

Matters Arising 217

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 6 - 10 Jan 2025

Roman Revenge

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


It was only last week that we saw a hand on which reaching a Grand Slam was arguably easier using simple Blackwood than the new-fangled Roman Key-Card version. Thursday produced a hand on which Roman players gained their revenge.

At our table the bidding was

1H	1S
3H	4NT
5S	7NT

4NT is Roman Key-Card Blackwood agreeing hearts, so KH counts as a keycard alongside all the Aces. Responses are 5C = 0 or 3 keycards, 5D = 4 or 1 (though some pairs swap the meanings of these two responses), 5H = 2 keycards without the QT, 5S = 2 keycards with QT.

Together with the 3H rebid that 5S response tells East that West has KQxxxx H, AD and enough other goodies to justify jump rebidding their suit over a 1 level response. Start counting likely tricks - wouldn't you now bid 7NT as East, knowing about QH and hence a likely 6 heart tricks is invaluable?

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

At the table South led a club, and declarer claimed, quoting 2C, 3D, 4H, 4S as their tricks, and banking plenty of time to be used on board 8 should it prove useful.

A couple of asides

- If responder doesn't have 2 keycards their partner may still be able to find out about

the QT by bidding 5D/H over 5C/D respectively, asking partner to bid 6 holding QT, always assuming that this new bid is not in the agreed suit.


- East had no intentions of playing other than in NT, so 1S was the chosen response as this maximises the clarity of any strength signal in opener's rebid.

25 points ≠ Game

A Q J 3 Monday's board 4 was another hand on
A J 7 which envisaging the play during the
A K 2 bidding could have saved heartache. South
A Q 3 holds 25 points, which nominally suggests
an auction starting 2C – 2D – 3NT as a
2NT rebid is often quoted as 23–24 points.

However if South envisages trying to play 3NT opposite a hand that would pass a 2NT rebid it should be obvious that making 9 tricks would be at best a considerable struggle. For example the black suit finesses might work, but declarer would have no way to table to take them.

The hand is clearly too powerful for anything other than a 2C opening in Acol, but discretion suggests 2NT is a better rebid.

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

North's hand was indeed worthless, and barring help from the defence 9 tricks are just not there.

Needs Must

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




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

There is no attractive game on this hand from Thursday's play despite NS having a combined 25 count, particularly with East having opened 1S. Only one pair ignored the warning signs to reach game, in their case 3NT, which failed when West produced QC.

Suppose you had (miss-)bid your way to 4H by North. East starts with A and another spade. Any thoughts on the play?

You have lost a trick to the AS, and the moth-eaten trump suit means that for success a 3-3 break is non-negotiable to limit losers to 2 there.. Turning that around leaves you with 1 spade winner (T2) and 3 in trumps. Thus you require 6 minor suit tricks, which could be 4 diamonds and 2 clubs if KD onside with the suit 3-2, or 1 diamond and 5 clubs if QC onside with the suit 3-3. The former looks a better bet.

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


Realising the diamond finesse may need to be taken twice, T3 sees a diamond to the J, which holds. Now duck a heart. East is likely to win this and switch to a club. Win, play A and another heart. The defence can't stop you getting back to hand with a black suit ruff to repeat the diamond finesse (the K happens to be bare at this point, so returning to hand isn't necessary, but you don't know that!).

If East tried a third spade when in with their first trump life is easiest if you ignore the chance of ruffing on table as that leaves you in the wrong hand. Instead ruff in declarer's hand, repeat the diamond finesse, and play A and another heart.

The important points here are to tackle trumps - you cannot afford the defece to score even one ruff if you wish to limit your trump losers to 2 - and to time the taking of the diamond finesse to permit a repeat when it works.

4H is not a good contract as it needs a lot right to make, but if you are in it, work out what has to happen and go for it. A negative score will surely be poor as you can anticipate lots of pairs grinding to a halt in a minor suit part-score.

Watch Partner's Card

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


10 points isn't too many with which to pre-empt, particularly when red and with awful majors that all but remove the possibility that you are pre-empting partner out of game. Consequently on Monday's board 10 we can envisage bidding around the table of 3D - X - P - 4S all pass, though with a more conservative South unwilling to double with a minimum hand and only three hearts it might be 3D - P - P - X - P - 4S.

In the former case East looks no further than a top club as their opening lead. Partner plays the 5. Where's the 4 muses East? Either declarer has it and is hiding it for some reason, or partner has it, in which case they have presumably started a peter with a doubleton. The second top club follows, and indeed partner now contributes the 4. The third club is ruffed and West cashes the AD for one off.

Played by South West starts with AD and has to decide upon a switch. What did partner play at T1? the 2D. With a singleton on table East knows that partner will switch, and so seeks to help their decision. An ideal situation for a McKenney signal - low card for a low suit (clubs here) and a high card for a high one (hearts in this case). West can regard the 2D as a clear signal for a club, as having pre-empted they must have several more neutral looking cards. West switches to 5C to start a peter with their doubleton, and once again the defence come to four tricks.

On Monday 8 declarers played in spades, yet only three were held to 9 tricks despite the opening lead being as expected. It really is worth watching partner's cards, and indeed agreeing to play simple signals like petering with a doubleton or making a McKenney suit preference signal when partner will have to switch.


Overtricks to Spare

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

Imagine you as East have ended up in 5D on Monday's board 12. South leads a heart to their partner's A, who naturally switches to a trump. Now what?

You are missing 5 trumps, so the odds are against the Q falling in two. Hence you finesse the J, and when this holds draw trumps which indeed takes three rounds. You now have 11 winners - 7 in diamonds, KH, AC, AK S. Tick.

However, why settle for 11 tricks? After the third trump you can continue AC, C ruff, KS, C ruff, AS and run 4 more clubs should the clubs be 3-2. That seems to be 5 natural clubs, 2 club ruffs, 5 natural diamonds, KH and AK S. 15 tricks in all. Somehow I don't think the opposition will allow you to record that many.

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

Around The Club

This weeks winners were

Monday (9½ tables): Tim Harrison & Richard Brazier

Tuesday F2F (6½ tables):

NS: Roger & Debbie Wilkinson

EW: Brenda Richardson & Rita Davies

Tuesday BBO (6 tables): Ray & Irene Gregory

Thursday am (5½ tables):

Bernard Houssin & Bob Churchward

Thursday BBO (6½ tables):

Alan Wearmouth & Martyn Harris

Total 34 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