

Matters Arising 116

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 30 Jan - 3 Feb 2023

Extra Chance

Q 8 5 4 2
6 2
J
A K Q 6 2



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

Tuesday, you are North playing in 4S on a diamond lead. There are an easy 11 tricks if both black suits are 3-2. If spades are 4-1 you won't be able to avoid a trump loser, but can you see any way by which you might avoid a club loser if they are 4-1?

In order to avoid a club loser if the suit breaks badly you will need to ruff a club without suffering a club ruff earlier. This will require the hand short in clubs to be short in

spades too. Certainly not a given, but if it's your lucky day why not take advantage?


Win AD and cash the two top spades, getting the welcome news that they break 3-2. Now play off the top two clubs.

If both defenders follow then the suit has behaved, so you can draw the last trump and enjoy the clubs.

If someone discards on the second club you appear to have struck lucky, for surely they would ruff in with what is otherwise a losing spade. Next comes QC and a club ruff on table, establishing the last club as a winner. Ruff a diamond, draw the last trump, concede two hearts at the end.

But what if it's not your lucky day and someone ruffs the second club? Then you will still have a trump on table to ruff the 4th club, so in effect you have swapped the club loser you would have had had you drawn all the trumps for a ruffed loser. You are no worse off than if you had drawn trumps.

Definitely a heads I win, tails I don't lose line.

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

Count Your Tricks

As declarer I have a natural inclination to count my losers as usually there are fewer of these than winners. Sometimes though there is no substitute for counting your tricks.

K 3 2
A 8 2
A Q 10
K J 10 5



Q 10 6
K 7
K 8 7 5 2
Q 3 2

This hand occurred on Tuesday, with North declaring in 3NT against 4H lead. If the hearts are 5-3 we might be in danger of losing 3 hearts and 2 black Aces, but counting winners we might think: *win trick 1, run 5 diamonds, knock-out AC, win heart continuation, which with 3 club tricks makes 10 tricks in all.*

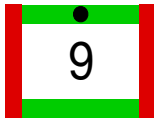
Unfortunately that makes an assumption, namely that there are 5 diamonds to run. It may be that we have to fall back on that, but is there an alternative count?

2 hearts, 3 top diamonds and 3 clubs by force comes to 8. A ninth will come if the diamonds split or by knocking out AS if the defence can't get 3 hearts and 2 Aces first.

Duck the first heart and win the second one the cards in which will probably suggest whether the opening lead was from four or five.

Now tackle clubs. They will almost certainly continue hearts when in with AC. Win and lay down A and then Q of diamonds. If the suit breaks you are in clover, if not you still have the suit under control and can set up a spade trick.

The contract makes unless diamonds are 4-1, hearts are 5-3 and the AS is in the long heart hand.

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

Setting up diamonds first allowed the defence to score 2 hearts and a trick in each of the other suits. Moral: We don't always play our longest suit first in no trumps.

After A Double

7 4 Also on Tuesday West found themselves
 K 6 5 2 the proud owner of the 13 cards left when
 10 9 8 7 2 their partner opened 1H and South doubled
 Q 2 for take-out. What would you bid?

Responding after the enemy have made a take-out double is not the same as when they have passed.

When showing support for partner's suit the approach leans towards bidding 1 more. Thus if you have support but such a weak hand you would normally pass, raise. If you would normally raise to the 2 level with 4 card support, now raise to 3. However we don't take the approach any further, as with a normal raise to 3 we bid 2NT, and with a normal raise to game, we bid game.

The loss of the natural 2NT response is no big deal; indeed many partnerships do away with this bid in an uncontested auction anyway.

The enemy double provides us with an additional bid, redouble, and we put that to use to show a hand with 9+ points, or 10+ according to taste, with no support for partner. A natural 2NT response will now be amongst the hands shown by a redouble. This XX, strongly suggesting that your side has the balance of points, is often the starting point for a penalty hunt, and also serves to limit the strength of any hand on which a simple change of suit bid is made.

7 4	14	10 6 3
K 6 5 2		A J 10 8 4
10 9 8 7 2		5 4
Q 2		A K 10
A K Q		
Q 7		
A K 3		
8 7 5 4 3		

Two Wests bid one more by saying 3H, and this cut North-South out of the auction, allowing a joint top for the two pairs concerned.

A more subdued approach from the other Wests allowed North-South to play in spades making 8 tricks. Even if they had to go to the 3 level for one down this was still better for North-South than 3H making the other way.

Don't Duck

We are well versed in the virtues of hold up plays designed to sever communications between the defenders, but we have to be careful not to overuse the technique. Here is Monday's hand 5 with West in 1NT facing a spade lead.

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

Clearly the red suits will need to provide most of the tricks, and whilst it might be tempting to hold off with the AS doing so could mean that after a trick or two the defence will switch to clubs and cause similar concerns there.

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

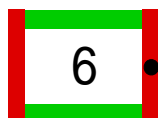
Winning trick one, playing a diamond to table - North surely will duck - and taking the heart finesse puts declarer on track for 7 tricks, and with the diamonds breaking there is the prospect of two more tricks there if the suit is continued whilst the club suit is still closed.

Yet of six declarers three made only 5 tricks, two 7 and one 8. We have no records of the play on Mondays, but I suspect ill-advised hold-up plays allowing the defence tricks in both black suits was the culprit.

Its a Declarer's Dog's Life

A K Q 9 4
10 7
A 8 7 6
9 6

Our opponents were one of three to bid 6NT on this hand from Thursday. South declared against my lead of 8S.



J 10 6
K Q J 5
K J 4
A Q J

Five spades, 3 hearts and 3 top tricks in the minors take declarer close, with chances in both minors for a 12th trick. First job though is to set the hearts up. The spade lead runs to declarer's hand, and a heart goes to the 10 and A.

Alan returned 5C. A club switch is natural given dummy, so is it an attempt to find partner with a club honour or a con job underleading the King? Finesse now, or rely on diamonds later? Declarer finessed, the King was offside.

	A K Q 9 4	1H	1S
	10 7	1NT	2C ¹
	A 8 7 6	3NT ²	6NT
	9 6	¹ asking	² 17-18
8		7 5 3 2	
9 4 3 2		A 8 6	
Q 10 5 2		9 3	
K 10 8 2		7 5 4 3	
	J 10 6		
	K Q J 5		
	K J 4		
	A Q J		

The QD is offside too, so declarer won't have been too pleased to learn that at all the other tables, in slam or not, the opening lead was from a minor, gifting 12 tricks whenever declarer was South. For reasons that are not apparent two other South's only made 11 tricks so that 3NT + 3 turned out to be a decent score.

Even more annoying not only did West hold the two missing court cards, but they held 4 diamonds too. This meant a squeeze works. Rise with AC, and run the major winners discarding a club and diamond from hand and a diamond from table on the third heart.

The four card ending is

	--		
	--		
	A 8 7		
	9		
--			--
--			--
Q 10 5			9 3
K			7 5
	-		
	J		
	K J		
	Q		

The last heart squeezes West. Clearly the KC must be retained, so a diamond goes and declarer makes the last three tricks in diamonds. Who'd be a declarer?

Where did that 8S lead come from? South clearly has a strong hand, so leading from my honours around to it is not enticing. Yes I could gamble on partner holding the AC, but it may well be that the opposition have sufficient points alongside my 5 for that not even to be possible. I confess that I was as much concerned about not giving an overtrick as defeating the contract, though held some hopes that I might score both my court cards. A heart around to declarer's suit was certainly not on the agenda, so a spade it was. Fortunately I had one.

Why the lurch to 6NT without Ace-asking? I didn't ask, but it could well be that if the wrong answer came they had no way of signing off in 5NT, so North simply decided to play the odds. Bidding a previously unbid suit at the 5 level after an inconvenient Blackwood response can be used to tell partner to bid 5NT, but this unbid suit bid can also be put to other uses. The other slam bidders had no such worries about using Blackwood, and indeed one then asked for Kings. How the number of Kings was going to affect the final choice of contract in this case when the pair were known to be missing an Ace is unclear.

There is a much maligned convention called Gerber - I often call it Gerbil - by which 4C is used to ask for Aces. Indeed there was another hand on which partner opened 1C, next hand overcalled 2C to show the majors, and I made a natural raise to 4C, restraining myself from self-alerting *not Gerber*.

It is in fact a perfectly sound convention, with it's poor reputation coming from a mixture of misuse and it's disciple's habit of asking "*Is that Gerber?*" whenever you bid 4C.

Indeed I play Gerber, restricting its use to situations in which both it comes immediately after a NT bid and no suit has been agreed.

Thus in the auction starting
1H – 1S – 1NT – 2C – 3NT 4C would be Ace-asking, but had opener's third bid been 3S to show a maximum with three card support, rather than 3NT, then 4C would be a cue-bid.

5 – 5 Trouble

Q J 9 7 6
A J 10 6 3
8
4 3



A 3 2
Q
Q 9 2

A K Q 9 6 5

Thursday's board 22 gave an object lesson into why we normally bid 5 card suits downwards even as responder where the tendency is to bid 4 card suits upwards.

After 1C – 1H – 3C – 3S – 3NT North doesn't want to bid 4S as this
a) drives partner to the 5 level to support hearts, and
b) suggests 6 hearts and 5 spades.

However 1C – 1S – 3C – 3H – 3NT permits a pull to 4H if North is uncomfortable about trusting South's diamonds, completing the 5 – 5 description of the hand. In practice it doesn't come to that as South gives preference to spades, quite possibly bouncing straight to game over 3H.

Q J 9 7 6
A J 10 6 3
8
4 3

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



A 3 2
Q
Q 9 2
A K Q 9 6 5

10 5 4
K 7 5 2
K J 10 6 4
8


South's diamond control is distinctly low quality and 3NT has no chance. Indeed even 1NT can be beaten.

4S makes though is not quite straightforward, for the lead and continuation of diamonds gives rise to fears of a forcing defence causing declarer to lose control, whilst the club lead, potentially singleton, makes declarer worry about not being able to access many club tricks. These distractions may lead declarer down the wrong lines, with there being slightly too many variations for me to want to go into. But 4S is certainly superior to the 3NT contract reached when North replies 1H rather than 1S.

One Track Mind

On Monday West found themselves declaring this hand in 3NT on the lead of a small spade. Ideas?

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



K
9 8 7 5
J 9 6
A Q 8 6 4

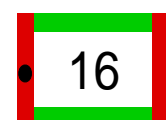
Two spades, two hearts by force and five clubs look our best bet, though two spades, four hearts and three clubs is a possibility. We really don't want to touch the diamonds unless we have to.

What would you play at trick 2?

There is a great temptation to bank the club tricks assuming the suit behaves, but they represent valuable entries to the table. Instead start with a heart finesse. When this appears to work return to table via clubs to repeat the heart finesse. On a good day the hearts will be 3–3 and you can clear the suit and get back to table via clubs again for the long heart, having remembered to cash your black suit winners first. This would give 11 tricks.

Q 7 6 4 2
10
A K 5 4
J 7 2

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



K
9 8 7 5
J 9 6
A Q 8 6 4

J 10 9 3
K 6 4 3 2
10 3
9 5

On the day the hearts don't break so declarer has to settle for 10 tricks – 2 spades, 3 hearts and 5 clubs.

Incidentally what is the best order in which to play the club honours when tackling the suit?

King first, then small towards table so that if North shows out you have the option of ducking from table so as to secure 4 tricks in the suit against that particular bad break.

Low Level Crime

Alan and I played twice at Kendal online this week, so had twice our normal chance of encountering dubious practice. There are many such practices in which the time taken to make a bid or play misleads or conveys a message. There is the slow pass which tells partner you are tantalisingly close to having a bid. It is not illegal for partner then to bid, but any such bid must be based on the bidder's hand and the auction to date, not the information conveyed by partner's hesitation.

We've all met the slow play of a singleton to try to mislead declarer into believing you had a choice of plays, and the slow play from two small designed to make declarer think you had the option of playing a high card.

This week we met the slow play of the xX on partner's lead to convey the message that the card chosen was significant. "I hoped you'd take the xX as a signal" appeared at the end in the table chat after the partner had found the right continuation. Alan and my immediate private messages to each other to the effect "*They certainly took long enough to make sure partner knew it was a signal*" crossed. There is no way of knowing whether the partner would have found the correct continuation without the slow play.

It is inevitable that from time to time one makes a play or bid that is not strictly in tempo, and this will particularly apply to those who are relatively new to competitive play. However those who wish to generate and protect a reputation for fair play really need to minimise their variations in tempo at significant points in the bidding and play.

Around The Club

Monday (7½ tables): Mike & Sally-Ann Rothwell

Tuesday BBO (6 tables):

Alan Wearmouth & Martyn Harris

Tuesday F2F (4 tables):

Angela Davenport & Jennifer Spencer

Thursday (9): Jackie Stabler & Linda White

Total 26½ tables for the week.

Piling up the master points in January were

Mondays:	Chris Walker & Chris Wilkinson	65
	Tim Harrison & Richard Brazier	35
	Ken Orford & Steve Douglas	32
Tuesdays F2F:	Angela Davenport	42
	& Jennifer Spencer	
	Chris Needham & Sheila Wilson	30
	Jean Dale & Ralph Rogerson	24
Tuesdays BBO:	Martyn Harris	66
	Michael Cox & Sandra Bell	60
	Steve Barron & Andrew Peill	
	Mike & Sally-Ann Rothwell	48
	Bob Stow	
Thursdays:	Martyn Harris	98
	Mike & Sally-Ann Rothwell	56
	Tim Harrison	48
	Irene & Ray Gregory	36

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.

Martyn Harris

spadeilike on BBO