

Matters Arising 175

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 18 - 22 Mar 2024

Frozen Suit

	J 6 4	
	10 6 4	
	A 10	
	J 10 8 3 2	
K 8 7	<div style="border: 2px solid red; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">4</div>	10
K Q 9 8 5	•	J 7 3
K 9 8 5 4		J 7 6 2
--		A Q 6 5 4
	A Q 9 5 3 2	
	A 2	
	Q 3	
	K 9 7	

Each side can make 9 tricks on this hand from Monday, NS in spades and EW in hearts. In practice though many declarers were allowed to make 10.

The key to the hand lies in the diamond suit, which is frozen. This means that whoever leads the suit costs their side a trick. If EW open the suit NS make two tricks, but if NS lead the suit they make only 1.

Do check that that is true, assuming that where necessary the players make a correct guess as to which honour to play.

The battle to benefit from a frozen suit is often won by declarer even though usually it should be won by the defence. On this hand consider 4H played by West. Can South know not to play diamonds when in with their major suit Aces?

That may depend on the bidding. If West bids diamonds as well as hearts it is surely inconceivable that they can discard enough diamonds on clubs for a delay in leading diamonds to help them. However if diamonds have not been bid then South may be concerned that declarer has J10x in clubs and only a couple of diamonds. In that case South will want to set up a diamond trick for the defence before declarer can knock out South's KC and run the suit. Now a diamond switch in case partner has KD is a sensible option.

As is so often the case the lead of an unsupported Ace in defence costs their side dearly. The AD at T1 by North solves declarer's diamond problem even before they see they have one.

Drop Or Finesse

A K J 9 8 3	<div style="border: 2px solid green; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">11</div>	10 5 4
--		J 2
10		A Q 6 4 3
K 8 7 5 4 2	•	A Q 9

Almost all tables saw a spade contract on this hand from Monday. If both black suits behave there are 13 tricks. Here behaving for spades means declarer not losing a trick to the Q. This is a common dilemma - missing 4 cards in the suit should declarer finesse or play for the drop?

The chances of a 2-2 break are 40%, of a 3-1 one 50%, which superficially suggests finessing. However the percentages quoted in tables of odds are calculated on a before any cards have been played basis. In practice the odds change every time a card is played, for all the possibilities where that card lies elsewhere are no longer relevant.

The decision whether to finesse or drop will be taken half way through a trick, so at that point the last hand has one more card than partner, and hence slightly more room for the Q than partner. Play for the drop.

This assumes of course that there is no hint provided by the bidding.

		Q 7
		A 8 5 3
		K 9 8 7 5
		10 3
A K J 9 8 3	<div style="border: 2px solid green; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">11</div>	10 5 4
--		J 2
10		A Q 6 4 3
K 8 7 5 4 2	•	A Q 9
	6 2	
	K Q 10 9 7 6 4	
	J 2	
	J 6	

South presumably opened 3H, so the play went AH ruffed by declarer. AS, AD, 10S, so the finesse/drop decision is made halfway through T4. At that point South has 9 cards left, 6 of which are presumed to be hearts, so has 3 unknown cards. North has 10 cards, 3 of which are presumed to be hearts, so 7 unknown. With North having 70% of the unknown cards playing for the drop looks right, and on Monday turned out to be so. Had North been the one to pre-empt then a similar logic would have cried finesse.


Missed Game

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

This hand turned up at Thursday's teams session. With 8 losers and fewer than 12 points West may well elect to pass. North then opens 1C.

Suppose East overcalls 1D. There follows 1S from West, 2C from North, with East then faced with a choice between 2S and 3S. Choosing 2S because partner passed originally ends the auction, 3S might draw 4S from partner.

If instead East doubles, West responds 3S, and it would be churlish of East not to go on to game. Why 3S from West? Had East opened 1S West would happily raise to three, so West bids 3S here, with the 5th spade providing added protection should partner have doubled with only 3 spades. Indeed some might argue that the fifth spade and the imperative not to miss close games at teams is justification for going straight to 4S.

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

4S should be an easy make, losing a trick in each side suit.

Majors Matter


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

Why do people hide majors? On this hand from Tuesday half the room avoided playing in the 4-4 spade fit in favour of 3NT which can be beaten on a heart lead despite both minor suit finesses working.

A normal auction might be 1H - 1S - 2S - 4S with the raises determined by the losing trick count, though some might think 16 points are too many for a single raise and so bid 1H - 1S - 3S - 4S. There seems no case for West to rebid NT to show their points.

An aggressive East might open 1D. The EBU's minimum requirements for a 1 level suit opening are 8 points and in first or second position a hand that obeys the rule of 18. East's hand just about matches this, else the opening would be regarded as either a psych or as evidence of an illegal agreement. Now the auction would be 1D - 1H - 1S - 4S with East having no reason to hide their spades by rebidding diamonds on the second round.

It is precisely because of the risk of missing such a fit that we we don't open a weak two with a four card major on the side.

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

Around The Club

This weeks winners were

Monday (7 tables): Mike & Sally-Ann Rothwell

Tuesday BBO (4½ tables): Rose Parker & Sandra Bell

Tues F2F (8½ tables): Bob Boyd & Dorothy Bayliss

Wraight Cup: Bob Churchward & Bernard Houssin

Thursday am (10 tables):

NS: Lynn Percival & Jill Yates

EW: Suzanne Graham & Diana Smethurst

Thursday (Teams, 5 tables):

Ray Gregory & John Ellwood

Carl Penson & Brian Smith

Total 35 tables for the week.

Martyn Harris

spadeilike on BBO