

Sometimes more is Less - Norman's Notes No. 42

An Unusual No-Trump

Board 1 July 4th

Most players are familiar with - and occasionally use - the Unusual No-Trump (UNT), showing at least 5-5 in the minor suits after opponents have bid one or both major suits. Thus 1♥/1♠ - 2NT; or 1♥ - pass - 2♥ - 2NT; or 1♠ - pass - 2♥ - 2NT etc.

But the bid can be used at higher levels. Not 3NT (1♥ - pass - 3♥ - 3NT). That must be reserved as a natural bid with a powerful hand and probably a double heart stop, but 4NT.

This was West's hand on Board 1 at Bury Club, 4th July:

♠ 5

♥ -

♦ A K J 10 9 6 3

♣ A Q 9 6 4

The bidding starts: 1♥ - pass - 4♥ - ? and 4th in hand, the massive 7-5 minor suit holding is ideal for the UNT.

These were the full hands:

Dealer North. Neither vulnerable.

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

After West's 4NT, North will - or should - pass, leaving options for partner, East will bid 5♣ (none of, "I only had two jacks in my hand, partner"), and South will probably bid 5♥. (Or South and West will pass and North bid 5♥). Should West now bid 6♣? It's a difficult decision; excellent if the contract succeeds but disastrous if it fails and 5♥ can be defeated.

In practice, three EWs bid to 6♣. Two were allowed to play there, undoubled, and one North continued to 6♥ (played, undoubled, for 11 tricks).

How many tricks will East make in 6♣? Unless South finds a spade lead, the answer is 13! But surely declarer's 'correct' play is to finesse and lose a trick in clubs? Fortunately - or unfortunately for the defenders - there is no entry to the East hand, and declarer must lay down the ♣A with a satisfying result.

But that bidding sequence isn't quite what occurred at the tables. The two declarers in 6♣ were West, not East. They had not used the UNT. And with North 100% certain to lead a top heart, West made 13 tricks for +940.

Readers may note that if West had insisted on playing in the much better diamond suit he could have ruffed the heart lead, cashed ♦A and found an entry to dummy with ♦8. Now take the losing club finesse, and lose a further trick to North's inevitable spade exit!