

## Matters Arising 87

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 11 - 15 July 2022

### Ace!?

Of all the tasks in bridge that one would readily delegate to partner, making the opening lead must rank highest. Exhibitionists may count it as a chance to shine, but even they will have noticed how many poor results stem from a poor choice of opening lead.

In some quarters this leads to the excessive use of the lead of an Ace so as to be on lead once dummy is seen. There are good reasons to want to lead an Ace. You may have a suit headed by a run of top honours. The bidding may suggest that declarer will have a lot of discards available, so what you don't take quickly you won't get. Wanting to see dummy is rarely a good one.

4 Cue Thursday's board 7.  
A Q J 8 4 West held the hand left and at six tables  
8 7 5 heard the bidding 2NT – 3C – 3S – 4S or  
10 9 5 3 similar. What to lead?

The answer for four Wests was AH. Declarer duly made their KH and their nominally unmakeable contract.

To me this is an all too predictable disaster. South has opened 2NT, 20-22 balanced(ish). South is hot favourite to hold the KH so any heart lead is likely to cost a trick. Far better to lead a minor suit x and let declarer uncover the heart position themselves. There sounds little danger of declarer disposing of all their hearts anytime soon.

Even had the opening been 1NT so that declarer's resources are more evenly split between hand and dummy I'd avoid the heart lead. After all if the K is on the table you are still setting it up for them.

I might consider leading the QH against a NT contract on the basis that I need partner to know to lead the suit when they get in, so that it would be worth losing a trick unnecessarily to get this message across.

It is unlikely I'd lead this A against a slam. Far too likely that I'd be setting up declarer's 12th trick.

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

Without a heart lead declarer cannot avoid losing at least 2 hearts, a diamond, and a trump.

### An Opener For Ten

Have you ever looked at your hand, thought this looks nice, only to be disappointed that the hand contains only 10 points? How do you decide whether to open light?

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

On Thursday's last board Sally-Ann and I were both West, opened 1H and quickly reached game: 1H – 2D – 2H – 4H, a contract which makes for the loss of a club and two trumps. The rest of the field languished in various part-scores.

What made me open?

As hinted in the intro, my first thoughts were that I liked the look of the hand. Why this liking?

There is a decent 5 card suit that I'm not ashamed to rebid if partner replies 2D or to invite preference to by rebidding 2C over 1S or 1NT responses.

There are good intermediates, 10s and 9s. Lets look at them. In spades Qxx opposite partners actual holding would almost certainly be worth 2 tricks. Yes, a dozy North may fail to cover the Q and allow you to make 3 tricks, or leading small might fell a singleton King, but realistically 2 tricks is the limit of your hopes. With the 10 9 there are 3 tricks whenever the K is onside - half the time.

In hearts the 10 backing up the J means that leading from dummy twice with intent to finesse I can pick up the suit for one loser whenever there is a normal 3–2 break unless both missing honours are offside. Without the 10 two losers are likely except when both honours onside. The 10 transforms a 25% chance of 1 loser into a 75% chance on a normal break.

In clubs the 10 9 make it difficult for the enemy to attack the suit. Yes partner has a singleton, so I'm looking for ruffs anyway, but if we end up in NT on a different hand from partner it is difficult for the defence to mount an effective attack on clubs without setting up tricks there for me.

Liking the look of a light hand isn't in itself enough for me to open. I also want to have at most 7 losers on the losing trick count. This hand is spot on the 7.

Thus I like the look of the hand and it has 7 losers. 1H it is. This is not a "taking candy from a baby" bid. I'd open 1H against anyone. Indeed taking the opposition into account when making bids is rarely to be recommended for it can lead to bad habits.

How light would I go? Down to the legal limits, which for a 1 of a suit opening is 8 high card points and obeying the rule of 18 (HCP + total length of two longest suits at least 18), though the rule of 18 part is waived after two passes.

Can the "liking the hand" part of my decision be quantified? Not fully, but if you add 1 point for every card beyond 4 in a suit, and a point for every two 10s you may get close. On that basis West on board 24 has 12 points which presumably says open, though I'm not convinced I'd always open on 12 points calculated this way even if the hand held just 7 losers. And I might open if this calculation falls short of 12.

I welcome any comments or queries sent me at [martyn@orpheusmail.co.uk](mailto: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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