

Having fun with bridge on line #2

Information leaks and (over)tricks

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

In the absence of opportunities to play teams bridge, many congress players have been sharpening their skills at matchpoint pairs. Here are some deals from recent BBO sessions, one each focusing on bidding, play and defence at pairs, where the emphasis is often on (not giving away) overtricks.

Before I show them to you, however, here's a question that will be answered when we look at the last deal. LHO deals and bids 1♥, then over the response of 1♠ by RHO, rebids 3♥. RHO converts to 3NT. What will you lead from this hand?

♠ T862
♥ 3
♦ KQ54
♣ 6543

The first deal below was played in a Southern Highlands virtual club event. It illustrates some of the competing priorities of bidding at matchpoint pairs, although one could argue that the issues being considered on this deal are just as relevant at IMPs. Would you as South overcall East's 1♠ opening with 2NT showing the minors? The key issue here is whether you are likely to buy the contract; if not, you may have given the opposition declarer valuable information about the distribution.

If you do bid 2NT, West jumps to 4♠. If North passes, South will presumably lead ♣K. There now appear to be 2 unavoidable diamond losers, plus a likely club loser, so how should East play the hearts?

Board 10

Dealer E | Vul All

♠ T65
♥ Q7654
♦ A95
♣ J4

♠ Q874
♥ AJT3
♦ T8
♣ A73

♠ AKJ93
♥ K98
♦ Q64
♣ 52

♠ 2
♥ 2
♦ KJ732
♣ KQT986

W	N	E	S
		1S	2NT
4S	P	P	//

East has a lot of distributional information. If s/he credits South with length and values in the minors, therefore assuming the ♥Q is with North, trumps can be drawn in 3 rounds to run the ♥J. If North is unwise and covers, declarer even gets to discard the club loser!

Of course Bridge Solver always makes 11 tricks in spades by leading ♠8 from dummy at trick 2, running it if North doesn't cover or gaining an extra entry if North does, then playing hearts. But this won't happen in the real world ...

One interesting corollary to that is that even though North has a hand which looks very disappointing, on this deal the best result for his/her side is to bid 5♦ and get doubled! Who can tell whether/when that's the right thing to do when vulnerable?

The other interesting corollary is that if South does not bid at all (or overcalls 2♣) then without the information leakage, East has a 50% chance of getting the hearts wrong (or maybe an even higher chance, because with the prospect of an overtrick, declarer may well be attracted to the idea of playing for the ♥Q with South, to discard a losing club).

The second deal, from a MasterBridge session, illustrates the endless pursuit of overtricks:

Board 13

Dealer N | Vul All

♠ AKT92
♥ K854
♦ Q9
♣ 63

♠ Q654
♥ QT972
♦ J73
♣ K

♠ 3
♥ AJ
♦ AKT6
♣ AQ9742

♠ J87
♥ 63
♦ 8542
♣ JT85

W	N	E	S
	1S	X	P
2H	P	3C	P
3H	P	3S	P
3NT	P	P	//

After the auction shown, at our table North did not want to lead either of the suits bid by the opponents, and felt that leading away from ♠AK might donate a crucial trick. Therefore North started with ♦Q. Because a count of the missing points guarantees that North holds both ♠AK and ♥K, East now has 9 automatic tricks (4 diamonds, 3 clubs, 2 hearts) and if the clubs break, it's Christmas! But what if they don't? How can declarer play to find that overtrick needed for a good score?

One approach is to come to hand with ♣K, finesse in hearts and cash the ace, then cash the remaining top clubs discovering the bad break and, if blessed with a seeing-eye dog, play a diamond to the jack and exit with ♥Q. That's the Bridge Solver line. Otherwise, a good approach is to ignore the heart finesse and cash 7 minor suit tricks. North has to make a decision about what to hold. If s/he keeps spades and comes down to a doubleton heart (tempting as declarer is locked in dummy and the heart king is now a sure trick) then ace and small heart will endplay him/her for a tenth trick to declarer.

On this third deal, played in a Tasmanian Bridge Association session (it's easy to get around virtually!) as East you are obviously not going to start by leading a major. Leading a club doesn't seem to make sense, because you are unlikely to develop a useful number of tricks and in any case may simply be finessing partner.

Board 3

Dealer S | Vul E-W

♠ A753
♥ K
♦ T8762
♣ KQ7

♠ QJ94
♥ T754
♦ A3
♣ JT9

♠ T862
♥ 3
♦ KQ54
♣ 6543

♠ K
♥ AQJ9862
♦ J9
♣ A82

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

So it comes down to leading a diamond – but it must be a low card, hoping partner has at least one of the ace or jack. As the cards lie, if you lead a top diamond, you will compress your side's 3 tricks into 2, with matchpoints going astray ... 🎯