

2.7.19

Your Guess is as Good as Mine (but I don't play hunches)

There wasn't much interesting to speak of Tuesday gone, not that I could see anyway. Okay, a 7NT hand, but I presume everyone bid that (or perhaps not) and there was an 'out-there' hand with 7-5 distribution but hands like that do genuinely have elements of guesswork involved. Unlike the following sequence:

N	E	S	W
1C	Dbl (1)	Rdbl (2)	1D (3)
1NT (4)	2D	Dbl (5)	P
P	P		

Assume N/S are playing 12-14 no-trump, what do bids 1 to 5 mean exactly (they have exact meanings, so if you're trying to guess what they mean, I'm afraid you don't know your Acol). Have a go at explaining before I say what they do mean exactly in classic Acol. Then if you're looking at the answers in disbelief, you really do need to improve your understanding of the system. Still, not just to 'appeal to authority' ('Acol says this so it must be right'). I'll explain the logic of the meanings and if you still can't stomach the exactness of the system, then certainly, your guess is as good as mine. But I'm not guessing.

Okay, so, in numerical order (why not):

1. *Either* a minimum opening hand of 12-15 pts and at least 3 card support for the unbid suits *or* any 16pt hand (with the exception of 16-18pts balanced and a club stop – this would be a 1NT overcall).
2. Any 9+pt hand with the exception of 10+pt hand with a good 6-card suit (bid, for example, 2S on this) or a 10-12pt hand with club support and no four-card major (bid 2NT on this)
3. 8+pts
4. Pretty much an impossible bid. Best guess is 11-12pts, must be at least 5 clubs and a diamond stop
5. Penalty double

Anything surprise you there? Well, I promised you Acol and I've given it to you, I promised you logic and here it is.

1. With tolerance for the unbid suits, East wants to compete, so she doubles. The double also doubles up (haha) as the first move on any strong hand. East distinguishes between the two types of hand she might have doubled with after her partner removes the double. With the weaker hand, East passes whatever her partner bids and with the stronger hand she bids on. Although, to make life difficult for the opponents, she might raise her partner's suit with a weak hand. So, for example, taking a different sequence:

N	E	S	W
[1H]	Dbl	[P]	1S
[P]			

Now, from East:

Pass	12-15 pts, at least 3 Spades
2C/2D	16-18 pts. 5 card suit
2S	12-15 pts, at least 4 Spades
1NT	19 – 21 pts, Heart stop (with 16-18 pts balanced, East would have overcalled 1NT)
3S	16 – 20 pts, at least 4 Spades
3C/3D	19-21 pts, 5-card suit
2NT	22-24 pts, Heart stop

Higher bids are even stronger – I'm sure you can complete the sequence.

You'll notice that I haven't said anything like: *the original double of a 1C opening shows four cards in the majors*. It shows nothing of the sort. If the doubler is weak, she only needs 3 cards in Spades and Hearts, otherwise she prevents herself competing on a number of decent balanced hands. And if she's strong, her only suit may be Diamonds. She may be, for instance be 2.2.6.3 (doubletons in both majors). Similarly, a double of an opening of 1H does not guarantee 1S.

If you're fiddling around trying to find other bids than the double for the strong hands, I can assure you that you're either trying to invent an immensely complicated alternative to a simple and elegant system or you haven't fully thought through what you're going to do with strong hands, on which you don't want to double.

2. Where responder has 9+pts, she knows she has the opponents in trouble. Why? Because she knows her side has the balance of the points and that the opponents need to remove the redouble. If they let it stand with a maximum of 19pts between them, they're fighting fire with a dud match.

The only exceptions to redoubling with a 9pt hand are strongish one-suited hands (where the responder needs to communicate his hand quickly) and a hand worth a normal raise to 3C. Here, the 2NT response substitutes for the 3C immediate raise without the intervening double. A raise to 3C shows 6-9pts and club support (one level higher than without the double to try to shut out the opponents)

So what would a South response of 1D, 1H or 1S to her partner's double of 1C, mean? It would mean a 4-card suit and 7-8pts. Yes, that's right, it's weak and non-forcing. If South does limit her hand like this, it's very useful knowledge for her partner to have. And, as I said, she needs to put pressure on the opponents by redoubling when she has a stronger hand.

3. 8+pts and 4+ Diamonds. Surely you didn't say that 'it's just a bid West made because he has to bid'. He doesn't have to bid, unlike a situation without the intervening redouble. You can figure it out.

4. 1NT is an impossible bid. Why? Why isn't it just the 'normal' 15-16pts?

Because with anything more than a bare minimum, *North passes*. Yes, that's right. He passes because he doesn't want to let E/W off the hook. That hook being allowing his partner to whack the opponents for penalties. And he doesn't do that by removing the redouble.

North, with a minimum hand of 11-12 pts, having not opened 1NT in the first place, cannot have a 1NT bid now. If he's so weak he will have a long suit, or a second suit, which he should be bidding.

5. Penalties? At the 2-level? This seems to be sacrilege these days, with most players thinking you will never beat the opponents at the one, two or three of a suit level. But I can assure you, classical Acol always used penalty doubles of suit part-scores *if your partner has bid* (doesn't include passes). When your partner has bid, you can count on him for some defensive strength and it's then that you

want occasionally to hammer the opponents. If he hasn't bid, there is virtually no chance that you can beat a suit part-score on your own so it's then that you want to compete, not get penalties. And I can also assure you, many lucrative penalty doubles of part scores are to be had. Particularly these days when players seem to think no-one will ever double them for hundreds of points at a low level.

The original sequence happened on board 4. I cheated a little because the N/S pair weren't playing a 12-14pt no-trump. And West, of course, got it wrong. South didn't and raked in 800.

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1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
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Dir: West
Vul: All

♠ K 10 9 4

♥ 9 2

♦ A J 5

♣ K Q 7 2

♠ 5 3

♥ 8 3

♦ 9 6 2

♣ J 10 9 8 4 3

	NORTH	
WEST	4	EAST
	SOUTH	

♠ A Q 8 2

♥ Q J 10 5 4

♦ K 10 4

♣ A

13

1

16

10

♠ J 7 6

♥ A K 7 6

♦ Q 8 7 3

♣ 6 5

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