




The 4-4 Fit

MUCH BIDDING revolves around trying to locate a trump fit, often a 4-4 fit. Quite why this is so important is not often clearly explained, however. There are deals where a 4-4 fit may prove superior to an apparently better fit. In the deal below 6♣ may well make, whereas 6♥ is impossible when East turns up with the ace of clubs.

Deal 1
 South plays in 6♣.
 West leads the ♣Q.

♠ K Q 9 8
 ♥ A Q 9 8
 ♦ 9 5 4
 ♣ K 3



♠ A J 7 6
 ♥ K J 10 7 6
 ♦ A K 2
 ♣ 9

If you were to count your winners and losers in a contract of 6♥, you will see that you have a club loser and a diamond loser with nowhere to pitch the latter. 6♠, though, will make as the diamond loser will get pitched on the long hearts. If this is mysterious to you, the extra trick comes from making five spade tricks (that includes a club ruff in the South hand), five hearts and the ♦A-K. Played in hearts, you cannot make any more than four spades, five hearts and the ♦A-K. As usual, ruffing in the long hand (trumping a club in the South hand in this example) is a waste of time.

So, are 4-4 always better than 5-4 fits? Perversely, no – not at all. At slam level maybe, but not necessarily at game level – so you needn't warp your bidding too much or fret over various possibilities in the auction. Where 4-4 fits are important (and the reader may be ahead of me here)


is after a 1NT opening bid where two relatively balanced hands may well make more tricks in a 4-4 major fit than in 3NT. Mind you, given that 4♠ and 4♥ are one trick higher than 3NT, they'd have to, wouldn't they . . . ?



Teachers are very keen to tell beginners all about the well-known Stayman convention without necessarily being clear about its rationale. So let's try to dot the i's and cross the t's in this article. There are two types of hand where the 4-4 fit will gain extra tricks over 3NT with two balanced hands. One is where the trump contract gives declarer control:

Deal 2
 South plays in 4♠.
 West leads the ♣K.

♠ Q 10 8 7
 ♥ K 6 3
 ♦ A K Q 10
 ♣ 7 5



♠ 5 3 2
 ♥ 10 8
 ♦ 8 6 4
 ♣ K Q J 9 4

♠ K J 9 6
 ♥ A 7 4
 ♦ J 9 7 5
 ♣ A 3

♠ A 4
 ♥ Q J 9 5 2
 ♦ 3 2
 ♣ 10 8 6 2

Here, 3NT is doomed by a club lead. In a sense declarer has enough tricks to make 3NT (three spades, two hearts, four diamonds and a club – which adds up to an overtrick, you'll note) but the opponents have the tempo. They can set up four club tricks and gain the lead with the ace of spades in order to enjoy them. In passing, it is worth noting that many no-trump contracts are races between the declaring side and the defenders. The one advantage that the defence has over declarer is that

they get to go first...


Back to the subject matter. In Deal 2 declarer makes 4♠ because he has control of the hand. He can win the club lead, knock out the ace of spades, wait patiently while West takes a club trick and then he will regain the lead. Eventually he will have to concede a heart trick but by then everyone will have lost interest in the deal.



Then there are deals where 4-4 fits can generate extra tricks:

Deal 3
 South plays in 4♠.
 West leads the ♥K.

♠ K J 9 7
 ♥ 7 3
 ♦ K 5 3
 ♣ A 7 6 4




♠ Q 10 8 6
 ♥ A 5 4 2
 ♦ A 9 2
 ♣ K 2

Here, 3NT is bereft of tricks on any lead. There are three spades, one heart, two diamonds and two clubs for a total of eight. Played in spades, though, declarer may well be able to ruff two hearts on table (or two clubs in hand). If he does so, he will make ten tricks (five trump tricks, one heart, two diamonds and two clubs). Here, then, the 4-4 fit is worth two extra tricks over no-trumps.

Now, care must be taken in playing these deals. You have to Count Your Tricks and Plan Your Play (familiar themes, I hope). Try this one, played in 4♥ by South after a Stayman sequence:

Hand 4
South plays in 4♥.
West leads the ♦K.

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

On the sight of dummy, South should pause and make a plan (I make no apology for the continually beating of this particular drum). A count of tricks (winners and losers) shows there to be . . . four heart winners, one diamond winner and three club winners. So that's eight winners. In terms of losers, there are two spade losers and one diamond loser. As so often we have a discrepancy – eight winners, three losers.

We only have two ways of disposing of losers: we can either trump them or dump them (thanks are due to my American friend for this phrase). There is no source of tricks in either dummy or declarer's hand that would allow any discards, so there is to be no dumping. The only way in which we can dispose of losers, then, is to trump them and we have to ruff two losers to raise the winner count to ten.

The important point, though, is that we must not be seduced into ruffing in both hands – with the 4-1 trump break that would be fatal. We either have to ruff two diamonds on the table *or* two spades in hand – but not both. So, win the ace of diamonds and concede a diamond. The ball is now in the defenders' court. If they play three rounds of spades at us we aim to ruff two spades in hand (ruff the third spade, cross to a club, ruff the last spade and draw trumps). If West plays a red card (in practice, he is very likely to play a trump) we ruff a diamond on table, cross to hand, ruff another diamond on table, draw four rounds of trumps and cash the clubs.

Ten tricks come from six trump tricks, one diamond and three clubs. Note that drawing trumps would be fatal, as would any attempt to play this deal on some sort of cross-ruff. It is a major error with these deals to ruff in both hands. □

Top Table

David Burn



DAVID BURN has won most of the national trophies and has represented England at Camrose as well as at European and World level. David coached Britain to a Bermuda Bowl silver medal in 1987 and, more recently, has been the Coach for the England Women's Team that won gold at the European Championship in Dublin and the World Mind Sports in Lille in 2012.

When did you start playing bridge?

At school – Steve Burton, a Camrose player, tried unsuccessfully to teach me calculus but more successfully to encourage me to play bridge.

How often / where do you play?

I work at TGRs Bridge Club in London, so I play there during the week and in a number of matches, tournaments and so forth, at weekends.

Do you always play with the same partners / team-mates? What do you expect of them?

I play on Dame Janet de Botton's team (it is a source of great amusement to us that as a Commander of the British Empire she is now qualified to tell Andrew Robson, a mere Officer, what to do). I expect them not to shout at me when I underbid. I am invariably disappointed.

What do you do for a living?

I refer the Honourable Member to the answers I gave a short while ago.

What are your favourite bridge books?

Adventures in Card Play, and David Bird's

fiction. I am sometimes confused with him because our names sound similar, and when I am congratulated on the Abbot stories I can truthfully say that I wish I had written them.

What are your hobbies?

Reading, cooking, going to the theatre. But the nature of my work means that I don't have as much time for these as I would like.

What do you like and what would you change in bridge?

It ain't broke. So I wouldn't fix it.

What's the bridge success (so far) closest to your heart?

Coaching the British (not English in those days) team in the 1987 Bermuda Bowl, where they won the silver medal. I suppose technically that counts as a failure, but it was a particularly gallant one. Hoping to go one better at the Venice Cup this year, and proud to have been part of the England Women's team in Lille and in Dublin.



EBU ANNUAL REPORT

THE EBU's Annual Report 2012-13 is available on our website. It has been sent to our shareholders and will be discussed at the Annual General Meeting on 2nd October 2013.



The English Bridge Union provides the infrastructure, regulation and development of the game of duplicate bridge in England. We hope this report demonstrates that what we do at national level ensures that these services are delivered promptly and effectively locally. If you cannot access the report online and would like to receive a copy through the post please send an A4 stamped addressed envelope to Annual Report, EBU, Broadfields, Bicester Road, Aylesbury, Bucks, HP19 8AZ and we will be happy to supply you with a copy.