

NSBC Online Spring Teams

Courage never goes out of fashion

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

One of the themes of this year's eCongress News columns has been that courage in the bidding is often critical to success at IMPs bridge. The article about the [MasterBridge Teams](#) in April was subtitled "All about courage" and that about the [Morgan's Swiss Pairs at NSBC](#) in June was subtitled "Still about courage ..."

Nothing changed during the NSBC Spring Teams – winning IMPs still depended on courageous bidding, which of course had to be matched by careful play. A bit of luck never did any harm either – after all, by definition, courageous decisions do not come with any guarantee of success.

There were 24 teams playing in the tournament, comprised of 6 x 9-board matches on RealBridge, with normal teams scoring i.e. IMPs converted to VPs. My team did have quite a bit of luck through the day: the gambles that we took usually paid off, whereas those our opponents took often didn't work out so well for them. When the (virtual) dust settled, the KUMAR team (Rakesh Kumar – Jenny Michael, Julian Abel – Colin Clifford) finished on 90.9 VPs, followed by the SEBESFI team (Bob Sebesfi – Richard Douglas, Helena Dawson – David Weston) on 78.3 VPs and the JOHANNSSON team (Axel Johannsson – Avril Zets, Les Grewcock – Liz Sylvester) on 74.5 VPs.

Here are 3 problems for you to chew over. Firstly, nil vulnerable, partner opens 1NT promising 14-17 hcp and RHO overcalls 2♣ showing the majors. What will you bid?

♠ J95
♥ 543
♦ AKT986
♣ 5

Secondly, vulnerable against opponents who are not vulnerable, RHO deals and passes, as do you. LHO pre-empt with 3♦, partner doubles and RHO raises to 5♦. What will you do?

♠ KT32
♥ J9852
♦ 9
♣ K65

And thirdly, again vulnerable against not vulnerable, LHO and partner pass, RHO opens 1♠ and you overcall 2♣. LHO bids a pre-emptive 3♠ and partner raises you to 4♣, passed back to you. What will you do?

♠
♥ 842
♦ K86
♣ AQJ8432

Here's the board related to the first problem:

Board 27

Dealer S | Vul None

♠ J95
♥ 543
♦ AKT986
♣ 5

♠ K643
♥ QT982
♦
♣ A986

♠ AT
♥ J6
♦ 5432
♣ KJ743

♠ Q872
♥ AK7
♦ QJ7
♣ QT2

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

Most of the field played in a part score. At our table, after partner opened 1NT (14-17 hcp) and West overcalled 2♣ showing the majors, I hoped that my diamonds might be worth 6 tricks in notrumps. Trusting partner to have stoppers elsewhere, I raised to 3NT.

There were 4 pairs in this contract. It is beatable, but 2 Souths made it after an opening heart lead. How would you approach the play? Running the diamonds and hoping for a discarding error is one possibility, but better is to try to generate a ninth trick in one of the black suits. Partner led a spade to the jack and ace. East returned a low club and partner bravely inserted ♣ 10. When this forced the ace, things looked promising.

Now West returned a club to East's king and it was all over. The subsequent switch to ♠ 10 was covered with the queen, so after West won her king, dummy's ♠ 9 became a stopper. For the contract to be defeated, either East has to continue hearts at trick 3 or West has to do so at trick 4. With dummy having a singleton club, that's not so obvious.

This is the board related to the second problem:

Board 41

Dealer N | Vul E-W

♠ 95
♥ T76
♦ JT52
♣ 9832

♠ AQJ86
♥ AK3
♦ K
♣ AQT7

♠ KT32
♥ J9852
♦ 9
♣ K65

♠ 74
♥ Q4
♦ AQ87643
♣ J4

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

When you are vulnerable and the non-vulnerable opponents raise a pre-empt of 3-of-a-minor to the 5-level over partner's double, you know they are trying to steal the teeth out of your head. However, as East, you now have a problem. Your hand is too good to just bid 5♥ as simple preference, but not quite good enough to bid 6♦ as "pick a major suit slam".

What's the solution? Les Grewcock found an imaginative one – he doubled. As this could not be a penalty double, it implied extra values and the ability to play in either major suit, which enabled his side to reach 6♠.

The play in the slam is not entirely straightforward, because declarer has options in the heart suit. After cashing a top honour in case a singleton ♥Q drops, s/he can either play for it to be a doubleton or lead the ♥J from table, finessing for the queen while hoping to pin a doubleton ten. Across the field, there were only three in 6♠: two dropped the doubleton ♥Q and made their contract, but one declarer went down. A fourth West bid to 6♠, only to have North save in 7♦ – this was worth almost as much because it went for -1400.

Finally, this is the board associated with the third problem:

Board 50

Dealer E | Vul N-S

♠

♥ 842

♦ K86

♣ AQJ8432

♠ JT983 ♥ K953 ♦ AQ3 ♣ K	<table style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 100px; 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	♠ KQ65 ♥ T76 ♦ J975 ♣ T9
N					
W E					
S					

♠ A742

♥ AQJ

♦ T42

♣ 765

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	5	-	1	-	3
S	5	-	1	-	3
E	-	1	-	2	-
W	-	1	-	2	-

If you're feeling suitably courageous, you bid on to 5♣ after the auction described, even at adverse vulnerability. Your reward is an unexpectedly strong dummy and a making contract.

Across the field, there were 10 North-South pairs in 5♣. Some of them got there without too much effort, because South opened 1♣. However, by any standards that's a truly questionable bid when vulnerable against not: the hand does have 2½ quick tricks, but it has 4333 shape and 9 losers. Still, on this occasion the opening was a winner.

If South does pass, an easier route to 5♣ might be for North to overcall 4♣ immediately. At this vulnerability, the overcall must surely show a good hand, hoping to play in game – partner is of course happy to raise.

And in case you were wondering – yes, one pair was sufficiently courageous to play in 3NT, which just made for the same +600! 🎉