

TIPS FOR TOPS

BY JANE JENNINGS



All boards referred to in this article were played in the 299er game at Bridge Centre of Niagara on March 8th, (Game #44220). Full results and game schedule at www.bridgecentreofniagara.com.

• Bidding Strong Hands

This week I'm looking at 2 boards that bear a certain similarity, although also with differences. One main similarity: on both, NS had trouble reaching their game-level contract.

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|------------|----------|-------------|
| Bd: 9 | ♠ KQ7653 | Optimum |
| Vul: E/W | ♥ A | NS 4S: +420 |
| Dlr: North | ♦ AQ2 | |
| | ♣ Q42 | |
| ♠ AJT2 | N | ♠ 9 |
| ♥ KT52 | W 9 E | ♥ Q7643 |
| ♦ 3 | S | ♦ 98765 |
| ♣ 8653 | | ♣ AJ |
| 17 | ♠ 84 | ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N |
| 8 HCP 7 | ♥ J98 | N 2 2 - 4 1 |
| 8 | ♦ KJT4 | S 2 2 - 4 1 |
| | ♣ KT97 | E - - 2 - - |
| | | W - - 2 - - |

Board 9: The start is easy; North has a very nice hand with a clear 1S opening bid. South doesn't love Spades, but has enough points to respond 1NT. North clearly should rebid the

spades to show six of them, but also must show her strength by jumping a level to 3S. A 2S rebid limits your hand to about 15HCP - a clear understatement. After 3S, South knows there is a Golden Fit, and adding her 8HCP to North's 16-18 gets into game range. The "glass half empty" folks will find a reason to pass 3S, but most duplicate players would rather go down trying and will raise to 4S.

And now to try to make it! The key here is in the play of the trump suit. With KQxxxx in your hand, you have to hope the A is on your right and lead towards your hand. Further; when that succeeds, you have to go back to the board and repeat the finesse - no point in wasting

that good first effort by giving it away on the next trick. Despite the bad split, if you play this way, all you need to lose is two Spade tricks and the CA.

I think it's worth using this hand to point out a fact of matchpoint play. Only one pair took ten tricks, so they got a "top" without actually bidding the game. And that's worth keeping in mind: if you think of bidding a game only because you play it better than the others, then you don't need to bid it. You will earn a top simply by taking one more trick than they do. For my rubber bridge readers, or team players, this doesn't hold true; there you have to bid the game to score the 300 point game bonus.

And a point to make on defence. In most cases, the opening lead was a small Heart. Although it doesn't actually make a difference this time I hope that West played the 10 and not the K unless the J was played from the board. Keep that K to capture another honour.

Now to board 14. Again, it's North who has a very nice hand. Bean counters will see this as only 16HCP, compared to the 17 on the previous hand. I see this as a much better hand than the other; you are close to having a game in your own hand. Played in Spades, you are almost guaranteed not to have a Spade loser; you have one Heart loser and one Club loser; the Diamonds may lose two or three. All you

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| Bd: 14 | ♠ AKQ7653 | Optimum |
| Vul: None | ♥ A4 | EW 5Hx, EW 5Cx |
| Dir: East | ♦ K42 | |
| | ♣ 6 | |
| ♠ J98 | N | ♠ T |
| ♥ K92 | W 14 E | ♥ QT765 |
| ♦ A763 | S | ♦ 8 |
| ♣ J43 | | ♣ AKT952 |
| 16 | ♠ 42 | ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N |
| 9 HCP 9 | ♥ J83 | N - 3 - 4 2 |
| 6 | ♦ QJT95 | S - 3 - 4 2 |
| | ♣ Q87 | E 4 - 4 - - |
| | | W 4 - 4 - - |

need in dummy is something like HK and DQ to make game. But how North bids this hand may have to depend on what East does as dealer.

At half the tables, the hand was

passed around to North; that fact alone gives you some useful information. First; you know that partner will have some help for you; if partner was completely broke, the opponents would have found something to say. You also know that slam is very unlikely when partner was not able to open the bidding. You don't care about help in Spades; you can handle that suit quite fine. So the bid that stands out is 4S. It's not a bid you should make with this hand in 1st or 2nd seat, for fear of missing a slam. But you certainly don't want to play or defend against any suit other than Spades, so why give the opponents any chance to exchange information - as they will if you open 1S?

At 2 tables, East opened the bidding 1H. In an open game, you would get some passes, some 1H bids, and some 1C. What you would not get is 3C. it's too unilateral and is likely to (in fact, does) eliminate any chance of finding a Heart fit. Those who pass initially would be expecting to be able to show both suits later with some sort of Michaels/Unusual NT type of bid.

If East opens the bidding, the auction will be either at 1D or 2H when North gets her first opportunity to bid. I would still make a case for bidding 4S. I have less confidence that my partner will have any help, but if she doesn't, the opponents are probably making 4H or 5D, so down one or two will be a good result. And, if East opens 3C, North must certainly jump to

4S at her turn. You can't bid 3S and leave it to your partner; how are they to know that a couple of stray honours are all you need?

There is very little to the play or defence of this hand. EW can take CA, DA and Diamond ruff OR they can lead a Heart and they will take a Heart trick and not get a ruff. But if they take their DA early, they had better get the ruff and the CA, or all North's losers will go on dummy's Diamonds, and she will make five.

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|------------|-----------|-------------|
| Bd: 1 | ♠ AQ85432 | Optimum |
| Vul: None | ♥ Q9 | EW 5D: -400 |
| Dir: North | ♦ 9 | |
| | ♣ Q76 | |
| ♠ 6 | N | ♠ J97 |
| ♥ JT874 | W 1 E | ♥ K65 |
| ♦ K76 | S | ♦ AQJT3 |
| ♣ AJ93 | | ♣ K2 |
| 10 | ♠ KT | ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N |
| 9 HCP 14 | ♥ A32 | N - - - 2 - |
| 7 | ♦ 8542 | S - - - 2 - |
| | ♣ T854 | E 3 5 4 - - |
| | | W 3 5 4 - - |

I will make one more comment on defence, based on board 1. This was played in Spades from the North, and several defenders led the Queen of Diamonds from

AQJ103. This might be a reasonable lead against a NT contract, but you never want to make it against a suit. Why the difference? If declarer has the singleton K, you will have given up a trick if you're in NT, but you are likely to take four more later; it may be a worthwhile trade-off. In a suit contract, on the other hand, that trick is never coming back. The rule in leading against suit contracts: if you're going to lead a suit in which you hold the A, lead the A. But, even better is not to lead the suit at all. Just picture how it will be if the K is on your right. Declarer isn't entitled to any tricks in that suit. On lead later in the play, if you see the K on your left, you might consider leading the suit, But, unless you SEE the K on your left, or KNOW it's in your partner's hand (and how can you know that?), leave that suit alone and wait for someone else to lead it. And, if you're forced to lead it (maybe late in the play it's all you have); lead the A. ♠