

TIPS FOR TOPS

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All boards referred to in this article were played in the 299er game at Bridge Centre of Niagara on May 4th, 2021, (Game 33221). Full results and game schedule at www.bridgecentreofniagara.com.

- A difficult 3NT
- Thinking Defence

Bd: 11	♠ T6	Optimum
Vul: None	♥ KQJT	EW 2H: -110
Dir: South	♦ 75	
	♣ A8742	
♠ 93	N	♠ KQ54
♥ 965432	W 11 E	♥ A8
♦ KT92	S	♦ A6
♣ 5		♣ KQT96
10	♠ AJ872	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
3 HCP 18	♥ 7	N - - - -
9	♦ QJ843	S - - - -
	♣ J3	E 2 - 2 - 1
		W 2 - 2 - 1

I start today with board 11. There were so many different ways to get into trouble on this board; let's look at each hand in its turn.

South and West pass to start. N is in 3rd seat with 10HCP. You've probably heard "in 3rd seat anything goes"; The reasoning for this is that, after 2 passes, it's possible that the points are fairly evenly distributed around the table - maybe each side can make a part score, so let's get the conversation started. Either that, or our LHO has a BIG hand, and we would like to get in their way. But there is, as always, a risk involved, so we should weigh that against the possible gains. It's easy to get overboard; how will partner know that we have less than full opening points? The way to tell your partner "just kidding, p" is to pass their response; once you make a normal rebid, they are entitled to believe you had a legitimate opening bid. With the hand on

this board, you "know" that your partner is going to respond in Ss - and what are you going to do then? Rebid those puny Cs?

And, if you are considering opening, what are you going to bid? 1C doesn't do much to get in the opponent's way. If I was going to open this hand, I would at least think about opening 1H, planning a 2C rebid. Showing 2 suits may be the best description of this hand. But it's still only 10HCP, too risky. Pass and see what happens next is advised.

E has the only good hand at the table. If N passes, E has a clear 1C opening bid, planning to rebid 1S. If N opened 1C, the best choice is probably a slightly off-shape 1NT. The only other possibility is to double, hoping partner will bid Ss. But if she doesn't, you will have to bid NT next - a slight stretch.

The S hand, which passed initially, will respond 1S if N opened, and might overcall 1S if E opens 1C. It's pretty light, but suggests a lead, and takes the whole 1-level away from W. If E overcalled 1N, S has a tougher decision, and knowing your partner's style becomes important. If N's bid was legitimate, 9HCP is enough for S to consider a penalty double of 1NT. If you know your partner might be opening light, pass makes more sense.

The W hand is pretty awful, but some folks fell in love with their 6-card H suit. If the bid is at 1NT when it

comes to you, of course, you will transfer to Hs and then pass. If S has responded or overcalled 1S, you don't have enough to act in any way; you should be relieved to not have to think about this one. Even if S passes the 1C opening, you don't have enough to bid 1H. Those who have adopted weak jump shift responses can consider 2H (typically 3-5 HCP and a 6-card suit); but remember, this is NOT standard and would need to be alerted. And I would prefer a stronger suit, myself.

The best makeable contract on this board is 2H, but gave some declarers trouble. You should start to pull trump, despite the size of yours. You don't want the opponents scoring their 5 trumps separately; you hope their honours will crash together. Once you find out the bad split, you stop and leave them outstanding, but should lose only 3 trumps and the 2 black aces.

Board 16: Almost everyone played 3NT E or W, and most didn't make 3. Following the logical auction 1D p 3N, S led either a S or a H, so I will look at both scenarios. E should be happy to see a S lead. Make your plan; count your tricks. Off the top you have 7; 2 Ss, 1H, 2Ds and 2Cs. Where can you find 2 more tricks? If the CQ is on your right, you can pick it up and have 2 more tricks, but if you lose to the Q in the S, you're still a trick short. On the other hand, if the DQ is on your left, you have 5 D tricks. More importantly, even if you

Bd: 16	♠ A94	Optimum EW 3N+1: -630
Vul: E/W	♥ T85	
Dlr: West	♦ Q982	
	♣ 973	
♠ QT	N	♠ KJ5
♥ Q92	W 16 E	♥ A63
♦ AKJ54	S	♦ T63
♣ T64		♣ AKJ2
6	♠ 87632	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
12 HCP 16	♥ KJ74	N - - - -
6	♦ 7	S - - - -
	♣ Q85	E 3 4 2 1 4
		W 3 4 2 1 4

lose to the DQ, you still have AK and 10 (or J), and by then your last D is good unless one opponent has all 5 of the outstanding cards. So starting with the D suit is much better; it guarantees your contract even if the finesse loses. How should you play the suit? It's always better to play toward the high honours, hoping to catch the Q and make the extra trick. If you took the 2nd S trick in the dummy, you have a safe entry to your hand with the CA. Or, if you plan ahead you can win the 2nd trick with the SK, "swallowing" the Q. In either case, your D loses to the Q, and N returns her last S. Now cash your Ds, but be careful; if you still have the D10 in your hand, cash it first, then a small card to dummy, or your suit will be blocked. That's a tip to always keep in mind: play the high card from the short side first.

With 4 D tricks, your count is up to 9. Can you afford to try the C finesse for an overtrick? That depends; are you paying attention? The defenders already have 2 tricks; if S has 2 more Ss in her hand, you can't afford to lose to the CQ; your cold contract will go down. But, while you play your 5 D tricks, S will have had to find 4 discards. Looking at the hand records, you can see, now, how difficult that will have been. At the table, with no hand records, you don't have to think at all about what else S may hold, just pay attention to whether she discards Ss. If she throws one, your contract is safe to try the finesse. And if she throws 2, your finesse is guaranteed to create a 10th trick for you. If no S has been pitched, just take your tricks. But, whatever you do, be

sure to cash all your Ds first, or you will have trouble getting back to them. And, as it happens, if S holds tight to her Ss, forcing you to forego the C finesse, you will probably find she has pitched a C; her Q will fall and you will have 4 C tricks for a total of 11.

It turns out that on this hand, a H lead is a bit harder to deal with. How should E play on the lead of the H4?

The first thing to recognize is that, if it's a standard 4th best lead, then she's leading a 4-card suit (you can see all the Hs lower than the 4), and the worst case is they get 3 H tricks. You will have to give them the SA, so you might then have to count on a successful D finesse. But there are other possibilities.

With these holdings, it's worth trying the Q first; if S is leading away from the K, you will generate a second H trick - and a second stopper. That will give you time to knock out the SA. When you do, you need to duck the next round of Hs; after 3 rounds, S will hold the remaining 13th H, and you will be comfortable trying the D finesse, because if it loses to N, she can't hurt you.

Because the HQ wins the first trick, you make 2Hs, 2S, 4Ds and 2C, for 10. If the K had been in the N hand, you would have had to duck twice, and take your A on the 3rd round. Then, if you're lucky and N has the SA, you could make sure S never regains the lead to cash that last H trick.

Bd: 1	♠ 763	Optimum EW 4Sx, EW 5Cx
Vul: None	♥ 72	
Dlr: North	♦ Q9762	
	♣ A53	
♠ AJ54	N	♠ KT92
♥ T9	W 1 E	♥ 8
♦ T53	S	♦ AJ84
♣ T842		♣ QJ97
6	♠ Q8	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N
5 HCP 11	♥ AKQJ6543	N - - 4 - 2
18	♦ K	S - - 4 - 2
	♣ K6	E 3 1 - 2 -
		W 3 1 - 2 -

Board 1 is a perfect setup to discuss 2 points about defence. In all cases, the hand was played in Hs after S in-

dicated a long, independent suit. Often the lead was a D. Now consider the view from the E seat. E is holding AJxx over dummy's Q-fifth. It's usually right to hold off the A, keeping it to capture the Q, but take a little longer to consider. E can see 9 Ds, not including the lead, leaving only 4 in the other 2 hands. If the lead was the 3, that's not from a doubleton; it's either a singleton or low from 3. Given Ss very long Hs, who is more likely to have a singleton D? Right - S. If the singleton is not the K, your J will take the trick, but if it **IS** the K, you should capture it right now. And so it comes to pass. There is no risk here, because if the singleton is not the K, then partner has the K, and declarer will never be able to make use of that Q.

But, recognize that this logic was based on the lead being the standard 3. Those Ws who chose to lead the undecipherable 5 or 10 gave their partners the wrong information, making this deduction impossible, and costing a trick.

Now, supposing E has played the A and captured the K; the battle is not done. You have set up that Q in dummy for a discard, and declarer has the CA as transportation to it. You need to get whatever S tricks you can before they disappear on the DQ. Today, there are only 2 S tricks for the defence, but if S had had one less H and one more S, this would have been the only way to defeat the contract.