

IBA Swiss Pairs

How high can you go?

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

The Illawarra Bridge Association Swiss Pairs held at the end of September was convincingly won by Paul and Helen Lavings – after the 6 x 9-board matches they had amassed 91 VPs i.e. an average of over 15 VPs per round. There was a major reshuffle of the minor placings after the eventful last match, with Martin Bunder and Duncan Munro rocketing back into second place, while Tomer and Lavy Libman finished third.

There may be no such thing as overbidding at Swiss Pairs... certainly the evidence of the day supported the idea that bidding everything to the hilt was a necessary prerequisite for success. That applied equally to both constructive bidding, whether to game or slam, and obstructive bidding.

Of course one always needs a bit of luck with the seating when the high cards are mostly running in one direction, because every cold game bid and made by the opponents is typically worth at least 2-3 IMPs to them. If that happens three or four times in a match, as was the case in the last two rounds, there may be little chance for your side to recover.

Anyway, keeping Swiss Pairs tactics in mind, what would you do with this hand (nil vulnerable) after LHO as dealer opens 1♣, partner passes and RHO responds 1♠?

♠ 874
♥ A6
♦ AK9753
♣ 62

And how about this hand (opponents vulnerable) after 1♥ by LHO, 2♣ by partner and 2♠ by RHO?

♠ 3
♥ 863
♦ AJ752
♣ 8432

On the first hand, after partner has passed, any "rules" of pre-empting no longer apply. I figured that while 2♦ would show my hand quite accurately, 3♦ would be much more of an annoyance to the opponents, so that was what I chose to bid. Somewhat to my surprise, I was left to play there. The deal is shown on the next page.

In fact it's not obvious what either North or South should bid after the obstructive overcall. Perhaps South could invoke standard semi-suicidal Swiss Pairs strategy and bid 3NT, which turns out to be cold.

Board 17

Dealer N | Vul None

<p>♠ 874 ♥ A6 ♦ AK9753 ♣ 62</p>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	<p>♠ A96 ♥ K92 ♦ Q6 ♣ KQT87</p> <p>♠ J3 ♥ QJT74 ♦ 8 ♣ J9543</p>
N					
W E					
S					
<p>♠ KQT52 ♥ 853 ♦ JT42 ♣ A</p>					

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

Of course 3♦ went down by 2 tricks, but this led to a small gain against the datum. If West overcalls only 2♦, North can make a support double to show 3 spades and then, with a 7-loser hand, South might jump to game in spades. This contract is also makeable, although it requires very careful play after the defence begins with ♦AK and a third diamond. Only 7 of 50 North-South pairs reached game – not all were successful.

On the second hand, unless partner has a very strong overcall the opponents must have a game in one or the other major suit, so the best bid is an immediate 5♣.

Board 5

Dealer N | Vul N-S

<p>♠ 3 ♥ 863 ♦ AJ752 ♣ 8432</p>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	<p>♠ AQ5 ♥ KQT942 ♦ T84 ♣ J</p> <p>♠ J962 ♥ J5 ♦ 6 ♣ AKQ976</p>
N					
W E					
S					
<p>♠ KT874 ♥ A7 ♦ KQ93 ♣ T5</p>					

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

In fact both 4♥ and 4♠ are unbeatable, but if North-South continue to the 5-level, the defence takes a club, the ace of diamonds and a diamond ruff for one off. Even if East-West are doubled in 5♣, the contract is only 2 down. Enough East-West pairs got into the act on this board to make that result a small loss against the datum.

The exciting final round included this test of constructive bidding:

Board 19

Dealer S | Vul E-W

<p>♠ AQT642</p> <p>♥</p> <p>♦ T84</p> <p>♣ AKJ9</p>	<p>♠ 953</p> <p>♥ KQ62</p> <p>♦ Q765</p> <p>♣ 54</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 5px; width: fit-content; margin: 0 auto;"> <p style="text-align: center;">N</p> <hr style="border: 1px solid red;"/> <p style="text-align: center;">W ————— E</p> <div style="border: 1px solid gray; padding: 2px; width: 20px; margin: 5px auto; text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	<p>♠ KJ87</p> <p>♥ AJ875</p> <p>♦ A</p> <p>♣ T83</p>
	<p>♠</p> <p>♥ T943</p> <p>♦ KJ932</p> <p>♣ Q762</p>		

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	1	-	-	-
S	-	1	-	-	-
E	6	-	1	7	6
W	6	-	1	7	6

Remarkably, only 9 of 50 East-West pairs reached the slam. After West opens 1♠, for East to respond 2♥ is pointless: not only does it make West downgrade his/her hand because of the void opposite partner's values, it hides the excellent fit. To move towards slam, one possibility for East is to splinter with 4♦. Or if you don't believe in splintering with a singleton ace, you could bid a Jacoby 2NT, which does not have to promise a balanced hand.

If you take the latter approach, using traditional Jacoby responses, West will rebid 3♥ showing a shortage in that suit. While that's good news in terms of East's heart ace covering West's presumed singleton, a problem with the traditional rebids is that when opener has a shortage, responder does not know about opener's strength. That's why some folks play a version of Jacoby 2NT in which opener rebids 3♣ with all minimum hands, although this makes the other rebids more complicated. My simple home-grown approach is for responder to bid the first step over the shortage bid as an artificial inquiry: then opener's rebid of the next step says "I have a minimum hand" while the rebid of the next+1 step says "I have a good hand".

On this hand, that would lead to 1♠ - 2NT - 3♥ (shortage) - 3♠ (minimum or better?) - 4♣(better) - 4NT (RKCB) - 5♠ (2+Q, unless playing voidwood in which case 5NT) - 6♠. Would you have reached the slam? ♠