

## Summertown Bridge Bulletin, 13<sup>th</sup> June 2022

### Game, or no game?

No matter what version of bridge you're playing, it's almost always a disaster to miss a makable game. The problem is, of course, to know which ones are making and which aren't!

Take Board 6. The analysis says that N/S can make only 9 tricks playing in hearts against best defence, but only two pairs stopped there, as a result of rather cautious bidding when North opened 1♥, East doubled, and South bid 3♥. It's normal to raise pre-emptively after a double when you have 4-card support for partner's suit, so in both cases North now passed – presumably expecting South's hand to be much weaker than it was. Perhaps South was worried that North might have opened light in fourth position?

Dlr: East  
 Vul: E/W  
 Optimum NS +140

♠ K  
 ♥ K 10 9 7 4 2  
 ♦ K Q J 5  
 ♣ 8 6

♠ 6 5 3 2  
 ♥ A J 3  
 ♦ 10  
 ♣ Q J 9 3 2

WEST NORTH EAST  
 SOUTH SOUTH EAST  
 6

♠ Q J 7 4  
 ♥ - -  
 ♦ 9 8 7 4 3 2  
 ♣ A K 10

♠ A 10 9 8  
 ♥ Q 8 6 5  
 ♦ A 6  
 ♣ 7 5 4

♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N  
 N - - 3 - 1  
 S - - 3 - 1  
 E 2 - - 2 -  
 W 2 1 - 2 -

At the other four tables, the bidding was more lively and North ended up playing in game. Now, there is a way for the defence to get this down no matter what declarer does: but it involves leading a diamond, so that when the ♥A is taken, West can play a club to partner's Ace and get a diamond ruff. Even if East starts with a top club, an immediate diamond switch will achieve the same effect. However, at almost all tables, East started by cashing both top clubs. Now all (all!) declarer had to do was get the trumps right to make 10 tricks. In the end two of the four pairs in game made it for a joint top, whilst two went down for a joint bottom.

So should you be in it? If you're playing teams, the answer is undoubtedly yes, since, as you probably know, the general strategy at teams is to bid thin games whenever possible. At pairs, it's not so clear cut, particularly when the opposition don't push you into it. On the other hand, you could argue that, at this vulnerability, in any competitive situation, it's always worth bidding up: even if you can't legitimately make a game, there's always a chance it will sneak through; alternatively, you may tempt the opponents to overbid. Also, with a 6-card trump suit and no Aces, North's hand is highly "offensive" (worth more as declarer than in defence). So if you trust your own declarer play, you should probably go for it ...

Now, here are two hands where everyone played in No Trumps.

Dlr: North  
 Vul: E/W

♠ A K 4  
 ♥ A 5 4 3  
 ♦ K 7 2  
 ♣ Q 5 3

Optimum  
NS +140

♠ Q 10 3  
 ♥ Q 6 2  
 ♦ Q 8 6 5  
 ♣ 8 7 4

WEST NORTH EAST  
 SOUTH 9 SOUTH

♠ 7 5 2  
 ♥ K 10 9 8  
 ♦ J 9  
 ♣ A J 10 6

16  
 6 9  
 9

♠ J 9 8 6  
 ♥ J 7  
 ♦ A 10 4 3  
 ♣ K 9 2

♣♦♥♠N  
 N 2 3 2 3 2  
 S 2 2 1 3 2  
 E - - - -  
 W - - - -

On Board 9, as you'll see, N/S have 25 points between them, which would generally be considered enough for 3NT, even with two flat hands such as these. On the night, for whatever reason, two pairs didn't get there, and the pair who stopped in 1NT got an absolute top when it turned out that 3NT simply wasn't makeable against any reasonable defence. Even making 8 tricks wasn't easy!

Board 18 was almost exactly the opposite. E/W had 24 points between them and, again, both had flat hands. Four pairs duly stayed below game and all made at least 9 tricks. Two pairs ventured into game, and Dave and Linda won themselves an absolute top by making it.

Dlr: East  
 Vul: N/S

♠ 7  
 ♥ 9 6 4 2  
 ♦ 6 4 2  
 ♣ Q J 9 7 5

Optimum  
NS -400

♠ Q 6 3  
 ♥ K 8 5  
 ♦ K 10 8 7  
 ♣ 8 4 3

WEST NORTH EAST  
 SOUTH 18 SOUTH

♠ A J 10 2  
 ♥ A 7 3  
 ♦ 9 5  
 ♣ A K 10 6

3  
 8 16  
 13

♠ K 9 8 5 4  
 ♥ Q J 10  
 ♦ A Q J 3  
 ♣ 2

♣♦♥♠N  
 N - - - -  
 S - - - -  
 E 2 2 2 2 3  
 W 2 1 2 2 3

So how should you know what to do on these two hands? At teams, of course, you would bid game on both hands, being fairly confident that your opponents would do likewise – but at pairs? Some people will say “look at the intermediates” – but here, there are good intermediates in both cases. Some will say “bid on if one of you has a 5-card suit” – but here, that isn't relevant. We say: bid on if you like an exciting game – and isn't that what bridge is all about!?

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