?



16 June

Responding with a weak hand

Rakesh Kumar

Back in the dark ages, we were taught that if partner opened 1♣ or 1♦ you had to have 6 high card points to respond. These days, however, it's not so rare to see bridge players responding with fewer high card points. Is that a good idea? Should you always respond with 4-5 hcp?

The short answer to that last question is "no" but the longer answer is "it's complicated" because a lot depends on what the rest of your hand looks like. Here are three ideas to take on board:

Firstly, if you have an ace, or a king-queen in the one suit, and you have a 4+ major suit, you should respond 1M e.g. bid 1H holding ♥KQxx and nothing else. Why? Because you have a *sure trick* and partner might just have a fit. With a longer suit e.g. ♠KJxxxx and nothing else, if you play weak jump shifts you would bid 2S, but if not you could bid 1S anyway.

Secondly, if you have a 5+ major suit and 0-1 cards in partner's minor suit, you should respond 1M, because bidding is likely to *improve the contract* for your side. Your high card strength is actually quite unimportant in this situation e.g. if partner opens 1C, you should respond 1S with ♠K9752 ♥432 ♦T842 ♣3. Even if partner has an 18-19 hcp balanced hand and rebids 2NT, it may not be a disaster – if you rebid 3S that's to play and you could make it, even opposite as little as ♠AT4 ♥AQ5 ♦AK9 ♣JT87.

Thirdly, it's worth remembering that responding is not just about bidding constructively to your side's contracts, it's also about making it *more difficult for the opponents* to find their good contracts. If the auction begins 1♣-P-1♠ life is a bit more awkward for fourth hand holding ♠83 ♥KJT65 ♦Q52 ♣K64 than if you had passed.

So keeping all that in mind, not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, you hear partner open 1♣ in third seat and your right-hand opponent passes. It's a reasonable inference that partner has a fairly good hand. Will you respond with this?

♠JT62
♥QT3
♦Q643
♣85

You shouldn't. It does not fit with any of the three ideas above. If you want more on this topic, check out Larry Cohen's [suggestions](#) about responding with weak hands.

Meanwhile, on Monday 16 June this deal turned up:

BD: 25	♠JT62	Dir: N
	♥QT3	Vul: EW
	♦Q643	
	♣85	
♠K98543		♠A7
♥K96		♥7542
♦2		♦J985
♣A96		♣JT7
	♠Q	
	♥AJ8	
	♦AKT7	
	♣KQ432	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N	2 3 1	1 5
S	2 3 1	2 10 6
E		1 19
W		1

If West chooses not to overcall 1S because the suit is poor, North should pass. If West does overcall 1S, which is entirely reasonable, North should pass; South might rebid 2D showing a 16+ hcp hand and again North should pass. However, if South

re-opens with a double, it's not so simple; North might bid 1NT and South must show restraint, otherwise the auction could go off the rails.

On the day, there was clearly altogether too much bidding by most North-South pairs, because this was the table of results:

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
1♠ by EW	-1	100	1
1♣ by NS	+1	90	1
3♣ by NS	-1	-50	1
3♦ by NS	-1	-50	1
3NT by NS	-1	-50	1
3NT by NS	-2	-100	1
5♦ by NS	-2	-100	1
3♣ by NS	-3	-150	1
4♠ by NS	-3	-150	1

There are times when silence is golden ...



28 June

SHBC Swiss Pairs 2025

Rakesh Kumar

This year's Swiss Pairs championship was held on Saturday 28 June. As usual, the format of the tournament was 6 rounds of 8-board matches, scored as IMPs converted to Victory Points (VPs) on the 20 VP decimalised scale. There was a strong turnout, with 16 pairs competing vigorously and lots of good bridge. Steve Brabyn did a fine job of looking after the movement and scoring. The highlight of the day, though, was undoubtedly the excellent lunch provided by Jo Goodacre!

By mid-afternoon, Rose Massey – Richard Burrells had established their place at the top of the order, but Mardi Svensson – Rakesh Kumar were closing in and it all came down to the last round. When the smoke cleared, Richard and Rose had won – by just 0.05 VPs!! To their great credit, they were victorious in all 6 of their matches.

Keeping in mind that to do well at IMPs one must bid every thin game contract, reach for slam whenever possible and defend carefully so that the opposition don't get away with anything, here are some interesting and instructive boards from the two sessions.

Firstly, on this deal, what will you open with the South hand? It's basically not good for much other than a contract in hearts, so even though 12 hcp suggests a 1H opening is possible, a better approach – which makes things much more difficult for the opponents – is an immediate 4H bid.

If you were West, what would you do over a 4H opening? You could double for takeout, in case partner has a hand with a long minor suit, but a direct 4S also makes good sense.

<p>9 N/EW</p> <p>♠ AKT87 ♥ T ♦ AT6 ♣ KQJT</p> <p>6 17 5 12</p>	<p>♠ J6 ♥ 875 ♦ KQ943 ♣ 743</p> <p>♠ 95432 ♥ 4 ♦ J5 ♣ A8652</p> <p>♠ Q ♥ AKQJ9632 ♦ 872 ♣ 9</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>N</th> <th>S</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>NT</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>♠</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>♥</td> <td>4</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>♦</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>♣</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Opt res: NS 6HX; -300</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>E</th> <th>W</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>NT</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>♠</td> <td>5</td> <td>5</td> </tr> <tr> <td>♥</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>♦</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>♣</td> <td>5</td> <td>5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		N	S	NT			♠			♥	4	4	♦	1	1	♣				E	W	NT			♠	5	5	♥			♦			♣	5	5
	N	S																																				
NT																																						
♠																																						
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♦	1	1																																				
♣																																						
	E	W																																				
NT																																						
♠	5	5																																				
♥																																						
♦																																						
♣	5	5																																				

Now if you were East and partner doubled, would you be confident that was for takeout? Mid-morning, when Richard Burrells opened 4H, West doubled and East left the double in ... that raked in lots of IMPs for Massey-Burrells.

The next deal is again highly distributional and is in some respects rather tricky for North-South to bid sensibly, because the auction starts with 1D by East.

Would you have had the courage to overcall 2C as South? You have a pretty awful suit, but there doesn't seem to be anything else to do. If you dare to bid, West might make a negative double showing the majors, or simply pass. How can North show a really good raise in clubs? Via a cue raise of 2D, which just might encourage South to try for game on the basis of shape and top controls. As it turns out, taking 12 tricks in 5C is not difficult, but Svensson-Kumar were the only pair to reach this game.

<p>14 E/-</p> <p>♠ 87643 ♥ QT43 ♦ 76 ♣ KJ</p> <p>10 6 14 10</p>	<p>♠ JT95 ♥ AK65 ♦ Q ♣ T987</p> <p>♠ AKQ2 ♥ 872 ♦ KT83 ♣ Q4</p> <p>♠ - ♥ J9 ♦ AJ9542 ♣ A6532</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>N</th> <th>S</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>NT</td> <td>2</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>♠</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>♥</td> <td>2</td> <td>2</td> </tr> <tr> <td>♦</td> <td>4</td> <td>4</td> </tr> <tr> <td>♣</td> <td>6</td> <td>6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>Opt res: NS 6C; 920</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>E</th> <th>W</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>NT</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>♠</td> <td>1</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>♥</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>♦</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>♣</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		N	S	NT	2	1	♠			♥	2	2	♦	4	4	♣	6	6		E	W	NT			♠	1	1	♥			♦			♣		
	N	S																																				
NT	2	1																																				
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♥	2	2																																				
♦	4	4																																				
♣	6	6																																				
	E	W																																				
NT																																						
♠	1	1																																				
♥																																						
♦																																						
♣																																						

In the late afternoon, this deal swung lots of IMPs in the crucial final round:

22
E/EW

♠ AKT975	♠ QJ43
♥ 42	♥ AQ83
♦ KT6	♦ Q98
♣ Q4	♣ 93

11	♠ 6
12	♥ JT96
11	♦ J53
6	♣ KJT62

	N	S
NT		
♠		
♥		
♦		1
♣	1	1

Opt res:
EW 4S; -620

	E	W
NT	1	1
♠	4	4
♥	1	1
♦		
♣		

West plays in 4S, with the usual lead being a trump or a low heart. The play is interesting, as you have two losers in clubs, potentially two in diamonds, as well as a possible loser in hearts. When the heart finesse succeeds, however, the best line is to cash ♥A, ruff a heart, cross to dummy with a trump, and ruff the last heart. Now having drawn the last trump, declarer exits with a club. North or South can take another club trick but then must either give a ruff-and-discard or else open up the diamond suit. That effectively deals with trying to find ♦A and ♦J, which was a problem for many, because half the field made only 9 tricks ...



2 July

The "Goldilocks Effect"

Rakesh Kumar

A few years ago, I wrote a column for our website about trying to achieve the "Goldilocks Effect" in the bidding i.e. not too little, not too much, but just right ...

It's usually quite difficult, but happened on this deal on Monday 30 June:

BD: 9	♠T9876	Dlr: N
	♥AT	Vul: EW
	♦T87	
	♣KJ8	
♠J5		♠AKQ
♥97532		♥QJ86
♦94		♦Q
♣9763		♣AT542
	♠432	
	♥K4	
	♦AKJ6532	
	♣Q	
		N
	♣♦♥♠	T
N	3 3 3	8
S	3 3 3	1 18
E	2 2	13
W	2 2	

After North passed, East opened 1C and South overcalled 1D. West passed, of course, and North bid 1S despite the poor suit. This was forcing for one round – in principle promising 10+ high card points – and was an attempt to improve the contract, to play in a major if possible. Although a bit short on points, it wasn't an entirely unreasonable bid, as North had 3-card support for diamonds and would have been happy to pass a 2D rebid by South.

Now East quite sensibly doubled, showing extra values, promising support for hearts and looking for some co-operation from partner. He found it, because when South did rebid 2D, West was quite happy to bid 2H.

However, North raised to 3D and this was passed back around to West. With zero working points, vulnerable against opponents who are not vulnerable, would you dare to bid 3H? Partner may have only 3 hearts so you would have to be brave ...

Steve Brabyn was brave – and successful too! His bid of 3H bought the contract. In accordance with the table of makeable contracts, he duly managed to take 8 tricks. And as you can see from the table of results, a bid of 3H was "just right" because he earned an absolute top!!

Contract	Result	Score	Frequency
2NT by EW	-3	300	1
4♥ by EW	-2	200	1
3♦ by NS	+2	150	2
2♣ by NS	+1	140	1
2♦ by NS	+1	110	2
3♥ by EW	-1	100	1

North-South can in fact make 3S despite having none of the top honours in the suit, but who was going to bid that? Meanwhile 4D will go down, although if it is bid and East decides to push on to 4H that goes 2 down. Just our luck that Steve chose to do this against us ...



8 August

Another awkward hand

Rakesh Kumar

The dealing computer regularly throws up hands that induce headaches. On Monday 4 August, this was a fine example:

♠K
♥A8
♦AT982
♣AQJ95

After 3 passes, you open 1D, of course. Partner responds 1S and you jump to 3C. Partner rebids 3D. What now?

It's problematical, because your side probably has enough high card strength for game, but contracting for 11 tricks in 5D could well be a bridge too far. Although 3NT might have better chances, it would be much better played from partner's side of the table if she had, say, ♥Qxx. How could you ask partner for a heart stopper?

One solution might be to try 3H as a kind of fourth-suit-forcing bid – this really ought not to be a natural call. After all if you had a 0=4=5=4 hand you could just bid 3NT yourself, however unwise that might be. Then again, a bid like 3H may well confuse partner and as this was the full deal, with no genuine stopper in hearts she wouldn't have been able to bid 3NT anyway:

BD: 3	♠Q32	Dlr: S	
	♥K52	Vul: EW	
	♦QJ6		
	♣T742		
♠A9765		♠K	
♥JT3		♥A8	
♦7543		♦AT982	
♣K		♣AQJ95	
	♠JT84		
	♥Q9764		
	♦K		
	♣863		
	♣♦♥♠	N	
		T	
N			8
S			8 18
E	4 5 3 4 3		6
W	4 5 3 4 3		

Jan Fennell chose the reasonable alternative of simply bashing 3NT and hoping for the best. No one else dared to bid game so her courage earned her a 100% score! Naturally, that was against us ... as it turned out, both 3NT and 5D were unbeatable.



14 August

Working out your discards

Rakesh Kumar

Not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, you hold this unexciting hand:

♠J94
♥962
♦T632
♣KJ7

Partner passes as dealer and your RHO opens 2NT promising 20-22 hcp. You pass, of course. The opponents now bid 3C (by LHO, Stayman)-3H (by RHO)-3NT (by LHO, denying 4 hearts but promising 4 spades)-3NT and you are on lead.

Not wishing to help declarer by leading either of the shown major suits, nor by giving a possible gift with a lead away from ♣KJ7, you choose to start with ♦2. A very strong dummy comes down:

	(dummy)
	♠AK76
	♥875
	♦K4
(you)	♣T654
♠J94	
♥962	
♦T632	
♣KJ7	

As the opponents have at least 30 hcp between them, you are not beating this contract! However, even though you don't hold much you still have to stay alert to avoid giving declarer any "free" overtricks.

The first trick goes ♦2, ♦4, ♦J from partner, and declarer wins with ♦A. He now cashes dummy's ♠AK and then plays ♥AKQJ from hand. What will you discard on the fourth heart? Does it matter? How can you work out what's the best thing to do?

Well, you have seen 14 of declarer's high card points. It seems he does not hold ♠Q otherwise he would have played the spades differently, looking for a 3-3 break and finishing in dummy. It also seems he doesn't have ♣AQ9, otherwise he might have used the entries in dummy to finesse twice in clubs.

So even though the play to the first trick suggests that partner has ♦Q, perhaps that's not actually the case – declarer might have been trying to fool you.

If you worked that out, well done. Here is the full deal, now in its correct orientation:

BD: 12		♠ T53		Dlr: W	
		♥ AKQJ		Vul: NS	
		♦ AQ85			
		♣ A3			
♠ Q82		♠ J94			
♥ T43		♥ 962			
♦ J97		♦ T632			
♣ Q982		♣ KJ7			
		♠ AK76			
		♥ 875			
		♦ K4			
		♣ T654			
				N	
				T	
N	3	4	5	5	4
S	3	4	5	5	4
E					10
W					

As you can see, what you discarded mattered quite a lot. You could afford to throw either **♠ J** or **♣ 7**, but if you pitched **♦ 3** declarer would in due course make 4 diamond tricks to go with his other 7 top tricks.

When this deal turned up on Wednesday 13 August, 6 of 7 North-South pairs played in 3NT and 3 of those declarers succeeded in making 11 tricks, which they certainly didn't deserve.

Discarding correctly is a difficult skill to learn, usually requiring the sort of hand visualisation discussed in this column.



18 August

No forgiveness ...

Rakesh Kumar

When you're defending, you cannot afford to relax/dope off/play by instinct. If you do not work at counting declarer's high card points and shape, you will pay for it. On this deal from Monday 18 August, I did. My hand was:

♠K4
♥T87
♦AQJ85
♣KT7

Tony Lye on my left opened 1S as dealer and Steve Brabyn responded with a natural 2NT, denying spade support and promising some 11-12 hcp. Tony rebid 3C and Steve converted to 3NT. I led ♦Q and this was the dummy that I saw:

	(dummy)
	♠AQT96
	♥QJ6
	♦3
(me)	♣Q632
	♠K4
	♥T87
	♦AQJ85
	♣KT7

The first trick went ♦Q, ♦3, ♦2, ♦4. Obviously declarer had ducked with the king, possibly ♦K10, so it would be best to have partner continue diamonds when she got in. Therefore I switched to ♥8.

Declarer thought about this for a moment, then played ♥6 from dummy and won the trick in hand with ♥A. Next he led a low spade, inserting the nine when I followed with ♠4.

Partner won ♠J and returned ♦9, covered by the ten as I won ♦J. Now I cashed ♦A, partner following with ♦7 and declarer with ♦6.

Are you with me? Should I play a fourth diamond to declarer's king and wait to come in with ♣K to take the the contract 2 down?

That's what I thought I should do and it is what I did, but that was lazy defence. If I had been counting I would have realised that apart from ♦K, declarer must have ♥AK, otherwise he would have played the queen from dummy when I switched. That's 10 hcp so if his original 2NT bid was indeed 11-12 hcp, he *could not possibly* have ♣A as well.

Beating the contract by two tricks simply required me to play ♣K followed by a low club to partner. Instead, my return of a fourth diamond gifted declarer the contract, because with hearts breaking 3-3 declarer had 9 tricks. The full board is below:

BD: 18	♠K4	Dlr: E
	♥T87	Vul: NS
	♦AQJ85	
	♣KT7	
♠72		♠AQT96
♥AK54		♥QJ6
♦KT64		♦3
♣J84		♣Q632
	♠J853	
	♥932	
	♦972	
	♣A95	
	♣♦♥♠	N
		T
N		13
S		11 11
E	2 2 2	5
W	2 1 2 2 1	

That sleepy moment is going to keep me awake at night for a while ...

