

Summertown Bridge Bulletin, 8 February 2021

The opponent on your right opens 1NT (12-14). You have a fairly decent 6-card suit, let's say AQxxxx. What should you do?

Well, I hear you say, surely it depends. How many other points have I got? Are we vulnerable? Is the suit a major or a minor? What defence do we play over a weak NT? Do I have outside entries to set up my suit if we end up defending against a NT contract?

It may surprise you to learn that, on the evidence of last night's game at Summertown, none of these questions matter: it seems that what you should do is just close your eyes and bid 3 of your suit! Yes, you may be doubled for penalties. However, many pairs reserve a double here for takeout, so it's less risky than you think; plus, it's also not always obvious what it means if the opener's partner now bids a suit (is it forcing, or just competitive?); and even if you do end up going down doubled, this may be a better score than letting your opponents make a game.

Dir: East
Vul: E/W

♠ 10 5
♥ 3
♦ A Q J 5 4 3
♣ J 5 4 3

Optimum
NS 3Hx, NS
3Dx: -100

♠ K Q 7 4
♥ J 5 2
♦ K 10 7
♣ A 8 6

	NORTH	
W	6	E
	SOUTH	

♠ A 3 2
♥ K 10 6
♦ 8 6
♣ K Q 10 7 2

	8	
13		12
	7	

♠ J 9 8 6
♥ A Q 9 8 7 4
♦ 9 2
♣ 9

N	-	2	2	-	-
S	-	2	2	-	-
E	2	-	-	-	-
W	2	-	-	1	2

Take Board 6. East dealt and normally opened 1NT. Most Souths now bid 2♥, after which the auction took various paths, but almost all the E/W pairs found their way to 3NT. Three Souths then bravely continued to 4♥: even three down doubled, this was worth 50% of the match points, since 3NT makes easily on a heart lead.

But as West, what would you do if South overcalls 3♥? What does it mean if you try 3♠ – is that forcing? Or should you double for takeout? – and if you do, is your partner allowed to convert this to penalties by passing? (probably not the best move at this vulnerability, though ...) Tricky, isn't it?

A final thought. If, as South, you allow 3NT to become the final contract, don't do what I carelessly did on this hand and lead a heart at trick one. Your suit is too gappy, partner is very unlikely to have anything helpful in it, and you have no obvious outside entry. Plus, as you have so few points yourself, your partner will have some points somewhere and will be able to lead your suit later in the hand. On this particular layout, if you happen to choose a diamond, you'll hit the jackpot and correct defence will quickly net you the first 8 tricks – quite a difference!

Now take a look at Board 11. If West opens 1NT (as, this time, everyone did), should North intervene? Most people play 2♦ here as some sort of convention, so if you do want to come in, the bid has to be 3♦. This was too adventurous for most pairs, and without intervention E/W then easily found their way to a spade contract, often making 11 tricks, although most weren't in game.

However, put yourself in East's seat and imagine that North has, annoyingly, managed to come up with that 3♦ call. You could certainly double for takeout, but with your diamond void, there's a strong risk that partner will either pass, or bid 3NT. Do you have enough points to stand either of those? What if you try 3♠ – again, is that forcing, or just competitive? It's a tough one.

If E/W do still manage to find 4♠ after 3♦, should North go on to 5♦? Not on this hand. The combination of the vulnerability, and having to go to the 5 level, means that three down doubled would be worse than letting E/W make their game. And what if E/W end up in 3NT? First of all, North should not bid 4♦ – the singleton spade means it's very likely that E/W have missed a spade fit, which they might then find. Secondly, what should North lead? Here, the intermediates are so good that you can afford to lead the ♦J (top of interior sequence). Best defence would then lead to a 3-trick defeat for declarer.

Lastly, here's a board where East actually has a fairly strong hand, once again with a gappy 6-card suit. It's a major, so you could easily bid it at the 2 level: but once more, a 3-level bid will put N/S under much more pressure.

With this hand, after North opened 1NT, almost all the Easts bid 2♥. South bid 2♠ and that often ended the auction, although a couple of enterprising Norths converted to 2NT for a good score. Only one East immediately bid 3♥ and when South then tried 3♠, North was put on the spot: was this competitive, or forcing? North, with only two cards in partner's suit and a probable double-stop in hearts, decided to try 3NT, and on this occasion was rewarded with a top: but it could so easily have gone the other way!

So, next time you're looking at a six-card suit with a couple of honours and the hand on your right opens 1NT, why not think about calling your suit at the 3 level? It will certainly put your opponents under pressure – it may well get you a good score – and most of all, it's fun!

Dlr: South
Vul: None

♠ 5
♥ 10 5 4 3
♦ A J 10 9 8 2
♣ 9 6

Optimum
EW 4S:
-420

♠ K 8 7
♥ A 2
♦ K Q 7 4
♣ Q 10 8 7

W	NORTH	E
S	11	A
T	SOUTH	T

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

5		
14		10
		11

♠ A 6 4 2
♥ Q J 9 7
♦ 6 5 3
♣ A 3

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

Dlr: North
Vul: None

♠ 4 2
♥ K 10 9 4
♦ A 8 7
♣ A Q 10 7

Optimum
NS 3N:
+400

♠ Q 6 3
♥ J
♦ 4 3 2
♣ J 6 5 4 3 2

W	NORTH	E
S	17	A
T	SOUTH	T

♠ K J 10
♥ A Q 7 5 3 2
♦ Q J 6
♣ 8

	13	
4		13
		10

♠ A 9 8 7 5
♥ 8 6
♦ K 10 9 5
♣ K 9

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