

Summertown Bridge Bulletin No. 3

16 November 2020

written by Trevor Dawn

I know I am not alone in my admiration for last week's bulletin by James which I felt was way in advance of the books we used to receive in the other universe after a simultaneous pairs event. They were better than most of the bridge columns in newspapers and magazines. I enjoyed the bulletin immensely. Thank you, James.

I am always in awe of those who can analyse bridge hands. Having now tried this for the first time, I am even more in awe. Right now, I feel like one of those football managers who has to give an interview after his team has suffered a humiliating 0 - 4 defeat at home to a team ranked several places below them. Reliving the experience doesn't lessen the pain of a sub-standard performance. So, my comments on tonight's hands are not based on my own play - which was mediocre - but on how information from the bidding and other factors can combine to influence the decision(s) that affect the perennial problem of the opening lead.

Take hand 1. There will be a competitive auction involving clubs from East, hearts and/or diamonds from South and spades from West. More often than not, judging from the "travellers", East will end up in a club contract. Problem for South is: how to keep it to 9 tricks. What goes through your mind as South when partner has responded to your hearts with a simple raise? Could one of your opponents be short? East did not respond to his partner's spades, so KS might give you an early ruff, but how likely is that? What about AH? It is not likely to give much away. It is perfectly respectable. But it is your best entry. This leaves AD as the only lead guaranteed to keep the club contract to 9 tricks, since your partner can ruff at trick 2 and put you back in with a heart to play another diamond. Nobody found this defence!

Dlr: North Vul: None	♠ Q 8 6 5 3 2 ♥ 10 5 4 ♦ 10 ♣ Q 9 3	Optimum NS 3Hx: -100																													
♠ A J 10 9 4 ♥ 9 ♦ K 9 8 2 ♣ 8 7 6	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">WEST</td><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">NORTH</td><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">EAST</td></tr> <tr><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">SOUTH</td><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px; text-align: center; font-size: 24px;">1</td><td style="width: 20px; height: 20px;">EAST</td></tr> </table>	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	1	EAST	♠ 7 ♥ Q 7 6 3 ♦ Q J 5 ♣ A K J 10 2																							
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Dlr: North Vul: N/S	♠ Q J 9 7 ♥ J 9 8 7 ♦ Q 3 ♣ A K 6	Optimum NS 4H: +620																													
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Take hand 5. Most Norths will open 1NT. Assuming East doesn't bid 2D (unlikely), South will bid 2C (Stayman), and whether the reply is 2H or 2S East should wind up in 4H. East is on lead. What does she/he know? That North has a balanced hand; that South has four hearts at least, and did not even offer the choice between 3N and 4H. The inference is that he is weak in the minors. You are unlikely to defeat 4H, so how do you limit the damage? The answer is to lead a minor. Of course, there are dangers in all opening leads, but the AD does at least give you a chance to assess the situation, whereas a club led from this holding always has the

potential to promote the jack – which is the case here. As it happens, only one person defending 4H found the diamond lead (Jack), and in this case the pair earned joint bottom. There ain't no justice.

Dlr: East
 Vul: E/W

♠ A J 8
 ♥ J 5 2
 ♦ 5 4 3 2
 ♣ Q 8 7

Optimum
 EW
 4S+1:
 -650

♠ K 6 4 3
 ♥ A Q 9 8 7
 ♦ A Q
 ♣ A K

NORTH
 WEST EAST
 SOUTH
 6

♠ Q 9 7
 ♥ 4
 ♦ K J 9 8 7
 ♣ 10 6 4 2

8
 22 6
 4

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

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

Take hand 6. 3NT by W is the contract and is most likely to make. It is unlikely that a Stayman request or a red suit transfer has been bid. The inference is a top-heavy minor distribution for East (as is the case). How does the North lead limit the number of tricks? Leading from an honour looks as though it will provide declarer with a cheap trick, so a diamond is safer in that regard. None of the alternatives is any better and those who chose diamonds mostly escaped with a loss of only 10 tricks. I failed the test, as you can all see.

And now to hand 18. 2H by N following a red suit transfer was a favoured contract, but there were some pairs in 1NT. What are East's options against 1NT? Either the fourth highest from a black suit, or KD as an attacking ploy. Is it a good idea to lead away from A and Q of ANY suit against a NT contract? In this case such a lead of a low spade will produce the worst outcome for defence allowing 9 tricks. The odds are not good. Leading a heart is misleading to partner, which leaves clubs or diamonds. In pairs, how often does it pay to lead away from a King? So, a low club may well be best.

Dlr: East
 Vul: N/S

♠ K J 3
 ♥ A J 5
 ♦ J 5 4 2
 ♣ A J 4

Optimum
 NS
 2H+1:
 +140

♠ 8 4 2
 ♥ Q 2
 ♦ A Q 10 9 7
 ♣ Q 8 2

NORTH
 WEST EAST
 SOUTH
 18

♠ A Q 9 7
 ♥ 10 9 7
 ♦ K 3
 ♣ 9 7 6 3

15
 10 9
 6

♠ 10 6 5
 ♥ K 8 6 4 3
 ♦ 8 6
 ♣ K 10 5

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

Overall it wasn't a vintage night for killer opening leads or disastrous ones either. It was a more bread and butter event where opening leads had a marginal influence on the number of tricks. None of the leads on optimum contracts lead to the contract being defeated. My reading of the hands comes with the benefit of hindsight and having had sight of all four hands. At the table it is a different matter. It is one of the most difficult and critical aspects of playing bridge, and more often than not, we get it wrong, no one more so than me. Sometimes we all revert to automatic pilot or a mantra such as fourth highest from best suit in NT; sometimes we lead an Ace to "have a look"; some of us always lead a suit in which we have an honour; sometimes we lead the unbid major; sometimes we lead high-low. These leads always work some of the time. There may be a way to increase the odds in our favour by using what the bidding has revealed to us. Even if this helps in only one hand it is a small victory.

As to my own play – physician heal thyself.