TIPS FOR TOPS

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- Missing Game
- Tips on Play & Defence

All boards referred to in this article were played in the 299er game at Bridge Centre of Niagara on July 27, 2021, (Game #49943). Full results and game schedule at www.bridgecentreofniagara.com.

Bd: 10 Vul: All Dlr: East	♠ 9 ♥ T4 ♦ AKQ985 ♣ K943	Optimum NS 4H: +620
♠ K7654 ♥ QJ62 ♦ 43 ♣ J6	N W 10 E S	♠ AQT32 ♥ 87 ♦ J76 ♣ Q82
12 7 HCP 9 12	♠ J8 ♥ AK953 ♦ T2 ♣ AT75	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 5 5 4 - 2 S 5 5 4 - 2 E - - - 1 - W - - - 1 -

Board 10 this week illustrates a couple of points which I have written about before, but which are worth repeating. South opens the bidding 2H, and North has a nice hand with opening points as well. North knows their side belongs in game - but doesn't know where. I wrote 2 weeks ago that North must not let the bidding die before they reach game, but North needs their partner's cooperation to achieve that goal. North's first move is clear - they bid 2D, and must be able to count on partner to bid again. A new suit by responder is absolutely forcing. (How can it not be? An initial response = even a 1-level response - can be made on strengths up to 18 or 19HCP; opener must make at least one more bid to give responder a chance to clarify)

As it happens, this hand can make game in Hearts, Diamonds or Clubs. In matchpoints we always want to play in the Major suit, because it scores better, but today making game in any suit would have been a good result, because most pairs let the bidding stop in a part-score.The exact bidding will depend on systems and agreements; some Souths rebid the Heart suit, which should have steered the pair into the Heart game, but if North bids 3C over 2H, South MUST bid again - a new suit is still forcing. As for North's 2nd bid; 2/1 players have created a game-force with their 2D bid but Standard American bidders must be careful not to repeat a suit below game level; 3D, 3H, and 2N can all be passed by South - and were.

A side comment to the brave souls venturing a 2S bid over North's 2D response. It's one thing to stretch to make a lead-directing overcall, but when your opponents have shown 22+ HCP, that's a very risky endeavour. They KNOW it's their hand, and will (should) be ready to double you for a big penalty. You need a better suit or better hand than this, or you will get badly burned.

Bd: 16 Vul: E/W Dlr: West	♠ KT6 ♥ 8642 ♦ T52 ♣ T84	Optimum EW 4H: -620
♠ Q843 ♥ AQT7 ♦ AQJ ♣ Q9	N W 16 E S	♠ 95 ♥ KJ93 ♦ 983 ♣ AJ72
3 17 HCP 9 11	♠ AJ72 ♥ 5 ♦ K764 ♣ K653	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - - - - - S - - - - - E 2 2 4 2 3 W 2 2 4 2 3

Board 16 proved a challenge for several declarers, and illustrates some pointers for both declarers and defenders. All tables played this board in 4H, usually after a 1NT opening and a Stayman sequence. In most cases, the opening lead was a small spade; defenders took the first 2 tricks with the A and K. What should North do now? Good practice when defending is to lead through strong suits, and up to weak suits. So when the dummy is on your left, lead one of dummy's suits; in this case the C suit stands out, and you will set up - or score - the K if partner has it. And, when South takes the CK, she should return dummy's weak suit, the Ds - up to weakness - creating a guess for declarer.

Declarer, of course, must make a plan. From the West hand, you see 6 possible losers (4 Spades, maybe CK and maybe DK) - that's 3 too many. There's nothing you can do about the Ds - you have to hope the K is onside, and you will have to lead toward your AQJ twice, to avoid losing to the K. After you lose 2 Spade tricks, you can ruff at least one Spade in dummy. You can lose to the CK, and still set up one extra Club in dummy for a Spade pitch, but that runs the risk of 3rd round ruff. The stronger plan is to ruff 2 Spades in dummy, using high trumps to avoid an overruff. But timing is critical; you have to take your 2 ruffs before drawing trump, and you also have to lead Ds from dummy when you have the chance.

So, if the opponents take the first 2 Spade tricks and then lead a Club, you duck and lose to the K. If they then lead a D you play the J, then: ruff a Spade; H3 to HA; ruff the last Spade; cash the HK; D to Q; finish pulling trump, and claim. 10 tricks via 2 ruffs in dummy, 4 Hearts, 3 Diamonds and 1 Club.