

Summertown Bridge Bulletin, 15 February 2021

This is Steven Bliss again, with two interesting hands from Monday's club night, plus a bonus bidding challenge from last week's A team match.

Dlr: West Vul: N/S	♠ 10 6 2 ♥ K 10 6 2 ♦ Q 9 7 2 ♣ 9 7	Optimum EW 4H+1: -450																																		
♠ A Q J 5 ♥ A J 8 5 4 ♦ 8 6 4 ♣ 4	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px;"> <tr><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">W</td><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">NORTH</td><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">E</td><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0; text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">12</td><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">A</td></tr> <tr><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">S</td><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">SOUTH</td><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">T</td></tr> </table>	W	NORTH	E	E	12	A	S	SOUTH	T	♠ K 4 ♥ Q 9 7 ♦ A 3 ♣ A 8 6 5 3 2																									
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Hand 12, shown here, is all about declarer play. Almost everyone played in 4 hearts by West (one pair stopped in 3). Four pairs made 11 tricks, three made 10, and five made only 9. The lead was usually a club or spade, occasionally the diamond 2. It's wise, at pairs, to think what you're trying to achieve before you play to trick 1. If you are in a good contract which not everyone will bid (for instance a slam), you should play as safely as possible to ensure the contract. If, as here, you are in a contract which almost everyone will bid, you should look for an overtrick if possible.

The 'safe' way to play the hand is to draw trumps immediately. There is an 88% chance of losing only one trump trick (I looked it up!), and a 16% chance of not losing any (if the king of hearts is well-placed and the 10 drops too). You will be unlucky to go off, but very unlikely to make an overtrick – you will lose two diamonds eventually as well as one trump. Here, however, with the bad heart break you are destined to go off. Five pairs did exactly this.

The slightly riskier approach is to cash the ace of diamonds and take three rounds of spades discarding dummy's diamond. You can then ruff two diamonds (returning with a club ruff when needed) and run the Queen of hearts. There is (other things being equal) a 62% chance that three rounds of spades will stand up, and only a 7% chance that they are worse than 5-2. With spades behaving you make 12 tricks if hearts break normally, and 11 if, as here, they don't. I think at pairs this was the right line, and the four pairs who followed it scored well.

The next hand wouldn't be at all interesting at teams or rubber. However, in a pairs event where most of the room plays a weak no trump, it's fascinating!

If playing strong NT and 5-card majors, West opens 1 diamond, North doubles, East probably passes and South bids 1 spade. North either passes (which works) or bids 1NT (which doesn't). Not very exciting. However, on the night, most Wests opened a weak NT, most Norths doubled, and this led to a huge variety of results (see next page):

Dlr: South Vul: N/S	♠ 10 7 3 ♥ A K 9 6 ♦ A 2 ♣ A K 9 2	Optimum EW 1N: -90																																		
♠ A Q 9 6 ♥ Q 4 3 ♦ Q J 9 4 ♣ J 6	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100px; height: 100px;"> <tr><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">W</td><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">NORTH</td><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">S</td><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0; text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">15</td><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">A</td></tr> <tr><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">T</td><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">SOUTH</td><td style="background-color: #f0f0f0;">T</td></tr> </table>	W	NORTH	E	S	15	A	T	SOUTH	T	♠ J 5 ♥ 10 8 7 5 ♦ K 7 3 ♣ Q 10 7 4																									
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Three EW pairs made 8 tricks in 1NT and two of them were doubled.

Three EW pairs played in 2 hearts, usually making (the computer says it should go one off).

Two EW pairs played in 2 diamonds – at my table we doubled and then let it make, at the other table it went off.

The other contracts were 1NT-1 by North, 2S-2 by West, 2S-1 by North, and 4H-4 by North (don't ask me how).

I suppose the moral is that there are an awful lot of points to be won or lost when a weak NT is doubled, and both pairs need to agree what they do in these situations. It's easy to understand why the strong NT is growing in popularity!

Finally, here's a bidding challenge from last week's A team match – before reading on, see what contract you would get to with a familiar partner.

D 1	N ♠ J853 ♥ KQ862 ♦ J3 ♣ 32		
W ♠ AQ72 ♥ 9 ♦ Q9852 ♣ A107	W N E S	E ♠ 1094 ♥ A10 ♦ AK6 ♣ KQJ64	
	S ♠ K6 ♥ J7543 ♦ 1074 ♣ 985	0	0

No one vulnerable
Dealer North

Both Summertown pairs played in 3NT+3, and both Banbury pairs played (rather surprisingly) in 4 spades making, so we picked up a few IMPs. No one found the good slam in clubs or diamonds (or NT). Generally East opened 1C, West bid 1D, North came in with 1H, and East, with an awkward bid, chose 1NT as originally intended. No one found the 5-3 minor suit fits.

Because modern bidding styles are pairs-oriented, we don't explore minor suit fits very well – we just settle for 3NT when there's no major suit fit, which at pairs is usually right. Strong club systems are rarely played these days, but they handle hands like this much better than Acol – after an artificial strong club from East, and a positive diamond response from West, you know that game is on and you have conventional bids available (if you can remember them all!) to explore the slam. (In the version of Precision I played many years ago, East would make an asking bid in clubs, and West would show three-card support with an honour plus extra values. East would now ask in diamonds, and find that West has five to the queen. It's then easy to ask for aces and bid 6C or 6D with confidence). Modern Acol works very well in many ways, but bidding minor suit slams isn't one of them!

Steven Bliss