

A Difficult Game

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Again...

- ▶ We're going to look at contracts which, for a variety of reasons, present no clear approach.
- ▶ But... That doesn't mean these are outside of normal techniques. In fact, they only emphasize proper preparation:
 - **W**inners and losers – count them
 - **A**ssets – identify them
 - **R**isks – look out for them
 - **P**lan
- ▶ Finesses will still be taken, honours led towards, losers ruffed, long suits established, hold-ups made, your plays camouflaged, their leads analysed – all the regular components of card-play.

"I don't know where to start..."

- ▶ Three classes of 'no clear line':
 1. Contracts with few obvious tricks; examples:
 - i. 1NT opened and passed out or, worse still, doubled
 - ii. Doubled part-scores that indicate a bad trump-break
 - iii. 4-3 fits
 2. Sound contracts but with no clear suit to tackle or finesses to take.
 - i. 3NT with no long suit despite 26, 27 or more HCP
 - ii. 4-4 fits and a 4-1 break – drawing trumps leaves you with none
 - iii. Scrambling tricks in sacrifices
 3. Desperate measures: requiring deception or specific (and unlikely) lie of the cards:
 - i. You've simply got too high

A Difficult Game

- ▶ There is a lot here. I will concentrate on the first type, first subtype, no-trump contracts with few obvious tricks, because,
 - i. The skills are transferable to other situations.
 - ii. 1NT passed out is very common – and is often ‘non-optimal’.
 - iii. A glance at club travellers shows needless catastrophes in 1NT (and 1NTX).
 - iv. No-trumps still seem to cause difficulty for some.
 - v. The other categories, ‘trick desert’ NT games and ‘only chance’ deals are rarer. Though the last are fun – maybe we can return.

Too few tricks in 1NT

▶ ♠ J108
♥ AJ73
♦ K94
♣ KJ7

♠ 9732
♥ K84
♦ 1062
♣ 1064

▶ 1NT passed out, ♦3 lead, low, queen, king:
what's your plan?

A. Play spades

B. Play hearts via a finesse

Too few tricks in 1NT (2)

▶ ♠ J108
♥ AJ73
♦ K94
♣ KJ7

♠ 9732
♥ K84
♦ 1062
♣ 1064

- ▶ What does the lead tell you?
- ▶ The ♦3 suggests leader has only four.
- ▶ There are seven losers ($3♠ + 3♦ + 1♣$) and we don't even have six winners (only five at the very best). There's no great hurry, we won't be discarding winners at the end.

Too few tricks in 1NT (3)

▶ ♠ J108
♥ AJ73
♦ K94
♣ KJ7

♠ 9732
♥ K84
♦ 1062
♣ 1064

▶ Play a spade

1. There is more time because the opponent's danger-suit is only four cards.
2. A losing heart finesse creates another loser.
3. There is no chance of making 1NT: others will be in the same position and we haven't been doubled. This is not in the 'desperate measures' class. We shouldn't worry about going down – no-one will make this.
4. The opponents, after taking their diamonds might lead hearts or clubs, giving us an extra trick – or at the very least, an extra chance in the suit they lead.

Too few tricks in 1NT (4)

▶ ♠ J108
♥ AJ73
♦ K94
♣ KJ7

♠ 9732
♥ K84
♦ 1062
♣ 1064

- ▶ When choosing suits to play look out for these pointers:
1. It is always better if the opponents 'break' a suit (be the first to lead it). Here, had the defence not led diamonds (North holding, say ♦AJ73) West could not have scored a trick in the suit.
 2. Look for honour combinations without alternative approaches – such as spades above. I always tell myself, "at least this is a suit I can't mess up".
 3. Not cashing your winners leaves the defence in the dark as to the location of your high cards. Tackling dummy's length – as above – looks natural and offers no new information.

Too few tricks in 1NT (5)

▶ ♠ J108
♥ AJ73
♦ K94
♣ KJ7

♠ 9732
♥ K84
♦ 106
♣ 10642

- ▶ Whoa! Different hand and different Lead, ♦7, low, queen, king.
- ▶ Now it is very likely North has a five-card suit (at least) and if we play a spade we will be embarrassed when they take their (four) winning diamonds:

▶ ♠ 108
♥ AJ7
♦ ---
♣ KJ7

♠ 973
♥ K84
♦ ---
♣ 106

What do you discard on the last diamond?

- ▶ Look ahead and anticipate your difficulties. Here go for hearts and hope for the best.

Too few tricks in 1NT (6)

▶ ♠ J108
♥ AJ73
♦ K94
♣ A73

♠ 9732
♥ K84
♦ 1062
♣ 1064

- ▶ Another small alteration and back to the ♦3 lead; low, queen, king. What's changed and should we do anything different?
- ▶ We have a certain club trick but the suit is safe and profitable for NS: we will never get a second trick while they set up three.
- ▶ That they have (or can develop) more winners again suggests we play for quick tricks in hearts rather than slowly in spades.
- ▶ If we finesse and lose to ♥Q we can still make the thirteenth if they are 3-3. While if we play spades, lose diamonds and an opponent switches to clubs, we haven't got the time to lose a heart. Before, with ♣KJ7 we were compensated by a club trick we might not otherwise get if they led the suit – we might even get two.
- ▶ The more losers we have the quicker we go about business.

Key points so far

- ▶ Count winners and losers: adopt quick-trick approaches when the number of losers indicates you might either have to discard a winner at the end or weaken one of your options.
- ▶ Select suits which can be played only one way.
- ▶ Let the opponents play 'messy suits'
- ▶ Avoid showing where your strength lies.
- ▶ Don't panic! And don't worry about going down in contracts other will reach. If you can, set yourself a trick-target.

Frozen

- ▶ Of the 'messy suits' a particular subset are important; those neither side can play without conceding an extra trick. Such suits are called *frozen* and they are surprisingly common.
- ▶ ♣ J76
- ▶ ♣ Q52
- ▶ When I attack this suit, low to the queen loses to the ace and next, low to the jack loses to the king. I make no tricks when the ace-king are divided.
- ▶ If opponents break the suit I'm guaranteed a trick by playing low from second-hand.

Frozen – the quiz

- ▶ To be strictly accurate, the term relates to the lie in all four hands. To be useful however, one must spot potentially frozen suits.

▶ ♣ J6 ♦ K62 ♥ AJ2 ♠ A2
♣ A103 ♦ J5 ♥ K103 ♠ Q10

- ▶ Which suits might be frozen?

- a) ♣, ♦, ♥
- b) ♣, ♦, ♠
- c) ♦, ♥, ♠
- d) ♣, ♥, ♠
- e) All of them

Round 2.

▶ ♠ J108
♥ AJ73
♦ K94
♣ KJ7

♠ 9732
♥ K84
♦ 1062
♣ 1064

- ▶ **Q:** Our old friend. Which suits, if any, are frozen?
- ▶ **A:** Diamonds (we mentioned it – the ace-jack lies over the king).
- ▶ **A2:** But also potentially hearts and clubs. Consider South holding ♥1092, North ♥Q65; neither can play the suit but declarer cannot take a quick third trick on her own.

Frozen – don't touch!

- ▶ Leave potentially frozen suits alone. Or at the very least, until as late as you can.
- ▶ Although hearts in round 1. of the quiz were 'guessable', leave those alone/as late as possible too.
- ▶ Better still, try to get the opponents to play these suits. This is a technique called 'elimination play'. The idea is that you remove the suits it is safe to play and leave them only with unsafe options. This is a tactic about which whole books are written...
- ▶ Even without a perfect elimination, that is the opponents may have safe option – if they knew what it was, don't be afraid to concede an inevitable loser and make them guess what to play.

Other Points

1. I've concentrated on poor contracts reached by reasonable actions: on these don't lose percentage-points by going down more than you have to.
2. But when something has gone wrong you have to try and make your contract – or at least, do no worse than others in a more sensible spot.
3. Don't let your bidding upset you so much you do not concentrate on the play. The only reason to reflect on your own actions is to assess what the opponents know about your hand.

βοῦς ἐπὶ γλῶσση μέγας βέβηκεν

▶ ♠ K4
♥ Q1083
♦ A1076
♣ Q63

▶
1♥
3NT

♠ 732
♥ KJ94
♦ 3
♣ AKJ107

1♣
2♥
Pass!

▶ Lead ♦8; what are your thoughts?

▶ *[For the rest I'm dumb;] a great ox stands upon my tongue – Aeschylus, Agamemnon.*

Last Night

- ▶ Knock-out teams: vulnerable against non-vul opponents, how can the tide of expensive undertricks be stemmed?

Key Points

- ▶ Embrace 1NT contracts! These are excellent opportunities to demonstrate your declarer-play technique.
- ▶ Poor contracts are a matter of time: keep a count of their winners and yours, make sure you can take all yours before they get theirs.
- ▶ Emotions: just because your contract isn't very good doesn't mean you have to lose points. Just because you are doubled, doesn't mean it is a disaster. You can win these boards.

Credits

- ▶ I lifted the 1NT example from Tony Forrester's book, *Secrets of Success* (Faber and Faber, 1993). With few writers addressing this topic it left a lasting impression. I read it preparing to dabble with bridge teaching in 2008 and that summer, bumped into Mr Forrester at the water-cooler in Brighton. I complimented him on it, saying though I'd gone to it for students, I had learnt a lot. He seemed quite chuffed. I'm sure he won't mind the extracted deal here.
- ▶ For a guide to declarer's thought processes there are a number of 'over the shoulder' books. To my knowledge Terence Reese originated the format and his remain classics. See,
 - *Play Bridge With Reese* (1960, reprinted 2002, Better Bridge Now)
 - *Play These Hands With Me* (1976, reprinted 2001, Better Bridge Now)
 - *Over Your Shoulder* by Tony Forrester & Brian Senior (Batsford, 1994)
 - *The Bridge Philosopher* by James S Kauder (1972). Kauder takes a sidelong look at play and covers idea not met elsewhere; one of a series.
 - *Play Swiss Teams of Four with Mike Lawrence* by Mike Lawrence (2006)