

TIPS FOR TOPS

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- Reverse Worthy?
- Defence Against NT

All boards referred to in this article were played in the 299er game at Bridge Centre of Niagara on January 19, 2021, (Game 389248.)

Board 2

Dlr: East
Vul: N/S

♠ Q J 10 3
♥ A 5 3 2
♦ A 9
♣ 9 7 3

Optimum
EW
1H+2:
-140

♠ A 8 5 2
♥ K Q J 7
♦ 8 2
♣ J 5 4

NORTH
2
EAST

♠ 7 6
♥ 9 8
♦ K Q J 4
♣ A K Q 10 8

WEST
SOUTH

♠ K 9 4
♥ 10 6 4
♦ 10 7 6 5 3
♣ 6 2

11 11 15
3

N
- - - -
S
- - - -
E 4 2 3 2 2
W 4 2 3 2 2

Board 2 this week provides interesting points on both bidding and defence. E has a beautiful hand with both minors; most opened 1C, planning to bid 2D over whatever response they get. This is called a reverse; the rebid suit is higher ranking and a level higher than the opening suit bid. It promises that the opening suit is longer than the rebid suit, and it also promises extra values - a good 16+. In fact, beautiful as this is, it's a borderline strength for a reverse. I showed it to 2 of our club's strongest players; they both felt it was not quite good enough. Keep this hand in mind next time you are thinking of making a reverse bid; if it doesn't look as great as this hand, don't even think about it!

But what do you do if you can't reverse? You have to open the D suit and rebid the Cs. Partner won't know the precise shape of your hand, but will know that it's unbalanced (you

didn't rebid NT) and heavily weighted in the minor suits.

Let's continue as if E had opened 1C, as many did. W, holding 4-4 in the Majors must respond 1H. With 4-4, you bid up the line; if you bid the Ss first, and then the Hs, you are promising at least 5Ss. When E rebids 2D over your 1H, W has a couple of choices. One thing she cannot do is pass; a reverse bid is forcing for one round. You know E has a strong hand; combined with your 11 HCP, you definitely want to be in game. And you have Ss stopped, so 3NT is a logical bid.

If you are not enthusiastic about playing NT with a S lead, you can bid 3C. In this sequence, you know E has at least 5, so your 3 combine to make a good suit. But E wants to be in game, and will probably now bid 3S - what's that? It's a question: do you have Ss stopped, partner? W will reluctantly admit she does, and will bid 3NT.

One thing that W must be very aware of: E does not have 4Ss. If she did, she would have bid those over your 1H instead of 2D. So, if W bids 2Ss over the 2D, it should not be taken as a real suit. It tends to mean "I don't know where to go next, partner". And it tends to deny a S stopper for NT.

Now let's look at the defense against 3NT. Assuming it's played in the W, consider N's opening lead. The first thing that N should consider is this: E/W have bid game; they probably

have 25 or 26 HCP. And you have 11; that leaves very few for your partner. You won't get much help in defeating this contract; you want to be careful not to give up a cheap trick that declarer doesn't deserve. You have a solid sequence in Ss. That's a safe lead. Even if, at your table, Ss had been bid, if you lead the top of the sequence, you start to establish at least one S trick for your side. And you have 2 entries in your 2 Aces, so you can count on taking 3 tricks - 2 aces and 1S.

So that's pointer #1. You probably know the maxim: lead 4th best of your longest and strongest suit against NT. But when your suit is headed by a sequence of 3 or more honours, lead the top card of the sequence. Leading the Q promises the J, and usually the 10 (sometimes the 9 instead of the 10 - that's called a broken sequence.) Don't lead the 4 from this hand; this time you get away with it, but you would be giving declarer a cheap trick if she had the 9. You need to be sure you are forcing out one of the top honours.

Now focus on the S hand; what should she be thinking? We like the lead; it's not our long suit, but we do have some help for partner. Do you see a danger? It's possible this suit is going to get tangled ("blocked"). But if you trust your partner (you do, don't you?), you know she has the QJ10x. What you need to do is to play the K on the Q; if it holds, play the 9 next. Now partner knows where

all the important cards are. W will probably (should) duck at least twice, but after she takes her A, N will get the lead with one of her aces, and can cash the last S and another A to set the contract.

Dir: South
Vul: N/S

♠ 7 2
♥ 8 2
♦ A K 10 7 6
♣ A J 4 2

Optimum
EW
3N+1:
-430

♠ Q 3
♥ A Q J 10
♦ 5 4
♣ K Q 8 6 5

NORTH
15
WEST
SOUTH

♠ A K J 10 5
♥ 5 3
♦ Q J 9 3
♣ 10 3

12
14
3
11

♠ 9 8 6 4
♥ K 9 7 6 4
♦ 8 2
♣ 9 7

♠ ♣ ♥ ♦ N
N - - - -
S - - - -
E 3 2 2 4 4
W 3 2 2 4 4

Now let's look at board 15. The first round of bidding is easy: p 1C 1D 1S. South passes again, and what does W do? What I hope you all recognize now: W cannot bid 2H. That would be a reverse, and the hand isn't anywhere near strong enough. She can't bid 1NT without a D stopper, and she can't pass, because E's new suit response was forcing. So, although not perfect, the only choice is to bid 2C. N has nothing more to say, so E? With a minimum hand E could pass, but with 11HCP, it's worth an invitation; opposite a 14 point opener, a game might still be possible. E has the Ds well stopped, but has nothing in Hs, so is a little leary of NT. Here a 2D bid stands out; it's clearly not natural, and asks W for more information. NOW W can bid the Hs; E can comfortably bid 2NT, knowing the Hs are not a problem. W's 14HCP, opposite an invitational hand are enough to go on to game.

There is little to say about defense; in fact the 3N contract is unbeatable. But looking at the opening lead: should S follow the "4th highest..." maxim? No; here is another important exception to the rule. It's almost always right to lead your partner's suit. Consider why. First, you know they have 5, because their bid was an overcall. They had enough strength to overcall, which means they likely have other high cards that will give

them an entry to their hand later. If, instead, you try your own suit, it's not longer than partner's Ds, and you have no outside entry to cash your Hs, even if you do get them set up. In any case, it's good for partnership harmony to lead your partner's suit.

Which D do you lead? When you have 2, you lead the high one - the 8. This is standard, and applies against suit and NT contracts; lead high from doubleton and low from 3 or more. It helps your partner understand what is going on in the suit.

Now look at the hand from declarer's perspective. What's the first thing to do? As always: make a plan. In NT, you count your tricks. "Off the top" you have 5 Ss and the HA for 6. You can establish 2 more H tricks by knocking out the K, and 1 more C by knocking out the A. So your contract looks pretty safe, but your plan will have to depend on what happens on the first trick or 2.

In one common scenario, N will take the first 2 tricks with AK of Ds. Now what? Well, now your "off the top" count has gone up to 8 with the QJ of Ds. You can easily set up your ninth in either Hs or Cs. In matchpoints, once your contract is safe, you should be looking for the chance of overtricks. Which suit gives you a better chance for that? In fact, they are fairly equal in odds, but not as equal in ease of execution, because entries to your hand are quite limited.

Based on the bidding, you expect N to have at least one of the HK or the CA, but she doesn't need to have both. Suppose you play on Cs first. If S has the CA, you can win tricks with both of your honours, but unless S pops up with her A the first time, you will have to play toward them from your hand twice. If N has the CA, you will have set up your 9th trick, but N will now force out your last D, and you won't want to take a chance on the H finesse. So nine is probably your limit.

If, instead you play to the HQ and the finesse loses, the opponents can cash the CA and hold you to 9 right

away. But, if the finesse wins, you have your second H trick available right away without having to repeat the finesse. Now you can guarantee 10 tricks by playing a top C to set up a trick in that suit. Alternatively, you can come back to your hand to repeat the H finesse; there is a slight chance of 11 tricks if the K falls under the A on the 3rd round. But you will have to cash all your winners from your hand first because of the limited transportation.

It's harder to say what to do if NS don't take their 2 D tricks right away, but the key is always to plan ahead, and to recognize that when you don't have the top honour of a suit, you need to lead towards your lower honours if you hope to promote them. So, in this second scenario, you should plan to lead Ds towards your QJ - probably twice - at some point, forcing N to play ahead of you with her expected A and/or K. It's the only way to make any D tricks.

Dir: West
Vul: E/W

♠ A K 9 8
♥ Q J 5 4
♦ 9
♣ J 8 7 6

Optimum
NS
3N+1:
+430

♠ J 7 5 4 2
♥ 10 9 6 3 2
♦ 4
♣ 9 3

NORTH
16
WEST
SOUTH

♠ Q 10 6
♥ A 8
♦ J 10 7
♣ A K 10 5 4

11
1
14
14

♠ 3
♥ K 7
♦ A K Q 8 6 5 3 2
♣ Q 2

♠ ♣ ♥ ♦ N
N 1 4 1 - 4
S 1 4 1 - 4
E - - - 1 -
W - - - - -

Board 16 deserves a quick comment, because it's a perfect example of how important it can be to consider NT instead of trying for a minor suit game. S has gorgeous Ds, but, against good defense, can only make 4 playing in Ds, while she can make game playing in NT. It truly is worth working hard to find that 9-trick game instead of having to try for 11. And if there are 11 tricks, 3NT pays better than 5 of a minor - which is critical in matchpoints.