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 Dec 7th, 2021, (Game 54281). Full results and game schedule at www.bridgecentreofniagara.com.

- Forcing Responses

This column is intended to give you tips on how to achieve good scores. But, once in a while, I like to include tips on how to avoid unpleasant director calls. Because there's nothing worse than seeing a good result turn bad because of a penalty imposed after an inadvertent lapse.

Bd: 5 Vul: N/S Dlr: North	♠ 3 ♥ 8654 ♦ AKJT85 ♣ 85	Optimum EW 4Cx: +100
♠ AJ964 ♥ 72 ♦ 94 ♣ AQ64	N W 5 E S	♠ T ♥ AJT3 ♦ 7632 ♣ KT32
8 11 HCP 8 13	♠ KQ8752 ♥ KQ9 ♦ Q ♣ J97	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - 3 - - 1 S - 3 - - 1 E 3 - 1 1 - W 3 - 1 1 -

On board 5, almost all Norths opened the bidding with 2D, showing their 6-card suit and less than opening points. Several Souths bid 2S - and some of the Norths passed. This is a problem; in standard methods, a new suit by partner opposite a preempt is a forcing bid. If, for some reason, you and your partner have agreed to play it as non-forcing the new suit bid must be alerted as such. None of the 2S bids in our game were alerted.

Why is this important, you ask? If opener's RHO planned to bid, they might decide to wait, knowing that they will have another chance. And if they miss their chance because opener passes, they have a legitimate complaint when they call the director.

But why should a new suit be forcing? How else are you going to reach a possible game contract? The preemptor has announced a weak hand, but responder's hand is completely unknown; it could be anything from bust to huge. A preempt is meant to make it difficult for the opponents to find their best contract, but it backfires if it has the same effect on the home team.

Now, going back to that 2S bid; what were the bidders trying to accomplish? Opposite a hand that's too weak for an opening bid, you don't have enough to contemplate the possibility of game. Sure, you have only a singleton Diamond, but it's a nice singleton; it will certainly help your partner in her Diamond contract. And, there is no guarantee - as you saw - that her Spade support will be any better than your Diamond support.

The same general situation arises with a 2NT response to a weak-2 opening bid. This normally asks for further information from the opening bidder, and there are different methods of responses, but passing is not an option.

Bd: 11 Vul: None Dlr: South	♠ KJT42 ♥ K73 ♦ AJ4 ♣ 73	Optimum EW 1H+2: -140
♠ AQ9875 ♥ JT2 ♦ Q7 ♣ 65	N W 11 E S	♠ 6 ♥ AQ98 ♦ KT5 ♣ AT982
12 9 HCP 13 6	♠ 3 ♥ 654 ♦ 98632 ♣ KQJ4	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - - - - - S - - - - - E 3 1 3 2 2 W 3 1 3 2 2

This was illustrated on board 11; most Wests opened 2S, and some Easts responded 2NT which was passed. But what were these Easts hoping to accomplish? With no 8-card fit, there is no future in either the suit contract or NT. A singleton in partner's suit is the worst possible holding for NT - you won't have

enough entries to set up the suit and get back to take advantage of it.

Bottom line: when your partner preempts, don't bid out of fear, just because you don't like their suit. If you like their suit, you might make a raise to increase the preempt, but introduce a new suit only if you have aspirations of game, or pass and hope the preempt has done its job. And if you preempt and your partner responds with 2NT or a new suit, don't pass.

Bd: 6 Vul: E/W Dlr: East	♠ Q ♥ KQ986542 ♦ T3 ♣ Q6	Optimum NS 2H+1: +140
♠ T52 ♥ 73 ♦ J74 ♣ KT942	N W 6 E S	♠ KJ83 ♥ AJ ♦ AK862 ♣ 85
9 4 HCP 16 11	♠ A9764 ♥ T ♦ Q95 ♣ AJ73	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - - 3 - - S - - 3 - - E 2 2 - 1 - W 2 2 - 1 -

Board 6 offers a lesson in defence. It was played in Hearts from the North - not surprisingly since North has a "golden fit" in her own hand. East found the good lead of A from AK of Diamonds, but then most of them led the K, to their cost. The Q in dummy should have raised alarm bells. You know declarer will be looking to set up winners in dummy; the last thing you should want to do is to do her job for her. On trick 2, East should be looking for a different suit to lead. Leading Spades is no good; you're putting your potential Spade trick at risk unless you KNOW your partner has the Q - and why should she? Even the HA isn't safe - maybe your partner has the singleton K? Which leaves the Club - not guaranteed, but partner might have the K. And so it comes to pass.

Were you thinking that West might have only two Diamonds and be hoping for a ruff on the third round? Pairs who use defensive signals need not worry; with two, West would play a high Diamond on the first round, beginning a hi-lo encouraging signal. The D4, on this hand is clearly low, indicating a lack of interest in a continuation of the suit. The defence should come to four tricks on the hand; HA, DA, DK and CK. But you have to attack the Clubs before you set up the DQ in the dummy for a discard.

Bd: 16 Vul: E/W Dlr: West	♠ AQT965 ♥ AT6 ♦ 73 ♣ K9	Optimum NS 6S: +980
♠ 84 ♥ Q42 ♦ Q84 ♣ AQ763	N W 16 E S	♠ 732 ♥ J8753 ♦ 65 ♣ 542
13 10 HCP 1 16	♠ KJ ♥ K9 ♦ AKJT92 ♣ JT8	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N 2 5 2 6 5 S 2 5 2 6 5 E - - - - - W - - - - -

I will make one last quick comment on board 16. This was played in Spades by North, and I was surprised that most declarers did not take full advantage of the wonderful Diamond suit in dummy. With the opening lead of a Heart or a Club, declarers will see no Diamond losers, but that's not the full story. A long, semi-solid suit like this should always be considered as a source of tricks - and somewhere to pitch losers from your hand. All it takes is a 3-2 split of outstanding cards - better than a 50% chance - and an entry in dummy when you are ready for it. So, if the opening lead was a heart, win it with the A in hand, leaving the K for later. Draw trumps, and then play A and K of diamonds, and then a 3rd round. When the suit cooperates, you can now get rid of two losers from your hand and make six. If it hadn't worked out, you use your dummy entry to lead towards your CK (if the opening lead was not a Club), and make an extra trick that way. But don't let a gorgeous suit like that go to waste. And congratulations, Hans - the only declarer to make the maximum 12 tricks on this hand