TIPS FOR TOPS

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- Restricted Choice
- Suit Preference Signals

All boards referred to in this article were played in the 299er game at Bridge Centre of Niagara on Oct 19th, 2021, (Game #62222). Full results and game schedule at www.bridgecentreofniagara.com.

Bd: 9 Vul: E/W Dlr: North	♠ K85 ♥ A8753 ♦ K ♣ K986	Optimum NS 6N: +990
♠ JT9 ♥ Q ♦ JT65432 ♣ 43	N W 9 E S	♠ Q42 ♥ J964 ♦ 98 ♣ JT75
13 4 HCP 4 19	♠ A763 ♥ KT2 ♦ AQ7 ♣ AQ2	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 6 2 6 6 6 S 6 2 6 6 6 E - - - - - W - - - - -

Board 9 provided a little excitement this week. North opened the bidding 1H; South had 19 HCP and heart support, and several pairs pushed to the heart slam. Nobody made their slam - should they? Looking at the two hands, there is only one suit that needs any planning, and that's the hearts. (Yes, you have a potential spade loser, but you have 2 good diamonds in dummy where you can pitch it - after trumps are drawn.) Even the hearts look fine; if they split 3-2 as they "should", you will lose one trick and make your slam.

But, you need to be prepared for the possibility that they are not 3-2, which will happen about one third of the time. If one opponent holds all five outstanding cards, there's probably nothing you can do, but if they are 4-1, and the singleton is one of the honours, you can.

Suppose you play your HA and see the Q fall; now you have to decide whether to next play to the K and hope the J also falls, or to play for the Q to be singleton, and play to the 10. The correct answer to this is based on what's called the "Principle of Restricted Choice", which says once you see an opponent play one of two equal cards, the other equal card is twice as likely to be in the other opponent's hand. On this hand, the Q and the J are "equal" as far as their value to the defenders. So, in this case, you play to the 10, because once West has shown up with the Q, the J is twice as likely to be with East as it is to be with West.

The name of the principle comes from this: if West had both the Q and the J, it wouldn't matter which he played; he would be equally likely to play the Q as the J. But, if he started with only one, he had no choice. The fact that he played one increases the probability that he didn't also have the other; ie, his choice was "restricted".

This "Principle of Restricted Choice" comes up often, but there is a more compelling reason you should play the second heart to the 10. You can afford to lose one trick; if West has the J after all you will still make your slam. But, if you play to the K and West shows out, you are going down. And, when you are playing in a slam, playing safe is what counts. Overtricks are rarely important; bidding and making a slam almost always gives you a good result, because there will al-

most always be some pairs who don't bid it.

In this description. I assumed the A was played first. In fact, if declarer started with the K, they can still survive if they play for all the rest of the suit to be with East. You will have more complicated transportation, but you should play for this scenario, because, again, you will still survive if you are wrong, but not if you don't try.

Bd: 15 Vul: N/S Dlr: South	♠ QT62 ♥ AT962 ♦ Q ♣ 987	Optimum EW 4S+1: -450
♠ KJ753 ♥ Q ♦ AK42 ♣ KQ3	N W 15 E S	♠ A984 ♥ 874 ♦ T8 ♣ AT52
8 18 HCP 8 6	♠ -- ♥ KJ53 ♦ J97653 ♣ J64	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - 1 2 - - S - 1 2 - - E 3 - - 5 2 W 3 - - 5 2

Last week I wrote of the "second hand low" rule of defence; this week board 15 demonstrates the same principle. West played in spades; making his plan, he would have found one loser in hearts, and possibly no others, if spades cooperate. A natural way to play the spades, holding nine, is low to the A, and then back toward the KJ. This leaves the possibility of finessing against the Q on the way back, although odds favour playing for the drop. ("Eight ever, nine never.") If he does that he finds himself with two spade losers, and makes four - as long as North plays low on the first trick. But, if North doesn't play low, thinking they want to "force the A", they cost themselves a trick, and declarer makes five.

A well-executed defence is one of bridge's most satisfying treats, and the key to a good defence is communication. You can't talk to your partner during the play, but every card you play can send a message.

Bd: 8 Vul: None Dlr: West	♠ KQJT83 ♥ Q ♦ KJ ♣ KQJ6	Optimum EW 3D: -110
♠ A95 ♥ A653 ♦ T8543 ♣ T	N W 8 E S	♠ 6 ♥ T42 ♦ A72 ♣ A87542
18 8 HCP 8 6	♠ 742 ♥ KJ987 ♦ Q96 ♣ 93	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 1 - - 1 1 S 1 - - 1 1 E - 3 1 - - W - 3 1 - -

Take board 8. It's not surprising that most NS pairs got themselves into a hopeless 4S contract. Holding all four Aces, the defence was bound to prevail, but there is a big difference between down one and the best possible down three. How to accomplish this?

The opening lead is not clear, but it's not good to lead Aces - and even worse to lead away from an Ace, so East might choose a trump or a heart lead. Either way, West takes the trick, but West has other ideas about the defence; West wants to get a ruff with his trumps, so he returns his singleton club. East takes the A and plays another club for West to ruff. Which club does he return? This is where communication comes in. East should return his smallest club; the message to West is "If you want to get me onto the lead again, play the lowest ranking "other" suit - the diamonds. West ruffs the club, returns a diamond, and when East leads another club, West scores another trick. Grand total: four Aces and two ruffs for down three. This is called a "suit preference signal"; if East had held the HA instead, a high club return would be a signal to return the higher ranking suit - the Hearts.

There are other signals available to defenders, which I will try to address in future issues, but "Suit Preference" is what you use when you want to tell your partner where you have an entry to your hand.