

Summertown Bridge Bulletin, 3rd October 2022

For this week's Bulletin we've picked out two pairs of hands for "compare and contrast" discussions. Let's start with the very first and the very last boards of the evening. The common theme here is competitive bidding, when both sides have a good fit in a major suit.

Dir: North
Vul: None

♠ - -
 ♥ **A K Q 5 4 3**
 ♦ **K 8 3 2**
 ♣ **J 6 4**

Optimum
NS -100

♠ **A 9 6 5 2**
 ♥ **J**
 ♦ **A 9 6 5**
 ♣ **Q 8 3**

	NORTH	
W	1	E
S		T
	SOUTH	

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

	13	
11		11
	5	

♠ **10 8 7**
 ♥ **10 9 8 6**
 ♦ **Q 10**
 ♣ **K 10 9 7**

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

On Board 1, N/S have a 10-card fit in hearts, whilst E/W have the same in spades. North deals and will surely open 1♥, over which East will bid 1♠. Now what? Most Souths looked at their good trump support and intermediates, and decided that their hand was worth a raise to 2♥, even though it has only 5 points, and 10 losers. Those Wests with red blood in their veins promptly jumped to 4♠, bidding to "the level of the fit" (i.e. with a 10-card fit, bid for 10 tricks). Should you let this put you off, holding the North hand? You estimate that E/W are likely to make 4♠ – you don't expect to

make more than one trick in hearts, and if partner could bid only 2♥, it's unlikely that you can muster another three tricks between you. Looking at the vulnerability, if you go two down doubled that should be a good score, but conceding -500 for three down doubled would be worse than letting N/S make their game. So do you feel lucky?

Optimistic (a.k.a. aggressive!) bidding often pays off in pairs, and in the event, those who bid on to 5♥ all did well. Valerie and James even got an outright top when Sandra misjudged to continue to 5♠, going one off ("leave the 5 level to the opponents", do we hear you say?!).

On Board 20, if West passed as dealer, most Norths also passed, but some brave souls did try 1♦. Although East promptly overcalled 1♠, it was now more difficult for E/W to get to 4♠ than when either West or East made the opening bid: still, nearly everyone managed to bid the game, making an easy 12 tricks after giving up a heart.

One pair, however, were not prepared to give in so easily! After Pass-Pass-1♠, South came in with an adventurous 3♥ weak jump overcall. Knowing that both sides had a big fit in their respective suits, North piled on the pressure by raising to 5♥. E/W chose to double and defend, and the analysis says

they can take 5 tricks, which would have been a top for them: but after West kicked off with a very reasonable-looking top spade, they didn't have the communication for a club ruff and could take only four tricks, for a near-bottom instead. And who were the super-optimistic N/S bidders? Why, who else but Valerie and James again!

Dir: West
Vul: All

♠ **9**
 ♥ **A Q 10**
 ♦ **Q 8 7 6 4**
 ♣ **Q J 5 3**

Optimum
NS -1400

♠ **A K J 10**
 ♥ **9**
 ♦ **10 9 5 2**
 ♣ **K 9 7 6**

	NORTH	
W	20	E
S		T
	SOUTH	

♠ **Q 8 6 5 4 2**
 ♥ **8 5 4**
 ♦ **A K 3**
 ♣ **A**

	11	
11		13
	5	

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

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

Then there was Board 3 and Board 6.

Dlr: South Vul: E/W	♠ A K ♥ A J 9 ♦ J 10 6 3 ♣ K Q 10 6	Optimum NS +420																														
♠ 9 6 5 4 ♥ 8 6 5 3 ♦ 5 ♣ A 5 3 2	W NORTH E S 3 A T SOUTH T	♠ J 10 8 7 3 ♥ 10 7 ♦ A 7 4 2 ♣ J 7																														
18 4 6 12	♠ Q 2 ♥ K Q 4 2 ♦ K Q 9 8 ♣ 9 8 4	<table style="font-size: small; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td>♣</td><td>♦</td><td>♥</td><td>♠</td><td>N</td></tr> <tr><td>N</td><td>4</td><td>4</td><td>4</td><td>-</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>S</td><td>4</td><td>4</td><td>4</td><td>-</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>E</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>1</td><td>-</td></tr> </table>	♣	♦	♥	♠	N	N	4	4	4	-	3	S	4	4	4	-	3	E	-	-	-	1	-	W	-	-	-	1	-	
♣	♦	♥	♠	N																												
N	4	4	4	-	3																											
S	4	4	4	-	3																											
E	-	-	-	1	-																											
W	-	-	-	1	-																											

Dlr: East Vul: E/W	♠ 9 7 4 ♥ A 9 8 ♦ 9 7 4 2 ♣ Q 5 2	Optimum NS -1440																												
♠ K J 3 2 ♥ K Q 7 ♦ A 10 5 ♣ A J 4	W NORTH E S 6 A T SOUTH T	♠ A 6 ♥ 5 4 2 ♦ K Q J 8 ♣ K 10 8 7																												
6 18 13 3	♠ Q 10 8 5 ♥ J 10 6 3 ♦ 6 3 ♣ 9 6 3	<table style="font-size: small; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td>♣</td><td>♦</td><td>♥</td><td>♠</td><td>N</td></tr> <tr><td>N</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>S</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>E</td><td>6</td><td>6</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>6</td><td>6</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>6</td></tr> </table>	♣	♦	♥	♠	N	N	-	-	-	-	S	-	-	-	-	E	6	6	4	5	6	W	6	6	4	5	6	
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N	-	-	-	-																										
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W	6	6	4	5	6																									

As you can see, on each of these hands, playing weak NT, the dealer will open 1NT, whilst their partner is sitting with a balanced 18-point hand. What should you do?

A weak NT normally shows 14 points at most, and the conventional wisdom is that unless you have a long solid suit, you need 33 points between you to have a reasonable chance of making 6NT (amongst other things, this figure does of course guarantee that you aren't missing two Aces). Nevertheless, on Board 3, three Norths bid 4NT – not Blackwood here, but a “quantitative” raise, asking partner to bid slam with a maximum. Perhaps they were influenced by the two useful 10s. South had no trouble in finding a pass but with 30 points, you would still expect to be able to collect 10 tricks without too much difficulty. Sadly, here, a spade lead makes that impossible. Unlucky!

On Board 6, it appeared that most Wests had taken this message on board, and seven out of eight pairs played the hand in a safe 3NT, making between 10 and 12 tricks. This time just one West liked the look of his 18 points (OK, 18 plus one 10) enough to raise to 4NT. His partner took the equally optimistic view that 13 points plus one 10 should be good enough to count as a maximum, and bid the slam. After a heart lead, it didn't seem as though there was much of a chance for this ambitious contract: but declarer managed to take the two-way club finesse the right way round, and then a successful spade finesse eventually brought in the twelfth trick. Lucky!

All of which goes to show that luck is sometimes just as important as skill; and also, that doing the “right” thing doesn't always get you the best result. And aren't those some of the reasons why we all think bridge is such a fascinating game?