

Matters Arising 60

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal Online 3 - 7 Jan 2022

Helping Partner

On this hand from Thursday East-West bid hearts and North-South diamonds. Usually hearts won the auction, but two Souths found themselves declaring 5DX.

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

You are East. Partner leads KH and switches to 6C. Naturally you win. Now what?

What is that 6C?

You originally couldn't see Q J 6 5 3. Consequently that 6 cannot be second from rubbish and it cannot be fourth best. Presumably therefore it is singleton, doubleton or a slightly strange lead from QJx. So declarer isn't singleton and you can safely take your other club honour.

You do and partner follows with the 5. You are not at all upset about setting up declarer's Queen, for a third club ruffed takes care of that. Partner leads a spade back to your A. A fourth club enables partner to ruff with his K, so the defence comes to 2 clubs, 2 ruffs, a heart and a spade. Four off for 800.

One East perhaps worried about heart ruffs on the table switched to a trump rather than taking a second club, trapping his partner's K. Things got worse when he ducked the small spade off table, either hoping partner had the Queen or not wanting to establish dummy's suit.

Now with the help of the 2-2 trump break and a ruffing finesse in spades declarer was able to make the rest for 550. Had these two tables been in the same match that would have been a 1350 point swing for 16 IMPs.

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

The original position above, and below after KH, club to K, trump to table and small spade ducked to declarer.

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

Play continues heart ruff, KS A ruff, return to table with last trump and throw declarer's losers on the spades. Had the KS not been covered the ruffing finesse would have been taken by discarding a loser, and another spade led.

Taking the second club immediately shows an appreciation that it will not be ruffed and an understanding of how the subsequent play will go depending on who holds a doubleton.

It is not about grabbing a trick to make sure the contract goes down having been doubled. I've lost count of the number of doubled contracts I've seen going one off through the defence's haste to prove the double correct, when the scoresheet reveals the undoubled contract regularly going 2 off for the same score.

The hand is also another illustration of the virtue of playing standard rather than random leads. If East can't be sure from the lead that his second club will stand up, defending is a lot harder.

Finally how does West know to switch to a club when partner might have been sat with AQ spades and wanting a spade switch? With a singleton heart on table East knows that West will have to switch, so ignores the usual practice of showing attitude or count according to partnership agreement and instead gives a simple suit preference signal - high for the high suit spades and low for clubs. The 4H had *please lead a club* written all over it.

Weak NT Trap

The major flaw in the weak NT is well-known - from time to time, particularly against strong players, you will concede a large penalty. Some regard this flaw as too large and play a strong NT, some are a bit choosy about what hands they open 1NT on, and some have an inevitably imperfect escape mechanism for when the opposition turn nasty.

We are all familiar with passing the ace twelve count even if we don't (always) practice it ourselves. How else might we be choosy?


K Q 4 3 Here is North's hand 17 from Thursday's
7 5 teams event, with two suits wide open
7 6 4 without even any length to help defend
A K 9 2 attacks on the red suits.

Perhaps the hand could usefully be opened 1C with intent to rebid 1S over a red suit response. Yes, it makes it easier for the opposition to join in the auction with a red suit, but could anything go seriously wrong?

Trying to extend this approach to other suit combinations hits difficulties as your rebid may need to be at 2 level, bypassing the possible best spot of 1NT and perhaps convincing partner you have 5 cards in your first suit.


At pairs frequency counts and we can stomach the odd big penalty provided we get plenty of good scores otherwise. Things are different in teams where recovering from one terrible board can be difficult. Perhaps we need a mix and match approach depending on which version of bridge we are playing.

Here is board 17 as played at one table:

	K Q 4 3	N E S W	
	7 5	1NT P P X	
	7 6 4	all pass	
	A K 9 2		
A 2 A K Q 9 3 2 K Q J Q J		10 6 5 J 8 4 A 9 5 2 7 6 5	
	J 9 8 7		
	10 6		
	10 8 3		
	10 8 4 3		

East lead a diamond, and North gained the lead at trick 12. Although East-West have game on in hearts, -1100 for NS is ugly.

Now try switching the major suit Kings whilst keeping the distribution the same so that North is only wide open in one suit:

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

On the diamond lead North soon gets in with KH, so can cash AK C for three tricks and -800. Not good, but an improvement. However the favourable lie of the clubs means that declarer actually gets 4 club tricks for 2 off, -300 and an for him improvement on an East-West game.

It won't always work this way of course, but it hints at a superiority for not being wide open in 2 suits.

We are all used to making remarkable numbers of tricks in a suit contract when holding less than half the points in the pack, but playing in NT with significantly less than 20 points is nearly always asking for trouble.

On this deal South should not pass the double out. XX is often used as an SOS, asking partner to bid on the principal that at least with a trump suit you have a little control.

If that is not your style then bid a suit yourself. Forget Stayman and transfers, all bids must be natural in order to give yourself the best chance of a good escape. Here there would be two schools of thought:

- a) bid 2C to give the opposition as much room as possible to rescue you,
- b) bid 2S to dare the opposition to double you into game.

On this hand both work well as there are 7 tricks available in both black suits. If East-West want 100 instead of game you don't mind. But even where the bids work out less well more often than not you will have improved on the sitting duck target of 1NTX.

On the night three other North-Souths had to contend with the double. One was saved by East bidding before South had to make a decision, one South bid 2C, the other 2S. All three joined the rest of the room in witnessing a heart contract by West so didn't have to enter anything like 1100 in the minus column.

