

## Summertown Bridge Bulletin, 27 December 2021

Although the movement last night went somewhat awry, there were still plenty of entertaining hands, mostly not at all straightforward to play or defend. Congratulations to the overall winner Zane (ably accompanied by a virtual partner), runners-up Moira and Cliff, and third-placed Christina and Tom.

For this week's Bulletin we've picked out a few hands that focus on competitive bidding when one side has a heart fit and the other has spades: what you might call "The Battle of the Majors".

Of course it's always an advantage to have the spades, as your opponents have to go up a level to outbid you. But let's not forget the importance of vulnerability, and the overall effect of pairs scoring.

Dir: South  
Vul: All

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

Optimum  
NS 5Sx:  
-500

♠ 5 4 2  
♥ K Q 5 4 3  
♦ Q J  
♣ J 5 2

W NORTH E  
S 7 A S  
T SOUTH T

♠ - -  
♥ A J 7 6  
♦ 10 9 5 4  
♣ A K 7 6 3

♠ K 9 8 7 6  
♥ 10 9 8  
♦ A 8 3  
♣ Q 9

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

Board 7 was a classic example. As you can see, E/W have 21 points and nine hearts between them, whilst N/S have "only" 19 points, but ten spades. Both sides are vulnerable, which makes a difference if the bidding is going to stop in a part score (since going two down for -200 is almost always a bad score if your opponents aren't going to be in game), but not so much once you get to game level (since both sides need to get their opponents three down doubled to compensate for missing a game their way).

The hand was played five times and at three tables, North opened 1♠ (OK, only 10 points, but a lovely suit, good shape, and not more than 7 losers). East naturally made a takeout double and at two tables, South now raised to 3♠. This led once to a top for N/S, when they were allowed to play in 3♠ making, for the only positive score their way; and once to a top for E/W, when West looked at his five nice hearts, bid 4♥ and was left to play there, making. At the third table, South decided that the probable 10-card fit was worth a pre-emptive raise to 4♠ ("bid to the level of the fit"), and this was left to play for a quiet one down.

On the other two tables, North opted to pass and East opened 1♣. This led to a spirited auction which, in both cases, ended in 4♠ going one down – once doubled and once not.

As you can see from the analysis, 5♥ can actually make, but it calls for some fancy footwork by declarer, as you can't afford to take the easy route of cashing the top clubs in case you lose one: plus, if East has opened in clubs, West will know from the bidding that their side *doesn't* have a 10-card fit. So if you're fairly sure you've just been pushed out of a making game, and you don't think bidding on will be safe, why not try a double? Sometimes this does go wrong on hands with very extreme distributions, but here 4♠ doubled turned out to be worth 75%.

Now let's take a look at Board 12. Again, one side (this time E/W) has ten spades, whilst their opponents have nine hearts between them. There are two key differences, though: on the one hand, E/W have the advantage of favourable vulnerability; on the other hand, N/S definitely have the balance of the high cards (26 points between them). What should this tell us? It suggests that E/W will most likely have a profitable sacrifice – and indeed, the analysis suggests that in the unlikely event of N/S happening to reach their optimum contract of 6NT, it would be worth while for E/W to go four down doubled in 7♠.

Dir: West  
Vul: N/S

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

Optimum  
EW 7Sx:  
+800

♠ Q 9 5 2  
♥ 10 8 7 6  
♦ K 6  
♣ 8 7 3

W	NORTH	E
E	12	S
S	SOUTH	T

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

16	9
5	10

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

♣	♦	♥	♠	N
6	3	6	-	6
5	2	6	-	1
-	-	-	3	-
-	-	-	3	-

At our table, after North opened 1♣, Krys made a pre-emptive overcall of 3♠, South (Bridget) came in with 4♥, and I followed the reasoning above to bid 4♠. This was passed round to Bridget, who doubled. North (John Cecil) pondered for a while and then correctly took this out to 5♥. Krys passed, as did Bridget, and I now failed to show the courage of my convictions by competing to 5♠. Who knows whether this would have been doubled again and left in – as happened at one other table, giving Christina and Tom 80% for -300 – or whether N/S might have gone on to bid and make 6♥, for an absolute top? As it was, they got 70% for making 5♥ + 1.

At one of the other tables, E/W were allowed to play in 4♠ after a ding-dong sequence with both hearts and spades bid at the 2, 3 and 4 levels, and managed to make it for an outright top (although as it turned out, one or even two down, undoubled, would have been just as good at pairs scoring); whilst at Zane's table, his robot partner opened a strong NT and after East overcalled 2♠, Zane jumped straight to 4♥, where he played. At the remaining two tables, N/S were pushed into 5♥ and left there, once making +1 and once +2 after a defensive slip.

Dir: East  
Vul: None

♠ A Q 3  
♥ K 5 4  
♦ K 6 2  
♣ Q 7 5 2

Optimum  
NS 3H:  
+140

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

W	NORTH	E
S	14	S
T	SOUTH	T

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

14	6
12	8

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

♣	♦	♥	♠	N
1	2	3	-	2
1	3	3	-	2
-	-	-	1	-
-	-	-	1	-

Lastly, here's board 14, this time featuring a part-score battle with no one vulnerable. As it happened, when this was played, three of the E/W pairs were playing a strong NT and so opened the West hand with either 1♣ or 1♦. This resulted twice in 2♠ making for a joint top, and once in 3♥ going down one for a 60% score. However, at the other three tables, West opened 1NT and East bid 2♥ as a transfer to spades. Now South could double to show a good heart suit, and E/W were immediately pushed beyond their comfort level, being doomed to a bad score for either allowing N/S to play in 3♥ making 8 tricks, or going down themselves in 3♠.

And the moral is: holding the spades doesn't always guarantee a good result – but then, as we all know, there are no guarantees in bridge!