

Summertown Bridge Bulletin, 28 December 2020

by Sandra and Krys

In the last of our online bridge sessions this year, things got off to an exciting start with the second board of the first round.

Dlr: East
 Vul: N/S

♠ A
 ♥ K Q 7 5
 ♦ A J 10 8 7 5 3
 ♣ 5

Optimum
 EW 6Sx:
 +1100

♠ Q J 10 9 4
 ♥ A J 8 6 4
 ♦ Q 9
 ♣ 4

WEST NORTH EAST
 SOUTH 2 SOUTH

♠ K 8 5 3
 ♥ 10 3 2
 ♦ 6 4
 ♣ J 10 9 2

14
 10 4
 12

♠ 7 6 2
 ♥ 9
 ♦ K 2
 ♣ A K Q 8 7 6 3

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	5	6	1	-	5
S	5	6	1	-	5
E	-	-	-	1	-
W	-	-	-	1	-

East passes and South opens 1♣. What should West do now?

If you have a system of two-suited overcalls, now's the time to wheel it out. So let's suppose West bids 2♣, a "Michaels cue bid", showing at least 5-5 in the majors.

The spotlight is now on North, who has game values and needs to make some sort of forcing bid. Is 2♦ enough? What would 3♦ mean? Should you just shut your eyes and try 3NT – or even 5♦? If you're playing in a regular partnership, it's worth having a discussion about this and

agreeing some kind of system. You might even decide that a bid of one of the opponents' suits is the best way to force partner to make at least one more bid.

If West simply overcalls 1♠, North is likely to double, to show the four-card heart suit. Now at favourable vulnerability East should jump to 3♠, "the level of the fit" (you know you have a 9-card fit, so bid for 9 tricks – this works particularly well when your suit is spades). If South tries 4♣, West carries on with 4♣ and North will most probably double again, for penalties, rather than risk 5♦. Best defence nets +500 for N/S, which beats a diamond part score, but is poor compensation for missing game. Not surprisingly, no one reached the slam (which relies on the trumps coming in without loss) or was left to play in 3NT, but several pairs did manage to find 5♦.

Last thought on this one: if N/S had somehow managed to bid 6♦, would E/W be brave enough to sacrifice in 6♣, as Deep Finesse says they should? This is where you really need to know your scoring. 6♦ vulnerable would score 1320 for N/S, so if you think it's likely to make (and West's diamond holding suggests it will), then you can afford to lose 800 or even 1100, but not 1400. How many tricks do you need to make in 6♣ doubled to lose exactly 1100? If you don't know, now's the time to work it out!

Now let's look at board 6, which also features a very strong diamond suit. If East opens 1NT (12-14), what should South do? It's tempting to overcall a natural 2♦, or even 3♦, especially if you play 2♦ as some sort of conventional bid. On the other hand, if you pass quietly and E/W end up playing in NT, you'll surely be able to take the first 6 tricks. But it looks as if they have a fit in the major suits ... are they more likely to find it if you bid, or if you pass? Again, you are at favourable vulnerability – does that make a difference?

Dlr: East
 Vul: E/W

♠ 6 5 4 3
 ♥ J 10 2
 ♦ 9 8
 ♣ A 9 7 3

Optimum
 NS 5Dx:
 -500

♠ A Q J 2
 ♥ 9 8 5 4
 ♦ 10 5
 ♣ Q J 6

WEST NORTH EAST
 SOUTH 6 SOUTH

♠ 10 9 8 7
 ♥ A K Q 6
 ♦ 7 3 2
 ♣ K 8

5
 10 12
 13

♠ K
 ♥ 7 3
 ♦ A K Q J 6 4
 ♣ 10 5 4 2

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	1	2	-	-	-
S	1	2	-	-	-
E	-	-	3	4	-
W	-	-	3	4	-

At the table, two Souths passed over 1NT, and when West also made a disciplined pass with 10 points, the contract went one down, for +100 to N/S. Two Souths were allowed to play in 2♦, which the analysis says should make exactly for +90: however (as we know) defence is difficult, and they both made 9 tricks, thereby netting themselves a joint top with +110. In a couple of cases, where East opened something other than 1NT, a competitive auction led to a contract of 4♥, going one off when South was able to cash two top diamonds and give partner a ruff (overruffing dummy). This gave N/S the same +100 as they would have got from beating 1NT.

So why does Deep Finesse suggest that *minus* 500 should be a good score for N/S? Well, rather unfairly, although 4♥ doesn't make, 4♠ does – because as long as declarer doesn't carelessly ruff the third diamond lead with the ♠2, North now can't overruff. It's a funny old game sometimes!

Finally, here's a potential slam hand:

Dir: North
Vul: E/W

♠ 9 8
♥ A 10 3
♦ 10 9 7 5 4 3
♣ 7 5

Optimum
E 6N:
-1440

♠ J 10
♥ K 9 5
♦ A K Q 6
♣ Q 9 8 2

W	NORTH	E
E	9	A
S		S
T	SOUTH	T

♠ A Q 5
♥ Q J 7 6 2
♦ J 8
♣ A K 6

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	4	3	5	2	6
W	4	3	5	1	5

♠ K 7 6 4 3 2
♥ 8 4
♦ 2
♣ J 10 4 3

	4	
15		17
	4	

As you can see, E/W have 32 points between them, and an 8-card heart fit – surely a good indicator that there could be a slam available. However, only two pairs actually got there.

The evening's winning pair (visitors John Briggs and Peter Litchfield) did it very simply: East opened a strong NT, West bid 4NT (a quantitative invitation to 6), and East accepted. With East as declarer, there was no need to risk the spade finesse, as once the hearts break, there are 12 tricks without it. Note, though, that if West had been the declarer, a spade lead from North would have been fatal.

If you play a weak NT, East will open 1♥ and West will respond either 2♣ or 2♦. Now, as East, a 2NT rebid will generally be game forcing – but do you have a way for West to ask about a possible heart fit, and to find out whether East has a minimum 15/16 points, or something better? Most pairs simply settled for 3NT. Only one pair used a conventional enquiry to find their way to 6♥, which looks as if it should be at least as good a contract as 6NT, but in fact they were fortunate to make it. Can you see how it might go down? If South leads their singleton diamond, North must go up immediately with the Ace as soon as trumps are played, and can then give partner a ruff.

And that's it for now. We wish you all a very Happy New Year, and lots more exciting bridge hands in 2021!