

Summertown Bridge Bulletin, 11 January 2021

Hello everyone – this is Steven again, looking at two hands from last night that posed interesting bidding problems.

Dlr: North Vul: E/W	♠52 ♥76532 ♦AK3 ♣K98	Optimum NS 4Cx; -500														
♠AKQ1064 ♥109 ♦J84 ♣102	<table border="1" style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="background-color: green; color: white;">W</td><td style="background-color: green; color: white;">North</td><td style="background-color: red; color: white;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="background-color: red; color: white;">e</td><td style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">9</td><td style="background-color: red; color: white;">a</td></tr> <tr><td style="background-color: red; color: white;">s</td><td></td><td style="background-color: red; color: white;">s</td></tr> <tr><td style="background-color: red; color: white;">t</td><td style="background-color: green; color: white;">South</td><td style="background-color: red; color: white;">t</td></tr> </table>	W	North	E	e	9	a	s		s	t	South	t	♠J7 ♥KQ8 ♦109752 ♣AQ4		
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<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">10</td></tr> <tr><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">10</td><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">12</td></tr> <tr><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">8</td></tr> </table>	10	10	12	8	♠983 ♥AJ4 ♦Q6 ♣J7653	<table style="margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">♣♦♥♠N</td></tr> <tr><td>N</td><td style="text-align: center;">1 - - -</td></tr> <tr><td>S</td><td style="text-align: center;">1 - - -</td></tr> <tr><td>E</td><td style="text-align: center;">- 3 - 3 3</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td style="text-align: center;">- 3 - 3 3</td></tr> </table>		♣♦♥♠N	N	1 - - -	S	1 - - -	E	- 3 - 3 3	W	- 3 - 3 3
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Let's start with Board 9. Generally, you think twice before opening light second in hand and vulnerable against not, as you can easily run into a penalty. Here, the East hand is a minimum weak no trump, with all the points in the short suits, so not ideal. At teams I might pass, but at pairs it's usually right to do what most people do and open 1NT. West now has the problem of whether to try for game.

One West bid straight to 3NT, taking the reasonable view that it would make if partner could contribute three tricks before opponents took five. This should have worked, especially on the actual club lead, but East had domestic distractions and went off. It's interesting that many of us might gamble 3NT with a solid 6-card minor, but we just don't think of doing it with a major.

If I didn't find the imaginative 3NT bid, I would transfer to spades and then invite game by bidding 3 spades, which East would pass. I'm clearly the odd one out because no one did this! One pair were only in 2 spades (+2) and everyone else was in 4 spades. This is an optimistic contract, especially if (as here) East is minimum – how likely is it that East will contribute four tricks to add to the six in spades? Generally, it doesn't pay to punt thin games at pairs (unlike at teams). However, although there are clearly four tricks to lose, three pairs actually made 4 spades – which just shows, as so often, that defence is the hardest part of the game.

The last hand of the evening was one of *those dilemmas about what to do at the five level*.

Dlr: East Vul: N/S	♠J97 ♥42 ♦QJ65 ♣9872	Optimum EW 6Hx; +300																																		
♠K ♥AK109863 ♦3 ♣KQ64	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px;"> <tr><td style="background-color: red; color: white;">North</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">18</td></tr> <tr><td style="background-color: green; color: white;">South</td></tr> </table>	North	18	South	♠Q4 ♥QJ75 ♦10874 ♣1053																															
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The South hand isn't good enough for an Acol 2 club opening. It would qualify for an Acol strong 2 spades (which almost no one now plays) or a Benji 2 clubs. However, that is best reserved for one-suited hands with a good suit. It seems better here to open 1 spade – this surely won't be passed out, and if it is you probably haven't missed a game. West might double and then bid hearts (to show a very strong jump overcall), but with 11 cards in two suits, opposite a passed partner, it seems best to go straight to 4 hearts. This is passed round to South, who presumably bids 4 spades (double would be for penalties and would be unwise). Now it gets interesting....

There are few hard and fast rules at bridge for competitive situations, and when it comes to decisions at the 5 level there are two conflicting bits of advice. One is that 'The 5 level belongs to the opponents': that suggests caution. The other is that extreme distributional hands tend to make more tricks than you expect in the play and fewer in defence: that suggests bidding on. Here West should pass 4 spades (people who make pre-emptive bids shouldn't bid again), but East, who has four useful hearts and no defensive tricks, should go on to 5 hearts at favourable vulnerability. Most Easts did this, and most of them were doubled, but it only went one off and 4 spades was making. In fact, 5 spades will make: but South shouldn't bid again, and North can't know how useful his/her diamonds are. Only one pair actually bid and made 5 spades (doubled as well, for a top).

My only advice, which probably isn't much help, is to stop and think before you bid at the 5 level, and then trust your instincts....

Steven Bliss