

Matters Arising 132

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 22 - 26 May 2023

5-4 in Majors

Holding 5-4 in the majors when partner opens 1NT is not an uncommon experience. How do we handle this situation?

No surprise that the answer is *it depends on how strong you are*. The main possibilities are that you know you should be in a part-score, that you know you should be in game, and that you are in between the two. Hands on which slam may be possible can be dealt with by tagging on a suitable investigation to the bidding of the game hands.

With part-score hands use Stayman. If partner responds in a major pass, if partner responds 2D bid your 5 card major.

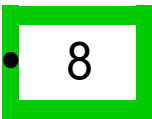
If certain of game transfer into your 5 card major, and then rebid your 4 card major at the 3 level. Rebidding a new suit at the 3 level after a transfer is game-forcing. Thus the sequences involved are

1NT – 2D – 2H – 3S holding 5 hearts and 4 spades, and
1NT – 2H – 2S – 3H holding 5 spades and 4 hearts.

With an invitational hand containing 5 hearts and 4 spades transfer and rebid spades at the 2 level.

The auction is 1NT – 2D – 2H – 2S. Partner can choose between part-score and game in hearts, spades or NT.

Unfortunately we cannot transfer to spades and then rebid hearts at the 2 level, so we revert to Stayman with an invitational hand with 5 spades and 4 hearts. A major suit response we can handle easily, and over 2D we jump to 3S to show 5 spades and an invitational hand. Partner is left with a choice between 3S, 3NT and 4S over this jump, which admittedly is not ideal if they are minimum and 2-3 in the majors. Not using this sequence though means one or other partner having to make a decision in the dark.

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

Monday's hand 8 saw West with a six loser 10 count with 4 spades and 5 hearts opposite their partner's NT. A fit is all they wanted for game, yet few got beyond the 2 level, and two pairs languished in their 5-2 heart fit, presumably after a transfer and pass sequence.

4S is not a spread, but makes despite KH, AQ D and AC all being wrong, and opener having 8 losers in their NT hand. The latter is sufficiently common in 1NT openings that responders should want to take it into account when bidding on losers rather than points.

3S Forcing


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



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

On this hand from Monday South had an easy 2C response to their partner's opening bid of 1S, but then had to choose a continuation after hearing a 2NT rebid.

This is not a problem for those partnerships that insist on a new suit at the two level by responder showing at least 10 points, for the 2NT rebid is then game forcing as the partnership has at least 25 points. Thus South can safely bid 3S, which will be forcing, to show secondary (3 card) support, thus allowing opener to choose between 4S and 3NT depending on whether they have 5 or 4 spades. So useful is this approach that opener may rebid 2NT rather 3NT when strong enough for the latter simply to improve the chances of finding a fit.

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

3NT is an easy make for North whereas played in spades the normal 4-2 trump break causes insurmountable problems.

Do check that you can play the club suit in no trumps for no losers even if there is a 4-0 break either way.

Have A Plan

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

14

K 9 8 3 2
A K J 9 4
J
Q J

Holding a combined 25 count, 4S is the natural contract for South on this hand from Thursday, with a small diamond from West being an equally natural lead.

Clearly South will want to tackle trumps at some point, and equally clearly there are sufficient variations on what might happen that our plan to some extent will be an outline one to be filled in as we go. But that doesn't mean we can afford to simply play cards and see what happens. What are your thoughts on the hand?

The AC is an obvious loser, but the red suits seem loser-free. Thus 4S revolves around not losing 3 trump tricks. Further, will the defence likely to lead diamonds whenever they get in we will lose control of the hand if trumps are 4-1 as a second diamond ruff will leave us shorter in trumps than one of the defenders. Thus we can assume trumps are 3-2.

How might we play the trumps? One way would be to place East with at least one of Q, 10 and finesseing twice towards hand - a typical split honours play.

Win AD and lead JS with intent to run it if Q doesn't appear - we would be very happy for the play to go J - Q - K - A. It doesn't as the J runs around to West's Q. Back comes a diamond, as expected, which we ruff. Cross to QH and lead another trump with intent to finesse the 9, but East rises in front of us with the A and plays a third diamond. Ruff.

We've lost our two trumps, but cannot afford to draw the last one yet as then we'd have nothing to stop the defence leading diamonds when in with AC. Instead we play a club, so that if they win and play a diamond we can ruff on table before returning to hand via a club to draw the last trump.

There are variations on this line, for example playing the club after the first diamond ruff. What we cannot afford to do is waste time by ruffing diamonds voluntarily ourselves or worrying about a possible heart loser should that suit be 5-1. Indeed that 5-1 break might either see the defence arrange a heart ruff, or your last heart disappearing on a club from dummy later anyway.

Having an outline plan, in this case picking up trumps for 2 losers, saves us from being distracted by other ideas which win tricks in the short term but leave us vulnerable later in the hand.

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

We see that playing East for AS also works (presumably with intent to hope to guess whether West also has Q or 10 if the A is West).

Around The Club

This weeks winners were

Monday (7 tables): Martyn Harris & Mike Howse

Tuesday F2F (4½ tables): Robert Boyd & Mary Simm

Tuesday BBO (6 tables): Ray & Irene Gregory

Thursday (5 tables): Ina Gray & Mary Anne Peden

Total 22½ tables for the week.

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