

Matters Arising 251

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 1- 5 Sep 2025

Play Safe

A Q 10 5
10 9
10 9
A K Q 7 4

The bidding on this hand seems destined to start 1C – 1D, and when West overcalls 1H a continuation of 1S – 2NT – 3NT seems natural.



K 8
A 7 6 5
A 8 7 5 3
10 9

However reaching 3NT was a minority achievement on Monday, so what do I know about natural?

Imagine you are part of that minority, and as South have to cope with the KH lead. How will you play it?

Ducking the opening lead to disrupt defensive communications is right, but declarer then takes the second heart. Why? a) given the heart overcall West surely has 5+ hearts, so East will be out after the second round, b) Even if West has overcalled on a 4 card heart suit you can lose at most 3 heart tricks so can afford to lose the lead once, and c) if you duck two hearts and the defence switch their attention to diamonds there is a danger of losing 2 hearts, 2 diamonds and a black suit trick if 9 tricks don't run for you.

Will 9 tricks run? You have just 3 top tricks in each black suit plus 2 red Aces giving 8 certain tricks. Can you do better than playing for a 3–3 club break and falling back on the chances in spades if clubs don't behave?

Try running JC at T3. This guarantees 4 tricks in clubs even if East holds the J, and as you have arranged for East to be a safe hand by ducking the first heart it also guarantees the contract. Sometimes East will have precisely Jxx and the play costs a trick, but you really don't want to have to lose a 4th round of clubs to West if they have 4 cards in the suit.

A Q 10 5
10 9
10 9
A K Q 7 4

6 4
K Q J 8 3
K J 6
J 3 2

J 9 7 3 2
4 2
Q 4 2
8 6 5

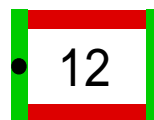
K 8
A 7 6 5
A 8 7 5 3
10 9

All sane lines secure 10 tricks as the clubs break 3–3 with J onside. But things could have been different.

Loser Reduction

A 9 6 5 4 2
A 3
9
A Q 4 2

K Q 3
J 7 2
K 8 6 5 4
K 8



You are West in 4S against the lead of JC on this hand from Monday. Ideas?

Unless 4–0 there are no natural trump losers, but you do seem to have one in each side suit. Which is fine as far as your contract goes, but it is pairs and so you always want more.

Can any of those losers disappear? Possibly. You might be able to ruff the fourth club, or better still the third one, keeping a winner back until later.

Win KC, play off KQ S, then club to A and ruff a small club with 3S. If trumps are 2–2 or clubs are 4–3, or clubs are 5–2 with long trump with long clubs this will rid you of your club loser. You will then be on table, so have to lead something red, which means your 2 red suit losers are inescapable.

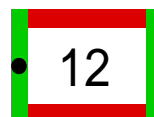
There is a chance of a diamond trick, just needing AD onside. Try win T1 in hand, temporarily blocking the suit, and lead your diamond towards the K. If North has the A and ducks you no longer have a diamond loser, and if they rise you have a parking place for your heart loser. You can then try for the club ruff later. If both work you make 12 tricks.

J
Q 9 6 4
A J 2
J 10 9 5 3

A 9 6 5 4 2
A 3
9
A Q 4 2

K Q 3
J 7 2
K 8 6 5 4
K 8

10 8 7
K 10 8 5
Q 10 7 3
7 6



The AD is onside, but South has a doubleton club and three trumps. Tackling the diamonds from hand immediately gets rid of your heart loser. Playing on clubs not only doesn't work but removes your chance of leading towards KD whilst still in possession of AH.

Too Easy?

A K J 4
6 3
9 8 7 3
J 9 6



Q 9 6 2
7 4
A Q J 2
A Q 10


Tuesday, and you are North in 4S on a trump lead. There are two obvious heart losers, so initially it looks as if the contract depends on one of the minor suit finesses working. A closer look reveals that even such an apparently straightforward contract may need careful handling. What problems can you see?

A 4-1 trump break would mean we can't draw trumps before taking the finesses for fear that a failed finesse would be followed by an unstoppable succession of heart losers. Best hope for a 3-2 trump break.

A 4-1 break in diamonds could leave a loser even if the K is onside, and 2 losers (too many!) in the suit if West held the 4. Another 3-2 break may well be needed.

All the minor suit finesses - 2 in diamonds and one in clubs - are to be taken the same way. That will require 3 entries to the North hand. The fourth round of diamonds, assuming a 3-2 break, can be one of these, but trumps will have to be the others. And the diamond entry can't be used to take the diamond finesse, so diamond finesse, first, then diamond entry to take club finesse.

Suggested line: Win T1 in hand with JS and cash KS. Both follow, so there is a 3-2 trump break. Diamond to J. If it holds return to hand with AS, clearing the last enemy trump. Diamond to Q, and if that holds and suit 3-2 the A clears the suit and you can return to hand with the 4th diamond to run JC.

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

On the layout the line works well, though the KC wins for the defence. Running JC first will see you struggle to return to hand twice for diamond finesses, even more so if you start with 3 rounds of trumps.

Bidder's Game

Q 9
J 10 8 6 5
J 6
A J 10 2



A 10 7
K 9 7
A K 9 3
K 6 5

It is sometimes said that Bridge is a bidder's game, and with travellers that show the results of hands like this one from Monday, it is easy to see why.

I can see 2 natural auctions:

1D - 1H - 2NT - 3C - 3H - 4H


and

1D - 1H - 1NT - 2NT - 3H - 4H

depending on the partnership's range for their 1NT rebid, though in the first there is also the option of South

bidding 4H directly over 3C.

The traveller revealed that only half the field reached game, and those in 3NT.

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

The 10S is an important card preventing a successful attack on the suit, especially in NT. Nevertheless a spade lead holds South to 11 tricks in NT, though it gives an immediate 12 tricks in hearts or NT if declared by North. There are also 12 tricks for North on any other lead as after playing AD, the subsequent lead of the J smotheres West's 10 whilst finessing against the Q, allowing the 12th trick to come in diamonds alongside AK D, AS, 4 hearts and 4 clubs.

Suit Combination

Q 9 6 3		A 10 5 2
Q 10 7		9 6
A Q 10 8	24	K J 9 2
K 6		A 8 6

Thursday's last hand saw most East-Wests in 4S, with West declaring. With two top losers in hearts the fate of the contract depends on declarer playing trumps for one loser. Further, with trumps needing to be drawn before the diamonds can be cashed, and the necessity for a club or heart ruff, a 4-1 trump break may be difficult to negotiate, depending on the singleton. Concentrate then on handling the trumps for 1 loser on the assumption they are 3-2. How would you play them?

One obvious idea is to play off the A, followed by small towards the Q. If no honour appears guess whether to rise with the Q hoping for K South or finesse the 9 hoping for J South. Call rising with the Q plan A, and finessing the 9 plan B. There is also a plan C involving playing North for at least one of the missing honours: lead small towards the 10, and if this loses to the J lead the Q as a running finesse against the K - the 9 provides the necessary back-up for this to work should North cover the Q.

How do these plans stack up against the various possible 3-2 breaks? The doubleton could be KJ, Kx (3 possibilities - K8, K7, K4), Jx (3 possibilities) or xx (3 possibilities). Each of these 10 possibilities could be held by either North or South, giving 20 possible equally likely layouts, for there was no clue in the bidding as to defensive holdings.

The table below shows the number of layouts that work for each plan:

N	S	A	B	C	N	S	A	B	C
KJ	xxx	1	1	1	xxx	KJ	1	1	0
Kx	Jxx	0	3	3	Jxx	Kx	3	3	3
Jx	Kxx	3	0	3	Kxx	Jx	3	3	3
xx	KJx	3	3	0	KJx	xx	0	0	3
					Totals		14	14	16

Plans A and B both work 14 times - 70% success, missing out when North holds KJx and when they mis-guess the play with North holding a doubleton honour.

Plan C has an 80% success rate, failing when South holds doubleton KJ or KJx.

		K 7
		K J 8 5 3
		5 3
		10 9 4 2
Q 9 6 3		A 10 5 2
Q 10 7		9 6
A Q 10 8	24	K J 9 2
K 6		A 8 6
		J 8 4
		A 4 2
		7 6 4
		Q J 7 3

On the day plans B and C work, with those choosing to play South for the K when they followed small on the second round losing out. Without the 9 though there is no plan C - spot cards can matter.

Around The Club

This weeks winners were

Monday (6½ tables): Russell White & Jeremy Harris

Tuesday F2F (8 tables): Russell White & Robert Harvey

Tuesday BBO (3½ tables): Ray & Irene Gregory

Thursday am (6½ tables):

NS: Debbie & Roger Wilkinson

EW: Bob Churchward & Lynn Percival

Thursday BBO (3K & 4 Wearside tables):

Wendy Rowlinson & Ina Gray

Total 27½ 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