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 June 1st , 2021, (Game #73451). Full results and game schedule at www.bridgecentreofniagara.com.

- Preemts
- Slams

This was a week of preemptive hands and big hands. Let's look at the pre-empts first.

Bd: 14 Vul: None Dlr: East	♠ Q83 ♥ 8 ♦ AQT87543 ♣ J	Optimum EW 4Sx: +100
♠ AJT42 ♥ AJ6 ♦ K ♣ T652	N W 14 E S	♠ K975 ♥ 7532 ♦ J6 ♣ KQ7
9 13 HCP 9 9	♠ 6 ♥ KQT94 ♦ 92 ♣ A9843	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - 4 - - 1 S - 4 1 - 1 E 1 - - 3 - W 1 - - 3 -

I was asked about board 14. Both sides were bidding. How do you know when enough is enough? Should you bid one more because you think the opponents can make their contract, even expecting to go down in yours?

After 2 passes, W opened the bidding 1S, and N had to decide how many Ds to bid. It's really not good enough for a 2D overcall; this is a hand with only one good feature - the long suit - and a preempt is the way to describe that to your partner. 3D is a preemptive bid, but with 8 cards; 4D would usually be the first choice. But look first at vulnerability and how many tricks you expect to lose. A few weeks ago I wrote about the rule of 2, 3 and 4; I talked about it in an opening bid situation, but it works the same as an overcall. Neither side is vulnerable, so bidding 4D suggests you think you can take 7 tricks (a result of down 3), and that looks about right. And a 4D bid makes life very difficult for E; she would have been happy to bid 3S over 3D, but 4S?

Whatever E chooses, neither N nor S should bid again. For N, it's a fundamental rule of preempts; once you make your bid you don't bid again unless partner forces you to. You've fully described your hand to your partner; she is now "captain" and makes all further bidding decisions. For S; you don't know whether E/W can make 4S. E, after all, was a passed hand; she didn't have enough to open, but now she has enough to jump to game? Your partner did a good job in making E guess; let's hope she guessed wrong.

Let's go back for a minute and look at the sequences where N overcalled 3D instead of 4. E had no trouble bidding 3S, and now what? If S considers the meaning of N's bid, she should count: N has suggested she has 6 tricks; S probably has 2, but going down 2 doubled is no victory compared with the 140 or even 170 the opponents might make in a S partial. And what will you do if you push W into 4S? So pass.

While we're talking about preempts, look again at board 1. N has a possible but marginal 3S preempt. Should you do it? Everyone has to find their own level of comfort when it comes to preempting styles.

Bd: 1 Vul: None Dlr: North	♠ QT76543 ♥ 53 ♦ -- ♣ JT52	Optimum NS 5S: +450
♠ 2 ♥ JT984 ♦ KJ953 ♣ Q7	N W 1 E S	♠ J9 ♥ KQ762 ♦ A62 ♣ A86
3 7 HCP 14 16	♠ AK8 ♥ A ♦ QT874 ♣ K943	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 5 - - 5 2 S 5 - - 5 2 E - 2 2 - - W - 2 3 - -

On this hand, it worked well; S had no trouble raising to 4S. Sometimes, of course, it will backfire. One caution: whatever style you adopt, stick with it. Your partner can't be expected to read your mind; if you pass this because it's "not good enough", don't open the next hand that looks like this, because your partner will expect it to be better. But don't be afraid to preempt; they certainly get in the way of the opponents.

I leave you with the words of a top American player and writer, Richard Pavlicek, regarding preempts:

"Don't wait for the classic hand; look for every opportunity. This strategy will make your bridge sessions less consistent; but there is no reward for

consistency in duplicate bridge. A steady player who scores 55% every session will almost never win; while the player who alternates from 45% to 65% will win nearly half the time."

The other feature of this week's game was a pair of very big hands. On board 3, W opened the bidding, and E was holding 19HCP. Those E players should be thinking slam immediately, but which slam, and how to get there?

Bd: 3 Vul: E/W Dlr: South	♠ J82 ♥ KT542 ♦ 82 ♣ T93	Optimum EW 7N: -2220
♠ A94 ♥ J86 ♦ KQJ7 ♣ K65	N W 3 E S	♠ KQ765 ♥ A ♦ A954 ♣ AQ2
4 14 HCP 19 3	♠ T3 ♥ Q973 ♦ T63 ♣ J874	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - - - - - S - - - - - E 4 7 2 7 7 W 4 7 2 7 7

This hand favoured the traditional bidders in our group. For those players, a 2S response indicated a hand that was interested in slam, absolutely forcing to game, and holding 5 or more Ss. Perfect! W could agree to Ss with 3-card support, and E could now use Blackwood to confirm the SA, and comfortably bid 6S.

For players who have given up the strong jump-shift in favour of the weak version (because "how often do you get to use the strong one?"), E's response of 1S solicited a 1NT rebid.

Bd: 10 Vul: All Dlr: East	♠ A65 ♥ AKT3 ♦ K98 ♣ A74	Optimum NS 6D,NS 6C: +1
♠ QJ93 ♥ Q854 ♦ 73 ♣ K53	N W 10 E S	♠ T82 ♥ 962 ♦ QT65 ♣ T92
18 8 HCP 2 12	♠ K74 ♥ J7 ♦ AJ42 ♣ QJ86	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 6 6 5 5 5 S 6 6 5 5 5 E - - - - - W - - - - -

The bidding from here had to depend on each pair's agreements. "New minor force" enabled one pair to find out about the 3-card S support, after which Blackwood would be appropriate. Without NMF in your arsenal, 4C should be available as an Ace asking bid - used instead of Blackwood when the last bid was NT - or 4NT as a quantitative bid. What is quantitative? It says "I'm interested in slam, and I know by your 1NT rebid that you have 12-14 HCP. If you have 14 please bid 6, with 12 you may pass". With 14, W should oblige and bid 6.

There's even one more possibility for E to consider: 6D. A player who opens 1D and doesn't support your Ss has at least 4 Ds. That gives you an 8-card fit, and may make you more comfortable than 6NT with your singleton H.

Bottom line: in the competitive Matchpoint game, you will get left behind if you don't start thinking slam when you see a hand as good as Es. They can be a little intimidating - but so satisfying when they work out. Looking briefly at board 10, there is another potential use of the 4NT quantitative bid. This one is marginal, but hard for N to resist with 18 HCP opposite an opening bid. But S has a very minimum 12 points, and will pass your 4NT inquiry, leaving herself in a very makeable 4NT contract, and leaving N knowing "at least I tried". In fact, that was a hard hand to defend, so a few pairs made 6, but it wouldn't against perfect defence.

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-Richard Pavlicek