

Matters Arising 220

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 27 - 31 Jan 2025

Best Suit Forward

When starting to play Bridge it is understandable to wish to bid your best suit first as that is the suit you would most like to be trumps, but most players soon come to realise that their choice of suit to bid first should be dictated by their shape at least as much as by the relative strengths of their suits.

Equally in the play of the hand it can be very tempting to cash out your strong suit first allowing you to make significant early inroads towards your target and put pressure on the defence through the discards they are forced to make. This too is not always the best approach.

A Q 5
A K Q 9 4
A K 3
K 2



4 2
J 7 6
J 8 4
A Q 8 6 5

This is Monday's board 4, often played in 6NT by North on the lead of 6D. You can try to interpret the lead to decide whether you are better playing the J or small from dummy, but with West holding Q 10 x you will be restricted to 2 diamond tricks whatever you choose.

Unless hearts are 5-0 you have 7 tricks in the red suits and 4 on top in the blacks. The 12th trick could come from a 3-3 break in clubs (which would also produce a 13th) or a

successful spade finesse.

This suggests a line of win T1, cash 5 hearts and play off three top clubs. If the suit behaves, even if only because a defender has made an injudicious club discard on your hearts, you are home. If not you fall back on the spade finesse. That is over a 50% chance overall, which means it's a good slam to be in.

But you can do better. After the AH at T2 you turn your attention to clubs, and as long as both defenders follow to the second round you are home, for you can afford to lose 1 club, making 5 hearts, 4 clubs, 2 diamonds and AS as you can use the JH to reach the established clubs. And if one defender shows out on the second club you can still try the spade finesse. Thus instead of making if clubs are 3-3 or the spade finesse works, you now make if the clubs are no worse than 4-2 or the spade finesse works.

That last statement is not quite true. You will have noticed that I recommend playing AH at T2 even if you are not going to run the suit. This is because if hearts are 5-0, which playing the A will reveal, you only have 6 red tricks so will need 6 black ones too. Thus in this case if clubs are 4-2 you will need the spade finesse too. Useful to know in advance.

A Q 5
A K Q 9 4
A K 3
K 2

10 9 6 3
8 2
Q 10 7
J 9 7 3

4

4 2
J 7 6
J 8 4
A Q 8 6 5

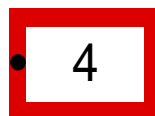
K J 8 7
10 5 3
9 6 5 2
10 4

Clubs are 4-2 and the spade finesse fails, so starting by cashing 5 heart tricks should fail too, barring a dozy West discarding a club - they need to discard spades and trust to partner to be able to hold that suit.

From declarer's point of view the significant card in dummy is JH. It can be used to reach table after clubs have been established. Running the hearts first removes that possibility so that clubs then only produce extra tricks if they are 3-3.

Being wary of starting with your best suit can apply to defenders too. Leading the fourth best of your longest and strongest may be sound general advice, but that doesn't mean it should be taken as a hard and fast rule. East's best suit is spades, but leading one gives declarer their 12th trick immediately. This is foreseeable as North will have shown a very powerful hand in the bidding. Leading away from honours when there is a known powerful hand on your right is asking to concede a trick needlessly. Usually it will be better to wait for declarer to tackle the suit themselves, for the missing honours in the suit are much more likely to be in declarer's than partner's hand.

A Q 5
A K Q 9 4
A K 3
K 2



4 2
J 7 6
J 8 4
A Q 8 6 5

Time to look at the hand again, this time with North playing in 6H. We'll stick to a diamond lead. How would you play this contract?

We know that we need at least 3 club tricks, and if we try to cash these before drawing all the trumps we are relying on clubs being 3-3, in which case we might as well draw the trumps and enjoy all the clubs, or are hoping that the same defender is short in both trumps and clubs.

As with the NT slam we start by testing the hearts to see what we need to achieve. This time play off A and K from hand. If both defenders follow the contract is now safe provided clubs are no worse than 4–2. Look to see why you think that is, and then read on to check.

After the second heart declarer switches to clubs, playing K and A before ruffing a small club with QH. Now a trump to the J and the remaining clubs can be enjoyed. Declarer makes 4 natural trump tricks, 4 clubs, a club ruff, AK D and AS for 12 tricks. Indeed with a trump left in hand they can safely try the spade finesse for the overtrick.

Of course if the clubs were 3–3 then ruffing the third club costs the overtrick if the spade finesse is wrong, but this is a small price to pay for securing the slam. It is not particularly unusual to ruff a suit whilst still having winners in it in order to establish the suit safely.

Around The Club

This weeks winners were

Monday (11 tables):

= Mike Howse & Martyn Harris

= Roger & Debbie Wilkinson

Tuesday F2F (8½ tables):

NS: Russell White & Robert Harvey

EW: Jill & Chris Yates

Tuesday BBO (4 tables): Roger & Catherine Preston

Thursday am (6 tables): David Crowe & Jane Curzon

Thursday BBO (5½ tables):

Alan Wearmouth & Martyn Harris

Total 35 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