


Matters Arising 98

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 26 - 30 Sep 2022

Count

Top players can keep track of every card that is played. Good ones will miss out on the odd spot card, but will be aware of how many of each suit are outstanding. Mere mortals may find this beyond them, but should still recognise when a count of the cards played in a particular suit is important, and complete this task.

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


Thursday board 1, with five Easts playing in diamonds. A typical line of play on a heart lead might be:

- 1 win in hand and ruff the 4H at trick two,
- 2 run the JD, which loses, and win the trump continuation on table, with North following.
- 3 AC, KC, ruff a club, with both defenders following throughout,
- 4 AS, ruff a spade, and claim.

An easy twelve tricks on the distribution, yet only two declarers achieved this. The others had trouble with one of the minors, either playing a third round of trumps leaving dummy one short of that needed to achieve the plan above, or being unaware that clubs could lie 3-3 enabling the suit to be picked up without loss.

Playing an extra round of trumps "in case I've miscounted" is fine if you have trumps to spare, but can cost points if that extra trump could be better use.

An awareness that the 7 card fit in clubs means the defence have six should lead to a count of the suit and no losers on the friendly 3-3 split.

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

Readers confident of their ability to make 12 tricks on this hand can congratulate themselves on being above average on Thursday's evidence.

5-5

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




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

Spot the contract from this deal on Tuesday.

You could be forgiven for assuming a spade part-score, losing say 2 trumps, a heart or two and a club. Yet on the night only four of nine tables saw a spade contract.

The culprit was North's decision to open 1H after two passes. South's 1NT now gave North problems - pass is unattractive on the shape, 2H wouldn't be welcome by South having made a courtesy response with a singleton heart, and 2S being a reverse leads partner to believe you are stronger with longer hearts than spades.

Regardless of strength holding a 5-5 hand open the higher ranking. The *when holding both majors open 1H* rule applies only to hands that are 4-4 in those suits.

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

After 1S - 1NT even if West comes in with clubs North has a simple rebid in hearts, and South has heard of both majors in the North hand.

Three Weak Twos

Acrol originally used strong opening twos in D/H/S showing hands with 8 playing tricks, with 2C showing a balanced hand of 23-24 points or any game going hand.

Most modern players believe they can get more mileage by employing weak twos at least in the majors, and in some cases in diamonds too. Those choosing the three weak twos route have a decision to make - do they cram all their strong hands into the 2 club opening with the problem of distinguishing between the strong and super-strong later in the auction, or should they relegate the merely strong hands to one level openings with the risk that partner will pass when game is on? There is no right answer to this, the choice is one of personal preference, mine being to avoid the problem by playing Benji with the strong hands opened 2C and the super-strong ones 2D.

North found themselves the proud owner of

-- A K 10 6 5 A 7 4 A K Q 5 3

on Monday's hand 21. If partner holds something fairly feeble such as

xxxx xxx xxx xxx

then 4H makes if both hearts and clubs are 3-2, losing just a trump and two diamonds. Looks like a 2C opener when playing 3 weak twos.

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A K 10 6 5
A 7 4
A K Q 5 3



Q J 9 7 3
9 8 4 2
K 8
J 9

South's first job is to decide whether their hand is worthy of a positive response. I know some people are fond of a 2D relay response in order to keep the bidding low, but it may not always be easy to show extra strength later. It can also lead to opener feeling the need to jump around in order to ensure game is reached, particularly if 2C can hide ordinary strong twos, thus eating up the space saved by the relay.

A positive suit response not only suggests a possible trump suit, but effectively says that provided a fit can be found you should be in slam territory. Consequently Aces and Kings are much more attractive than lesser honours. A 2NT response need not be balanced but denies a good suit, though still retains the 'slam could be on' connotations.

Here South is close to a positive, but with only 1 control (KD) I think 2D is better. If your 2C is of the 'strong or very strong' type you may feel more comfortable responding 2NT to reassure opener that game is on, but it isn't necessary provided you play openers suit rebid as at least a one round force.

2H is next.

If this is game-forcing (because of your style of 2C opening) then the Principle of Fast Arrival kicks in: *In a game-forcing situation the quicker you reach game the less interest you have in going further.* Thus as a continuation to our auction 4H is weaker than 3H, for the obvious reason that the single raise gives more room for exploration.

The full auction might be

2C - 2D - 2H - 3H - 4C - 4H - 4S - 5D - 6H

3H shows a good hand for a 2D response (2NT would be 2nd negative).

4C cue-bid (AC or void)

4H no first round control - as partner knows you have values there is no need to take over.

4S cue-bid (AS or void)

5D cue-bid (KD or singleton)

Note how the cue-bids enable North to discover it is the KD that South holds not just any King.

Aggressive partnerships might see North bidding 5NT rather than 6H, the so called Grand Slam Force, asking about partner's trump honours in a search for a Grand Slam, though the fate of North's third diamond is sufficiently unclear that most will choose discretion and settle for the small one.

If 2H is merely a one round force the subsequent bidding will depend on your system, but ideally you want to create a game-forcing situation before South supports hearts so that you can use The Principle of Fast Arrival to construct a sequence similar to the one above.

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A K 10 6 5
A 7 4
A K Q 5 3

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



Q J 9 7 3
9 8 4 2
K 8
J 9

K 10 8 5 4 2
3
9 2
10 7 6 4

Courtesy NT

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

It is not unusual as responder to be short of the 10 points needed to introduce a new suit at the 2 level but too strong to pass. Such was South's fate on Tuesday's board 8.

Opposite a 1S opening South has no choice other than to respond 1NT, a so called courtesy bid which misrepresents the shape of the hand but keeps the bidding alive.

Opposite a 1H opening though a raise to 2H is better. Three small trumps is clearly far from ideal, but the singleton spade is an obvious danger in NT and a potential source of ruffs if played in a suit contract. Besides there is no law saying partner can't have 5 hearts in which case we have an 8 card fit on a hand that partner might feel obliged to pass 1NT. Perhaps we should call this raise on three card support a courtesy raise and note that we never make jump courtesy raises in uncontested auctions.

With nothing in the majors a 1D opening should surely simply be raised.

K J 6 2		A 10 7 5
A K 7 4		6 5
A 10 9 2		K J 8 6
Q	<div style="border: 2px solid green; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> 8 </div>	J 6 3
Q 9 4 3		
Q J 10 2		
Q		
10 8 7 5		
8		
9 8 3		
7 5 4 3		
A K 9 4 2		

With 17 points opposite a possible 9 most Norths will feel obliged to raise a 1NT response. Nominally South cannot make even 7 tricks in NT, though it is easy for the defence to shed a trick. 2NT though is hopeless unless a generous defence provide an entry to the AK C after the Q has gone. In hearts on the other hand even trump leads don't prevent declarer from scoring a spade ruff, which also acts as entry to the club honours.

On the night there was a mixture of 1D and 1H openings. No doubt there are those who will swear that 1H is the 'correct' opening bid on a 4-4-4-1 hand with a singleton club, but as long as partner bids sensibly there is a lot to be said for opening the lowest suit when holding 15+ points on such a shape.

If holding a maximum of 14 points though opening the suit above the singleton in any 4-4-4-1 hand is asking

for trouble since a response in the singleton leaves you with no sane rebid. Imagine two small variations on North's hand:

KJxx Kxxx AQxx x

(AH replaced by an x, QC swapped with xD)

If you open 1D and partner replies 2C anything you now say will be a lie. The problem disappears with 15+ points as a NT rebid is now possible.

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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