

How to start your day with a disaster ...

Rakesh Kumar March 2015



In Round 1 of the Swiss Pairs at Kings and Queens in early March, the first board we were dealt was a challenge, and I failed to rise to the occasion. Here's your hand:

♠A942
♥
♦Q8763
♣A762

You're the dealer and your side is vulnerable. Will you open?

I should hope so – you have 2 aces, a 5-card suit and 6-7 losers depending on how you want to count them. Clearly, your hand has plenty of potential, if you can find a fit with partner.

But when you bid 1D, partner predictably responds 1H, and when you now bid 1S showing at least 5-4, partner rebids 2C. This of course is fourth suit forcing, either to game or at least for one round depending on your methods, and it's back to you. Do you bid 2NT to show your club stopper?

While you think about that, here's another interesting hand from the same event, perhaps a little less challenging. Both vulnerable, LHO passes and partner opens 1S! What will you bid?

♠KJT542
♥AT3
♦982
♣6

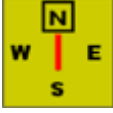
Back to the first hand. The "textbook" description of the responses to FSF goes thus:

1. show 3-card support for partner's major
2. rebid the suit opened to show extra length
3. bid no-trumps with a stopper in the fourth suit
4. raise the fourth suit with 4 cards in that suit.

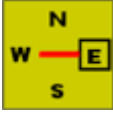
That last response is rare, but if ever there was a time for it, it was on this hand. In our methods, partner had forced to game, but this is a horrible hand for a notrump contract. Anyway, there was no reason why partner might not actually have a club suit.

In fact partner did have clubs – lots of them! He had a shapely 5-loser hand with only 11 hcp, so rebidding 2NT landed me in a 3NT contract with no play. I could have

cashed out for one off, but tried for miracles, so the result was much worse. Four other declarers joined me on negative scores, while 7 had positives with part scores in clubs. Only one NS pair out of 13 reached 5C, which turned out to be cold.

Board 5	♠A942	
Dealer N	♥	
Vul N-S	♦Q8763	
	♣A762	
♠K753		♠QJ6
♥AKJ9		♥8653
♦T542		♦KJ9
♣J		♣T84
	♠T8	
	♥QT742	
	♦A	
	♣KQ953	

Continuing the theme of starting the day with a disaster, Bob Sebesfi told me this story from Round 1 of the Swiss Pairs at the Central Coast Congress, held later in the month. Wayne Zhu played the role of creative destroyer. After a perfectly normal strong notrump opening and a Stayman sequence, South was in 4S on this hand:


Board 6	♠KQ85	
Dealer E	♥3	
Vul E-W	♦QT762	
	♣A83	
♠73		♠J92
♥KT942		♥AJ75
♦A9843		♦J
♣T		♣97642
	♠AT64	
	♥Q86	
	♦K5	
	♣KQJ5	

Bob, sitting West, led ♣10. Declarer took this in hand and played a small spade to the king. Wayne, sitting East, dropped the ♠J under this! Of course declarer now believed that spades were 4-1, so she tried a low diamond to the king, and the roof fell in – ♦A, diamond ruff, ♥A cashed as West played a vigorously discouraging card, club ruff. Ouch! There goes a cold game ...

Anyway, returning to that second hand from Kings and Queens, while partner's 1S opening is very good news, this doesn't exactly fit any "standard" raise or response.

It's much too strong for a mere jump to 4S. If you play Bergen raises, the hand is also too strong for a 3C bid, even though it has only 8 hcp, but if you play that 3D denies shortage, as partner and I do, then that's not right either. Most folks play splinters as showing 10+ hcp, but that seemed to me to be the best solution here, so our auction proceeded 1S-4C-4D (cue)-4H (cue)-4NT (RKCB)-5S (if able to guarantee 10+ cards between the 2 hands, responder does not need to actually possess the queen)-6S. This very safe contract was reached at 6 of the 13 tables.

Board 23 ♠6
 Dealer S ♥J7
 Vul Both ♦QJ653
 ♣KJ754

♠A9873 ♥K5 ♦AK7 ♣A32		♠KJT542 ♥AT3 ♦982 ♣6
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♠Q
 ♥Q98642
 ♦T4
 ♣QT98

Finally, from the Swiss Teams at the Central Coast Congress, here are two opening lead challenges. The first of these is again from the first round, and if I had got it right I might have avoided starting the day with yet another disaster ...

♠AJ95
 ♥964
 ♦9
 ♣A9874

After partner's pass, RHO opens 3D and LHO raises to 5D. What do you lead?

Much later in the day came this hand:

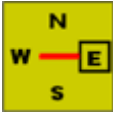
♠A5
 ♥KJ
 ♦964
 ♣Q87432

This time, RHO deals and opens 1H, LHO bids a natural and invitational 3H, and RHO continues to 4H. All pass and it's up to you.


On that first board, a passive lead turns out to be a very bad idea. I led a heart, so declarer drew trumps, played 4 rounds of hearts pitching a spade, then eventually

led a club towards the king to make 11 tricks. Although leading an unsupported ace is usually not a good idea, on this occasion leading an ace would have allowed me to get an encouraging signal from partner to cash 2 spades. Three of six declarers who played in 5D made their contract.

Fortunately, our teammates, who played in 3NT, also received a passive lead and like a couple of dozen other declarers, made plenty of tricks. However, 17 Norths went down in 3NT on a spade lead.

Board 6	♠Q82	
Dealer E	♥AKQJ	
Vul E-W	♦QJ3	
	♣KJ3	
♠AJ95		♠K764
♥964		♥T83
♦9		♦752
♣A9874		♣Q52
	♠T3	
	♥752	
	♦AKT864	
	♣T6	

For me, the choice of lead on the second board wasn't really an attempt to do anything brilliant, more a case of continuing to hope that one day partner would actually have something useful in his hand ... I led a club. To declarer's horror, partner ruffed. The inevitable spade return meant another ruff and the contract went one off.

Board 31	♠T93	
Dealer S	♥A98	
Vul N-S	♦K832	
	♣KT6	
♠A5		♠J87642
♥KJ		♥654
♦964		♦QT75
♣Q87432		♣
	♠KQ	
	♥QT732	
	♦AJ	
	♣AJ95	

Across the field, 19 of 52 found a club lead, sometimes assisted by South having bid clubs. The eight NS pairs who elected to play in 3NT were delighted to find that it was completely unbeatable!