

TIPS FOR TOPS

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- Power Doubles
- Defence, defence, defence!

All boards referred to in this article were played in the 299er game at Bridge Centre of Niagara on April 6, 2021, (Game 68305.)

Bd: 16 Vul: E/W Dir: West	♠ T3 ♥ 9 ♦ KQT63 ♣ AQ532	Optimum EW 4S+1: -650
♠ K874 ♥ Q3 ♦ 9872 ♣ J76	N W 16 E S	♠ AQJ9 ♥ AKT64 ♦ AJ ♣ K4
11 6 HCP 22 1	♠ 652 ♥ J8752 ♦ 54 ♣ T98	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 1 - - - S 1 - - - E - 2 3 5 3 W - 2 3 5 3

I'm going to go straight to board 16 this week, because it's a good illustration of the topics we have been looking at recently.

E has a beautiful hand of 22 HCP, but N opened 1D ahead of her. What should E do? It's a fine H suit, but the hand is much too strong for an immediate overcall. With this hand, you should double first, planning to bid your Hs next round - with a jump. In today's case, W replies to your double with Ss, so now you don't mention your Hs - you support your partner's Ss. How high? You can go straight to game. It's true that you forced your partner to bid, and she could have 0 points. But if you jump to 3, as an invitation, how is she to know that all you need from her is one K? A jump to 3 would show only 19 or 20 points. With 22 - "Just do it".

What should N lead against 4S? Leading a singleton can sometimes work - but only if you can get your

partner on lead to return a H for you to ruff. After this bidding sequence, you can't expect partner to have anything at all in her hand, so leading your top D - the K - top of a broken sequence - would be the best chance of starting to develop tricks for your side.

There is very little to the play, as long as you recognize that the Cs need to be led from the W hand towards the K. You expect the A to be in the N hand, based on N's opening bid, so the K rates to take a trick as long as you lead towards it.

Bd: 6 Vul: E/W Dir: East	♠ 9752 ♥ JT4 ♦ QJ ♣ KQ97	Optimum NS 3N+2: +460
♠ 64 ♥ 7 ♦ KT654 ♣ AJT84	N W 6 E S	♠ QJ3 ♥ K9653 ♦ 872 ♣ 52
9 8 HCP 6 17	♠ AKT8 ♥ AQ82 ♦ A93 ♣ 63	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 2 1 4 5 5 S 2 1 4 5 5 E - - - - W - - - -

Board 6 caused some trouble. S opened 1NT, and N responded with 2C - Stayman. S correctly rebid 2H, and N followed with 2N. Now, the onus is on S to consider: what is my partner telling me? 2N, of course is an invitation; opposite a 15-17 point NT hand, it shows 8 or 9 points. It says "partner, if you have 15, we don't want to be in game, but if you have 17 we do". With 17, S needs to

accept the invitation, but she also needs to consider: why did N use Stayman? She didn't like my Hs, but she wouldn't use Stayman if she didn't have a Major - so she must have 4 Ss. S should now sign off in 4S, playing in the 8-card Major fit.

This looks like a better hand to try to singleton lead; alas, it only helps declarer pick up your partner's K. If declarer is now careful to cash 2 rounds of trump and then lead towards the KQ of clubs, she can pitch a losing D from dummy on her long Hs, and one from her hand on the second C honour, she will lose only CA and 1 trump to make 5.

Bd: 9 Vul: E/W Dir: North	♠ A8 ♥ T62 ♦ AKT984 ♣ JT	Optimum N 6N: +990
♠ 9642 ♥ 873 ♦ 76 ♣ Q873	N W 9 E S	♠ KJ53 ♥ J94 ♦ J5 ♣ A952
12 2 HCP 10 16	♠ QT7 ♥ AKQ5 ♦ Q32 ♣ K64	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 2 6 6 3 6 S 2 6 6 2 5 E - - - - W - - - -

Board 9. N opens 1D and rebids 2D. What should be clear to S; with 16HCP opposite an opening hand, our side needs to get to a game level contract. You have good cards in both of the unbid suits - 3NT should stand out like a flashing beacon.

I would like to find more to talk about defence. It's tricky, because the first

rule of defence is “listen to the bidding”, so with different bidding at different tables, the available clues are not the same. Let’s look at board 10. It was, correctly, played in 4S in the S at most tables. What should W lead? At some tables, E had bid Hs - some even opened a bad 2H - so that makes the H3 a clear choice (low from an honour). Otherwise, consider the other suits.

Bd: 10	♠ AT9	Optimum
Vul: All	♥ 75	NS 4S: +620
Dir: East	♦ K874	
	♣ KQ96	
♠ Q74	N	♠ 86
♥ K64	W 10 E	♥ AJT932
♦ AJT6	S	♦ 532
♣ T53		♣ 74
12	♠ KJ532	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
10 HCP 5	♥ Q8	N 4 1 - 4 -
13	♦ Q9	S 4 1 - 4 -
	♣ AJ82	E - - 2 - -
		W - - 2 - -

The last thing you want to lead is a trump - you’re giving declarer a gift no-lose finesse. If declarer has a source of tricks in the dummy, you need to try to get the defence tricks quickly before they go away. At some tables, Cs were bid by N; that suggests a little urgency for the defence. Leading an A is not a good choice unless you also have the K; you want your A to capture an honour, not the 234. Leading any other D should not even occur to you; you never lead away from an A in a suit contract. Which brings us back to the H3. After you take your 2 H tricks, you can now see that dummy’s Cs are not a threat; you can lead one and wait for your DA.

Whether S makes 3 or 4 on this hand depends on whether declarer finds the trump Q. It’s not likely to drop under the AK, but which way do you finesse? It would seem to be a 50-50 guess unless E bid Hs at your table - showing 5 or 6 Hs. If she did, it suggests the higher-odds play. There is no guarantee, but the logic is: there is more space for Ss in the W hand than in the E, and if the suit breaks 3-2, the Q is more likely to be in the hand with 3. So play for W to have the Q, and you make your game.

Bd: 11	♠ 62	Optimum
Vul: None	♥ 765	EW 6N: -990
Dir: South	♦ 8732	
	♣ T643	
♠ AJ54	N	♠ 87
♥ --	W 11 E	♥ AQ432
♦ KT9	S	♦ AQ54
♣ AKQJ92		♣ 87
0	♠ KQT93	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
18 HCP 12	♥ KJT98	N - - - -
10	♦ J6	S - - - -
	♣ 5	E 6 6 1 3 6
		W 6 6 1 3 6

I have a defensive tip from board 11. N has an awful hand - tempting to go to sleep, because how can you have any effect on the result here? But you can. When W is running all his club winners, it matters what you discard when you can’t follow suit. In this case, if you discard a D along the way, dummy’s 4th D becomes a trick for declarer. It’s true your D8 doesn’t look like much, but it’s bigger than dummy’s smallest. And, in this case, none of your other cards stands ANY chance of taking a trick, so the D suit is your only chance. Cherish it. This is called maintaining parity, and it’s worth remembering. Any time you have a suit that’s as long as a suit you see in dummy, hold onto it if you possibly can. It’s only an overtrick this time, but overtricks are important in matchpoint scoring.

Something else happened here that I see from time to time. Most Ns led a S on this hand, usually the correct 6, but there were a couple who led the 2. In defence, every card you play has a meaning, and the way to tell your partner you have a doubleton is to lead the 6. Hi-lo when you hold 2 cards. It’s important to develop good habits on little issues like this; partnership communication depends on it.

I think I have room to look at the bidding on board 11 as well. A few Ss opened the bidding 1S - fewer than I expected. Yes, this hand has only 10HCP, but it’s much stronger than many of the 11-point hands that players love to open. It has 2 semi-solid Major suits, so you have a convenient rebid. The spot cards are good - 10, 9, 8 are much more likely to be useful

than if they were 4,5,6. It passes the rule of 20, and it has only 6 losers.

In any case, how should W bid if she has to contend with a 1S opening on her right? This hand is similar to others we have looked at - too strong for a 2C overcall. With a long minor suit and good S stoppers, W should be thinking about NT, but clearly needs to know partner has some help in Hs. So W should double first and see what transpires.

How should E respond to the T/O double? This hand is too strong to bid any number of Hs, but there is a bid that says “I have opening points, too - we belong in game”; 2S, the cue bid. Now W can show her Cs, E can show her Hs, and W can comfortably bid 3NT.

What if S doesn’t open the bidding? I don’t see the W hand as a 2C opener; rather 1C with a plan to follow with a jump-shift to 2S - forcing to game. You will be surprised when S overcalls 1S, and you will have to choose from an underbid of 3C, an off-shape 3NT or a penalty double. I don’t have the perfect answer; a penalty double pays off best this time, but you will probably hear your partner bid again, and end up in 3N after all.