

Matters Arising 95

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal Online 5 - 9 Sept 2022

Cross-Ruff

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

South can be forgiven for leading a top spade against East's diamond contract on this hand from Thursday, though it opened the way to eleven tricks. With AK A on table taking care of declarer's short suits, their only potential losers are AD and spades. Admittedly they might get lucky with a club finesse to help dispose of a spade, but ruffing the big suit on table seems the best way of disposing of losers there. To get to hand to lead spades will require ruffs, so a cross ruff is the answer - this is not a hand for drawing trumps.

There are potential traps though. Suppose we ruff the opening spade and plan AC, club ruff, spade ruff, club ruff, spade ruff, club ruff, AK H, after which we can only lose AD and the fourth spade. Sounds good, but ...

... clubs are likely to be 4-2, and if South can over-ruff the third round with their A and continue trumps that will leave us with an extra spade loser. Even if they can't or don't if they discard hearts on the club ruffs you may find that AK H no longer stand up.

Thus we need to do 2 things:

- a) cash AK H before embarking on the cross-ruff, and
- b) re-enter hand once with a club ruff and once with a heart ruff for the most likely splits of these two suits are 4-2 and 4-3 respectively in which case there can be no over-ruff.

Cashing side suit winners before embarking on a cross ruff is a common ploy.

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

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

Side Suit

6-6 hands are not always easy to handle in the bidding, so thankfully they are not very common. On this one from Thursday North usually and understandably insisted on playing in spades despite the misfit. There are 10 tricks available, though East's natural 4th best heart lead makes that 11. However none of the declarers receiving that lead reached double figures for their trick count, losing control after too many ruffs in hand.

A K Q 10 6 2
--
10 8 6 4 3 2
7

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

Dummy's clubs are a distraction - we can't set them up and reach them. The side suit that matters is diamonds, and with 5 missing a normal 3-2 break would allow us to set up the suit for two losers - either the A and J or A and an over-ruff if we try ruffing the third round. It could be of course that the J is doubleton so that our 10 comes to the top, so only one loser. Meanwhile the trumps look nice and can be brought home for no losers if the suit is 3-3 or 4-2 with a doubleton J. Thus discarding our club on AH at trick one leaves us with 1, maybe 2 diamond losers and perhaps one in trumps.

Trick 2 is KD, which East wins. No surprise after your discard at trick one that AC comes next. Ruff, QD. Now play of the top trumps, and if the J appears on the second round complete the extraction process. Lose a second diamond and claim.

A K Q 10 6 2
--
10 8 6 4 3 2
7

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

8
A 10 7 4
K Q
K 10 9 5 4 2

It is tempting to ignore the potential of the diamond suit since in hand it is only 10 high, but dummy provides the quality in the suit that enables establishment.

Discards

Discards can make or break a contract, and on Tuesday's board 17 it was declarer's voluntary discards that mattered.


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

With a combined 32 count and two five card minor suits 6NT is an inviting contract, and indeed played by West on a spade lead an excellent one. Typically the spade was won on table and the diamonds immediately run, requiring declarer to make 2 discards.

Some players have it fixed in their minds that the smallest cards are the least likely to win tricks, and I've lost count of the number of times I've seen such players discard from the 2s upwards regardless of suit. Here they discard their two remaining 4s, and when it came to pass that there was an inevitable club loser went one down as they had no way to avoid a heart loser too.

One declarer won trick one in hand, thus giving themselves the choice of three 4s from which to discard. Retaining all the clubs the major suit 4s disappeared. After a losing club finesse there was no way back to table for the second spade when the defence unsportingly didn't continue their original suit.

Declarer can count two spade, one heart and five diamond tricks, so needs 4 in clubs. On the not unreasonable assumption that they may need to lose a club in order to win 4 the clubs must all be retained. We've mentioned the difficulty that arises if a spade is discarded, so it must be the hearts that go. The fact that the 6H is a bigger card than the black 4s is irrelevant; it won't be contributing to the trick count.

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

I referred to the discards as voluntary as declarer didn't have to run the diamonds first - they could have started on the clubs. Nevertheless playing diamonds first is

sensible as it might lead to important club discards by a dozy defender.

Trumps Again


Tuesday's final hand featured a competitive auction with East overcalling spades that were sometimes supported by West.

4H by North was the commonest contract, which with the KD wrong is destined to go one down to the loss of a trick in each minor and two in spades.

Destiny was turned on its head when East cashed two top spades before switching to a club, but several declarers threw this lifeline away by playing by the book and drawing trumps, which took three rounds and left them once more with the losers mentioned above.

The spade attack has left the QS as boss and a useful resting spot for dummy's losing club, so why not use it, particularly where support from West tells you the spade suit is 5-3?

Thus after AC comes QS throw a club, ruff a club, heart to hand (both defenders follow), ruff the last club, AH. Now it has to be diamonds, so A and Q. You will only be in trouble if East has three trumps and two diamonds excluding the K, as you will then suffer a trump promotion.

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

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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