

Trumps Winter Teams 2017

Decisions, decisions...

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

At the Trumps Winter Teams on 4 June, it appeared almost as if the ASHTON team (Sophie Ashton – Anita Curtis with Kim Morrison – David Weston) had no competition. They won by an embarrassing margin of just under 30 VPs (on a 20 VP scale). Putting it another way, they could have gone home after the penultimate match of the day and would still have won!

Oh well, the rest of us staggered on for the full 6 rounds, finding new and different ways to make mistakes. There were lots of hands on which critical bidding decisions needed to be made. Of course winning bridge is not just about good bidding – good play and defence are also absolutely necessary – but it's my opinion that for success in Congresses, good bidding is particularly important. If you're not in a good contract, no amount of declarer play technique is going to win you those IMPs.

So the focus in this column is on the bidding decisions that generated – or could have generated – significant swings in the course of the Winter Teams. I'm going to describe hands where the question is how to decide what to bid, and whether or not to bid up the hand. That does not mean I'm encouraging rampant overbidding, which doesn't help – in fact it's a sure route to negative scores.

In round 2, there were multiple hands involving slam decisions. I thought this one was interesting:

Board 18

Dealer E | Vul N-S

♠ QJ6542

♥ 8

♦ 94

♣ 8643

♠ K3

♥ QT7

♦ 863

♣ KQ972

♠ 8

♥ AKJ943

♦ AQT

♣ AJ5

♠ AT97

♥ 652

♦ KJ752

♣ T

3
10 19
8

W	N	E	S
		?	

Do you have a method to show such a hand?

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	–	–	–	3	–
S	–	–	–	3	–
E	6	1	6	–	6
W	6	1	6	–	6

East has a 5-loser hand (8 playing tricks) with an excellent heart suit. Do you have a method to show such a hand? One approach is via a multi-2♦ bid; following responder's correctable bid of 2♥, rebidding 3♥ shows exactly this sort of holding. Now responder, who has a 7-loser hand and a fit, needs to think about bidding more than just game. Applying loser count arithmetic (i.e. adding the losers in the two hands and subtracting from 24 to get an estimate of the possible number of tricks available) suggests slam really might be on, because 24 – (5+7) = 12 tricks. Of course this depends on controls, but even a straight forward 4NT RKCB bid sorts that out when opener shows 4 keycards, and there you are ...

Surprisingly, of the 15 teams in the event, only 4 of the East-West pairs reached 6♥. One of those was Morrison-Weston, who also reached 2 other slams in this set of 9 boards. That's winning bridge.

The next hand isn't about decisions at the slam level, but it does say something about bidding strategy. East opens 1♦, West bids 1♠ and East is likely to make a jump rebid of 3♣. Now what?

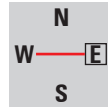
Board 22

Dealer E | Vul E-W

8
8 15
9

♠ 87654
♥ AKT83
♦ 2
♣ J9

♠ AQ
♥ Q752
♦ T83
♣ 7642



♠ K93
♥ J964
♦ J654
♣ A8

♠ JT2
♥
♦ AKQ97
♣ KQT53

W	N	E	S
		1D	P
1S	P	3C	P
?			

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	3	2	1	3	2
W	3	2	1	3	2

You could bid a fourth suit forcing 3♥ to find out if East has 3 spades, but do you really want to play in 4♠? Unless East has concentrated values in spades, I doubt it! If you bid 3NT, how likely is it that you will get a spade lead? No, the odds are you will get a heart lead, which ought to help you.

And it does. Only 3 pairs played in 3NT, and while in theory that should not succeed, the defenders will almost certainly continue hearts when in with ♣A, so you make your contract – as all 3 of those pairs did. A couple were somehow allowed to make 4♠ and the remainder either went down or stopped in a making partscore.

Now for judgement in a competitive auction. This is your hand:

♠ KQJ76
♥ QJ7652
♦ 2
♣ 7

W	N	You	S
			1D
X	P	?	

You are vulnerable, the opponents are not, and your LHO opens 1♦. Partner doubles. Here are two questions for you: (1) what will you bid on this turn? (2) if LHO can rebid clubs at the 3-level, s/he does so and partner doubles again; now what will you bid?

Before I give you the answer to those, here's another hand where playing a multi-2♦ would allow you to show a strong-but-not-quite game-forcing hand:

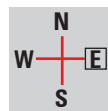
Board 26

Dealer E | Vul All

23
5 4
8

♠ 72
♥ 75
♦ A9
♣ JT97542

♠ AK4
♥ AKJ
♦ KQT862
♣ K



♠ J93
♥ Q8643
♦ J3
♣ A83

♠ QT865
♥ T92
♦ 754
♣ Q6

W	N	E	S
		P	P
P	2D!	P	2H!
P	3D	P	3H
P	4NT	P	5C
P	6H		

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	1	6	6	4	6
S	1	6	6	4	6
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

North can open 2♦ after 3 passes and rebid 3♦ over South's correctable 2♥, thus showing a 4- or 5-loser hand with a 6+ diamond suit. South can now bid 3♥ to show a 5+ suit with some values. This should get North, who has extra high card points in the 4-loser hand, very interested in slam. And if you don't play a multi-2♦ that allows showing a hand with a strong minor suit, you might just have to open 2♣ anyway, which should make it even easier, especially when South admits to possession of one keycard. However, in the Trumps Winter Teams, only 2 North-South pairs reached 6♥ – one of those was Ashton-Curtis. One pair each found 6♥ and 6NT, while 11 languished in game.

Back to the previous hand. I think that as East in the hand below, your first response ought to be 2♦ to show interest in both majors, followed by a jump to 4♥ to simultaneously indicate likely greater length in hearts plus enough values for game opposite any takeout double. That's sufficient information for West to bid 5♥ over 5♦, because the vulnerability doesn't favour doubling for penalty.

Board 3

Dealer S | Vul E-W

<p>♠ A542 ♥ A43 ♦ Q5 ♣ AQ52</p>	<p>♠ 983 ♥ T98 ♦ 974 ♣ T964</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 10px auto;"> <p style="margin: 0;">N</p> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid red; width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/> <p style="margin: 0;">W — E</p> <p style="margin: 0; font-size: 2em;">S</p> </div>	<p>♠ KQJ76 ♥ QJ7652 ♦ 2 ♣ 7</p>
	<p>♠ T ♥ K ♦ AKJT863 ♣ KJ83</p>	

0
16 9
15

W	N	E	S
			1D
X	P	2D	3C
P	P	4H	5D
5H	P	P	P

Showing interest in both Majors

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	—	2	—	—	—
S	—	2	—	—	—
E	—	—	6	6	—
W	—	—	6	6	—

In fact 12 tricks are made if you lay down ♥A rather than trying for a finesse, which is hardly likely to work when South is clearly highly distributional. Not that you'd want to be in a slam, but +650 or +680 is quite a bit better than the +300 collected by those doubled and defended 5♦.

So many decisions to get wrong, so little time ... 🍀