Matters Arising 150

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 25 - 29 Sept 2023

How Many Can You Lose?

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

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

On Tuesday South found themselves in 3NT on hand 5 against the 5H lead. How should they play the clubs?

The answer depends on how many tricks they want, and how many they can afford to lose.

If one trick will suffice then small to the K will score that trick quickly whenever West has the A.

However if the answer is somewhere along the lines of "several for the loss of just one" then finessing the J /10 is best, for even if small to the K holds there are still two losers in the suit unless the Q was singleton, for after the first trick the defence would still hold AQx between them. It is the position of the Q, not the A, that is vital to success.

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

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

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

Declarer wins trick one in hand and immediately plays a club to the 10. This holds, strongly suggesting the Q is with West. Either defender might be holding off with the A. If clubs are 3–2 we can count 5 clubs and 3 hearts, with tricks available in both spades and diamonds by force. The only quick way back to hand to repeat the finesse is via the second heart honour, but it is surely better to set up the ninth trick at this point. The KS may well draw the A, setting up two spade tricks, but even if it doesn't you can now anticipate 9 tricks, and choose between a safe heart back to hand or a spade or diamond in an attempt to set up a tenth trick.

The play of the KC on the first round of the suit condemns declarer to the loss of 2 clubs and 2 further Aces as a minimum. The successful club finesse may well restrict losers to 3 Aces.

Listen

Q 10 2
10 9 8 7
Q 2
J 8 7 4

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

Tuesday hand 11. South opened 1NT and East interrupted the NS transfer sequence by bidding spades over North's 2D to become declarer.

The defence started with AH. Prospects for East are rosy, with just three obvious losers in the red suits and none in the blacks. Despite being in a part-score declarer should set 10 tricks as their target.

South continues with the 3H at T2 and North wins with the J before leading the K to T3. At this point some declarers went wrong by ruffing low. North had bid 2D, showing at least 5 hearts. With four on the table South must now be out of the suit and presumably can over-ruff the 7S. With no loser on loser play available East must ruff high.

On to trumps. We are used to 9 card fits missing the Q, and having to decide whether to play a finesse or attempt to drop the Q. Having already ruffed high we are now missing 4 trumps including the J. Once both defenders have followed to our remaining high honour we have to decide whether to play to finesse against or to drop the J.
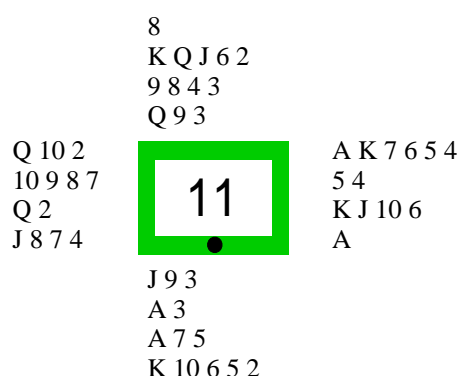
Those who like rules "know" they should play for the drop. Let us remind ourselves of the underlying logic. The finesse/drop choice will be made half way through a trick, when one opponent has played and the other hasn't. At this point there is one more unknown card left in the hand to play than in the hand that has played, so there is slightly more room for any missing card to be in the unplayed hand. So Heart, heart, heart ruff with K, AS, small spade with South following. We are on T5. At the point we decide to finesse or not South has 8 cards left and North 9. The odds are 9 to 8 in favour of North holding the J.

However that is not the full story, for North was known to have 5 hearts and has followed to the first spade, so only has 7 other cards. South meanwhile had 2 hearts, has discarded on the 3rd heart and followed to 2 trumps and so has 8 unknown cards. Perhaps the odds are now 8 to 7 in favour of South holding the J.

Wait. EW have 20 points between them, so NS have the same. North has shown 6 in hearts - we know they have
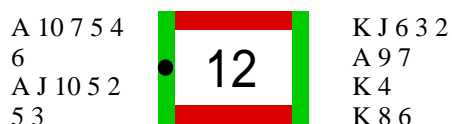
the Q even though we haven't seen it - so given South's 1NT opening North has at most 2 more points. Room for either JS or QC, but not for AD or KC. Placing those high honours as known cards in the South hand puts the odds back to 7 to 6 in favour of North holding the JS.

Victor Mollo & Nico Gardner in their book Card Play Technique coined the phrase *an ounce of inference is worth a pound of percentage*. We've certainly been pounding the percentages. Are there any inferences? Back to the bidding. South opened 1NT and is known to have started with 2 hearts. Many players won't open 1NT with 2 doubletons, and those that do don't do so that often. This seems a pretty good inference that South has 3 spades so that declarer should finesse.

```
                    8
                    K Q J 6 2
                    9 8 4 3
                    Q 9 3
    Q 10 2                         A K 7 6 5 4
    10 9 8 7          ┌──────┐     5 4
    Q 2               │  11  │     K J 10 6
    J 8 7 4           └──────┘     A
                    J 9 3
                    A 3
                    A 7 5
                    K 10 6 5 2
```

Just one declarer both ruffed high and took the finesse against the JS, gaining an outright top.

A Fortnight Later

```
    A 10 7 5 4          ┌──────┐     K J 6 3 2
    6                   │  12  │     A 9 7
    A J 10 5 2          └──────┘     K 4
    5 3                               K 8 6
```
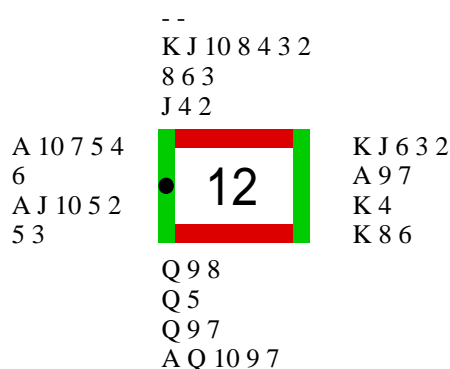
It was a mere fortnight ago (matters 148) that I reported on a 10 card trump fit missing the Q 10 on which declarer could protect against one of the hands holding 3 trumps. On Monday's board 10 with EW in 4S declarer also had the services of the 10, so could choose either defender to protect against holding three trumps with the aid of the 2-way finesse. All declarer had to do was decide which defender to protect against, either on the basis of who was most likely to have 3 trumps or according to which hand they wished to keep off lead.

North had bid 3H on the first round of bidding, either as an overcall of West's 1S opening or as an opening bid where West passed. That seems to provide a pretty good inference that any spade shortage will be North. Any declarer laying down the KS first was rewarded by North showing out, whereas those who always start

with the A found themselves with a trump loser.

The next question is how to play the diamonds. If South has Qxx or Qx then playing the K followed by the 4 with intent to finesse with secure 5 diamond tricks. East's clubs will the disappear on the long diamonds to allow 13 tricks to be made. The downside of this line is that if North produces QD and switches to a club with the A wrong, then decalrer can lose 3 tricks so making a mere 10.

Perhaps it is safer to settle for 11: KD, AD, JD and if North doesn't produce the Q discard a club.

```
                    - -
                    K J 10 8 4 3 2
                    8 6 3
                    J 4 2
    A 10 7 5 4                        K J 6 3 2
    6                 ┌──────┐        A 9 7
    A J 10 5 2        │  12  │        K 4
    5 3               └──────┘        K 8 6
                    Q 9 8
                    Q 5
                    Q 9 7
                    A Q 10 9 7
```

South can now take AC but not a second trick there for they are leading around to East's K. Indeed if South declines to take their AC at this point all East's clubs disappear and 12 tricks are made.

Around The Club

This weeks winners were

Monday (5½ tables): Russell White & Jeremy Harris

Tuesday F2F (5½ tables): David & Shirley Harris

Tuesday BBO (6½ tables): Ray & Irene Gregory

Thursday am (5 tables) Tutor & Hanna Burke

Thursday (4½ tables): Ken Orford & Steve Douglas

Total 27 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