

Matters Arising 198

being some thoughts prompted by hands played at Kendal BC 26 - 30 Aug 2024

Gambling 3NT


Since it is possible to incorporate very strong balanced hands within a 2C opening there is no need for a "natural" 3NT opening bid. Instead most established partnerships use 3NT as some sort of gambling bid based on a long minor.

The bid is clearly pre-emptive and takes 3NT away from the opposition whilst retaining it as a possibility for your own side.

Partnerships will differ as to how good the minor has to be, and to what, if anything, is expected or denied outside of the suit. My personal preference is that the minor suit should be solid, at least AKQxxxx, with no outside A or K.

Partner will often bid 4C (or even 5C) as a pass or correct bid (ie opener passes with clubs, bids diamonds with that minor), but can pass to play in 3NT. Such a pass can be as big a gamble as partner wishes to indulge. It is worth noting that the recommended lead against a gambling 3NT is an Ace, for this is one situation in which retaining the lead whilst looking at dummy has clear advantages.

Which brings us to Monday's hand 9:


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

Although some Norths would open 3C, many would dislike so doing in front of partner or even at all, arguing one or more of the hand is too weak, the suit is too poor, having a 4 card major bars them from pre-empting.

East has a perfect gambling 3NT opening hand of my preferred type, and West has an easy response - they know East's suit is diamonds and that AC is missing, and can count 5 top winners in their hand and 7 diamonds in partner's. Twelve tricks, 6D. 6S also makes, and might be bid after a 1D opening if the partnership can identify they have a 6-2 fit.

Easy Eleven

Q 3 Thursday board 20, and South declares in 3NT on a spade lead.

4 3
9 6 4 3
A K J 9 6



A quick trick count reveals 9 black ones off the top and two red Aces. An easy 11 tricks.

A K J 9
A J 9
A 8
Q 7 4 3

Pairs though requires you to set your own targets in play rather than thinking you've done well if you make the contract and more. If there are an easy 11 tricks then look for a twelfth.

Clearly here a twelfth would have to come from a red suit, and whilst optimists may think that by cashing all their black winners the defence will discard in a manner to allow an extra red trick there is no great reason to suppose that that will be the case.

The heart suit though provides a classical deep finesse, allowing an extra trick if East holds K 10 or Q 10 there. This requires leading hearts twice from table, so win T1 with QS and play a heart to 10. If West wins with K or Q then a finesse of the J is available when on table with a club, which finesse declarer will only decline to take if West continues with a diamond when in with their heart honour.

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

Reverse Power

Reverses, also known as barrier bids, remain a mystery for many players. Put simply, if you bid your suits in an order that would force partner to the three level to give preference to your first suit then you have reversed.

1H 2C 1D 2C 1H 2C
2S 2H 2H 2S

are all auctions involving reverses - yes responder can reverse too as in the third sequence above.

Typically a reverse shows at least similar values to a 2NT rebid, so 15+ after a 2 level response and hence game-forcing, 17+ after a 1 level response, and 11+ by responder after opener rebids their suit. These latter two reverses are normally played as forcing to 2NT. It is possible to substitute distributional values for high card ones when considering reversing, but care has to be taken if so doing as there is no guarantee of a fit.

Which introduction brings us to Thursday's board 7:

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

The bidding is passed around to East who opens 1C. West responds 1H and North inserts a 1S overcall. Reversing rules still apply as far as possible after an overcall, so East can rebid 2D to show their shape and significant extra strength. Although their hearts are not of great beauty West has spades stopped, and it seems likely that partner must have something in hearts to justify their reverse anyway given the spade overcall. 3NT is the obvious rebid from West, which equally obviously makes on sight of all the hands. Only one pair got there.

1NT Rebid

For most players a 1NT rebid promises 15-16 points and denies primary support for partner's major should they have shown one. It also denies 4 cards in a major that could have been rebid at the one level. That doesn't mean that the hand is best played in NT.

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

The natural start to the bidding on Thursday's board 8 was 1H – 1S – 1NT. Where East raised to 3NT a club lead left declarer in a quandary as to whether or not to risk the diamond finesse. Without it, even assuming spades are 3–2, there are just 9 tricks. However take the finesse then if it fails the contract fails too. In spades the finesse can always be taken as trumps give control over clubs.

East can easily find the spade fit by rebidding 3D over partner's 1NT rebid. West bids 3S to show their secondary support and East raises to 4S.

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

As the cards lie it is possible to make 11 tricks in either spades or NT, so one can argue that NT is better, though that of course is only true when the diamond finesse works. In practice although the finesse worked most declarers in 3NT decided that cashing out for 9 tricks was the sensible course of action, so were beaten by those in 4S.

Trump Reduction

K 7
A Q 10
A J 5
A Q 8 7 5

13

A J 8 6 5 3
K 7 5
K 4
6 4

As soon as North opened 2NT on this hand from Monday's play South was thinking slam, for they know they have at least an 8 card spade fit and a combined 31+ points. Aces are checked and 6S bid, usually after starting with a transfer bid of 3H to arrange for North to declare.

A minor suit lead around to North immediately solves the problem of a possible minor loser - a club very obviously and a diamond by setting up a third diamond trick on which to discard a club. Imagine then a neutral heart lead.

Declarer wins in hand and lays down KS preparatory to taking a second round finesse. When West follows with the 10S under the King North has several options. If that 10 is natural (ie West's lowest card) then either West has the Q and declarer can drop it by playing the Ace, or the 10 is singleton and declarer can run the 7 or finesse the 8 on the second round. The 10 could also be a false card played from 10 9, in which case the finesse of the J is required next.

Suppose declarer finesses the 8 next and West shows out. Dummy now has AJxx left over Qx in the East hand, but no trump in their own hand with which to start another finesse. If declarer simply cashes winners East will refuse to ruff and wait for a trump trick that comes when declarer is forced eventually to ruff on table and lead trumps from there. What declarer would like to arrange is for the last two tricks to be reached with East and dummy having 2 trumps each and the lead to be in the North hand. Then whatever is led forces East to ruff in front of dummy. To arrange this declarer needs to shorten dummy's trumps with a couple of ruffs, even if this involves ruffing winners.

The AD looks the safest card to hold back to ensure the lead is in the North hand at the end, so the club finesse is taken from table. When this works the AC follows and a club ruff. Ideally West shows out so that East will have to follow to a fourth club too, but in practice the clubs are 3-3. Declarer returns to hand with a heart and leads another club. When East refuses to ruff the KH is discarded and a winning heart led and ruffed. Back to AD and the last club. East is powerless - if they ruff dummy overruffs, draws the last trump and wins KD, if East discards so does dummy and the desired position at trick 12 reached. Declarer ends up with all 13 tricks.

Had the club finesse failed the remaining play follows the same line as above to secure 12 tricks.

If declarer had played AS on the second round of trumps there is now a danger of losing two trump tricks

should they be forced to lead trumps from the table later. This danger can be averted by the same trump reduction play.

Finessing the JS on the second round of trumps would always leave declarer with one trump loser on the 4-1 break.

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

Around The Club

This weeks winners were

Monday (9½ tables): Carl Penson & Ray Gregory

Tuesday F2F (7½ tables):

Steven Barron & Andrew Peill

Tuesday BBO (5½ tables):

Ken Orford & Steve Douglas

Thursday am (5 tables): Bernard & Sabina Houssin

Thursday BBO (4 tables):

Alan Wearmouth & Martyn Harris

Total 31½ tables for the week.

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