

Breaking badly

Handling distributional hands

by RAKESH KUMAR



Rakesh Kumar describes himself as an enthusiastic non-expert who makes enough errors to have plenty of material for bridge columns.

It's been another one of those months in which I didn't get to play in a weekend Congress, so here's a selection of hands from various other events, all of which have in common the theme of coping with or taking advantage of distributional hands.

The first, which comes from the 2016 Parramatta Teams, relates to defence. It's an easy problem – just work out what to lead after the opponents bid 1♥ (by RHO)-1♠-2♣-2♦ (fourth suit forcing to game)-2♠-5♣?

♠ T97643
♥ J8
♦ QJ5
♣ A6

W	You	E	S
1H	P	1S	P
2C	P	2D(!)	P
2S	P	5C	

The next is from the 2016 State Mixed Teams and focuses on bidding. You hold this collection of dubious merit:

♠ QJT9
♥
♦ QT9732
♣ 765

Partner opens 2NT, showing a balanced hand with 21-22 hcp that may include a 5-card major. You inquire and partner shows a 5-card heart suit. What will you bid now?

Back to that first hand. You should work out that RHO has shown 5 hearts, 4 clubs and secondary spade support, so is presumably 3-5-1-4 or similar. How many spades has partner got? That's right, zero! If you lead a spade, partner gets a ruff, and the contract duly goes down.

Board 27

Dealer S | Vul None

♠ T97643
♥ J8
♦ QJ5
♣ A6

♠ AQ5
♥ KQ543
♦ 7
♣ K972

	N	E
W		♠
		♠

♠ KJ82
♥ 9
♦ A96
♣ QJT85

♠
♥ AT762
♦ KT8432
♣ 43

8
14 11
7

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	3	-	-	-
S	-	3	-	-	-
E	4	-	-	3	-
W	4	-	-	2	-

At the Parramatta Congress, 10 of 37 East-West pairs reached 5♣ but only 2 received a spade lead, which may well have been because the auction was different.

Now to the weak 4-0-6-3 hand. The point is that this actually has quite a lot of playing strength in diamonds, but is close to worthless in a notrump contract unless partner has perfect cards. So even though playing in 5♦ means contracting for 11 tricks rather than 9, in practice it makes a lot more sense. If you decided to give 5♦ a shot, ♣10 is led and this is what you see (rotated for convenience). Now plan the play.

♠ A8
♥ AKJ52
♦ AJ
♣ KQ83

W
S N
E

♠ QJT9
♥
♦ QT9732
♣ 765

Meanwhile, you can join me in admiring how my partner Kevin Davies handled a bad break to make 4♠ on this hand, which came up recently at the East Lindfield GNOT Metropolitan Qualifying event:

Board 22

Dealer E | Vul E-W

♠ T
♥ T654
♦ 84
♣ QJ9763

♠ AJ974
♥ 972
♦ AQT
♣ T4

N
W — [E]
S

♠ Q32
♥ QJ8
♦ KJ73
♣ A82

♠ K865
♥ AK3
♦ 9652
♣ K5

3
11 □ 13
13

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	2	—	—	—	—
S	2	—	—	—	—
E	—	4	1	5	4
W	—	4	1	5	4

On the lead of ♣Q, taken with the ace, South unblocked ♣K. While Deep Finesse would lead ♠Q from dummy at this point, pinning the ten in the North hand, in real life Kevin led the ♠2, finessed ♠J and could now infer the bad break. Again, Deep Finesse would take advantage of the inside information that South had to follow to 4 rounds of diamonds, but Kevin couldn't do that, so he crossed to dummy with a diamond to play ♠Q-K-A. Now he cashed ♦AQ and when they survived, led a heart to the queen and ace. South returned his remaining club and North played another high club, on which South discarded ♦9 and Kevin ruffed. In the position below, he led another heart and finessed the ♥8!

♠
♥ T65
♦
♣ 7

♠ 97
♥ 97
♦
♣

N
W — [E]
S

♠ 3
♥ J8
♦ J
♣

♠ 86
♥ K3
♦
♣

South could take the ♥K but was then end-played in two different ways: he could either return a spade, finessing himself, or a heart, providing an entry to dummy for the spade finesse. At East Lindfield, 9 EW pairs played in spades (only half were in game) and while 5 made 10 tricks, 4 did not.

Finally, back to that 5♦ hand. North takes the ♣A and returns a club. To make your contract you need to ensure that you do not lose both a trump and a spade. So ... ♥A pitching a club, ruff a low heart (as you would like to eventually either drop the ♥Q or find hearts 4-4, to be able to pitch a second spade) and take the diamond finesse. This works, but the king doesn't fall when you cash the ace, so now you have to find the ♠K outside. Cash the ♥A, ruff another heart (they break 4-4) and take the spade finesse. Hallelujah!

Board 22

Dealer E | Vul E-W

♠ 432	♠ QJT9
♥ QT94	♥
♦ 84	♦ QT9732
♣ AJ94	♣ 765

♠ A8	♠ K765
♥ AKJ52	♥ 8763
♦ AJ	♦ K65
♣ KQ83	♣ T2

N	E
W	S

7
22 5
6

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	—	—	—	—	—
S	—	—	—	—	—
E	3	5	1	3	2
W	4	5	2	3	2

For no very good reason, 11 of 20 East-West pairs played in 3NT and all but one duly went down. A few declarers went down in other unsuitable contracts, while only 5 played in diamonds, although one went overboard and thus was defeated in 6♦. There's a limit to how much you can take advantage of distribution!! 🎴