




Matters Arising 93

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 22 - 26 Aug 2022

Major Games

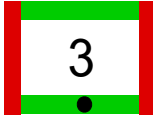
South was kept busy on Tuesday with three major suit games to play, though at several tables board 10 was played by North who was confronted with essentially the same problems. Leads were varied but didn't affect the challenge. How would you have fared?

I	II	III
8 6 4 2 A 10 9 7 K Q 10 8 9	J 9 5 3 2 J A K J 10 6 K 10	9 4 A Q 10 2 J 10 9 8 2 A 5
		
J 7 K Q 6 5 2 A 9 3 Q 8 7	A 8 7 K 5 3 Q 8 5 4 2 A 3	A 7 6 5 3 2 K 9 6 5 A Q 7
4H by S West overcalled 1S. JC led, then 3 top spades with East discarding a club.	4S by S 3D led, East showed H in auction	4H by S 8C led (unbid suit)

On the night everyone in hearts on board 3 made 10 tricks, but they all were either given an easy ride by West switching to a diamond at trick 4 or relied on 4 diamond tricks via a friendly distribution.

East wins trick one with KC and switches to K and another spade. West wins and continues with a high spade.. We need the rest, which looks like 5 hearts, 3 diamonds and 2 club ruffs.


With East discarding on the third spade we ruff low. Club ruff and return to hand via a trump to Q. Now a second club ruff and A and another trump back to hand. With only red cards left South is home and dry provided trumps were no worse than 3-1. A mixture of ruffing losers and using trumps as communications.

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

On board 10 that 3D lead has a horrible singleton look about it, which is a nuisance as we would like to make 5 diamond tricks. Still if trumps are 3-2 we can make 3 trumps and 2 clubs alongside our diamonds so 10 tricks look likely provided we draw trumps as quickly as possible.

Win trick one on table - this shouldn't matter but maximizing 2 way communication in the suit can't hurt - and play off A and another trump. Assuming trumps 3-2 the defence will only have one more trump left at this point, and if they use it to ruff a diamond all they are doing is changing a natural trump trick into a ruff - we make one less diamond but one more natural trump trick and the contract is safe.

In practice East produces QS on the first round of trumps, marking West with the 10. Consequently the 8S can be run on the second round and in due course the trump suit is picked up for 1 loser. Declarer makes 4 trumps, 5 diamonds and 2 clubs for an overtrick.

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

East showed their hearts in the auction in various ways, by opening 2H or 3H or by doubling North's 2H transfer bid over South's 1NT. Consequently several Wests started with AH, setting up South's K. This made no difference as there are no losers in the minors to make useful discards on KH.

As ever the bidding on 11 was varied with 1S – 2D – 2H – 4H being the most common auction. Consequently the 8C looks like the lead of the unbid suit. It could just be 4th highest, KJ98 say, may well be second from rubbish, and is very unlikely to be a singleton. But first we need to consider our options.

With three side suit aces we could try to make the contract with the help of 7 trump tricks, which presumably means 1 natural one and 6 ruffs. Setting up a spade-diamond cross-ruff means losing a spade at which point we would have to be prepared for a trump switch, so that all our other trumps have to be scored separately as ruffs. So no defensive over-ruffs.

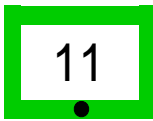
We do have a lot of spades, so if the suit breaks 3–2 we can establish it by winning one trick, losing the next and ruffing the third, leaving us with 3 further spade winners. Four spades, a spade ruff and two minor suit aces leaves us needing three trump tricks. This looks a better bet than the previous plan.

Thirdly we can look to establish diamonds. That needs three ruffs in hands, and the ability to reach dummy to lead for these ruffs, and to reach dummy afterwards to enjoy the long diamond. Communications don't look that good.

The middle plan then, the main danger to which seems to be being forced to ruff diamonds in hand so that we can't draw trumps and end in hand to enjoy the long spades. Consequently to maintain the protection given by AD rise with AC at trick one and play A and another spade. (I'd like to duck a spade first, but don't want to risk my A being ruffed if the suit is 4–1).

East wins the second spade with the Q over their partner's J, so the suit has behaved. East cashes KC and switches to a diamond. We now lead a third spade, and are disappointed to discover that West has the K - had East held the last spade we would know what to ruff with. As it is we are involved in a bit of a guessing game, but with trumps 3–2 anything works. Ruff low and East over-ruffs. You ruff the diamond continuation, draw trumps ending in hand and make the contract for the loss of a spade, KC and the spade overruff. Ruff high, cash the other high honour and run 10H makes 11 tricks. Both variations also secure the contract when East has 4 trumps.

So three major suit games made by different means - board 3 by ruffing club losers, 10 by drawing trumps and 11 by establishing spades. I also find it interesting that the hand that does call for an immediate removal of trumps is the one with the poorest quality trump holding, making it the one on which some players will be most reluctant to tackle the suit.


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

One Loser

Heart bids from NS didn't stop four Wests playing this hand from Monday in spades. There seems to be only one loser, but only two declarers made 12 tricks.

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

Suppose the defence start with a club. Win in hand and play off AK D and ruff a diamond. Now a heart to set up the heart ruff. Suppose South wins and leads a trump to try to reduce ruffing chances. Win in hand, ruff a heart, trump back to hand, ruff the last diamond with KS, which cannot be overruffed. Only clubs left on table so you ruff one, leaving you with winning trumps.

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

This looks like a simple case of not drawing trumps and being prepared to ruff the 4th diamond high, but there is also hidden from the play suggested above the importance of not making unnecessary ruffs. Suppose that after ducking the heart the defence continue with a club which you ruff in hand. Now a heart ruff and three rounds of diamonds is fine, but if you return to hand after the heart ruff with a club ruff then South gets to discard a diamond. Suddenly you have two diamonds that both need ruffing high, which can't be done. The unnecessary club ruff has cost a trick.

Bidding Game I

Monday's board 3 was an easy 4H contract for East, except half the 6 table field didn't find it.

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

1D – 1H is an easy enough start, but what next? A NT rebid presumably, either 2NT (17-18) or 1NT (15-17) according to system. Indeed two pairs played in 1NT suggesting that they play a 15-17 rebid, without the help of a countback convention - 2C to ask further about opener's hand. I'm in the 15-16 rebid school, but even if using 15-17 I can't help feeling I would upgrade the hand to 18 points on the back of a good 5 card suit and two potentially useful 10s. Consequently I would rebid 2NT anyway.

Over to East. 3S seems called for. Not through any expectation of finding a spade fit as surely partner would have rebid in spades with four, but to show the 5 hearts. Reverses always promise the first suit to be longer. Over 3S West has an easy 4H bid and with trumps and diamonds behaving East makes an equally easy 11 tricks.

Why not 3H over 2NT? Rebidding your own suit over NT does tend to show a 6 card suit.

Bidding Game II


No-one found the NT game on Monday's board 6 after North opened 1H.

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

I suspect the immediate cause of the problem is finding a bid for East over North's 1H. Playing a 15-17 NT overcall 1NT does the job nicely. With system on (ie bid the same way as over a 1NT opening, just with point counts adjusted to take account of the strength of the overcall) the bidding continues 2C (Stayman), 2D, 3NT.

Those opting for X or 2C as their initial action, either by choice or because they play a 16-18 NT overcall, have a harder time. Given the sort of values that people can overcall on even when red, West may struggle to envisage game over a 2C overcall, whilst it seems that many partnerships have only a vague agreement of how to bid after a double. More reasons for bidding 1NT, reaching well understood territory.

Count Your Tricks

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

Playing traditional Acol with strong twos West cannot open 2C as they don't have a game-going hand. No such problems for those for whom 2C is either game-going or 8 playing tricks in an unspecified suit, or indeed for those playing Benji Acol, as it seems eminently reasonable to count 6 club tricks and AS, plus another from QS or KJ H to reach the magic 8 playing tricks. East replies 2NT, positive (with lots in reserve) and West shows their suit. Time for a quick trick count by East. 8 tricks from partner plus KC - clearly West is expecting to lose a trick to the king - AH, AK D. That's 12. If partner has AS then our K is 13. 4NT clears up the 'if' question' and East can confidently bid 7NT.

What if West started more cautiously with 1C. Now 1S from East and presumably 3C from West. Trick counting time: 6 clubs probably given the 3C rebid, AK D, AH is 9 tricks and only takes into account 6 or 7 of partners points. West must have quite a bit more. East asks and hears 2 aces + Q trumps in reply to their Roman Keycard Blackwood enquiry. We can add 2 spades to our trick total, and still there is more in partners hand for so far West looks like

Axx xx xx AQxxxx

Presumably East is now happy to play in NT, and indeed to reach at least a small slam, so can safely ask for Kings, discovering KH in partner's hand. So now we can place West with something like

Axx Kx xx AQxxxx

which gives us an easy 12 tricks. Moreover this still doesn't represent a 3C jump rebid. Are you willing to gamble on West having a second Q which would guarantee 13 tricks on a reasonable club break, or are you wary that further values are all Jacks leading you to sign off in 6NT?

Wrong Rule

East is declaring in 1NT, their reply to West's 1H opening on this hand from Monday. South leads 5S which declarer ducks on the table.

Over to you as North.

A 9 7
10 9 2
K 9 6 4
K 9 8

Q J 6 3
A J 7 5
A Q J 8

20

Perhaps we should take a vote 5 on how North should proceed. Hands up everyone who would rise with AS (third hand plays high) and return the suit.

Now hands up all those who would rise with AS and switch to attack dummy's weakness in clubs.

Knowing me as you do you won't be surprised that I'm going to say that everyone who has voted so far is wrong. Third hand plays high is an excellent guideline, and I'll admit I've suffered as much as the next man from partners who cannot persuade themselves to part with their high cards when they should. But it is just that, a guideline.

What do you think the 5S is? Fourth best looks favourite. In which case we can use the Rule of Eleven:

For a 4th best lead subtract the number on the card from 11 and the answer tells you how many higher cards there are not in leader's hand.

Five from eleven is six, and we can see all six - the QJ6 on table and A97 in hand. If the 5S is indeed 4th best declarer cannot beat the 5, so we don't need to put up our Ace as both the 9 and 7 will win the trick.

It is worth pointing out that the rule of 11 is a simple mathematical consequence of leading 4th best. The leader has to make no effort to obey the rule and both partner and declarer can apply the rule whenever confronted with a 4th best lead.

Playing the A turns what should be 3 defensive tricks in spades into 2.

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

We may of course be wrong in our assumption that partner's 5S is 4th best. There are then two possibilities

- i) declarer holds the K, in which case holding off with the A doesn't cost,
- ii) partner has Kxx in which case I suggest playing the 9 in case their larger x is the 10. Again if declarer has 10 then the A doesn't gain other than giving us the lead quickly.

Overall then it seems the 9 is best, followed by the 7 which will be fine as long as the lead is 4th best, with the A definitely inferior unless there is an important reason for getting on lead quickly.

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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