

## Summertown Bridge Bulletin 9 August 2021

Hello, this is Steven again, with three boards from last night. As the last couple of bulletins have concentrated on bidding, I'm going to look mainly at the actual card play last night. Play is more complicated than bidding (usually more options), so please forgive me if I miss anything.

Let's start with Board 1. North-South played in 1NT at all tables (seven Souths opened a weak no trump; the other opened a diamond and partner bid 1NT). Howard managed to make 8 tricks, with a bit of help from the defence, three declarers made 7 tricks, and four went one off. At six tables West led a spade, which gave declarer a spade trick (although spades are clearly West's best suit, I would prefer a more passive heart lead which will probably give less away). Declarers who now played first on hearts or clubs went off, as this only gave them six tricks. Declarers who played first on diamonds usually made the contract, especially if East didn't hold up the diamond king until the third round.

Dlr: North Vul: None	♠ 9 8 6 ♥ K Q 10 ♦ 10 3 2 ♣ A 8 7 3	Optimum EW 2H+1: -140
♠ A J 10 7 ♥ J 8 5 4 ♦ A ♣ 10 6 4 2	W NORTH E 1 S T SOUTH	♠ Q 5 2 ♥ 7 6 3 2 ♦ K 8 6 4 ♣ K 9
9 10 8 13	♠ K 4 3 ♥ A 9 ♦ Q J 9 7 5 ♣ Q J 5	♣♦♥♠N N - 1 - - S - 1 - - E 1 - 3 2 1 W 1 - 3 2 1

The best defence (I think) is to start with the ♥8 (showing length but not honours) and play another heart when in with the ♦A. East then should hold up the ♦K until the third round and switch to a spade. Declarer has a 'slow' entry to hand with the ♣Q, but the defence make seven tricks first. This was more or less the defence that Steph and I played, but we had the advantage that North was declarer and the strong hand was visible in dummy.

On Board 6, South opens a weak no trump. Sara, sitting West, made a very brave 2♦ overcall

Dlr: East Vul: E/W	♠ A Q 7 4 ♥ J 4 3 ♦ 8 2 ♣ A 8 7 6	Optimum EW 2D: -90
♠ 5 2 ♥ Q 6 2 ♦ A J 6 5 4 3 ♣ 9 5	W NORTH E 6 S T SOUTH	♠ J 9 8 3 ♥ K 10 8 5 ♦ 10 7 ♣ K Q 10
11 7 9 13	♠ K 10 6 ♥ A 9 7 ♦ K Q 9 ♣ J 4 3 2	♣♦♥♠N N 2 - - 1 1 S 2 - - 1 1 E - 2 - - W - 2 - -

(especially considering the vulnerability), North doubled to show values, and South decided to leave the double in - all perfectly reasonable, except that 2♦ just made for an outright top! At every other table South played in 2NT or 3NT. The Robots led a club against 2NT for some reason, which helped to give the contract away. Every other West led a small diamond.

2NT is a pretty horrible contract, but almost everyone will be in it, except for the optimists who bid 3NT. There are only six top tricks (a diamond on the lead, three spades and two Aces). If you can make one more trick, going only one off, you should score quite well. To begin with you have to decide whether to win

the first trick: as West probably has at least one entry in another suit, there doesn't seem much point in ducking (and East may have Jack, ten and another). There are then three options (overleaf):

- Play on spades, hoping they are 3-3 or the Jack drops in the shorter hand – normally slightly better than a 50% chance. No one did this (and it wouldn't work here).
- Play on spades, finessing the 10 – Minty did this and it worked. (The finesse is slightly better than a 50% chance – West seems to be long in diamonds, so East may be long in spades.)
- Play on clubs and see what happens. Everyone else did this. It's the wrong line against best defence, as the cards lie, but East is under a lot of pressure as West takes all those diamond tricks: some Easts discarded a spade, and that gave declarer the crucial seventh trick.

Dlr: East  
Vul: E/W

♠ A Q 7 4  
♥ J 4 3  
♦ 8 2  
♣ A 8 7 6

Optimum  
EW 2D:  
-90

♠ 5 2  
♥ Q 6 2  
♦ A J 6 5 4 3  
♣ 9 5

NORTH  
6  
SOUTH

♠ J 9 8 3  
♥ K 10 8 5  
♦ 10 7  
♣ K Q 10

7 11 9 13

♠ K 10 6  
♥ A 9 7  
♦ K Q 9  
♣ J 4 3 2

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

Dlr: North  
Vul: None

♠ J 3  
♥ 6 5  
♦ A K J 9 8 7  
♣ A 6 3

Optimum  
NS 4H:  
+420

♠ A K 10 8 7 5  
♥ 8 7  
♦ 10 5  
♣ J 10 8

NORTH  
17  
SOUTH

♠ 9 4  
♥ Q 10 4 2  
♦ Q 6 2  
♣ K 9 7 5

13 8 7 12

♠ Q 6 2  
♥ A K J 9 3  
♦ 4 3  
♣ Q 4 2

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

Finally, here's Board 17. At nearly every table North opened a diamond, South bid a heart, and West bid 1 or (usually) 2 spades. This is awkward for North-South. Four pairs risked 3NT, hoping to have just enough of a spade stopper; one rather timidly left 2 spades in; two played in hearts, making 8 or 9 tricks (10 tricks are possible); and at our table Cliff played in 4♦ just making. I took two top spades and gave partner a ruff (Cliff discarding a club), but that was our last trick: Steph was squeezed as diamonds were run off and had to discard hearts, so that Cliff didn't even need to take the heart finesse. I congratulated Cliff, but he said they should have been in 3NT – at the time I was surprised, but I now

see how 3NT can be made even against best defence.

Against 3NT one West started off with a club lead, which gave declarer time to develop the diamonds. The other three pairs started off with three rounds of spades, and the hand was effectively over – declarer could just lose a diamond to the safe East hand. Of course it's sometimes right to cash your two top tricks, as otherwise you may never make them, but this wasn't one of those occasions – if West plays a *small* spade at trick 1, East will have a spade left to lead if/when he or she wins a diamond trick. That is why I first thought that 3NT should go off.

But even against this defence declarer has one last chance – the hearts. The winning line here is to take two top diamonds (in case the Queen drops) and then finesse the ♥9. When this works declarer can return to the ♣A and finesse the ♥J, just making nine tricks. It's a risky line (East is likely to be long in hearts, as West is long in spades, but West could easily have the 10 or Queen of hearts). I don't know if anyone would have found this line, but as the defence went they didn't need to.

I suppose the moral of all three hands is that defence, as we all know, is the hardest part of the game. As I let one impossible contract make last night, I know this only too well!

Steven Bliss