

Matters Arising 157


being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 13 - 17 Nov 2023

Trump Grief

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

East declared in 4S on the lead of 5H on this hand from Monday. Prospects look bright. The first trick is won with the A over North's Q, and not wanting to suffer a heart ruff declarer tackles trumps immediately. Spade to K, diamond to Q in hand and two more top spades reveals the slightly disappointing news that the trumps were 4-2 with the J in the long hand, South.

Determined to rid the defence of all trumps, a fourth round was played by one declarer. South won, played a second heart to North's K and enjoyed the club return through declarer:


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

One off.

Yet after the third trump the contract makes easily provided diamonds are no worse than 5-2. Simply play a diamond to the A, and discard the small club on KD. Whether South is able to ruff is immaterial - the defence comes to just KH, JS, AC. Retaining 7C in hand to protect the K is unnecessary - rather more importantly retaining the 7C allows the defence two club tricks when AC is wrong.

Double Trouble

Monday's board 5 gave a reminder of the problems that can arise for the users of a weak NT.

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

North has a normal weak NT opener, and many Easts will have doubled, for they have a sensible lead in diamonds to go with their minimum 15 count. If passed out West allows the QD lead to run to declarer's K. The AH reveals the bad news, but declarer continues with the Q, with East throwing a card from each black suit. The defence now get to take 4 diamond tricks. West's discards instruct East to lead spades next, and as long as East doesn't block the suit West will be on lead to lead a club through declarer's K at the end. The defence take 4S, 1H, 4D, 2C for 5 off and a juicy 1400 penalty.

With such danger lurking most experienced pairs agree a defence to 1NTX designed to get them out of it.

With a weak hand and a 5 card suit defences are split between those that bid the suit and those that transfer into it. If South bids 2H to play West with 4 trumps and knowing their side has at least 25 points will surely double, but this time the worst that can happen is an 800 penalty. Hardly a cause for great celebration, but better than a 4 figure penalty.

Those who transfer out will bid 2D. West may hold fire, waiting to double 2H from North. However East may choose to double the 2H bid themselves. Although it is usual to play one double penalties, all double penalties in an auction, it seems sensible that the second double in 1NT - X - 2D - P - 2H - X is for take-out since making a low level penalty double of a suit when partner may be weak lacks sense. Of course here if East does make such a take-out double, West will pass to convert to penalties anyway.

Before Trumps

7 5	● 29	J 6 3 2
A J 10 4 2		9 8 6 5
K 10 9 8 2		A Q 3
K		A 10

West found themselves in 4H on a club lead on this hand from Thursday's Ellis Cup (teams) heat. As ever declarer looks for anything that needs doing before tackling trumps. Here they have two spade losers, and depending on the lie of the cards 1 or 2 heart losers. However one spade loser can be jettisoned on dummy's AC, though doing this before the defence get a second chance to lead spades seems wise.

T1 is won in hand with KC, and then a diamond to A is followed by AC, discarding a spade. Is the contract now bullet-proof?

The diamond play means that if that suit breaks 4-1 then one of the defenders is now out of diamonds and might score a ruff. If North started with all 4 missing trumps and a singleton diamond, and South the AS then there is nothing we can do to prevent North getting in with a trump honour and crossing to partner via AS for a diamond ruff. North's second trump honour then beats the contract. If there is nothing we can do then no point worrying about it, but what distributions can we guard against?

- a) South has all the trumps and singleton diamond, North the AS. To guard against this lead 9H from table and let it run if South doesn't cover. A voluntary play of the A leaves declarer at the mercy of a line similar to the one described above.
- b) South has Hxx in trumps with the singleton diamond, and North AS. Now letting the 9H run allows North in to give South a diamond ruff. A spade to A and a second ruff beats the contract. To guard against this you need to play off AH, drawing trumps as quickly as possible.

Chances of a 4-0 trump break before play begins is 10%, so probability that South has the trump holding in a) is 5%.

A 3-1 break initially has a 50% chance, so 25% chance that South has the 3, and hence 12½% chance that North's singleton is one of the 2 honours. The other conditions in a) and b) are the same, so it looks like we should guard against b). Indeed having decided this declarer may well play off AH at T2 and then enter dummy via a diamond for a spade discard on AC, followed by a second trump.

	A 9 4	
	K Q	
	7 5 4	
	Q 9 6 4 2	
7 5	● 29	J 6 3 2
A J 10 4 2		9 8 6 5
K 10 9 8 2		A Q 3
K		A 10
	K Q 10 8	
	7 3	
	J 6	
	J 8 7 5 3	

On the night neither a) nor b) occurred, so provided the spade discard was made 4H makes easily. Without it declarer needs to guess how to play trumps for one loser, and playing for split honours, finessing twice, doesn't work on the actual layout.

Around The Club

This weeks winners were

Monday (5 tables): Mike Howse & Martyn Harris

Tuesday F2F (7½ tables): Roger & Debbie Wilkinson

Tuesday BBO (7 tables):

Amanda Etherington & Martyn Harris

Thursday am (8 tables):

NS: Helen Adams & Patricia White

EW: Margaret & Dennis Pook

Thursday (6 tables teams): Mike & Sally-Ann Rothwell

Robin Rose & Martyn Harris

Total 33½ 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