

Summertown Bridge Bulletin, 15 March 2021

Well, there were certainly some interesting hands in last night's set – including a 9-card spade suit, something I don't remember seeing for a while! There were several slams around too but, exciting as those are, we all know that in duplicate pairs, every hand counts equally towards your score no matter how high or low the contract may be. Accurate declarer play and defence are important, of course, but bidding judgement also plays a big part in success, particularly on competitive hands. In this bulletin we've picked out a couple of those and focussed on some factors that may help you decide what to do.

To start with, here's Board 6:

Dlr: East Vul: E/W	♠ K 7 4 2 ♥ 9 3 ♦ 7 6 3 ♣ Q J 6 3	Optimum E 4H: -620
♠ Q 8 5 ♥ K Q 5 4 ♦ 10 9 8 5 2 ♣ 7	WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH 6	♠ A 10 6 ♥ A J 10 6 2 ♦ Q J ♣ K 9 8
6 7 15 12	♠ J 9 3 ♥ 8 7 ♦ A K 4 ♣ A 10 5 4 2	♣♦♥♠N N 1 - - - S 1 - - - E - 3 4 - 1 W - 2 3 - -

East is dealer and opens 1♥ (well, the robots opened 1NT, but that's robots for you!). South also has an opening hand, but is it now worth an overcall? Traditional wisdom would suggest that a 5-card suit with only one top honour isn't good enough for a 2-level overcall, and sure enough, quite a few Souths passed. One or two made a take-out double despite only having 3 spades, but several did still bid 2♣.

Looking at the vulnerability, we think it's right to join in the bidding here if you possibly can. So, suppose it's gone 1♥ – 2♣ and you're looking at the West hand. You obviously want to support your partner, but how high should you go? You have lovely trumps, but your ♠Q looks a bit lonely – having the ♦Q instead would have been much more encouraging. However, your singleton is bound to be helpful, and what should sway you here is that it's in the opponents' suit. Let's say, then, that you raise to game (which, as you can see from the analysis, is the right thing to do).

Now North is holding the hot potato. With 4-card support for partner's overcall, and nothing much in the way of defensive values, what should you do? Again, the vulnerability should help you decide. If E/W can make a vulnerable game, you can go as many as 3 down doubled and still be better off (-500 instead of -620). So, you should bid 5♣.

Only two N/S pairs followed this line of reasoning. One was left undoubled and went two down for an excellent result, as -100 beat all the pairs where E/W were in part score making +170. The other pair were doubled and duly lost 500, which was indeed better than letting E/W make 4♥. As it turned out though, this pair were on a losing wicket whatever they did, as hardly any other table had actually gone to 4♥. It can be a very frustrating game sometimes!

Another particularly interesting hand last night was board 12:

Dlr: West Vul: N/S	♠ J 10 9 3 ♥ 8 7 5 2 ♦ A 9 ♣ K Q 4	Optimum EW 4D: -130																																							
♠ - - ♥ K 10 6 ♦ Q J 8 5 4 3 ♣ 9 6 3 2	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">W</td><td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">NORTH</td><td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">E</td><td style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em;">12</td><td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">S</td></tr> <tr><td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">T</td><td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">SOUTH</td><td style="background-color: #e0e0e0;">T</td></tr> </table>	W	NORTH	E	E	12	S	T	SOUTH	T	♠ K 8 6 4 ♥ A J 4 ♦ K 10 7 6 ♣ J 10																														
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On the night, 7 E/W pairs played this hand in diamonds, at any level from 2 to 5. Three N/S pairs managed to win the auction at the right level (for them) of 3♠, and one unfortunate East was left to play in a difficult 1NT.

It's a good hand for those who include a weak 2♦ opening in their armoury, as West has the ideal hand for this. Assuming North passes, East's 4-card support indicates the need to "up the ante" with a further pre-empt – but how

high? If you're going to choose 4♦ (which will almost certainly shut up your opponents), you need to have an agreement with your partner that this is pre-emptive and not invitational, in order to stop partner going any further. If you don't have such an agreement, it's probably better to try 3♦; although here, this may not be enough to stop South from coming in with a 3♠ bid, or possibly a takeout double.

If West doesn't have a bid available to show a weak two in diamonds, then East can open with a weak NT. Now South should pipe up, even at this vulnerability, either with a conventional bid showing spades and a minor if you have one, or else with a natural 2♠.

West can now overcall 3♦ as a natural bid – but will East know how strong it is? If you play Lebensohl, this is an ideal opportunity to wheel it out, bidding an artificial 2NT with the intention of playing in 3♦. Unfortunately North can scupper this cunning plan by bidding 3♠, but a brave West might still look at the vulnerability and continue to 4♦, knowing partner must have at least two cards in the suit.

Finally, this hand is a good illustration of the so-called "Law of Total Tricks". It's too long to explain here in full (google it if you're interested), but the basic principle is that when both sides have a trump fit, then the total number of tricks available to both sides is usually the same as the total number of trumps held by both sides. Here, N/S have 9 spades and E/W have 10 diamonds, so the total number of trumps is 19: and the total number of tricks is also 19, since N/S can make 9 tricks in spades and E/W can make 10 tricks in diamonds. Bearing this calculation in mind, together with the vulnerability and therefore the size of any penalty for going off, can sometimes help you decide whether or not to bid on, particularly when you have a good idea of the total number of trumps held by your opponents.