

Being optimistic

This month's hands aren't from a weekend Congress, because I didn't play in any. Instead they come from assorted other events around Sydney. They mostly emphasise the benefits of taking an optimistic view when bidding ...

This hand from the Watermark Teams, played at North Shore Bridge Club, emphasises the benefits of an optimistic light opening. Our teammates bid to 4H after Julian Abel decided to treat the West hand, which after all has just 5 losers, as being worth a 1-level opening bid. Only 8 of 22 pairs reached this game on the last night of the event, but it's glacially cold.

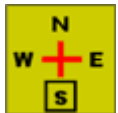
Dir W	♠T632	
Vul Both	♥32	
	♦J8	
	♣AT652	
♠7		♠AQ54
♥K9865		♥Q74
♦AQT542		♦K973
♣4		♣J9
	♠KJ98	
	♥AJT	
	♦6	
	♣KQ873	

Getting to game isn't always easy when the partnership strength is very unequally divided between the two hands. On this hand, from an earlier round of the Watermark Teams, 10 of 26 NS pairs reached game. Perhaps many of those sitting South were as lacking in optimism as I was – the hand certainly illustrates the need for the partner holding the weak hand not to be depressed by what s/he is looking at, but instead to try to visualise the strong hand and ask "how much worse might I be?"

Dealer E	♠AKT862	
Vul Both	♥K7	
	♦9	
	♣AQT2	
♠43		♠J75
♥J63		♥Q9854
♦Q8432		♦AKJ
♣K86		♣53
	♠Q9	
	♥AT2	
	♦T765	
	♣J974	

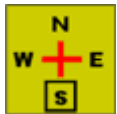
After 1H-P-2H-x-P-3C-P, Kevin Davies as North bid 3S. This obviously promised 16+ hcp and good spades, probably a 6+ suit. So how much worse could I be? I didn't have to have the ace of hearts or an honour in partner's suit, so I actually held an unexpectedly *good* hand! But as ever, I saw the glass half empty and passed. Partner proceeded to make 12 tricks more or less effortlessly, so we scored +230 like many others around the room.

It took more than a little bit of optimism reach 4S on this hand from Stage 2 of the Interstate Teams Selection event at NSWBA:

Dealer S		♠K94			
Vul Both		♥KJ9			
		♦KJ4			
		♣T743			
♠J86				♠AQ532	
♥85				♥AQ764	
♦952				♦T6	
♣AK862				♣5	
		♠T7			
		♥T32			
		♦AQ873			
		♣QJ9			

Even in a field of compulsive overbidders, only 7 of 15 reached game! Our opponents bid P-P-P-1S-P-2S-P-3H (long suit trial, usually implying a hand with 16+ hcp, but hey, maybe 5 losers is just as good)-P-4S (as responder had a maximum raise and could guarantee only 2 losers in hearts). With everything favourably placed, it was easy.

Here's another hand that illustrates not only the benefits of optimism but also the fact that every bridge "rule" has exceptions. On this hand, 12 NS pairs made 9 tricks in notrump, including us in 3NTx, which we reached – a bit optimistically – after West opened a weak 2H showing 5+/4+ in hearts and another suit. In fact any non-heart lead by West will beat the contract, but if it's going to be a heart, West *must* lead the ♥2. So much for 4th highest!

Dealer W	♠K2	
Vul NS	♥8	
	♦AQJ97	
	♣K7543	
♠10543		♠J7
♥AK1092		♥J7
♦83		♦K6542
♣Q10		♣J9825
	♠AQ986	
	♥Q6543	
	♦10	
	♣A6	

Finally, just for fun, here's a demonstration that optimism doesn't have to be confined to bidding contracts that make. This was an exciting hand that produced a range of results across the Watermark field.

Dealer N	♠QT83	
Vul Both	♥AK32	
	♦	
	♣AKJ97	
♠7		♠A94
♥Q965		♥T874
♦KQJ9854		♦AT762
♣6		♣4
	♠KJ652	
	♥J	
	♦3	
	♣QT8532	

Only 3 EW pairs reached the "par" result of saving against 6S in 7Dx. This contract goes for a mere -1100 compared to the NS score of +1430 for making the cold 6S. However, it wouldn't have been a good save against the 6 NS pairs who stopped in game, making overtricks. Playing a strong club system, our auction began 1C (16+ any shape)-P-2H (5+ spades, notionally 8+ hcp – of course one cannot treat this 6-5 hand as anything less)-4D-5D (Exclusion Blackwood, asking for keycards other than in diamonds)-X-5S (one keycard)-P-6S-7D-X-all pass. There were 12 pairs who actually got to play in slam (2 in 6C) while 2 were doubled in 5S. Perhaps one or the other of these doubles was a rare sighting of the stripe-tailed ape? See http://www.bridgebum.com/stripe_tailed_ape_double.php