

# State and Country Mixed Pairs

Catch 'em if you can ...

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

The State and Country Mixed Pairs tournament was played at the NSWBA over the weekend of 20-21 May, with the qualifying sessions on Saturday (as a Mitchell movement with separate North-South and East-West fields) and the two finals on Sunday (as 7-table and 5-table Howell movements respectively).

The winners of State Final were Michael Courtney - Joan Butts, with Nicoleta Giura - Nick Hughes in second place. The Country Final was won by Di Coats - Alan Bustany, with the runners up being Chris Williams - Larry Bryant. In both fields, the winning pairs were out of the starting blocks in a hurry on Sunday morning and had established a convincing lead by lunchtime. While other pairs attempted to catch up in the afternoon, no one really came close.

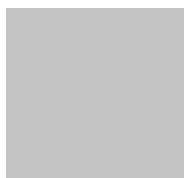
At matchpoint pairs, by far the most common game contract is 3NT (surprise!) and so you are likely to find yourself defending this quite a lot of the time. Compared to playing for IMPs, the catch is now that not only do you have to try to defeat the opponents, you also need to be careful about not giving away any undeserved overtricks. With that in mind, here are a couple of instructive deals, one from the qualifying and one from the afternoon session of the finals. For the first, with your side silent, the opponents bid 1♦ (by LHO) - 2♣ - 2♦ - 3NT. What are you going to lead?

♠ JT63  
♥ AK98  
♦ 96  
♣ J75

For the second, LHO opens 1♣ (promising 2+ cards) and partner overcalls 1♦. Now RHO jumps to 3NT. You dutifully lead ♦5 and this is what you see:

♠ Q82  
♥ A9  
♦ J74  
♣ AQ765

♠ KT954  
♥ Q652  
♦ 53  
♣ 98



Declarer plays low from dummy and takes partner's  $\heartsuit$  Q with the ace. He crosses to  $\clubsuit$  A and leads  $\spadesuit$  2 to the jack, which you win. Now what?

Of course in 2 days of bridge there was also no shortage of contracts other than 3NT, including many hands that were tricky to bid. Here's one. Partner opens 1NT promising 14-17 hcp and you hold:

$\spadesuit$  6  
 $\heartsuit$  A2  
 $\diamondsuit$  AKJ932  
 $\clubsuit$  J754

What is your plan for the auction?

This is the deal associated with the first hand. East's rebid is more or less consistent with Hamman's Law ("if you have a choice of reasonable bids and one of them is 3NT, then bid it"). That puts the defence to the test.

**Board 11**

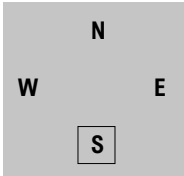
Dealer S | Vul None

$\spadesuit$  K98  
 $\heartsuit$  7654  
 $\diamondsuit$  8732  
 $\clubsuit$  A9

$\spadesuit$  Q542  
 $\heartsuit$  T3  
 $\diamondsuit$  AKJT54  
 $\clubsuit$  Q

$\spadesuit$  A7  
 $\heartsuit$  QJ2  
 $\diamondsuit$  Q  
 $\clubsuit$  KT86432

$\spadesuit$  JT63  
 $\heartsuit$  AK98  
 $\diamondsuit$  96  
 $\clubsuit$  J75



	$\clubsuit$	$\diamondsuit$	$\heartsuit$	$\spadesuit$	NT
N	-	-	2	1	-
S	-	-	2	1	-
E	3	3	-	-	2
W	3	3	-	-	2

If you led a low heart, you just gave away the contract – declarer wins and knocks out  $\clubsuit$  A. You get 3 heart tricks as well, but that's all. This is the sort of hand on which it makes sense to lead  $\heartsuit$  A instead, to ask for an attitude signal from partner. When she discourages, you can switch to a spade (either  $\spadesuit$  3, or  $\spadesuit$  J followed by  $\spadesuit$  3 after it's ducked all round) to take the contract down. However, two-thirds of those in 3NT were successful.

Here is the deal associated with the second hand, now in its correct orientation. After the first 3 tricks, what do you know about the cards around the table?

**Board 19**

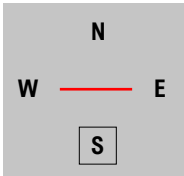
Dealer S | Vul EW

$\spadesuit$  AJ6  
 $\heartsuit$  J74  
 $\diamondsuit$  AT8  
 $\clubsuit$  KJ43

$\spadesuit$  73  
 $\heartsuit$  KT83  
 $\diamondsuit$  KQ962  
 $\clubsuit$  T2

$\spadesuit$  KT954  
 $\heartsuit$  Q652  
 $\diamondsuit$  53  
 $\clubsuit$  98

$\spadesuit$  Q82  
 $\heartsuit$  A9  
 $\diamondsuit$  J74  
 $\clubsuit$  AQ765



	$\clubsuit$	$\diamondsuit$	$\heartsuit$	$\spadesuit$	NT
N	4	1	-	1	3
S	4	1	-	1	3
E	-	-	1	-	-
W	-	-	1	-	-

Firstly, it's clear that declarer  $\clubsuit K$  and  $\spadesuit A$ , so she has 5 club tricks, 2 spade tricks and a heart, plus the diamond trick she has already taken. Secondly, it's obvious that partner does not hold  $\diamond 10$  as he didn't play that card with the jack visible in dummy. Therefore assuming declarer's holding is  $A10x$ , continuing partner's suit will simply establish a second diamond trick for her. Thirdly, for partner to have enough high card points for an overcall, he must hold  $\heartsuit K$ . So the logical switch at this point is to a low heart. In fact that holds declarer to 9 tricks, but across both fields, most declarers made the overtrick.

Finally, here is the board associated with the third deal. Opposite a 1NT opening, do you have a method for showing a game-forcing hand (with possible slam interest) promising at least 5/4 in the minors including shortage in a major? In my partnership we play a  $3\diamond$  response as showing exactly that type of hand.

**Board 22**

Dealer E | Vul EW

$\spadesuit$ AKJT3			
$\heartsuit$ QJT8			
$\diamond$ T8			
$\clubsuit$ 96			
$\spadesuit$ 6	$\spadesuit$ Q84		
$\heartsuit$ A2	$\heartsuit$ K95		
$\diamond$ AKJ932	$\diamond$ 54		
$\clubsuit$ J754	$\clubsuit$ AKQT2		
$\spadesuit$ 9452			
$\heartsuit$ 7643			
$\diamond$ Q76			
$\clubsuit$ 83			

	$\clubsuit$	$\diamond$	$\heartsuit$	$\spadesuit$	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	6	6	1	1	5
W	6	6	2	1	5

After I bid  $3\diamond$ , partner knew that the situation in both majors was fragile indeed, so she jumped to  $5\clubsuit$ , an attempt to sign off via "fast arrival" with a minimum and a fit. To me, though, it seemed a reasonable inference that she ought to hold 5 clubs to the ace-king or king-queen, in the latter case hopefully with the ace of spades, so I continued on to  $6\clubsuit$ . We were thus the only pair across both fields to bid the slam, but this was one of the very few highlights of our otherwise rather ordinary performance across the weekend ...



