

Summertown Bridge Bulletin, 30 November 2020

by Krys and Sandra

We were hoping that there might be some exciting hands to write about this week, but no such luck: no slams, no 10-card suits, no double voids. The only real cliff-hanger was the start to the evening, when BBO was clearly having problems once again and a few unlucky people never did manage to get logged on in time. Many thanks to director Mike, who battled through without much of his usual information, and got all those who did play safely to the end of the evening.

Apart from that, the oddest thing that happened was on Board 18 when West, looking at a lovely 7-card heart suit and no doubt getting geared up to open 3♥, several times saw South not only open 1♥, but rebid 2♥ after North replied 2♣ or 2♦.

At most tables the bidding eventually wound its way to 3NT by South, making with an overtrick.

However, two Souths opened a Robson-style 1NT.

On this occasion it didn't work so well, as it allowed

West to pre-empt after all. 3♥ doubled earned an outright top for the Sheppards when it went only two down, whilst a brave 4♥ from Alison Withers-Green pushed N/S into 5♦ – making 11 tricks, but not scoring well against the 430 available in NT. Not surprisingly, no one found 6♣!

Dlr: East Vul: N/S	♠643 ♥-- ♦AKQ43 ♣KJ543	Optimum EW 6Hx; +1100																																		
♠J10 ♥AQJ10952 ♦J5 ♣97	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 20px;">W</td><td style="width: 40px; text-align: center; background-color: #f0f0f0;">North</td><td style="width: 20px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">e</td><td style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">18</td><td style="text-align: center;">a</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">s</td><td style="text-align: center; background-color: #f0f0f0;">South</td><td style="text-align: center;">s</td></tr> <tr><td style="width: 20px;">t</td><td></td><td style="width: 20px;">t</td></tr> </table>	W	North	E	e	18	a	s	South	s	t		t	♠A9752 ♥3 ♦9862 ♣862																						
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Dlr: South Vul: All	♠A2 ♥84 ♦AK653 ♣AQ62	Optimum NS 4H; +620																																		
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Whilst Board 18 demonstrates the effect of match-point (duplicate) scoring on the bidding, Board 7 was a great illustration of how the scoring can affect the way you play the cards as declarer. Four out of the seven tables ended up in 3NT played by North. A spade lead would sink this (and did, when South played it), but all the Easts very reasonably chose to lead a small club, which immediately gave declarer an extra trick. This brought the total top tricks to eight, and now declarer had to choose a line of play. Can you see an almost completely safe way to make 9 tricks? And if you can, should you go for that – or should you take a less safe route, in the hope of making the overtricks that matter so much at pairs?

We're talking, of course, about the hearts in dummy's hand. If the suit breaks 3-3 (about a 35% chance), they'll bring in 5 tricks. But if you simply cash the top three honours and they break 4-2 (about a 49% chance), you have no entry back to dummy to make the extra trick you need for your contract – so the safest way to play for exactly 9 tricks, with an 84% chance of success, is to duck the first round of hearts. Three of the four declarers, including Krys, did just that, and duly made 9 tricks.

The fourth declarer, though, went down a different route. He started by cashing the top hearts in case they broke favourably. When they didn't, because he hadn't yet lost the lead, he still had time to change to plan B – aiming to set up the diamonds in his own hand. Again, there's only a 35% chance that this suit will break 3-3 as you need it to do, but the combined odds that one of the two suits will break favourably add up to about 52% - and this difference in the odds, which might give you a top rather than an average, is well worth a shot. As you can see, the diamonds do work, so that was a very well-played complete top for declarer Mike Prew.

Finally, here's a board that demonstrates the importance of agreeing your carding methods – particularly, your leads – with your partner.

The hand was mostly played in hearts, which is not surprising given the 4-4 heart fit that E/W have. On a combined point count of 24, 4♥ seems a reasonable contract. What should the North hand lead when West becomes declarer? The obvious lead is a club. There is an old bridge saying that, as defender, "God gave you an AK to lead it at trick one". The benefits are that you can then get a look at dummy whilst you're still on lead, it doesn't usually give anything away, and cashing a couple of winners right away always gets you off to a good start. The normal order to play from a suit headed by the AK, if you are playing standard leads, is to begin with the A and then continue with the K. However, when you only have a doubleton, you want to get this across to partner, so that partner can give you a ruff when s/he gets in. The standard thing to do is therefore to lead the K first and then continue with the A. This reversal of the normal order tells partner that those are the only two cards you have in that suit. On this hand it works beautifully, as partner happens to have the ♥A, so can get in as soon as declarer tries to draw trumps and lead a club back for you to ruff. Result: contract down 1.

Dir: North Vul: E/W	♠K653 ♥J7 ♦87654 ♣AK	Optimum EW 3N; -600																																							
♠AQ104 ♥Q543 ♦A ♣Q953	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="background-color: green; color: white;">North</td></tr> <tr><td style="background-color: white; color: black; text-align: center;">9</td></tr> <tr><td style="background-color: green; color: white;">South</td></tr> </table>	North	9	South	♠J8 ♥K1098 ♦KQJ10 ♣642																																				
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Of course, your carding methods may be different from standard Acol. If you play, say, that the lead of an Ace asks partner to give you an attitude signal, while the lead of a King asks for a length signal, they won't be able to read anything into the order in which you play the two cards.

One last point worth noting on this hand: after drawing trumps, in order to keep the damage to only one off, declarer needs to discard his/her spades on the winning diamonds in order to avoid giving away another trick by trying the losing spade finesse. The last remaining club and spade can then be cross-ruffed.