

Summertown Bridge Bulletin, 29 November 2021

There were a number of what seemed to us to be particularly difficult hands last night, so it's very well done to the winners Moira and Cliff, second Isabel and Howard, and third Steph and Steven.

Take board 3. After South passes, the first question is, what should West open?

This is one of the very few hands where an old-fashioned opening Strong Two would be perfect, as there are exactly nine playing tricks. Of course, hardly anyone still plays that system, so the choice is between a rather nervous $1\heartsuit$ (expecting to have to compete, since the opponents look to have a fit in at least one of the minor suits, and probably some decent high cards); a slightly skewed "strong" $2\clubsuit$ (well, it's only 16 points, but if you go by losers, it's a 2-loser hand); or a very full-blooded $4\heartsuit$, which at least has the virtue of making sure you get to game without giving the opposition any useful information to help them with the opening lead.

Dlr: South
Vul: E/W

Optimum
NS 3Sx, NS
4Dx: -100

♠ A 10 8 5
♥ J 4 2
♦ A 9 6 5
♣ K 4

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

W NORTH E
SOUTH A S T
3

♠ 7 2
♥ 8
♦ Q J 7 3
♣ J 10 7 6 5 2

♠ J 9 3
♥ 7
♦ K 10 8 4 2
♣ A 9 8 3

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

As it turned out, two thirds of the field got to game in one way or another and those who didn't, regretted it when they found themselves taking their 10th trick. But ... the analysis says you can't make more than 9 tricks and indeed, it seems hard to see where you can find any more than your eight trumps and one spade ... so what happened?

Defence is difficult, is what happened! There are all too many ways for the defence to go wrong here, for example by never leading trumps (allowing declarer to ruff a spade), or by cashing the $\heartsuit A$ early on. Even if the defenders don't do anything wrong to begin with, declarer can make it hard for them by simply running off all the trumps before revealing the position in both minors, hoping that someone will discard a spade.

Kudos here to Annabel and Zahir, who were the only pair who managed to hold declarer to the 9 tricks they started with.

Dlr: West
Vul: All

Optimum
EW
4S+1:
-650

♠ 10 8 6
♥ A K J 8 5
♦ 7 6
♣ 6 4 2

♠ A K 7 4
♥ 10 9 4
♦ A 5 4 3
♣ J 9

W NORTH E
SOUTH A S T
4

♠ Q J 9 3
♥ 2
♦ K J 10 9
♣ A 10 8 5

♠ 5 2
♥ Q 7 6 3
♦ Q 8 2
♣ K Q 7 3

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

The very next board was another "game or no game" hand. E/W have 23 points between them, which isn't usually enough for game with no fit of more than 8 cards; but East's singleton heart is gold-dust opposite West's 3 small cards in that suit, and if N/S bid and support hearts, West should be able to work out that East must be short.

(diagram repeated overleaf.....)

Dlr: West
Vul: All

♠ 10 8 6
♥ A K J 8 5
♦ 7 6
♣ 6 4 2

Optimum
EW
4S+1:
-650

♠ A K 7 4
♥ 10 9 4
♦ A 5 4 3
♣ J 9

W	NORTH	E
E	4	S
S	SOUTH	T

♠ Q J 9 3
♥ 2
♦ K J 10 9
♣ A 10 8 5

8		
12		11
		9

♠ 5 2
♥ Q 7 6 3
♦ Q 8 2
♣ K Q 7 3

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

Four pairs managed to reach game in spades, mostly without opposition bidding. After a 1NT opening by West, a Stayman enquiry from East found the spade fit, and then it all depended how optimistic East was feeling. However, only one of those who were in the game made the 11 tricks identified by Deep Finesse – and, rather annoyingly to us flesh and blood players, the declarer was a robot!

This was a hand with several possible lines of play after the standard lead of a top heart, and your choice should be influenced by whether or not you're in game – since you should be able to see that not everyone will go there.

If you're in game, your priority should be to make it, so you can afford to lose one trick in each of the side suits but no more. Ruff two hearts using trumps as entries, return to hand with the ♦A, draw the last trump and try the diamond finesse towards dummy. It loses, but you can win any return (you have one trump left in hand to ruff a heart), and then just concede one club trick.

If you're not in game, you'll need to try for 11 tricks to get any kind of a good score, so you'll have to work harder. You can either try to guess the diamonds, or you can try for the club honours to be split. Which is better? The finesse is 50/50 whilst the chance of split honours is 75%, so in theory you should go for the clubs: but sadly, here, South holds both of them, and your percentage play fails. Ouch.

Dlr: East
Vul: N/S

♠ A K Q J 7 5 2
♥ K 3
♦ A 8
♣ J 8

Optimum
NS 6N:
+1440

♠ 10 8
♥ 9 7 4
♦ K 10 5 3
♣ A 9 6 5

W	NORTH	E
E	18	S
S	SOUTH	T

♠ 6 3
♥ Q 2
♦ 9 7 6 4 2
♣ 7 4 3 2

18		
7		2
		13

♠ 9 4
♥ A J 10 8 6 5
♦ Q J
♣ K Q 10

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

Finally, here's the last board of the evening.

This one is a "slam or no slam" and now, if you haven't got there before the bidding dies, you are going to have to make all 13 tricks to avoid a complete bottom.

Of course, a club lead would scupper that plan immediately; but suppose you have escaped that fate, can you somehow dispose of your losing clubs? Yes, you can, if you can set up the hearts without losing the lead – and still keep an entry to dummy! So whilst your normal percentage play would be to cash the ♥K and A and then try to ruff out the Q, now – with no quick outside entry - you'll have to try the

heart finesse and hope the Q is on the right side, with a 3-2 split.

Or at least, you think you will until you see the missing lady appear on the second round of the suit. Sometimes bridge isn't such a frustrating game after all!