

The Balance

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Case Study

The top line: how did the auction go?

Notice:

- The deal 'belongs' to NS, despite them having the minority of the HCP.
- Most likely all the club North-Souths entered the auction.
- Most were prepared to bid up to 4♠

Dlr: South
 Vul: E/W

♠A K 9 5 3
 ♥J 8 5 2
 ♦J 8
 ♣9 4

♠2
 ♥9 7 6 4 3
 ♦10 4 3 2
 ♣K 6 2

North
 19
 South

♠10 4
 ♥A K Q 10
 ♦A 7 5
 ♣A J 10 5

♠Q J 8 7 6
 ♥--
 ♦K Q 9 6
 ♣Q 8 7 3

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

Board No 19 E/W Vul Dealer South									
Pairs		Contract			Scores		Points		
N/S	E/W	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	N/S	E/W	N/S	E/W
SS3	SS2	1♥	E		9	140		40	
SS6	SS5	1NT	E		6	100	5	35	
SS1	SS4	3♠	S	♠2	9	140	8	32	
1	10	4♠	S		10	420	23	17	
2	12	4♠*	S		10	590	33	7	
3	14	5♥*	W		9	500	26	14	
4	16	3♠	S		10	170	13	27	
5	18	5♥	W		8	300	20	20	
6	2	3♠	S		10	170	13	27	
7	4	3♠	S		10	170	13	27	
8	6	4♠	N		10	420	23	17	
9	8	4♠*	S		10	590	33	7	
10	17	3♥	E		8	100	5	35	
11	1	3♠	S		11	200	18	22	
12	3	4♠*	N		10	590	33	7	
13	5	4♠*	S		11	690		40	
14	7	4♠	S		9		50	2	38
15	9	3♠	S		10	170	13	27	
16	11	4♠*	S		10	590	33	7	
17	13	4♠*	S		10	590	33	7	
18	15	4♠*	S		10	590	33	7	

From class to club duplicate

- ▶ Teaching stresses bidding contracts that make – nothing wrong with that...
- ▶ But the club game is about having a better score than the than those holding the same cards and that means:
 1. Making overtricks to enhance our positive scores.
 2. Playing in higher-scoring strains (no-trumps > majors > minors) when the same number of tricks are available.
 3. If the cards are the other way, ensuring you suffer as small a minus as possible.
 4. ... Or better still, nudging the opponents up a level into a contract they can't make, turning a minus into a plus.
- ▶ The last two involve our side bidding contracts that will not – or may not – make. That's bidding to go down!
- ▶ We must take action when our side is out-gunned.

Who should play 1NT?

- ▶ A thought experiment: four vulnerabilities, our side can make six or seven tricks in no-trumps – should we declare or defend?

'White' – none vul.

Tricks	We	They
7	+90	+50
6	-50	-90

'Green' – them only

Tricks	We	They
7	+90	+100
6	-50	-90

'Red' – us only

Tricks	We	They
7	+90	+50
6	-100	-90

'Amber' – both vul.

Tricks	We	They
7	+90	+100
6	-100	-90

Look at the board!



- ▶ Are you vulnerable?
- ▶ Are they?

Opening the auction

- ▶ Opening the auction at the 1-level shows both HCPs and suit-length. It is a first statement in a conversation that may end in a part-score, game, slam – or doubling the opponents for a penalty.
- ▶ We use the 'rule of 20' to decide whether to open: add the length of the two longest suits to HCPs. If that's 20 or more, you have an opening bid.
- ▶ Example: an ordinary hand with modest distribution;
 - ♠ KJ862
 - ♥ 96
 - ♦ 107
 - ♣ AK65
- ▶ 5 + 4 in length and 11 HCP; it's a minimum opening bid. Anything less lacks 'opening values'.

Unfortunately...

- ▶ We don't pick up opening values every deal – does that mean we are 'out of it' and have to sit on our hands?
- ▶ No!
- ▶ Pre-emptive openings **deny** the values for a 1-level action:
 1. 2♦/♥/♠, typically 6-card suit with 6-9 HCP
 2. 3♣/♦/♥/♠, typically 7 cards and less than 10 HCP
 3. 4♣/♦, typically 8+ cards, unsuited to NTs
 4. 4♥/♠, typically 8 cards and <12 HCP

Interventions

- ▶ **Suit overcalls do not promise opening values**
- ▶ But other interventions after an opponent's 1-suit opening do promise values:
 1. 1NT overcalls (16-18) – not safe with less
 2. Doubles – with no long suit or guaranteed fit, double needs to be prepared for anything partner might call.
 3. Jump overcalls – 11-16 HCP and a 6-card suit [though everyone seems to forget this].
- ▶ Differentiating between calls which promise values and which do not ensures the partnership works together. Both players know whether the aim is to obstruct the opponents or to bid to a making contract.

Let's get active...

- ▶ Health warnings over! How do we get involved in auctions where we lack values and a long-enough suit to pre-empt?
- ▶ We must make sure it is 'safe'. That's safety not so much from the opponents but from partner: she must know we're trying to obstruct and sacrifice, not trying to make something – we don't want her bidding too much.
- ▶ Indicators of safety are:
 1. Prior limitation: such as passing as dealer
 2. Opponents having limited themselves
 3. Not being vulnerable
 4. Partner having passed

Pass once...

- ▶ None vul. Dealer North.

West	North	East	South
–	Pass	1♣	Pass
1♥	??		

♠ QJ96
♥ 82
♦ AJ765
♣ 76

- ▶ Double
- ▶ You wouldn't double if you hadn't passed because partner would take you for stronger and bid too high. But having passed you are limited to 11 HCP (with this shape).

The deal

<h1>1</h1>	♠ Q J 9 6 ♥ 8 2 ♦ A J 7 6 5 ♣ 7 6	Dir: North Vul: None Par: 3♠= N N/S +140
	♠ 4 3 2 ♥ K J 10 7 6 ♦ Q 8 4 ♣ 3 2	♠ A 8 ♥ A 9 5 ♦ 10 3 2 ♣ A Q J 9 8
8 6 + 15 11	♠ K 10 7 5 ♥ Q 4 3 ♦ K 9 ♣ K 10 5 4	N -3-3- S -3-3- E 1-2-1 W 1-2-1

Balancing

- ▶ NS vul. Dealer East.

West	North	East	South
—	—	1♥	Pass
2♥	Pass	Pass	??

♠ AJ54
♥ 7
♦ K842
♣ J964

- ▶ Double
- ▶ You passed over 1♥ so you don't have values. You should not quietly concede 2♥ and, even at these dangerous colours, your perfect shape indicates action.

Further bidding

- ▶ If they bid 3♥ should we press on with 3♠?
- ▶ No.
- ▶ Accept the 'small gain' of pushing them up one. Had we been non-vulnerable then bidding one more is tempting but when we are vulnerable they will often double.
- ▶ Doubled and vulnerable, even down one is a disaster; not for nothing is -200 known as the 'Kiss of Death'.
- ▶ In general, the safe level is governed by how many trumps you have. With 8 combined trumps, bid to the 2-level (8 tricks), with 9, the 3-level. But this is a talk on its own...

The deal

<h1>2</h1>	♠ 10 7 3 2 ♥ A 10 9 ♦ Q J 10 9 ♣ K 2	Dir: East Vul: NS Par: 3♥ = E E/W +140
	♠ K Q 8 ♥ J 8 6 5 ♦ 7 6 5 ♣ Q 7 5	♠ 9 6 ♥ K Q 4 3 2 ♦ A 3 ♣ A 10 8 3
10 8 + 13 9	♠ A J 5 4 ♥ 7 ♦ K 8 4 2 ♣ J 9 6 4	N -2-2- S -2-2- E 1-3-2 W 1-3-2

The doubling rules

- ▶ The bridge course we teach has simple but good rules about doubles of **suit bids**. These are **takeout**,
 1. At 2♠ or below
 2. All opening bids
 3. Whenever they have found a fit and we have not
- ▶ So the doubles we're considering conform – but the context alters their strength.

Why is double so important?

- ▶ Employing double to find a fit has a strong negative inference: when a suit is overcalled (or bid in competition) it suggests no other strains are of interest.
- ▶ When you are short in the suit of their fit, your side has a fit – somewhere.
- ▶ “If they have a fit, you have a fit.”
- ▶ Doubling for takeout with shortage is safe.

Why 'balance'

- ▶ 'Balancing' means to take an action when pass would end the auction.
- ▶ The 'balancing position' is synonymous with 'pass-out seat'
- ▶ Deal 2 featured a 'balancing double', had South passed (and defended 2♥) he would apologise and say "I didn't think I had enough to balance".
- ▶ 'Protection' (protect etc.) is the same terminology. According to the authority that is Wikipedia, 'protect' is in British circulation and balance, the US. However, I think they are interchangeable either side of the Atlantic.

Balancing (2)

- ▶ EW vul. Dealer South.

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	Pass
1♣	Pass	1♥	Pass
1NT	Pass	Pass	??

[1NT = 15-16]

♠ J1094
♥ KQJ6
♦ J10963
♣ ---

- ▶ Dangerous to balance against no-trumps: opponents may be limited but they know their combined HCP and will be inclined to double.
- ▶ But you have shape; with a trump suit, you can surely take tricks. Perhaps double shows diamonds and spades but rather than risk a misunderstanding, I tried 2♦

The deal

<h1>3</h1>	♠ A 5 3 ♥ 7 4 ♦ K 7 ♣ Q J 9 8 5 2	Dir: South Vul: EW Par: 2♦ = S N/S +90
	♠ K 7 6 ♥ A 2 ♦ Q 8 2 ♣ A K 10 6 4	♠ Q 8 2 ♥ 10 9 8 5 3 ♦ A 5 4 ♣ 7 3
10 16 + 6 8	♠ J 10 9 4 ♥ K Q J 6 ♦ J 10 9 6 3 ♣	N -1-1- S -2-1- E 1-1-1 W 1-1-1

Balancing (3)

- ▶ Both vul. Dealer West.

West	North	East	South	
1♥	Pass	2♥	Pass	[1♥ = 5-card major]
Pass	??			

♠ 8762
♥ Q8
♦ A64
♣ KJ65

- ▶ Remember that these colours are the least favourable for balancing, should you act here?
- ▶ Maybe. They never double do they? That means that one down (-100) will be good instead of 2♥ = for -110.
- ▶ The matchpoint demons double and push them to 3♥.

The deal

<h1>4</h1>	♠ 8 7 6 2 ♥ Q 8 ♦ A 6 4 ♣ K J 6 5	Dir: West Vul: Both Par: 4♠= N N/S +620
	♠ J 9 ♥ A K 10 5 2 ♦ Q J 7 ♣ Q 10 2	♠ Q 3 ♥ J 9 3 ♦ 10 9 8 5 2 ♣ A 4 3
10 13 + 7 10	♠ A K 10 5 4 ♥ 7 6 4 ♦ K 3 ♣ 9 8 7	N 4--41 S 4--41 E -11-- W -11--

Key Points

1. You don't need a opening hand to bid.
2. If they have a fit, you have a fit.
3. The hand with shape should act.
4. Double to introduce more than one suit.
5. Look at the board! Remember the colours:
 - **None vul** – fight to declare part-scores
 - **They're vulnerable, we're not** – push once
 - **We're vulnerable, they're not** – be careful
 - **Both vul** – be very careful