Learning in Springtime

Instructive boards from the Sydney Spring Nationals

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

he Sydney Spring Nationals Open Teams had 62 entries this year, exactly the same as the number in 2016. At the top end of the field there was quite a battle between a long list of very capable teams, although 3 of the 4 semi-finalists had found their way into the top 4 by round 3 and (mostly) stayed there, while the JACOB team (Tom JACOB - Brian MACE - Justin WILLIAMS - Johnno NEWMAN) took first place after round 5 and never let go. They then went on to win the finals, but it was a tight contest!

Meanwhile the rest of us found new and creative ways to stuff up... and there was no shortage of challenging hands on which to make mistakes. Before I show you a few, here are 3 questions for you.

1. Firstly a bidding question. Sitting South, as dealer you hold:

★ A87654

♥ Q7

♦ AKQT

♣ J

W	N	E	You
			18
2C	2H	Р	3D
Р	4D	Р	?

You open $1 \triangleq$ and West overcalls $2 \clubsuit$. Partner bids $2 \checkmark$ and you rebid $3 \diamondsuit$, which partner raises to $4 \diamondsuit$. What is your next bid?

2. Next a play question. As South, you open 1♦ after two passes, West overcalls 2♦ showing 5+/5+ in the majors, partner bids 3♦ and you convert to 3NT. West leads the ♠Q which you duck, followed by the ♠J which you win. You lead a low heart towards dummy and West rises with ♥K to play ♠10 to your ace. Now what?

♠ 95

♥ QJ5

♦ K9743

♣ 632

W E

♠ AK4

♥ A97

♦ AJT6

♣ QJ9

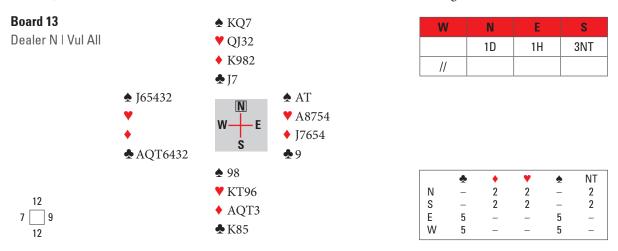
W	N	E	You
	Р	Р	1D
2D	3D	Р	3NT

3. And finally a question relating to defence. You are North. Partner and RHO pass and you open 1♦. LHO bids 2♦ showing 5+/5+ in the majors, RHO bids 2♠ and LHO raises, so RHO goes on to 4♠. You cash the ♦K, asking for (reverse) count and partner plays the ♦2, so you continue with ♦K and partner drops ♦Q. When you play a third diamond, declarer ruffs with the ♠A as partner discards a heart, and leads a club to the ace followed by ♥3 towards dummy. Do you rise with ♥A? If so, what then?



W	You	E	S
			Р
Р	1D	2D	Р
2S	Р	3S	Р
4S	//		

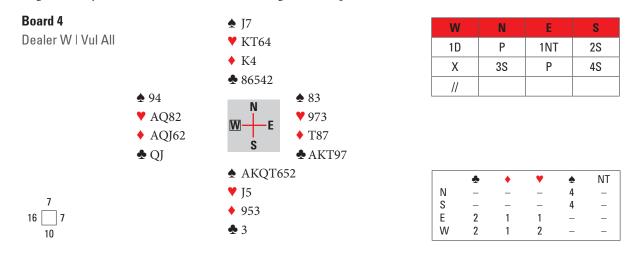
While you chew over those, here are a couple of boards that I found interesting or amusing. On this first one, partner opened 1♦, East bid 1♥ and I jumped to 3NT. Everyone passed and West led a low club. The ♣J held and I led a low heart to the ♥10. West showed out, pitching a spade, which was hardly surprising. Anyway, figuring that as East had long hearts West might easily have long diamonds, I played the ♦A from hand, intending to follow with ♦Q and then take the diamond finesse if needed. However, West showed out again!



I crossed to dummy with ♠K, took the marked finesse, and played on hearts, East ducking two more rounds. The hand then came down to nothing more than whether she held the ♠A and another, or had started with two small clubs. I could do nothing about the latter, but as East had no club to return after winning the first spade, all she could do was cash two hearts and return a spade or a diamond, so I made 1 spade, 3 hearts, 4 diamonds and a club trick.

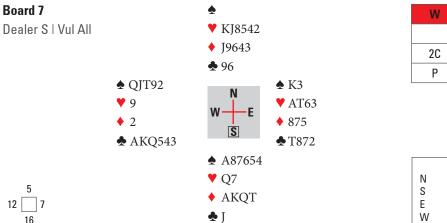
Deep Finesse beats 3NT, of course, with an opening lead of a spade so that partner can return a club through declarer's king. However, that's by no means the end of the story. With such a wildly distributional hand, West really should have backed in over 3NT: perhaps bidding 4\(\Phi\) was not now possible, but her hand was worth at least 4\(\Phi\). In fact 4\(\Phi\) is cold and the scores on this board ranged from 3NT by North-South, just making, to 4\(\Phi\)x by East-West, making with an overtrick!

And then there was this board, which was another triumph for those, such as my partner, who are addicted to overbidding. West opened $1 \diamondsuit$, East responded 1NT and I bid $2 \diamondsuit$. West doubled for takeout and partner now bid $3 \diamondsuit$ on the grounds that both his kings were well placed and he had doubleton honour support! I believed that he might actually have his bid, so with the extra length in trumps, I continued on to $4 \diamondsuit$.



Remarkably, this contract turned out to be completely unbeatable – after ♣Q, West shifted to a trump, so I drew trumps and led the ♥J. East took the ace, but on a subsequent finesse of the ♥10 I had 10 tricks. Meanwhile at many other tables, East-West made 9 tricks in a diamond contract...

OK, back to the questions. Here's the full hand for the first one.



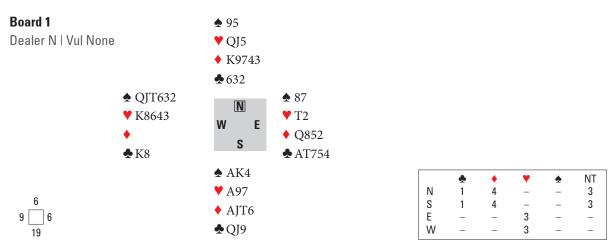
W	N	E	You	
			1S	
2C	2H	Р	3D	
Р	4D	Р	?	

	٠	•	Y	•	NT
N	_	4	4	_	_
S	_	4	4	_	-
Ε	4	_	_	_	1
W	4	-	-	-	1

After $1 \triangleq$ by South and a $2 \triangleq$ overcall, many might not bid in the North seat. However, partner rightly upgraded this highly distributional hand and bid $2 \checkmark$, then raised my $3 \diamondsuit$ to $4 \diamondsuit$. Now I had the opportunity to bid $4 \checkmark$ to belatedly show support, thus promising only a doubleton (otherwise I would have bid $3 \checkmark$ last round) but suggesting a doubleton honour, just in case partner had 6 hearts. I didn't do this: my unthinking $5 \diamondsuit$ bid led to one down.

Did you find the right bid? Across the 62 tables, just 5 played in 4, which is the only making game. A number of NS pairs played in partscores, presumably because North did not bid over 2, and therefore had a positive entry in the results column. However, 21 went down in 5.

Now to the question on declarer play. This hand is a reminder about asking "What could go wrong?" because unless you consider the possibility of a 4-0 diamond break you will go down. You have taken 2 spade tricks, established 2 heart tricks and therefore need 5 tricks from diamonds. Of course East is very likely to have the ◆Q so you can cross to dummy with ♥Q and take a finesse – but if you lead anything other than the ◆9, you will only take 4 tricks in that suit.

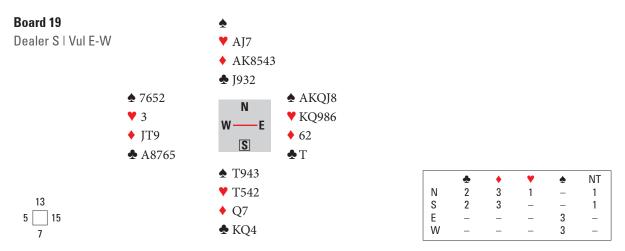


Only 8 of 62 made 3NT, while some turned a profit when the opponents bid on to 4♠, which goes down.

Winners of TBIB Spring National Open Teams – Johnno Newman-Justin Williams and Tom Jacob-Brian Mace.



And finally to the defence hand, on which a little thought goes a long way. Why did declarer ruff the third diamond with the ♠A? Clearly South has the ♠10, so all North has to do is rise with the ♥A and play another diamond – as long as South has 3 or more spades, this will promote a trick, and there is no danger that a ruff-sluff will help declarer. Note also that if North ducks the heart, the ♥AJ can be ruffed out, so declarer will again make her contract.



Across the field, the usual contract was indeed 4♠ and it usually went down, but 9 of 62 were allowed to make. I hope you got that right! △