

Matters Arising 88

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 18 - 22 July 2022

A Small King

On Tuesday seven of the eight Wests played in a heart game on board 5, with the exception bidding on to slam. How would you play the contract on a spade lead?


A 8 7 A Q J 4 2 K Q Q 8 3		- - K 9 6 5 9 6 5 3 A J 10 4 2
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Every declarer saw the desirability of ruffing their small spades before drawing trumps, an succeeded in doing so, but they didn't all make the same number of tricks.

Whether they ruffed the opening lead or allowed it to run to the A in hand, a common approach was: ruff a small spade, return to hand via a trump and ruff a second spade. Cash KH and use a diamond to force an entry to hand to draw the last trump, hearts being 3-1, and run the QC. When the finesse worked declarer had 12 tricks, losing just to AD.

Try again. Ruff a spade, return to hand via a trump, noting that both defenders follow. This show that the suit is no worse than 3-1 and means that dummy's K is not needed as a trump winner as declarer's AQJ must clear the suit. Consequently we can use the K as a small card, overtaking it in hand when following the line given above (assuming we didn't use the A on the first round). That leaves us in hand to draw the last trump and lead QC. With the club suit breaking 3-2 with the K onside declarer's diamonds disappear on dummy's long clubs and all 13 tricks are made.

Indeed knowing the trump break isn't 4-0 means we can afford to ruff the second spade with the K so that there is now no problem returning to hand in trumps even if we used the A on the first round, and the already small chance of a spade over-ruff shrinks to zero.

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

How do you fancy your chances in 3NT by East on a small spade lead on this hand from Monday?

Q 8 A K J 8 7 J 6 A 9 6 4		A J 2 2 K 8 4 3 K Q J 8 7
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With 5 club tricks, 2 in hearts and two in spades on the lead, this appears a problem free assignment. Everyone was in 3NT, yet those making 9 tricks scored a mere 25% on the hand. As ever in pairs overtricks should never be far from declarers mind.

I've probably mentioned before that always running a long suit in no trumps is akin to always drawing trumps in a suit contract. Often a good idea, but with enough exceptions that each case has to be treated on its merits.

Let's see what happens if we run all the clubs immediately after winning the QS on table (or indeed after allowing the lead to run to hand in a vain hope that North will play the K which almost certainly he doesn't possess).

After 4 clubs the position is:

8 A K J 8 7 J 6 - -		A J 2 K 8 4 3 8
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Now when you lead hearts, presumably after the last club, you cannot afford the finesse since if it loses there is no way back to table - A and K would be orphaned. This creates a risk of North retaining say Q 10 hearts over dummy with their partner leading through if getting on lead. With the ever-present risk of at least 2 diamond losers declarer finds themselves forced to cash out, for either the spade finesse or a diamond to the K could be disastrous.

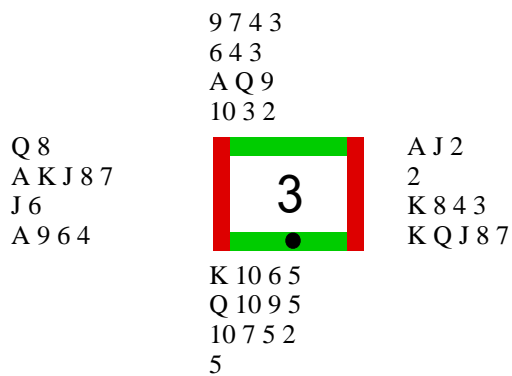
Suppose instead we just play a club at trick two to reach hand and the position below, and then immediately take the heart finesse.

8 A K J 8 7 J 6 A 9 6		A J 2 K 8 4 3 Q J 8 7
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Even if this loses we still have all suits under control, assuming that if a diamond other than the Q comes from North we don't play the King. Consequently the contract is not in danger.

In practice the JH holds, and both defenders follow to the A and K too, with you discarding a spade and a diamond. Unless you are very fearful of North having withheld the Q, you can now play a 4th round of hearts throwing another diamond. You can still reach dummy via AC to enjoy the long heart, and with South on lead the defence can cash a diamond if they wish to go with their QH but you are still in line for a total of 2 spades, 4 hearts and 5 clubs for 11 tricks, unless the defence make you take KD in place of one of your other winners, in which case you take a slightly different 11 tricks.

As is often the case the long suit, in this hand clubs, provides important communications between the two hands, the early removal of which limits declarer's trick taking possibilities.



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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