

Tales from the Deep South

Challenging hands from the Southern Highlands Congress

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

Mittagong is just 110 km south-west of Sydney, so the title of this column isn't really justified, but I couldn't resist. This is my first report from my new home base – in fact the Southern Highlands Bridge Club is now my home club – and it was a pleasure to play in their well-run congress in early November. Like many country congresses, the venue was delightful, the people even more so, and the food was tasty and plentiful. The bridge almost became secondary... well, not quite. There was a serious battle for placings in both the Open Swiss Pairs and the Teams, with the victors not being determined until the conclusion of the final round.

Eventually, the Open Swiss Pairs was won by Vicky and Ian Lisle, with David Weston and Julian Foster in second place, then Liz and Stephen Hurley third.

In a very successful weekend for the Hurleys, the Swiss Teams was then won by the team of Liz Hurley - Stephen Hurley - Michael Ross - Kevin Douglas, followed by Warren Dobes - Witold Chylewski - Yumin Li - Wayne Zhu, with Mardi Svensson - Rob Ward - Alex Penklis - Phil Halloran in third place (*NB the first two are regular players at SHBC*).

Of course there were lots of interesting hands and lots of errors ranging from the minor to the horrendous, at least in the matches in which I was involved. Here are some hands that I found interesting or thought-provoking. Let me start by showing these to you in the form of problems to solve.

Firstly, how would you bid this hand after partner passes and RHO opens 1♥?

♠ 6
♥
♦ AQ76543
♣ AKQT6

W	N	E	You
	P	1H	?

Secondly, what would you do with this hand after partner opens 1♣, you respond 1♠ and partner rebids 2♣?

♠ AKQ53
♥ Q9
♦ A74
♣ AT7

W	N	You	S
1C	P	1S	P
2C	P	?	

Thirdly, how would you defend on this hand? You are West and open 2♥ in first seat, showing hearts and a minor, but the opponents bid to 4♠ anyway. You lead the ♦10. Partner takes the ace and returns ♣K.

♠ 82
♥ KT985
♦ T2
♣ AQ83

♠ KJT5
♥ A732
♦ 3
♣ JT76

	N	
W		E
	S	

What will you do?

And finally, for a real challenge, plan the play on this hand:

♠ AJT92
♥
♦ AJ96
♣ 7543

N
W — E
S

♠ 43
♥ AQ8
♦ KT43
♣ AKT8

Sitting South, you are declarer in 3NT. Partner had opened a skinny 1♠ and East-West had been silent throughout. West led ♦5 which you ran around to your ♦10. Your spade to the jack lost to the queen. Of course East returns ♥10 and it's now your turn.

Let's look at the answers to the bidding problems first. On the first board, shown below, North-South are cold for 7♦ as the cards lie. But in any case, surely one would hope to reach 6♦. In fact that proved not to be so easy: in the Teams, only 14 of 39 North-South pairs bid slam.

Board 9

Dealer N | Vul E-W

♠ J742
♥ 654
♦ 98
♣ 7532

♠ AQ83
♥ KT983
♦ JT2
♣ 9

N
W — E
S

♠ KT95
♥ AQJ72
♦ K
♣ J84

♠ 6
♥
♦ AQ76543
♣ AKQT6

W	N	E	S
	P	1H	2NT
P	3D	P	4H
P	4S	P	6D
//			

10		14
15		

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	7	7	2	2	6
S	7	7	2	2	5
E	—	—	—	—	—
W	—	—	—	—	—

The hand offers a good reason to play 2-suited overcalls (e.g. Michaels, unusual notrump) as either weak (6-9 hcp) or strong (good 15+ hcp) but not intermediate (10-14 hcp hands should simply overcall the higher-ranking suit). After the 1♥ opening, if South bids 2NT and North responds 3♦ (how nice! partner has a preference for my longer suit) then a bid of 4♥ would be an unambiguous cue-bid showing a (very) strong hand. Now North can co-operate with 4♠ and the slam is reached.

On the second board, after 1♣-1♠-2♣ it makes sense for West to go looking for a slam in clubs – as partner did not rebid 1NT, s/he is likely to have either 4 hearts and 5+ clubs or 6+ clubs. Ideally one would like partner to hold 2 keycards and the club queen, but what if partner's assets are really minimal e.g. ♥K, ♦KQ and either ♣KJ or ♣QJ? Then it's important to be able to bail out in 5♣. If you play 4-of-a-minor as a Roman Keycard inquiry (often referred to as Minorwood) then 4♣ at this point will achieve the purpose. As it bypasses 3NT, the bid cannot be misunderstood.



Winners of Open Swiss Pairs – Ian & Vicky Lisle (right) with co-conveners Alison Minchin & Craig Curry.



Winners of Restricted Swiss Pairs – Donna Stewart & Sally Barber, between co-conveners Alison Minchin & Craig Curry.



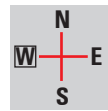
Winners of Open Teams – Kevin Douglas, Liz & Stephen Hurley with Club President Craig Curry. (Absent Michael Ross).

Board 20

Dealer W | Vul All

♠ 984
♥ KJT752
♦ 82
♣ Q6

♠
♥ A43
♦ KT95
♣ KJ9542



♠ AKQ53
♥ Q9
♦ A74
♣ AT7

♠ JT762
♥ 86
♦ QJ63
♣ 83

6
11 19
4

W	N	E	S
1C	P	1S	P
2C	P	4C	P
4S	P	6C	//

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	7	5	3	4	7
W	6	6	3	5	6

When partner bids 4♠ showing 2 keycards, slam looks very promising even though the ♣Q is missing. In fact 6♣ requires either that clubs break 2-2 or that spades break 4-4 for an extra discard, so the overall chances are a good deal better than average. Across the Teams field, however, only 13 of 39 were in slam. Of these, 4 went down, presumably after taking an unsuccessful club finesse.

Next to the defence against 4♠ on the board below. Sitting West, when partner returns the ♣K because it's obvious your minor suit is clubs, you might think that you are about to cash 3 club tricks to go with the diamond ace, so the opponents' contract is about to go down. But did you stop to think for a moment? What does partner hold in clubs? To be leading the king, s/he is likely to have Kx, but might have a singleton king. In either case, you can overtake the ♣K, cash the queen and give partner a ruff. This is absolutely essential if partner has a singleton – otherwise you will watch helplessly as declarer wins any other return, draws trumps and discards two clubs on the ♦KQ.

Board 8

Dealer W | Vul None

♠ KJT5
♥ A732
♦ 3
♣ JT76

♠ 82
♥ KT985
♦ T2
♣ AQ83



♠ Q6
♥ Q64
♦ AJ87654
♣ K

♠ A9743
♥ J
♦ KQ9
♣ 9542

9
9 12
10

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

Clearly this defence wasn't found too readily, because in the Open Swiss Pairs, 6 out of 7 who played in spades made 10 tricks.

And so to the really challenging play problem. The diamond lead marks West with the queen so you have 4 diamond tricks, 2 club tricks, a heart and a spade trick on top, with excellent prospects of an additional spade trick or two. So you take the spade finesse, which of course loses, and the ♥10 comes back. The question is what to do now. Are you totally dependent on the success of a second-round spade finesse? Is it possible to protect against losing 3 or more heart tricks if the repeat finesse also fails?

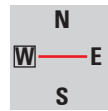


Board 16

Dealer W | Vul E-W

♠ 76
♥ KJ4
♦ Q875
♣ Q962

♠ AJT92
♥
♦ AJ96
♣ 7543



♠ KQ85
♥ T976532
♦ 2
♣ J

♠ 43
♥ AQ8
♦ KT43
♣ AKT8

10
8 6
16

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

The answer is far from obvious. In fact one has to duck the first heart and take the second with the ace, in the faint hope that this will lead to the hearts becoming blocked. On the actual hand, that works, but I didn't find the play. The awful 7-3 heart break now meant that I went 4 down for a disappointing result. In fact, of the 5 declarers who were in 3NT in the Open Swiss Pairs, only one made the contract, when East returned a low heart allowing South to insert the ♥8. The overall results on this wild hand ranged from +730 to -500 for East-West, so -200 our way was almost an average result! 🍀