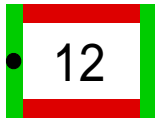


Matters Arising 100

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 10 - 14 Oct 2022

Improving Chances

5 4
K Q 10 8 7 6 5 4
K 4
Q



K 6 2
3
8 7 2
A J 10 6 5 2

On this hand from Tuesday North typically opened 4H and faced a defence starting a diamond to West's A and one back to declarer's K. Now what?


Missing 3 Aces declarer cannot afford a second spade loser too, so declarer has two choices: assume the AS is onside, or assume KC is onside so that a spade can be discarded on a club. The latter only works though if a co-operative East covers the Q, which given North's likely shortage

in the suit is unlikely to gain, for without the cover there is no access to dummy for a second club. It looks right then to play for AS onside.

What of trumps? If 2-2 there is no problem. However a singleton A means that a second trick will be lost to the J if declarer starts with a top honour, but starting with any other card risks losing to a singleton J.

We could improve our chances by leading trumps towards hand as a singleton honour in the West hand is revealed immediately.

Consequently we play a black card at trick 2, either crossing directly to AC or making use of KS on the basis of our assumption that the AS has to be onside.

10 9 8 7 3	5 4	A Q J
A	K Q 10 8 7 6 5 4	J 9 2
A Q 9	K 4	J 10 6 5 3
9 8 4 3	Q	K 7
		
	K 6 2	
	3	
	8 7 2	
	A J 10 6 5 2	

When a heart is led from table West' is forced to play their singleton A and declarer avoids a second trump loser.

Tricks Of The Trade

	declarer	dummy
trumps	A K x x x	Q x x
side suit	Q x x x	A K x

dummy also has some xs elsewhere

Variations on the set-up above are quite common, with trumps untouched declarer wants 4 tricks from the side suit. It may seem natural to draw all the trumps, assumed 3-2, and rely on the side suit breaking 3-3.

Better though is to draw just two rounds including the Q and then tackle the side suit. If this breaks 3-3 then after three rounds you can draw the last trump and enjoy the x at the end.

Suppose though that the side suit doesn't break, and the enemy score a ruff. That is their last trump so you can use dummy's last trump to ruff the final side suit x. You still end up losing just one trick as you would have done had you drawn trumps given the uneven side suit break, so are no worse off.

The benefit comes if the side suit doesn't break and the defender short in it doesn't possess the outstanding trump. Now you get to ruff the 4th round before returning to hand to draw the last trump, thereby achieving your target. A real heads I win, tails I don't lose technique.

10 8 5 3 2		J 9
A 10 7		K Q 9 4 3
10 8		J 4
K Q 8		A 10 3 2

Thursday's hand 7 appeared to be an opportunity to use the technique, with East in hearts after North opened 1S, for if the defence cash 4 tricks (2 spades and 2 diamonds) before North leads a club the situation is surely as described above. Thus the technique can be used to improve one's chances beyond relying on the JC falling in 2 or 3 rounds.

Yet on this occasion it is a distraction, for North opened 1S, so with the defence having taken 2 tricks in the suit we know a) that South is out of the suit and b) that North has one honour left. There is a marked ruffing finesse against North which can be used to set up a spade on which to discard the long club. Thus the club split is irrelevant.

Win the club switch with the A and play off KH and AH. This too is a standard play designed to uncover a singleton South which would allow a finesse against North's J when originally holding Jxxx.

On the deal trumps behave, so the third round completes the drawing of enemy teeth. Now club to Q and then 10S. Neither covering nor ducking works for North, with KC a further entry to dummy should North cover forcing declarer to ruff.

Here the ruffing finesse also sets up the 5th spade, but declarer has nothing useful to discard on it. Had declarer got in early enough the ruffing finesse could have been used to ditch their diamonds, and when clubs are played at the end it is in the search for a second overtrick.

The defence can be more testing. Suppose North wins their partner's opening spade lead, cashes a second honour in the suit and then leads the 6.

North has bid spades, South has led high low. That is surely enough to tell you not to ruff low. Options seem to be to put all your money on North holding JH by ruffing with the 9, or ruffing with the Q and hoping either to finesse South for the J or drop the J doubleton. However the decision can be deferred by discarding a diamond. South ruffs, and unless able to put partner in with a diamond the deferment becomes permanent.

A K Q 6		
J 8 5		
A Q 5		
9 6 4		
10 8 5 3 2	7	J 9
A 10 7		K Q 9 4 3
10 8		J 4
K Q 8		A 10 3 2
		7 4
		6 2
		K 9 7 6 3 2
		J 7 5

Of course if the defence take 2 diamonds too before leading the third spade East cannot avoid the decision. Today the 9H is the winning play, tomorrow ...

Thoughts About Thoughts

Board 14 on Monday looks quite mundane, but ...

A 8 6		E	S	W	N
K 9 7 6		1NT	P	2H	P
A J 9 8 3		2S	P	P*	3D
5		all pass *see text			
K 10 4 3 2	14	Q J 7			
Q 10 8		A 5 4			
K 6		Q 10 4			
Q 10 8		A J 4 2			
		9 5			
		J 3 2			
		7 5 2			
		K 9 7 6 3			

At my table East opened 1NT and was transferred into spades by partner, a contract which I as North declined to pass out, coming in with 3D.

There is no doubt that 3D is pushing the boat out, and the resulting contract on this occasion is fairly ugly. The natural spade lead allows the third spade to be ruffed, and achieving this and hoping the defence help me score my Kings was the limit of my plans.

This is not a simple case of fatalistically accepting a bottom for my sins. Surveying the North-South cards it seems likely that we could score at most one trick in each suit in defence of a spade contract, so pass from me would have meant -140 or even -170. The former means 2 down in diamonds is good, and the latter 3 down is fine. On the night eight tricks came my way, enough to have survived a double for -100.

If finding yourself in a poor contract turn your thoughts to what the enemy could achieve if declaring. You may well conclude that your target is for fewer tricks than needed to make your own contract.

Back to the hand in question, and to the East-West bidding. With 10 points, a 5 card suit and three tens might West have rebid 2NT rather than passing? Yes, but given the poor quality of the spades a reluctance to do so is understandable.

Double at the end by West is also a good option, though again many players are understandably reluctant to double the opposition into game.

Might East have bid 3S at the end with a guaranteed 8 card fit. Yes, but it could easily be the sort of hand where both sides can make a two level contract in their chosen suits, but not a three level one. There was also another problem, namely that asterisk by West's pass in the bidding.

It is there because West thought before passing, the dreaded hesitation. Why does it matter? Because any alternative that West was considering would have to involve their hand being at the top end of the range for their final pass, which means any action taken by East would be safer than average for the auction. Any bid now made by East would surely appear to have been influenced by this knowledge.

There are times when you need to think in the auction, and if your eventual bid conveys unauthorised information you just have to hope that either partner is uninterested or has an automatic bid so that the hesitation causes no problem. Here however the slow pass was entirely avoidable, and above all else it is a slow pass that needs to be avoided if at all possible.

Planning the play is a regular occupation of any player hoping to improve. So too should planning the auction. Instead of simply making a bid and waiting for the bidding to return to you to decide on your next one, look ahead in the bidding. Quite often the correct bid now will be determined by your options for the next round. On this occasion the correct time for West to have a think was for their 2H bid. That bid is easy to find, but don't make it until you have decided what you are going to say when the bidding returns to you.

Hesitating before bidding 2H conveys no unauthorised information as partner doesn't know whether you needed to think because of your weakness, your strength or your shape. Having done your thinking at this point making your chosen continuation over partner's 2S can now be made in tempo.

I welcome any comments or queries sent me at martyn@orpheusmail.co.uk though they may be used in future issues should I choose to produce such. Or they may not. You have been warned.

NB, I do try replying to mails raising a specific point, so if I seem to ignore you do check your spam folder after a day or three.

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