


Matters Arising 85

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 27 Jun - 1 Jul 2022

Autopilot Failure

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


Board 8 on Tuesday saw 6 out of 9 East-West pairs reach a heart slam, with a spade led, won of course by East. Twelve tricks looks likely to begin with, and even better when both defenders follow to 2 rounds of trumps. Time to think overtrick, which basically means picking up the diamond suit without loss as East's two long clubs can be ruffed.

Basic options are a) cash KD to guard against singleton Q North and then finesse J (unless of course North shows out in which case we'll know to finesse the 9). This has just over 50% chance of success.

b) Play to drop the QD in 2 rounds, so either singleton or doubleton. Since the Q is more likely to be in the long hand as there is more space there, this must be less than 50% chance.

There is a c) cash A then run J playing North for Qxx and South for 10x but such a precise distribution must surely occur less often than a).

a), cash K followed by finesse it is then.

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

Unlucky. The Q is doubleton North and playing against the odds to drop it would have worked. Those whose slam was at the Grand level may have felt particularly hard done by, though whether they really want to be that high is another thing.

However the traveller reveals a peculiarity - all bar one of these declarers made 13 tricks. What happened?

Back to trick 1, and North covered dummy's honour with their K. Now East could discard a diamond on the other spade honour and cross ruff all the long minor cards.

What was North thinking? Possibly nothing more original than cover an honour with an honour. Yet playing the K can only help if partner has the A. How often does your partner underlead an Ace against a suit slam? On this occasion playing the K solved declarer's diamond problem. I trust that the benefitting Easts have got around to writing thank-you letters.

Cover an honour with an honour is a wonderful idea based on using up 2 of the enemy's big cards on one of yours to help promote a trick later on. It is particularly useful if say there is AQx on table and declarer leads the J to cover with the K. Whoever holds the 10 will now win the third round. Ducking however will allow the J to win, with an inevitable finesse to follow. Of course declarer may have the 10, in which case no harm done, but if the defence has the 10 failure to cover has cost a trick.

However the technique has its limitations, not confined to the situation in board 8.

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

North leads the Q off table. If East covers South can win with the A and finesse the 9 on the second round to pick up three tricks in the suit. If East ducks the first round then declarer is restricted to two tricks unless they abandon the suit and East-West lead it later. In general one shouldn't cover the higher of touching honours from table because of the possibility of this set up. Even if table's third card is low, declarer might hold the 9 8 behind their A to create effectively the same threat.


Another common situation occurs when declarer is trying to work out the location of a missing Q which can be picked up by a 2 way finesse:

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

Declarer has decided to play East for the Q by playing the A and finessing on the way back to hand. They give themselves an extra chance by leading the J since if West is an *cover an honour with an honour* aficionado they will now pick up the Queen whoever holds it. Why cover the J here? What card are you hoping to promote? You might even find partner with a singleton K, which most definitely would not please them.

This is not an exhaustive list of when not to cover, but should suffice to show that you cannot afford simply to cover on autopilot.

Required Reading

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

Dummy of course had no role in the play of Tuesday's board 2, but everyone else did, which is why I'm showing the full deal immediately. East reached game in spades, either by opening it or by opening one and rebidding four. No surprises from our view that the opening lead was 7D.

The first person to start thinking is declarer. What is that lead? Could be singleton, doubleton or second from rubbish. If it is singleton we don't want North to know that, so if we hide our 3 North may think South has it. Either run the lead around to an honour in our hand, or rise with A and drop an honour.

Trumps are tackled and South wins one of the first two rounds. Now what. The only possible way to partner for a diamond ruff is by AC if partner has it. So a club switch. But should it come immediately? What happens if declarer has AC? Or if partner has five and declarer is void? If declarer won trick one in hand we can anticipate declarer winning, drawing the remaining trump(s) and taking the rest through trumps and diamonds. Looks best to cash AH first, though it could be that partner has 6 and declarer is void. Nothing is certain, but that seems a little less likely than declarer void or A in clubs.

The club switch when it comes puts North on lead. If East played 3D at trick one then the original lead looks favourite to be singleton, else partner has led the 7 from K 7, Q 7 or K Q 7, none of which look especially likely, particularly against such bidding. If the 3 is still hidden though North has little more than guesswork to go on as to whether they should try to cash a second club or give a diamond ruff, for even if the fourth best 6C was led North cannot place the 5 when the 3 appears from declarer. This was online, rather than face to face where unfortunately body language too often comes into play.

In practice by accident or design most declarers hid the 3D, most Souths didn't cash AH and most Norths decided to try to cash a second club honour rather than assume their partner's original lead was singleton. The

net result was that an overtrick was more common than defeat via three aces and a ruff.

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.

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