

Playing Teams

A new series by one of England's leading players and teachers

FOR many of us, the vast majority of bridge played is of the pairs variety, with an occasional foray into a teams event. As a consequence of this, for those who enjoy the teams format, spending a little time to consider strategies that are specific to it is probably a worthwhile exercise. In the forthcoming issues I will be presenting (and attempting to explain) some of these ideas. I will begin with some advice on declarer play.

As declarer, do not worry about (undoubled) overtricks.

A given problem might be handled in different ways, depending on whether one is playing pairs or teams. This is due to the difference in the scoring methods. On the one hand, in pairs, a result is good, or bad, depending on how many other results it has beaten (by how much is irrelevant). On the other hand, in teams, on each board, your score is added to your team-mates' score and the size of this total is critical. For this reason, in teams play, it is sensible to adopt an insurance policy, whereby small losses are accepted in order to guard against incurring large losses.

An example hand from a teams match may serve to illustrate this concept.

N/S Game. Dealer West.

♠ 9 7 4 3
♥ 10 7 6
♦ K 9 7 4
♣ J 6

♠ A K 5
♥ A 9
♦ A 8
♣ A Q 10 9 8 3

West	North	East	South
3♥	Pass	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

West leads the king of hearts. How should South plan the play?

Declarer wins the second round of hearts with East discarding the two of diamonds at trick two. Clearly, the clubs must be established and the normal way of doing this is to go to dummy via the king of diamonds to take the club finesse – on a good day, making eleven tricks. Playing pairs (when overtricks *do* matter), this is the correct line of play – but not at teams!

The correct line at teams

One should realise that as long as the clubs can be established without losing the lead to West, 3NT is certain to make. For this reason, South should adopt the line of play that, in the process of establishing the clubs, minimises the chance of West gaining the lead. On these grounds, the correct line is for declarer to *cash the ace of clubs at trick three* and then to continue with the queen of clubs. If East has the king, the contract is safe; and if West has the singleton king, it will drop and declarer's careful play will have been rewarded (of course, if West has the king but it is not singleton, then 3NT is doomed anyway).

The play of cashing the ace of clubs reduces the chances of an extra overtrick but maximises the chance of making the vulnerable game, thereby accepting a possible *small* loss (an overtrick) in order to guard against a *large* loss (going down in game). The full deal is in the next column.

On this occasion, by playing correctly, declarer managed to drop West's king, making eleven tricks for +660. When the board was replayed, declarer's team-mates had been fortunate enough to defeat an optimistic 6♣ by two tricks for a score of +200 and a gain of 860 for the team (converting to +13 IMPs).



Derek Patterson

TEAMS TACTICS

One can see that it would have been 13 IMPs even if 3NT had made nine or ten tricks – the overtricks were of no importance at all!

♠ 9 7 4 3
♥ 10 7 6
♦ K 9 7 4
♣ J 6

♠ 10 8 2
♥ K Q J 8 4 3 2
♦ 6 3
♣ K

♠ Q J 6
♥ 5
♦ Q J 10 5 2
♣ 7 5 4 2

♠ A K 5
♥ A 9
♦ A 8
♣ A Q 10 9 8 3

However, if declarer had taken the club finesse, then 3NT would have failed by three tricks and the team would have lost 3 IMPs.

Therefore, the decision to play the ace of clubs first was worth 16 IMPs, justifying the strategy of not worrying about overtricks at teams. □

MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

As a member of the EBU, you can receive the following benefits:

- HMCA healthcare benefits
- Special Rates at Barceló Hotels
- EBU Prizes used to pay at Barceló Hotels
- Household Insurance Scheme
- Club Insurance
- Car Hire
- Travel Insurance

Read all about it at www.ebu.co.uk (click on Membership Benefits in the right-hand-side menu on the home page).