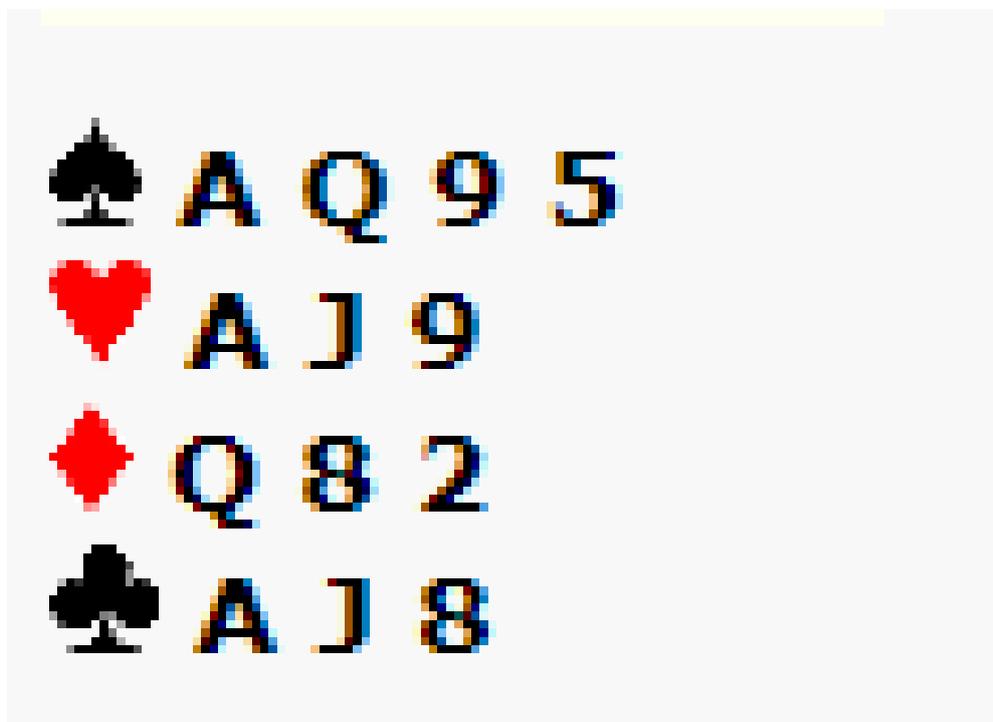


4.2.20 You're not Going to Get fat on Diet of Blackwood, Even if You're a Roman

An interesting hand from Tuesday, illustrating a number of slam-bidding techniques. You sit South, holding:



West is the dealer and passes, partner passes and East opens 1H. You have the choice between a double and 1NT. Get out of your head (if it's in your head) that an immediate double shows four Spades – it doesn't. So you bid 1NT which you should be playing as showing a definite range. Invariably, when I play and ask what the 1NT overcall means I get answers like:

Good hand

Strong

About 16, 17, 18 pts

I'd like to hear something like:

15-18 pts with at least a single stop in Hearts

I don't want to hear that because I'm pedantic (though of course, I am), I'd like to hear it because it shows that other players are doing some rudimentary thinking about their bidding.

Anyway, after your 1NT, West shoots 4H and partner, not to be deterred, bid 4S, East passes and it's back to you.

You could subside quietly in 4S and be thinking you've done well to get to game with such active opponents. Think again.

There is a good chance that partner is short in Hearts, so no losers there and there will likely be no losers in Spades (given that East opened and likely holds the KS, should your partner not have it).

You have good control of the Clubs and Hearts, the only thing that's worrying you is whether you will lose two Diamond tricks. How to find out? Let's see ...

You could bid 4NT (rare to see anybody not using Blackwood on slam-going hands these days). Playing normal Blackwood will be great if partner has the AD, but if he hasn't you're going to have to let this die in 5S, even though with the ♦K, 6S looks good. Playing the very much-loved Roman Key Card Blackwood, you may miss 6S if partner shows no key cards (assuming Spades as trumps). And also not much use if he shows only ♦A or ♠K (too much to hope he has both). If it's the ♠K, you may have two Diamond losers (you may not), but again, you'll have to let it go in 5S.

If only there were some way to find out about that crucial KD. If you're thinking there's no way, it's impossible, Blackwood doesn't work like that, you're sadly underdeveloped as a bridge player. There are two ways, though neither is infallible here (your partner has to know what those ways are, of course, though that's not the reason they may not work here).

You could bid 5S. Must be a slam try that, everybody can see that. Does it just mean, *have a go if you like the look of it partner*. No, no bids are so vague.

It means:

As I didn't introduce trumps, I'm interested in slam and need some outside controls from you for 6S.

Partner will have to make a judgement. Part of that judgement will be that he obviously can't be stacked in outside controls as he passed originally. But with ♦A, he should take the view that that's enough in this situation and bid 6S. With only ♦K he may take the view that you need more and pass 5S, you couldn't blame him.

The other option is that you bid 5C.

What! A new suit at the five level with only three clubs, are you crazy? I hear some of you cry.

No, I'm not crazy. This new suit at the five level cannot possibly be a genuine long suit, because you originally bid 1NT. I'm not so crazy that I overcall 1NT with a stop in the opponents suit and long solid clubs. 3NT contracts are everybody's friends but that doesn't mean you distort your hand on the first bid to anticipate playing in a final contract of 3NT. That way, lies madness.

5C is a cue bid, it absolutely must be. Here it shows good Spade support and first-round control of Clubs, as the cue-bid was made at the five-level. Obviously, the first-round control must be ♣A, not a void.

Partner has to be awake now. If he just thinks,

What can I do? I haven't got ♦A or ♥A, so I can't return the cue bid by bidding 5D or 5H, cue-bids at the five-level are first-round control. Yes, I've got the ♦K but that's not enough so I'll just have to sign off in 5S.

then the slam is obviously dead in the water.

But with ♦K, is it enough? It may be. Partner is obviously looking for a control somewhere and it must be either in Hearts or Diamonds. It seems unlikely that he'd kick off a slam effort at this level if he needs two controls. So a tight call again and you couldn't blame North if he bid 5S only holding ♦K control. At least both players will have the satisfaction that they were aware of a slam possibility and also that they had other methods than Blackwood, Blackwood and Blackwood for exploring it. The

observant among you will notice that in this case, North has to make similar judgements when you bid either 5C or 5S.

This was the full hand:

Dir: West
Vul: None

♠ J 10 6 4 2
♥ 4
♦ K J 9 5 4 3
♣ K

♠ --
♥ K 8 5 3 2
♦ 10 7
♣ Q 10 9 6 5 3

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
24

♠ K 8 7 3
♥ Q 10 7 6
♦ A 6
♣ 7 4 2

♠ A Q 9 5
♥ A J 9
♦ Q 8 2
♣ A J 8

5 8 9 18

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I didn't actually play this hand, so the sequences:

| W | N | E | S |
|----|----|----|----------|
| P | P | 1H | 1NT |
| 4H | 4S | P | 5C or 5S |
| P | ? | | |

are how I think the bidding might have gone. Lucas convention players might have opened in the West or the North seat (they would have been wrong in both cases to do so, Lucas or no Lucas). East may not have opened, only 9pts after all. But light openings third in hand (when there have been two passes) are a useful disruptive tool. You see, for instance what it did to N/S on my suggested sequence.

In fact, however the bidding went, nobody got anywhere near 6S. All contracts, played N/S, were a tame 4S or a strange 3NT. It seems that no-one even invoked the mighty Black. Only a 50% contract of course, if you don't suspect that East holds the ♠K but 50% small slams are just about worth bidding.