

Table Talk

Otago Bridge Club: December 2008

Cutlers Teams

The Cutlers-sponsored teams event concluded on 1 December. The winning teams were Thompson (Championship), van Zoelen (Trophy), and Tingle (Plate). We are fortunate that the 2009 teams competitions will again be sponsored by Cutlers Real Estate.

The final teams night produced one hand on which N-S can make 6♠ but I doubt whether it would have been bid many times:

Dealer: N	♠ KQ853	Vul: N-S
	♥ J	
	♦ AT3	
	♣ A962	
♠ 962		♠ 4
♥ 98		♥ KQT74
♦ KJ75		♦ Q984
♣ JT43		♣ Q87
	♠ AJT7	
	♥ A6532	
	♦ 62	
	♣ K5	

The play is quite simple so long as declarer (North) avoids the trap of drawing trumps since 3 minor suit cards need to be ruffed in dummy. But this is a 26 HCP slam. Does any reader have a convincing auction to 6♠?

Holiday bridge

Don't forget that you can get your bridge fix over the Christmas break by playing on the holiday bridge nights and competing for the Moise trophies.

Reflections on bidding

My victim (i.e. my partner) in a recent Christmas pairs game was Graeme Stout who is a plea-

sure to play with. After I had gone down in a number of contracts we came to a most interesting board where I can truthfully say my declarer play was error-free – because I was, in fact, not the declarer. The hand in question was

Dealer: S	♠ AKQJ97642	Vul: E-W
	♥ 6	
	♦ Q9	
	♣ T	
♠ 53		♠ 8
♥ QT9743		♥ 852
♦ T2		♦ J854
♣ K54		♣ QJ932
	♠ T	
	♥ AKJ	
	♦ AK763	
	♣ A876	

Our opponents were playing Precision and the auction was:

S	W	N	E
1♣*	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♠	Pass
2NT	Pass	3♠	Pass
4NT**	Pass	5♠***	Pass
6♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

*16+ HCP; **Roman Key card; *** 2 key cards and ♠Q

The play only took a moment as declarer claimed all 13 tricks immediately – indeed 9 spade tricks and 6 outside winners did not require a great deal of thought. Our opponents, both of them good friends and men of honour, then began to apologise to one another for bids along the way that had prevented their reaching the cold gram slam in either spades or no trumps. They also courteously asked for Graeme's opinion and, since we had a few minutes before the round ended, we had a mini post-mortem.

Graeme made two interesting observations. The first was that the auction would have been much easier to judge if North had done the Ace-asking.

The problem with South doing the asking is that he has no way of knowing that his partner holds such a colossal spade suit. North, on the other hand, can judge the situation far better – all he wants to know is whether his partner can produce 4 top tricks.

Graeme's second comment, which provoked me to think further, was that beginning players would have found this much easier for they would simply bid as

S	W	N	E
1♦	Pass	4♣*	Pass
4NT	Pass	5♣	Pass
5♠	Pass	7♠	All Pass

*Gerber

A standard Acol auction might go

S	W	N	E
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
3NT	Pass	4♣	Pass
4NT	Pass	7♠	All Pass

or even

S	W	N	E
1♦	Pass	1♠	Pass
3NT	Pass	7♠!	All Pass

Because everyone likes to hold strong hands and long suits, bidding systems pay a disproportionate amount of attention to slam bidding. I'm sure that the hand above would have given rise to a large variety of auctions – you might like, over the Christmas port, to think about how you and your favourite partner could reliably have reached the grand slam.

A final comment. At match-points consideration could be given to bidding the grand slam in no trumps. I think North should refrain from this – wouldn't it be tragic if there was no entry to his hand!

Dummy dummy

The hand below was composed many years ago.

Dealer: E	♠ A432 ♥ AT7543 ♦ A73 ♣ Void	Vul: E-W									
♠ Q ♥ 962 ♦ 2 ♣ KJT986532	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Void ♥ QJ8 ♦ KQT86 ♣ AQT74
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ KJT98765 ♥ K ♦ J954 ♣ Void										

The contract is 6♠ by South after East has opened 1♦. West leads his singleton diamond. How does South make the contract? There's a surprising solution that you might enjoy finding before skipping to the answer at the end of the Newsletter.

From a Wednesday game

The following hand was played recently at the club.

Dealer: E	♠ Q64 ♥ 83 ♦ K9754 ♣ Q43	Vul: E-W									
♠ 3 ♥ AK64 ♦ AQ3 ♣ AK976	<table border="1"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ AK5 ♥ Q97 ♦ JT8 ♣ J852
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	♠ JT9872 ♥ JT52 ♦ 62 ♣ T										

Deep Finesse tells us that 6♣ by West is a make despite there being a trump loser and the diamond finesse being wrong. Assume a major suit lead. Declarer takes two rounds of trumps and discovers the bad news. Then come the top two spades (on the second of which the 3♦ is discarded) and

a spade ruff. Next three top hearts. If North ruffs they have to lead a diamond so there is no diamond loser. If North refuses to ruff the fourth heart is ruffed in dummy and then a trump again end-plays North.

The interesting thing about this hand is that Deep Finesse's play is actually the right way to play in reality. As we all know, Mr D. Finesse often achieves his results by an anti-percentage play – not this time though. Playing three rounds of spades is much more likely to be possible without North ruffing and exiting with a heart than the diamond is likely to succeed. And once North has followed to all three spades declarer has three chances. The first is the one that arose (North with exactly three spades). The second is that hearts are 3-3 and, after 4 rounds of hearts, the trump endplay gives either a diamond lead as before or a spade lead giving a ruff and discard. The third chance is the diamond finesse.

More bridge quotes

Apologies that these quotes are unattributed. Since I didn't know all the authors I decided to omit attributions entirely.

1. Good sex is like good bridge. If you don't have a good partner, you'd better have a good hand.
2. I say, let's banish bridge. Let's find some pleasant way of being miserable together.
3. Every day you play worse and worse but today you are playing like it's tomorrow.
4. If you are accused in a court of law of being able to play bridge I'll defend you for free.
5. Question - how should I have played that hand? Answer - under an assumed name!
6. I can see that you learnt to play today but could you tell me at what time today?
7. We believe that bridge is particularly attractive to people with a scrappy disposition.
8. Bridge is a great comfort in your old age. It also helps you get there faster.
9. Bridge is essentially a social game, but unfortunately it attracts a substantial number of antisocial people.
10. Where's the hand you held during the auction?
11. South: Alert!
East: Yes?
South: I'm requested to further misdescribe my hand.
12. The difference between genius and stupidity is that genius has its limits.
13. I'd like a review of the bidding with all the original inflections.
14. If you play bridge with your spouse as partner, you need at least 20 points to open, and it wouldn't hurt to have 25.
15. Learn from the mistakes of others. You won't live long enough to make them all yourself.

Encrypted signals

I was asked recently what encrypted signals were. The answer is too complicated to give in full but here is an example hand due to a bridge player and cryptologist called Peter Winkler that gives the general idea.

Dealer: E	♠ 652	Vul: E-W
	♥ T85	
	♦ 74	
	♣ KQJT5	
♠ 983		♠ QJ4
♥ QJ962		♥ AK73
♦ T83		♦ 952
♣ 92		♣ A74
	♠ AKT7	
	♥ 4	
	♦ AKQJ6	
	♣ 863	

E	S	W	N
1NT	Dbl	2♥	Pass
Pass	3♥	Pass	4♣
Pass	4♦	Pass	5♦ (end)

Declarer ruffs the second heart and draws trumps in 3 rounds. Then he leads a club towards dummy. In the absence of any outside entries to dummy it seems that West must give a count signal so that East can judge when to take his A♣. With standard count that means playing 9♣ and with reverse count playing 2♣. The problem is that declarer can see that too and can work out that East will duck twice. So the only hope is to take the double finesse in spades (which happens to work). So should West not give a count signal? But then East doesn't know to hold up A♣ until the third round.

If the defenders are playing encrypted signals then they can exploit that they (and only they) know which of them has the lowest outstanding heart and they use this to choose whether to give standard count or reverse count. Their signalling method will be standard count if West has the lowest heart but reverse count if East has it. Therefore West can give an honest count signal that declarer will not be able to read. The defenders must tell the declarer that this is the method they use to decide their count style but need not tell him who has the lowest heart.

Too complicated? That's just a taste of the arcane world of encrypted signals. Fortunately for most of us most bridge bodies (including the NZCBA) ban the use of encrypted signals.

Double dummy solution

Declarer wins the first trick with the A♦. The issue is how to establish the heart suit in the absence of only one entry to dummy. The ingenious solution is to win the first trick, play a heart to the King, and then play a low spade towards dummy. When West plays the Q♠ let him hold the trick! Whatever West plays next then give you the needed entry to dummy to play A♥ followed by a heart ruff.

This hand was composed over 50 years ago by Terence Reese and Harold Franklin for a par contest at Selfridges hotel in 1957.

Tabletalk in 2009

The regular TableTalk editor Michael Albert will be returning next year. He will be glad to receive contributions to TableTalk in any format, including email to malbert.cs.otago.ac.nz.

In the meantime, Happy Christmas to all!

Mike Atkinson.