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 22nd, 2021, (Game #31751). Full results and game schedule at www.bridgecentreofniagara.com.

- Jump Overcall
- Ducking

Bd: 8 Vul: None Dlr: West	♠ AQJT94 ♥ A74 ♦ -- ♣ KQT5	Optimum NS 3N,NS 5C: +4
♠ 83 ♥ Q83 ♦ K876432 ♣ 9	N W 8 E S	♠ K652 ♥ K952 ♦ J5 ♣ A42
16 5 HCP 11 8	♠ 7 ♥ JT6 ♦ AQT9 ♣ J8763	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 5 - 2 3 3 S 5 - 2 3 3 E - 1 - - - W - 1 - - -

Board 8 this week is worth studying from both angles - bidding and play. Most Ws opened with a D preempt - either 2 or 3. Based on the rule of 2, 3 and 4, either feels acceptable; it looks as if you will take 5 or 6 tricks. But one certainty: if you choose to open 2D, you must stick with that choice, and not increase it to 3D next round. Your hand hasn't changed; your partner knows what you have, and makes all further decisions.

The N hand is the interesting one. You want to bid your Ss, but how many? My call is 4S. Remember: a jump overcall is strong when the opening bid was weak.(A jump overcall over a 1-level opening bid would be weak.) In this case, I see a hand that will make game in Ss with very little help from partner. I have only 4 apparent losers - the SK, 2Hs and the CA. If I bid 2 or 3 Ss, partner might easily pass holding only one good card - and that might be all I need.

This 4S, by the way, is not a "shutout" bid. Opposite a 4S bid, if S happened to have the hand that E has, they should get excited and make a slam attempt. In this case, S has very little, but should be satisfied that N isn't counting on much, and must pass.

Those who look at the little charts beside the hand record may be saying "but it doesn't make 4S!". And that's true - against perfect defence. In this case, "perfect" defence means E not leading partner's D suit. In fact, all of our Es led Ds - as they should - which gave declarer access to dummy to pitch a H loser on the DA.

Here is where a few declarers went wrong; they tried the DQ, and then had to ruff when it was covered. Now they had no access to dummy; at least not until they had lost to the SK and the CA. In fact, the contract was still salvageable, but the task had become immensely more difficult.

If you take the first trick with the DA, and start drawing trump, there is one more thing to watch out for. At a couple of tables, E won trick 2 with the SK and engineered a C ruff for partner. This was the defenders' 3rd trick, but they have set up dummy's Cs - IF declarer can get to them. This means that, on the 2nd round of Cs, N must UNBLOCK by playing the K or Q even after the trick has been ruffed. That leaves the 10 in hand to play over to the J - after drawing trumps, of course, and cashing the other C honour. Declarer's original 2 H losers have disappeared on the DA and the long C, and the contract is made with 5Ss, HA, DA, and 3Cs.

I have a quick observation on board 11. It was generally played in 3NT in the E, and got a C lead. Most declarers went down, because they won the first trick. When you get a dangerous lead, where you have only one

Bd: 11 Vul: None Dlr: South	♠ QT87 ♥ JT86 ♦ Q8 ♣ K97	Optimum EW 6D: -920
♠ 543 ♥ KQ542 ♦ AJ62 ♣ 2	N W 11 E S	♠ AK6 ♥ A7 ♦ T9754 ♣ AT4
8 10 HCP 15 7	♠ J92 ♥ 93 ♦ K3 ♣ QJ8653	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - - - - - S - - - - - E - 6 4 2 4 W - 6 4 2 4

stopper in the suit, it's very important to DUCK, especially in a case like this where you expect to have to lose the lead again before you can claim your 9 tricks. You have to hope that one of the defenders will run out of the suit and not be able to play it again when she gets on lead. In this case, with 9 clubs out against you, your odds aren't good, but it's your only chance. You have to hope that they are divided 6-3 or better; if 6-3, when you take the trick on the 3rd round, one of the defenders - probably N - will run out the same time as you do.

Now it's worth trying the Hs, in case they provide 5 tricks, but when they don't you play the Ds in such a way that you lose the lead to N; if she doesn't have another C - and she doesn't - you make your contract.

One more comment on the defence: the opening C lead should be the 6 - the 4th best. Against NT contracts, honour leads are only made with a 3+ card sequence. And, if S leads the 6, N must play the K ("third hand high") - it's the strongest move you can make to cooperate with your partner in setting up her suit.