



# All Guns Blazing!

IMAGINE THAT you are South with the following hand:

♠	A J 10 8 2
♥	A Q J 5 2
♦	K 7
♣	3

You are the dealer and open 1♠, partner raising to 3♠. How should you proceed?

To make slam a certainty, partner seems to require the ♠K-Q and two aces, or ♠K-Q, ♥K and one ace, neither being possible after the limit raise. It is conceivable that partner has something akin to:

♠ K 7 5 3 ♥ 7 6 3 ♦ A 5 2 ♣ A 9 2 when 6♠ would be a reasonable proposition but opposite some responding hands such as:

♠ K 7 5 3 ♥ K 7 ♦ 10 9 5 ♣ K Q 10 4 it would be desirable to play in 4♠ and no higher. On that basis, under normal circumstances, either opener should bid 4♠, or choose a slam-try, such as 4♥, thereby consulting partner.

Playing teams, however, there will be circumstances under which a more aggressive approach could be condoned. The point is that teams bridge is played in matches, one team against another. In certain forms, such as a knock-out competition, the sole objective is to win any given match – the margin of victory being irrelevant. If, when nearing the end of an encounter, one team is a long way behind, that team should be prepared to take more risks than normal, in order to make up the lost ground.

For example, if, after twenty-four boards in a 32-board match, a team found itself 40 IMPs behind, then the players of that team should realise that they are unlikely to recoup the deficit by utilising normal tactics. They must go down fighting and the most sensible strategy would be to try

to create swings, in the hope that these turn out to be favourable. It is inadvisable, however, to take long-shots as these invariably turn a difficult situation into one that is insurmountable.

The recommended approach is to make a bid or play that is just slightly against the odds. In this way, hopefully, the opponents will not make the same decision and there will still be a reasonable chance (close to 50%) of success, thereby creating a positive swing for the trailing side.

How would these circumstances affect the decision on our featured deal? When the hand actually occurred, opener recognised a perfect opportunity to substantially reduce the opponents' lead and via the auction detailed below, bid up to 6♠. To do this missing two aces would have been reckless but to bid slam missing the queen of trumps and one ace represented a fair shot. On the lead of the ♥8, the dummy went down and in order to make the slam, declarer had to negotiate the following trump suit:

♠	K 9 5 4
♠	A J 10 8 2

He started with the ace of spades and continued with the jack of spades, with both opponents following (West twice). Normally, with four cards missing, the drop would be preferred although the odds between this and taking the finesse are very close. Hence, South identified a further chance to create a swing, reasoning that although the bidding had been optimistic, the contract was reasonable and the opponents in the other room might have reached the same spot. In that case, a

successful finesse might still achieve the desired swing because, at the other table, they would probably play for the drop, or maybe start with the king first. Accordingly, the jack of spades was run and when East showed out, the slam had been brought home – with some panache!

Here is the full deal:

Game All. Dealer South.			
Contract: 6♠. Lead: ♥8.			
♠	K 9 5 4		
♥	K 7		
♦	A 8 6 3		
♣	J 10 8		
♠	Q 7 6	♠	3
♥	8 3	♥	10 9 6 4
♦	J 9 5 4	♦	Q 10 2
♣	K 6 5 2	♣	A Q 9 7 4
		♠	A J 10 8 2
		♥	A Q J 5 2
		♦	K 7
		♣	3

North	South
	1♠
3♠	4NT
5♥ <sup>1</sup>	6♠
Pass	

<sup>1</sup> Showing two key cards, in this case the ♠K and the ♦A and also denying the ♠Q.

South's bidding and play had been designed to create a positive swing for his side without taking any ridiculous risks. The bidding rated to prove successful quite often (say 40 % of the time) and the situation demanded some lively action. The rationale was that a 40% chance to greatly reduce the gap was worth taking when, otherwise, the odds of overcoming such a large deficit were very poor indeed. Desperate times call for desperate measures.

The chosen line of play was adopted on

**2011-2012 NICKO:** Congratulations to Cambridge A (Chris Jagger, Jon Cooke, Jonathan Mestel and Julian Wightwick) who have won the 2011/12 National Inter-Club Knockout. They beat Cheltenham B by 43 IMPs in the final.

similar grounds and in practice, South's well-reasoned tactics did indeed create a 13-IMP swing for the trailing side (incidentally, beginning a run of similar results that secured a most unlikely victory).

Other ways of creating such swings include:

- Pre-empting on hands that normally would not quite qualify for such a treatment;
- Bidding slightly more aggressively than normal to reach game (or slam, as we have seen);
- Being less cautious, although still realistic, when doubling for penalties.

In all cases, a player should be prepared to take a slightly bigger risk than normal, in order to rescue a near-hopeless cause. Wild risks, however, should be avoided. Perhaps team-mates will be able to produce the goods and it would be unforgivable to undo their good work by sheer recklessness.

It should be noted that the side that is ahead would be well-advised to attempt to neutralise these tactics by being more aggressive themselves, especially in terms of bidding thin games and thin slams. On another tack, please be aware that in a multiple or Swiss teams event and, also, when the match is part of a league, the margin of defeat is very likely to be relevant and so this 'going down fighting' approach is inappropriate for such events.

## CONCLUSION

Towards the end of a knock-out match, if the opponents have established a nearly unassailable lead, a player should be prepared to take marginally more risky actions than normal in order to create swings, without which the match is bound to be lost anyway. If your team must go down, then go down all guns blazing!

P.S. In the previous articles, I identified certain strategies, appropriate to all teams play. In this one, I have ended the series by considering a specific situation and how it might affect a player's approach. Despite its lack of generality, the topic merits discussion because of the frequent use of the knock-out format in teams play. □

## Top Table

## Simon Cope

**SIMON COPE is a 29-year-old full-time bridge professional from London. Having represented England several times at Junior level, he has since combined playing with several roles as NPC and coach of various teams, and at different times has captained U20s, U25s, Women's and Open teams. His successes as a player include coming second at the prestigious Icelandair Teams and winning several major domestic events.**



### When did you start playing bridge?

I started playing bridge at about the age of 13, when I stumbled across my school bridge club by mistake. I started becoming engrossed in it and the more I played, the more it fed my addiction!

### How often / where do you play?

I play pretty much daily, at a variety of bridge clubs over North London and additionally I play frequently with friends on the website [www.bridgebase.com](http://www.bridgebase.com) late at night.

### Do you always play with the same partners / team-mates? What do you expect of them?

I frequently play with the same people, both as partners and team-mates, but I think it is good to experiment with new people now and again – I think it broadens your horizons, which is especially important for someone who is young. All I expect is for them to behave reasonably, i.e. to give their best on every deal, and to accept that we all make mistakes sometimes, and it is not intentional. There is nothing worse than partner screaming at you over the table in front of the opponents; I don't like it, so why should anyone else?

### What do you do for a living?

I teach and play bridge for a living – I feel that I am lucky to be able to do something I love for a living. It also gives me an enormous sense of pleasure seeing someone I have taught going on to achieve some of their goals in the game.

### What are your favourite bridge books?

*Card Play Technique* by Victor Mollo. David Bird's imaginative books are also a really fun read, and bridge should be fun!

### What are your hobbies?

I love travelling first and foremost, with a particular affection for southern Africa. I also love playing tennis and golf, and (surprisingly, I know!) enjoy going to the gym. As regards watching sport, cricket, tennis, football and rugby are high on the list. Dining out with friends is also enjoyable.

### What do you like and what would you change in bridge?

The game is unique: it is almost impossible to encounter an identical situation twice, so the need to think on your feet and use your powers of logic is fascinating. One thing I would like to see is some BAM (Board-A-Match) events in England – seems like a fun format to me!

### What's the bridge success (so far) closest to your heart?

The two best moments for me have been as respectively coach and captain of the Open team: winning the silver medal in Beijing in 2008 as coach and qualifying for next year's Bermuda Bowl as non-playing captain of the Open team in Dublin last year. In terms of playing, my most satisfying results were winning the Swiss Pairs in Brighton in 2008 and getting a silver medal in the 2009 Icelandair Teams. The best thing, though, is that I have gained an enormous number of friends all over the world.