

Best Contract

Recently, I was asked by Marc my approach to 4-3-3-3 hands, do you play 4 Major or 3NT after you have identified a fit?

My view is that such hands play better in 3NT no matter if the fit is 4-4 or 5-3. For a start nine tricks are easier to achieve than ten. That is simplistic, but ask yourself the question what does the 4-3-3-3 hand bring to the party? There is no ruffing value immediately obvious. It may be that you can construct a hand where 4M is better, but in the long run 3NT will prove a better contract.

My approach to bridge is based on teams so 420/430 is not a consideration. Sometimes 4M may make an extra trick, but without seeing all four hands you don't know that.

It may be that one hand is unbalanced, with a singleton for example. That should become evident in the bidding and that can change the final contract decision.

When the opening bid is 1NT, then the flat hand should not be looking beyond 3NT.

Last night Board 11 was an example of this approach.

Partner opened 1♥ and you hold –

♠ QJ5
♥ 1032
♦ AQ7
♣ K854

This is a classic example when your points are in the other suit. Even when you are aware of the 5-3 fit it pays to play in 3NT. Most would respond 2♣, now a ♦ or ♠ lead is likely to assist.

Partner held

♠ A863
♥ AQJ54
♦ J43
♣ A

Even with a singleton, the same eleven tricks were available and on the diamond lead into the AQ twelve tricks could be made. This is a hand when the spade finesse is a mirage. You want the finesse to be wrong so play towards the QJ in spades. The timing needs to be correct, use the hearts as entries.

Sometimes it will not be the best contract, but in the long run your scores will improve if you consistently do the same thing. Six out of the eight tables played in 4♥, the other two both made twelve tricks in 3NT on a diamond lead.