

James' play/discuss for 21 June 2010

Board 1. Dealer: N, Vul: Nil

	♠AKT754 ♥A5 ♦QT4 ♣63	
♠J83 ♥T862 ♦A763 ♣Q7		♠Q ♥KQJ4 ♦852 ♣JT542
	♠962 ♥973 ♦KJ9 ♣AK98	

Restricted choice is often applied in bridge when we have a suit combination that is missing the Q and the J, and one of them fall on the first round of the suit. People often assume that whether to play for the finesse or the drop is a guess. However, the odds strongly favour taking the finesse. The likelihood of the LHO holding either singleton Jack or singleton Queen is approximately twice that of holding QJ tight. The correct assumption for declarer to make is that LHO played the Jack (or Queen) because they had to (i.e. have restricted choice).

For the record, the correct odds are (ignoring any inferences from the bidding, lead, or early play):

- Missing 4 cards, QJ and 2 small cards: odds are 11:6 in favour of the finesse (not quite 2:1 odds)
- Missing 5 cards (e.g. AK765 opposite 1098), QJ and 3 small cards: odds are 10:6 or 5:3 in favour of the finesse
- Missing 6 cards, QJ and 4 small cards (e.g. AK76 opposite 1098): odds are 9:6 or 3:2 in favour of the finesse (this ignores the issue of misleading false-cards)
- Missing 7 or more cards: although the odds could be computed, they likely would not be accurate because of signaling issues and/or inferences from the bidding

Board 2. Dealer: E, Vul: NS

	♠642 ♥QJT4 ♦Q72 ♣653	
♠AQ83 ♥72 ♦JT9 ♣AQT9		♠T95 ♥AK863 ♦A863 ♣7
	♠KJ7 ♥95 ♦K54 ♣KJ842	

There are two main points to this hand: overall quality and reopening doubles. Firstly, the South hand fits into many people's 2-level overcall criteria. Are you someone who would overcall 2C over a 1H opening from East? I'm hoping to convince you otherwise. The suit quality is poor, and with no extra length. Also, the hand is balanced and looks defensive with Kings sitting over the opening bidder.

Secondly, a problem for West. West would quite like to penalise 2C, especially at this vulnerability when any games that make are beaten by defeating 2C by 2 tricks (+500). Double would be takeout. We could still do that if we want – we have good opening values, 4 spades and 2 hearts. But wouldn't we rather have partner make a takeout double so we can pass it? Sure. But what if partner just passes them out in 2C? That probably won't compensate for our game score in 3NT or 4-major. Hopefully I'll be able to convince you that you will feel safe in passing, and that partner should **always** balance with a double to protect against exactly this. The only time that East should pass the hand out is if they have club length and know that their partner is not **trap passing**.

Board 3. Dealer: S. Vul: EW

From Monday night Teams last week.

	♠A7432 ♥AQ6 ♦942 ♣J2	
♠-- ♥J82 ♦KQJ765 ♣8653		♠QJ9865 ♥9543 ♦T8 ♣4
	♠KT ♥KT7 ♦A3 ♣AKQT97	

This board is a matter of subjective hand evaluation. What would/did you open the South hand? Some people often elect to open hands with shape like this 2NT. I am one of those – I think that bidding this way is easier than opening 1C and having to find a rebid to get across the huge playing strength of our hand. However, this one is even too strong for that in my opinion.

I am an advocate of upgrading this hand to a game force opening. Up to you whether you prefer to bid the 6-card club suit at your next turn or call it 23-25 balanced.

Board 4. Dealer: W, Vul: All

This hand was from Thursday night earlier in the year.

	♠K9 ♥T865 ♦74 ♣QJ963	
♠AQ8653 ♥J32 ♦A5 ♣74		♠742 ♥AKQ ♦KQT96 ♣AT
	♠JT ♥974 ♦J832 ♣K852	

Did everyone get to slam? 6S should be reached easily enough, but did you make it on the QC lead? At first glance you have to deal with the missing KS whilst also worrying about the club situation. The best way to play this hand is to win the AC, play the AS, then 3 rounds of diamonds to throw away your club loser. If N ruffs in with the KS, we are fine to win the return and draw the remaining trump. If no one ruffs, we can play a low spade towards the Q to protect against S having KJT.

Board 5. Dealer: N, Vul: NS

This hand was from the recently-completed Monday Swiss Pairs Tournament.

	♠T7 ♥T4 ♦98532 ♣9753	
♠KQ94 ♥AQJ832 ♦K ♣AT		♠A8652 ♥K5 ♦AQ64 ♣82
	♠J3 ♥976 ♦JT7 ♣KQJ64	

When slam bidding, what are your agreements after you have asked for Aces or Key Cards? EW have all the Key Cards and want to investigate whether they can make grand slam or not. If they bid a "King ask", they will hear that they are missing one of the Kings. If it is West doing the asking, it is really important to know which of the Kings East has: if it is the KH, grand is cold; if it is the KC, far from it. A good convention to play is **Specific King Ask**. That is, 5NT says "what King(s) do you have partner?" rather than "how many Kings do you have?". You bid the suit(s) you have the King of. East bids 6H to show the KH and all is well. If East had bid 6C over 5NT (I have the KC), then West can continue with 6D, to show their King. East will bid 6H over this with the KH as well, or 6S (returning to trumps) without it.

Board 6. Dealer E, Vul: EW

	♠T732 ♥T94 ♦Q43 ♣KT4	
♠Q94 ♥83 ♦AJT95 ♣AQ3		♠AK8 ♥KQ5 ♦K62 ♣9865
	♠J65 ♥AJ762 ♦87 ♣J72	

3NT played by East seems normal. On the 6H lead, we need to make our contract. We are worried about N getting on lead, so we need to play the diamonds in a manner that means if we lose a trick, we lose it to S. Make sure you play a diamond to the Ace, then finesse the Jack towards the King. And don't worry if you lose to the doubleton-Queen – at least they can't cash their hearts.

Board 7. Dealer: S, Vul: All

	♠862 ♥Q752 ♦J643 ♣K5	
♠AJT74 ♥KJ9 ♦975 ♣QJ		♠9 ♥T864 ♦T82 ♣AT876
	♠KQ53 ♥A3 ♦AKQ ♣9432	

The question on this hand is whether or not to bid again after you have opened 1C, West has overcalled 1S, and it has been passed around to you. And the answer: no. This hand looks great for defending our opponents' vulnerable 1S contract. The only possible bid to make is 1NT, but even that seems misguided. We have 5 tricks in our hand, so even to make our contract we need to find partner with 2 tricks. That seems very unlikely, from someone who couldn't find a bid over 1S, so we should pass and give ourselves the best opportunity of a plus score.

The better our partner's hand is, the more vulnerable undertricks we are about to score. Since partner couldn't find a bid, game is a write-off so let's score in multiples of 100.

Board 8. Dealer: W, Vul: Nil

	♠KQJ7 ♥A865 ♦K96 ♣K7	
♠T53 ♥J ♦84 ♣AQT9642		♠9842 ♥Q432 ♣QT52 ♣J
	♠A6 ♥KT97 ♦AJ73 ♣853	

This hand is another example of restricted choice. When trying to make as many tricks as possible, we take the percentage line (about 50% superior) of finessing the QH through the East hand. This looks even more likely to work given that West has pre-empted.

Board 9. Dealer: N, Vul: EW

	♠AT2 ♥AT8 ♦87 ♣AT963	
♠QJ973 ♥QJ3 ♦Q5 ♣52		♠865 ♥K64 ♦K932 ♣K74
	♠K4 ♥9752 ♦AJT6 ♣QJ8	

This is another matter of subjective hand evaluation. How do you evaluate the North hand? I'm sure for everyone this hand will fit into the 12-14 NT range. Partner will bid Stayman and invite, so now what do you do? I would accept the invite. There is 12 HCP in there under the classical hand evaluation system, but I think this vastly underrates the playing strength of your hand. Aces are undervalued in the 4-3-2-1 HCP system, and a 5-card suit with three 10s is a strong hand, all things considered. Even with the KC offside, we still make 9 tricks.

Board 10. Dealer: E, Vul: All

This hand is also from Monday night teams a few months ago.

	♠AJ8 ♥QT92 ♦A6 ♣QJ54	
♠K764 ♥A84 ♦K98732 ♣--		♠932 ♥J3 ♦Q ♣AT97632
	♠QT5 ♥K765 ♦JT54 ♣K8	

This hand brings up a few interesting points. Firstly, would you pre-empt with the East cards? Not great suit quality, but I reckon that with a 7-card suit you should get in there most of the time.

Secondly, what do NS do over a 3C opening? South doesn't have enough to bid and so passes. As does West, so it is North's decision now. I strongly advocate pass. Against vulnerable opponents, try and get some tricks that pay +100 each. Game seems a long way away so just let them have it. Second choice: 3NT. Last choice: double. I know that at some tables the North players elected to double, which doesn't work out well at all. South bids 4H (quite reasonably) and records -100 instead of +300, for a loss of 9 imps.