

Matters Arising 94

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 29 Aug - 2 Sep 2022


Tops and Bottoms

We all like to think our good scores are due to our own efforts, but in reality most come from taking advantage of enemy error. Hence my description of 'sit and catch' for my preferred style of play.

A Q 9 8 On Tuesday's board 18 NV v V East found themselves with the pleasant hand shown and heard the bidding:
Q J 5 2
K
K Q 7 5

West	North	East	South
		1C	P
2C	3D	3H	P
4H	5D	?	

Partner's initial 2C response shows limited values, though certainly not a bust, and should deny a 4 card major. Consequently 4H is presumably good 3 card support. With so many goodies East naturally wants to declare, but 6C is obviously out, and 5H on a 4-3 fit and possibly being forced to ruff diamonds in the long hand could be awkward at best. On the other hand in which suit(s) other than diamonds is North intending to take tricks? Time to reach for the axe.

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

At this colour 5D is an ill-judged bid. 5DX goes for at least 500, beating any game East-West can make, pass by East scores a more modest 200/300, beaten by those who found 5C, whilst 5H goes off.

In fact two North-South pairs happily ignored the colour and bid 5D, the other in a slightly different and less informative auction. One East said thank-you, doubled and took a top, the other threw the gift away by bidding 5H, finding themselves with the only negative score.

Such is life when the opponents go wrong. A top can be yours, but fail to take advantage and you can be right at the other end of the scale.

Last Hand Blues


Thursday's last hand saw all six Wests playing in 2H after a transfer sequence, making 8 or 9 tricks, usually on the lead of JC.

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

The natural line is to win and tackle trumps, relying on black suit tricks once trumps are gone. Trick 2 sees a small heart to the 10, which holds, followed by A and K with North glumly dropping their honours under these. A losing spade finesse follows and West has 5 trumps, 3 spades and two aces for 10 tricks.

If North splits their honours on the first trump it doesn't help as West wins on the table and is soon back in hand to take the trump finesse and clear the suit.

Note that the availability of 10 tricks on this line despite the spade finesse failing means the contract would still make if the trump distribution resulted in the loss of 2 trump tricks.

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

There is perhaps an excuse for reading the JC as a singleton and hence wanting to draw as many trumps as quickly as possible to avoid a club ruff, and so making 1 trick less.

Regrettably I have to confess to being one of the declarers who failed to find this simple play on the night.

Which Finesse?


On Monday West found themselves declaring 2S on a club lead on board 21. With a club and two hearts obvious losers declarer can only afford two losers between spades and diamonds. Moreover even if they don't take AC immediately it is clear they are about to be put on table for probably the only time. Should they come off table with a diamond or a spade?

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

If coming off table with a diamond the play in the suit is simple - lead the Q and run it if South doesn't cover. The Q lead is necessary so as to remain on table to repeat the finesse if it works. Leading the 8 to the 10 even if it works would probably leave declarer with a diamond loser as there is no way back to table to finesse again. A 50% chance of avoiding a diamond loser by playing that suit.

Is the spade finesse as good? Imagine that a spade to the 9 holds or draws the Ace from North. To avoid a second loser in the suit the K will have to crash the Q next time around, so finessing in spades works only if South has Qx or singleton Q. Similarly small to K picks up the suit for one loser only if North has singleton K. Thus the chances of picking up the spades for one loser are less than 50%.

Since playing diamonds all but guarantees 2 spade losers, and playing spades all but guarantees a diamond loser we need to save a trick in the suit we play, and that is more likely to happen in diamonds. Thus after winning AC we lead QD, overriding our usual desire to draw trumps immediately.


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

Note that swapping the locations of the missing spade honours would still result in 2 spade losers even if trumps are led from table.

Call That An Overcall?

Some players really do expect their partners to be able to see through the backs of cards when it comes to interpreting their overcalls. You won't need to think hard about your habits to realise that overcalls are in general weaker than opening bids, with the saving grace that they contain 5 rather than 4 card suits. My own guidelines are that a typical minimum suit opening will contain 7 losers whereas a minimum overcall will have 8. In order to stop partner having to guess completely it is sensible to put an upper limit on your overcalls. For example I rarely make a suit overcall with more than 15 points, which is also the upper limit on my jump overcalls. Anything stronger and I start with a double, bidding again later even if partner makes a minimum response.

Cue Tuesday's board 15.

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

One South passed, allowing West to make a strong opening and reach a spade game. At the other 8 tables South opened 1H, and five Wests overcalled 2D. Not surprisingly their partners did not credit them with such strength, resulting in these partnerships playing in a variety of inferior contracts.

Double makes life easy. Yes, West is the wrong shape for a classical double, being short in clubs rather than the enemy suit, but they can cope with any response.

1S from partner? Bid 4, for how many tricks do you expect to lose now?

2C from partner? 3NT. Not cast iron, but will surely have chances very much more often than not.

2D? 4NT with intent to bid 6D if partner produces an ace.

1NT. 3NT.

In practice East responds 1S, gulps on being bounced to 4, but relaxes when they see table.

Why 1S rather than 2C? Contrary to opinion in some quarters a take-out double doesn't ask partner for their best suit but to help find the best contract. We only play in minors if we can't play in a major so East bids a major if they can.

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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