

The last time I wrote one of the Bridge Bulletins I started by saying “We had no slams last night...”, but this week there were 4 slam hands!

On board 2 East deals, holding

S: A K 8 6  
H: A K J 8 7  
D: -  
C: 9 7 5 3  
while West holds  
S: Q 5 4  
H: Q 10 9 3 2  
D: A 9 4 2  
C: 2

In 6H the play is easy, and indeed it is a lay down once the trumps split 2-1. But how can you bid the slam? In fact the contract was only reached by Sandra and Krys, who bid 1H -3C- 6H. Here West’s 3C was a “Mini splinter” showing Heart support, invitational values, and a Club shortage - exactly what East wants to hear holding 4 small Clubs.

Now let’s look at Board 17.

♠ A1085
♥ 764
♦ J532
♣ 74
♠ K92
♥ K3
♦ K
♣ AKQJ1082

North dealt, and after two passes South usually chose to open 1C, and West often overcalled 1D. One N-S pair ended in 3NT by North, and with the defence unable to take more than 3 red-suit tricks, Declarer ended up with 10 tricks for a clear top.

The other 6 tables all played in Clubs, at 3C, 4C, or 5C. Suppose, as often happened, West leads ♥ J, East takes the Ace, and returns a Diamond to West’s Ace. Then West plays a second Heart, which declarer wins in hand:-

♠ A1085
♥ 7
♦ J53
♣ 74
♠ K92
♥ -
♦ -
♣ AKQJ1082

Declarer now has 7 Club tricks plus two top Spades, together with the ♥ K he has already taken. What are the prospects for an 11<sup>th</sup> trick?

Have a think now, before reading on.

Taking the Spade suit in isolation, the only hope for a third trick is that either the Q or J is singleton, or that the QJ are doubleton. Even if the Q or J is singleton, Declarer will have to

decide in advance which Defender to play for the singleton. For example, if Declarer hopes West might have a singleton Spade honour, they lead a low spade to Dummy's Ace, collecting the singleton Q (or J) from West in the process, and then play a low Spade back towards the K 9 tenace sitting over East's remaining Spade honour. This line has about a 10% chance of success.

However, there is a better option. Suppose Declarer merely plays out all the trumps, leaving this position:-

♠ A10
♥ -
♦ J
♣ -
♠ K92
♥ -
♦ -
♣ -

The Defender who holds the ♦ Q can keep only two Spades. So, if they started with four or more spades, or with QJx, they will have been squeezed, and must unguard the suit.

Admittedly this line still only has about a 20% success rate – but on the night it would have worked.

Here is the full hand.

♠ A1085	
♥ 764	
♦ J532	
♣ -	
♠ Q763	♠ J4
♥ J108	♥ AQ952
♦ AQ1086	♦ 974
♣ 5	♣ 963
	♠ K92
	♥ K3
	♦ K
	♣ AKQJ1082

Since West began with ♦ Q and four Spades the above line succeeds and brings in 11 tricks.

But Deep Finesse says that only 10 tricks can be made against best defence. So, can you see what went wrong?

The answer is that the defenders must avoid playing Hearts at all. Then Declarer can only make the ♥ K by leading from Dummy, and since the only entry is ♠ A the squeeze set-up will then be destroyed.

Roger Heath-Brown