

Summertown Bridge Bulletin 25 April 2022

Unusually, this week there were no really exciting hands – no slams bid (and hardly any makeable), and very little opportunity for any other dramatic bidding. In sessions like this, where most pairs end up in the same contract, good scores almost always rely on accurate card play.

Dir: West
Vul: None

♠ K 3
♥ K J 10 8 7 2
♦ A Q 9
♣ 10 6

Optimum
NS +460

♠ Q J
♥ 9 6 4
♦ K 10 8 6
♣ K Q 5 2

W	NORTH	E
E	8	S
S	T	T

♠ 10 9 8 5 4 2
♥ A 3
♦ 5 3 2
♣ J 9

	13	
11		5
	11	

♠ A 7 6
♥ Q 5
♦ J 7 4
♣ A 8 7 4 3

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	3	2	5	1	5
S	3	2	5	1	5
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

Take board 8. Although the analysis shows that 4♥ would be an excellent contract, five out of six tables ended up playing in either 2♥ or 3♥ (the other table played in NT, but also stopped below game). A quick scan shows that you're always going to make five trumps, two spades and a club. The trump loser and the club loser are unavoidable, so your chance of a good score depends entirely on how you play the diamonds. You obviously want to start them from the South hand, but which card should you lead first – the Jack, or a small one?

There are several ways to guarantee two tricks from this suit: either lead the Jack and run it; lead a small one and play the Queen; or even, take the Ace first and then play one of the remaining honours. No one is likely to get that wrong, so what's your best chance to make all three tricks without risking losing two?

If you play the Ace first, you might be very lucky and drop a singleton King in East's hand, but with seven cards out, this is only a 0.5% chance (a 6-1 break happens about 7% of the time, half of that time the singleton will be in East's hand, and that card will be the King only one in seven times). A much better line is to hope for both the King and the ten to be in West's hand (about 25% chance).

If this is the case, there are two ways to make all three tricks. You could begin with a deep finesse, leading a small card and if West plays low, you play the nine (finessing the Queen first doesn't work, since on the next round, West can put in either the ten or the King to force out your Ace, and will still have a winner left). The trouble with this is, if East happens to hold both the King and the ten, you'll end up making only one trick in the suit, for a very poor result.

So what else could you do? Well, you could lead the Jack. This still guarantees two tricks whoever holds the King: but if West does hold both the King and the ten, they have no winning option. If they cover the Jack, you will win the Ace and later return to hand to finesse against the ten. If they don't cover, you run your Jack and are still in hand to play small to the Queen. Bingo! And very well done to those declarers who found this play.

One last point to consider: you must make sure you keep an entry in South's hand because, if West decides to cover the Jack, you do need to be able to cross back in order to finesse against the ten.

Hand 17 also featured the play of the diamond suit within a heart contract, together with management of entries.

Although the analysis says that a slam is makeable, in practice everyone stopped in game.

Twice the contract was played by West, and North – understandably, looking at the available options – chose to lead a diamond, which made it fairly easy for declarer to wrap up 12 tricks (of course, you have to catch the ♥Q, but that isn't too difficult once you see the split).

Dir: North
Vul: None

♠ A Q 3 2
♥ Q 9 4
♦ 8 2
♣ K 10 6 4

Optimum
NS -800

♠ 8 5
♥ J 10 8 7 6 3
♦ A K J 5
♣ J

W NORTH E
S 17 S
T SOUTH T

♠ K 9
♥ A K 5 2
♦ 6 4 3
♣ A 9 5 3

	11	
10		14
	5	

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

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	1	-	-	2	-
S	1	-	-	2	-
E	-	4	6	-	4
W	-	4	6	-	4

The rest of the time, declarer was East, by way of a 1NT opening and a transfer. After a spade lead from South, you find out that the ♠K is always going to win a trick; and once you start the trumps, you now know that everyone will end up making at least 11 tricks (one spade, six trumps, two diamonds and a club). So to get a good score, you need to look for a twelfth trick, and this can only come from a successful diamond finesse.

Even realising this is only halfway to solving the problem because, after playing a top trump, you'll soon see that you need to cross to dummy in order to finesse against that pesky ♥Q. There are two ways to do that: one is to play a diamond and go up with the Ace (keeping the finesse in reserve for later), while the other is to take the ♣A and ruff a club. Does it matter which you choose? Yes, it does!

Three out of four Easts went for the club ruff. Now, when they played the ♥J, North covered. They won the other top heart but in order to draw the nine, they had to return to dummy's 10. Since they had already played the ♥3 (and without a crystal ball, why wouldn't you?), there was then no entry back to hand to try the diamond finesse....

Congratulations to Dave Dobson, who was the only East who managed to avoid this dilemma by crossing to dummy with a top diamond. Now it didn't matter whether or not North (who happened to be Sandra) covered the ♥J, as there was always going to be an entry back to declarer's hand with the ♣A: and the diamond finesse was duly taken, for the twelfth trick.

Sandra Nicholson & Krysztof Kazmierczak