

Matters Arising 194

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 29 Jul - 2 Aug 2024

Play Before You Bid

Does anybody not enjoy bidding slams? There may be a moment or two of nervousness involved, but the pleasure that results from successfully landing such a contract is surely worth this.

The first step in any successful slam hunt is a realisation that one might be there. I employ three triggers, any one of which suffices to set off on the slam trail. These are 33 points and no fit, 31 points with an 8 card fit, and at most 12 losers with an 8 card fit.

K Q 5 3 2 You are West on Monday's board 11. You
K open 1S and hear 4S from partner, which
A K Q 8 5 as you've agreed nothing sophisticated
9 3 could be any hand on which partner thinks
4S makes. With a mere 4 losers in hand
opposite a prssumed 7 you get excited and try 4NT. 5S
says partner - 3 Aces. Now what?

Consider the likely play. No trump losers barring a 4-0 break. No hearts to lose. Clubs taken care of by partner's AC and AH, unless the AH is singleton. Diamond losers are in short supply too regardless of partner's length in the suit. 7S methinks.

K Q 5 3 2	11	A J 9 8 7
K		A 10 3
A K Q 8 5		2
9 3		A Q 8 6

In practice East has many possible replies to their partner's 1S opening.

2NT, Jacoby, for those who play it, showing a game going hand with spade support. Continuations vary according to partnership agreement.

Others might choose 4D, splinter, agreeing spades and showing a diamond shortage.

Natural bidders not wanting to bid 4S immediately will try 2C and await developments, which will be 2D or 3D according to style.

Certainly though, whenever West takes over with 4NT their thoughts on hearing 3 Aces should be to bid 7S.

The losing trick count is no more an infallible guide than the point count. In order to counter its weaknesses players may apply adjustments such as

- when thinking of making a jump raise, add a loser if the hand is aceless,
- subtract a loser from the trumps if the fit is

known to be at least 9 cards,

- if the point count clearly says bid more strongly than the LTC does, go with the points.

East has a 6 loser hand, which becomes 5 if subtracting one for a known 9 card spade fit. Maybe it will be East rather than West who is triggered into going for slam.

1S	4NT
5D	5NT
7S	

would be the auction using ordinary Blackwood if East took over immediately. Note that although it is East asking the questions West stays awake and bids 7S as soon as they know partner has three Aces.

How do they know that East has 3 Aces? Because East bid 5NT which is normally taken to promise all the Aces (all the key cards if using Roman Key Card Blackwood).

No doubt someone somewhere will claim that the King answer may help them choose between 6NT and 6 of a suit, so that 5NT might mean there is an ace missing, but it would be a disaster on this hand. Simply replying 6S to show the three Kings would lead East to pass - they don't know which King is missing and will not be able to assess whether the Grand would be a good shot.

		10	
		Q 7 5	
		J 10 7 6 3	
		K J 7 5	
K Q 5 3 2	11	A J 9 8 7	
K		A 10 3	
A K Q 8 5		2	
9 3		A Q 8 6	
		6 4	
		J 9 8 6 4 2	
		9 4	
		10 4 2	

7S is every bit as good a contract as anticipated by West. A club goes on AH, and with a 10 card fit even if trumps are 3-0 both small diamonds from the West hand can be ruffed.

Finesse Or Break

6
A K 8 5 4
A K 8 3
A 10 9

23

A Q 9 3
Q 10 2
6 4 2
K Q 7

Another slam hand from Monday saw some NSs in 6H or 6NT. This one is not certain, but think your thoughts for handling 6NT by S on a small club lead.

Assuming a 3-2 heart break you can see 11 tricks - AS, 5 hearts, 2 diamonds, 3 clubs. Possibilities for a 12th trick lie in the spade finesse and in a 3-3 diamond break allowing the long diamond to score.

The finesse is a straight 50-50 chance, whereas there is only a 35% chance that diamonds will break 3-3. That doesn't mean we go straight for the finesse though for in an ideal world we would wish to give ourselves both chances.

Taking advantage of an even diamond break involves losing one. However if you play 3 rounds of diamonds from the top and the suit is 4-2 you will end up losing 2 diamond tricks. Thus our plan is to lose a diamond, regain the lead and cash AK D to see whether the diamonds break. If they do we are home, if they don't then fall back on the spade finesse.

We see that there is a problem with this ideal scenario in that if East wins the diamond and switches to a spade we are forced to guess whether to take the spade finesse before we know whether the diamonds have broken.

I can see no sure way around this problem, but there are several ideas one might try.

Idea 1

Rise with AC at T1 and lead a small diamond. East may well win this trick, but the hope is that this early in play they will simply return partner's suit (a club) and you get to fully test the diamonds before deciding whether you need the spade finesse.

Idea 2

Win T1 in hand and run the hearts, discarding spades. The hope here is that a defender will discard a diamond on the hearts. Then it would be safe to test the diamonds from the top. If a short hand had discarded diamonds they will show out on the K warning you that the other hand has 2 diamond winners. If the long hand discarded on diamonds or the suit was originally 3-3 then both follow to the second diamond and you know you can afford to lose to the remaining diamond. A defender with 4 diamonds should not be discarding one on the hearts as they can see 4 diamonds on table and so should be aware that they are the defender in

charge of stopping the diamonds from running. However defenders don't always act as they should.

Note that T1 had to be won in hand on this line to retain AC as entry to the fourth diamond if it can be established.

Idea 3

Try to keep East off lead.

Win T1 in hand and lead a diamond. If West plays something bigger than the 8 duck from table, hoping that even if East can overtake they are too lazy to both do so and switch to a spade. West of course can't hurt you - a spade lead from them would be Christmas - and so again you get to fully test the diamonds.

If however West plays small on the diamond you win with the K, return to hand with a club and lead another diamond. Again you are hoping that the safe hand, West, gets on lead, but this time you will have to duck from table regardless of what West plays, bar showing out, as we know we aren't test the diamonds by playing three rounds from the top.

	6	
	A K 8 5 4	
	A K 8 3	
	A 10 9	
K 7 4		J 10 8 5 2
J 6		9 7 3
J 10 5		Q 9 7
6 5 4 3 2		J 8
	A Q 9 3	
	Q 10 2	
	6 4 2	
	K Q 7	

The lesser chance of the diamond break is the one that works here, so certainly you will want to have given yourself the chance of discovering it. Which, if any, of the three ideas given would work against your particular opponents is difficult to predict, but you are not allowed to relate a hard luck story if you went down on the back of a failed spade finesse without trying any of the ideas for fitting in a test of the diamonds too. Remember, if you don't give the opponents a chance to go wrong they won't.

All Suits Contribute

A K 10 8		J 4
A J 7		Q 8 3 2
10 7 6 4		A K 2
J 9		Q 10 8 4

With NS silent West opens 1NT on this hand from Tuesday, and one can anticipate a Stayman auction ending in 3NT, though for some it ended in 2NT.

Which suit would you tackle first in 3NT on the lead of a small heart running around to the 9 and J?


On the not unreasonable assumption that the small heart is fourth best and that North holds the K then the 2 hearts secured by the lead will become 3 by cashing the A and leading towards the Q. Thus continuing hearts generates one extra trick.

Similarly we have two tricks on top in spades and we could use the J 10 combination to force a third trick there.

Diamonds also provides us with 2 top tricks, with a 3-3 break being the main chance of a third trick in that suit, though of course sometimes the QJ are doubleton.

As for clubs, we have no tricks on top there, but the suit will produce two in time if we knock-out the A and K.

We see that clubs is the best source of extra tricks, and that diamonds has no guarantee of producing more than the AK on top. It seems reasonable then that we attack clubs first, and leave diamonds to the opposition.


	7 6	
	K 10 6 5 4	
	9 8 5 3	
	K 6	
A K 10 8		J 4
A J 7		Q 8 3 2
10 7 6 4		A K 2
J 9		Q 10 8 4
	Q 9 5 3 2	
	9	
	Q J	
	A 7 5 3 2	

North wins the club switch at T2 but has no good continuation. Even if declarer ducks a diamond switch so that South gets on lead the defence has nowhere to go and the only question is how many overtricks West will make.

Your Bid

Q 2 Thursday, you are green against red, and
 K Q 9 2 your left hand opponent opens 2H weak.
 K 10 3 Partner doubles for take-out and your right
 K Q 6 5 hand opponent passes. Your bid.

Partner presumably has at least opening values, and one would normally hope 4+ spades. 3NT looks an easy make, but given the colour pass, converting to penalties is surely better. It looks as if EW have little more than 10 points between them, and even the distributional values associated with a weak 2 are unlikely to bring them close to 8 tricks.

	Q 2	
	K Q 9 2	
	K 10 3	
	K Q 6 5	
10 9 8 7 4 3		A 5
--		A 10 7 6 5 4
Q 5 4 2		9 7
10 7 2		8 4 3
	K J 6	
	J 8 3	
	A J 8 6	
	A J 9	

There are 11 tricks available in NT for 460, so you would need to take 2H two down doubled for 500 to beat this. Best defence takes it 5 off for 1400, so there is some room for error in defence to still enjoy a bumper payout for passing the double.

I confess I don't like doubling with the South hand for it doesn't provide convincing support for many unbid suits. Equally I don't like passing with a 15 count, though it looks likely that there is a fairly narrow range of strengths for partner where we cannot score more for defeating hearts than making a contract our way. The other option would be to come in with an off-centre 2NT on the South hand. Right sort of point count, pity about the heart stop. Pass, 2NT, X would be my order of preference, though no doubt other opinions are available.

If South passed North would come in with 2NT, for they do have a sensible heart stop, and South would come to life with 3NT.

But if South did double I'd expect North to pass. Or just possibly bid 3NT. 3C, simply showing their suit, is likely to be a disaster, for South cannot tell that North has any significant values and so will pass.

Around The Club

This weeks winners were

Monday (9 tables): Russell White & Jeremy Harris

Tuesday F2F (8 tables): Bernard & Sabina Houssin

Tuesday BBO (6 tables):

Amanda Etherington & Martyn Harris

Thursday am (5 tables):

David Airey & Jennifer Whalley

Thursday BBO (5 tables):

= Andrew Smith & Dudley Hargreaves

= Hilary Paarker & Gay Talbot

= Alan Wearmouth & Martyn Harris

Total 33 tables for the week.

The club season ended on 31st July. Competition winners were:

Ellis Cup (Championship Teams)

- 1 Mike & Sally-Ann Rothwell
Martyn Harris & Robin Rose
- 2 Babs Matthews & John Farmer
Tim Matthews & Ian Reeves
- 3 Russell White & Jeremy Harris,
John Nichols & Robert Boyd

Carson Cup (Championship Pairs)

- 1 62.6 Mike Howse & Martyn Harris
- 2 61.4 Mike & Sally-Ann Rothwell
- 3 58.5 Jeremy Harris & Russell White

Summer Cup (Thurs BBO)

- 1 64.72 Alan Wearmouth & Martyn Harris
- 2 64.66 Mike & Sally-Ann Rothwell
- 3 59.16 Irene & Ray Gregory

Monday Cup (players below Advanced Master)

- 1 56.19 Brian Smith & John Nicholls
- 2 55.13 Robert Boyd & Steven Barron
- 3 53.38 Janice Hornby & Janice Mitchell

Hargreaves Cup (Tues F2F players below 8 NGS)

- 1= 65.66 Debbie & Roger Wilkinson
- 3 64.35 Robert Boyd

Summer Plate (Tues BBO, handicapped)

- 1 61.70 Amanda Etherington & Martyn Harris
- 2 61.49 Ray & Irene Gregory
- 3 60.73 Ina Gray & Mary Anne Peden

Wraight Cup (Below Advanced Master, handicap)

Autumn: Helen Finch & Moira Williams

Spring: Bernard Houssin & Bob Churchward

Betty Limb (Individual)

- 1 Anne Urquhart, 2= Robert Harvey & Martyn Harris

Pro-Am

- 1 Mike Howse & Andrew Smith
- 2 Tim Harrison & Bob Stow
- 3 Martyn Harris & Jennifer Whalley

Leading averages for the season for those playing at least 10 time in the relevant sessions were

Monday

- 1 58.06 Russell White & Jeremy Harris
- 2 58.05 Mike & Sally-Ann Rothwell
- 3 57.96 Mike Howse & Martyn Harris

Tuesday F2F

- 1 57.71 Andrew Peill & Steven Barron
- 2 57.24 David & Shirley Harris
- 3 55.73 Roger & Debbie Wilkinson

Tuesday BBO

- 1 57.59 Ray & Irene Gregory
- 2 56.09 Amanda Etherington & Martyn Harris
- 3 55.60 John Maclachlan & Robin Rose

Thursday

- 1 58.58 Mike & Sally-Ann Rothwell
- 2 58.54 Alan Wearmouth & Martyn Harris
- 3 52.94 Irene & Ray Gregory

I welcome any comments or queries sent me at martyn@orpheusmail.co.uk though they may be used in future issues should I choose to produce such. Or they may not. You have been warned.

NB, I do try replying to mails raising a specific point, so if I seem to ignore you do check your spam folder after a day or three.

Martyn Harris

spadeilike on BBO