

# Learning in Springtime

## Instructive boards from the Sydney Spring Nationals

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

The 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
			1S
2C	2H	P	3D
P	4D	P	?

You open 1♠ and West overcalls 2♣. Partner bids 2♥ and you rebid 3♦, which partner raises to 4♦. 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	N	E	You
	P	P	1D
2D	3D	P	3NT

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ AK4  
♥ A97  
♦ AJT6  
♣ QJ9

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?

♠  
♥ AJ7  
♦ AK8543  
♣ J932

♠ AKQJ8  
♥ KQ986  
♦ 62  
♣ T

N  
W — E  
S

W	You	E	S
			P
P	1D	2D	P
2S	P	3S	P
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!

### Board 13

Dealer N | Vul All

♠ KQ7  
♥ QJ32  
♦ K982  
♣ J7

♠ AT  
♥ A8754  
♦ J7654  
♣ 9

♠ J65432  
♥  
♦  
♣ AQT6432

N  
W — E  
S

♠ 98  
♥ KT96  
♦ AQT3  
♣ K85

W	N	E	S
	1D	1H	3NT
//			

12		
7	□	9
	12	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	2	2	-	2
S	-	2	2	-	2
E	5	-	-	5	-
W	5	-	-	5	-

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♣ was not now possible, but her hand was worth at least 4♣. In fact 4♣ is cold and the scores on this board ranged from 3NT by North-South, just making, to 4♣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♦, East responded 1NT and I bid 2♠. West doubled for takeout and partner now bid 3♠ 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♠.

### Board 4

Dealer W | Vul All

♠ J7  
♥ KT64  
♦ K4  
♣ 86542

♠ 83  
♥ 973  
♦ T87  
♣ AKT97

♠ 94  
♥ AQ82  
♦ AQJ62  
♣ QJ

N  
W — E  
S

♠ AKQT652  
♥ J5  
♦ 953  
♣ 3

W	N	E	S
1D	P	1NT	2S
X	3S	P	4S
//			

7		
16	□	7
	10	

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

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.

**Board 7**

Dealer S | Vul All

5  
12  7  
16

♠ KJ8542  
♦ J9643  
♣ 96

♠ QJT92  
♥ 9  
♦ 2  
♣ AKQ543

♠ K3  
♥ AT63  
♦ 875  
♣ T872

♠ A87654  
♥ Q7  
♦ AKQT  
♣ J

♠ N  
♥ W  
♦ E  
♣ S

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

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	–	4	4	–	–
S	–	4	4	–	–
E	4	–	–	–	1
W	4	–	–	–	1

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

**Board 1**

Dealer N | Vul None

6  
9  6  
19

♠ 95  
♥ QJ5  
♦ K9743  
♣ 632

♠ QJT632  
♥ K8643  
♦  
♣ K8

♠ 87  
♥ T2  
♦ Q852  
♣ AT754

♠ AK4  
♥ A97  
♦ AJT6  
♣ QJ9

♠ N  
♥ W  
♦ E  
♣ S

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	1	4	–	–	3
S	1	4	–	–	3
E	–	–	3	–	–
W	–	–	3	–	–

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.

**Board 19**

Dealer S | Vul E-W

♠ 7652	♠	♠ AKQJ8
♥ 3	♥ AJ7	♥ KQ986
♦ JT9	♦ AK8543	♦ 62
♣ A8765	♣ J932	♣ T

  

♠ T943	♠	♠ AKQJ8
♥ T542	♥ AJ7	♥ KQ986
♦ Q7	♦ AK8543	♦ 62
♣ KQ4	♣ J932	♣ T

13  
5   15  
7

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

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! 🏆