

Learning Points – Making 7 NT at Pairs

October 1, 2008

by Steve Moese; edited by Mike Purcell

Saturday Morning September 27, 2008. Jim Pelletier Charity Pairs at the Fort Wayne IN Regional.

S Deals

EW Vul

Steve

Mike

| | | |
|---------|--------|---------|
| ♠ AK4 | N | ♠ QJ853 |
| ♥ KQ6 | W 11 E | ♥ AJ95 |
| ♦ A86 | S | ♦ J |
| ♣ KQ103 | | ♣ A96 |

♠ -
♥ 8742
♦ KQ105432
♣ 82

Deep Finesse:

EW 5♣, 1♦,
6♠, 7N, 7♥;
E 7♣;
W 6♥, 6♣

| South | West | North | East |
|-------|-----------------|------------|--------------------|
| Pass | 1♣ ¹ | Pass | 1♠ ² |
| 2♦ | 2♠ ³ | Pass | 3♥ ⁴ |
| Pass | 4♦ | Pass | 4N |
| Pass | 5♣ ⁵ | Pass | 5N |
| Pass | 6♣ | Pass | 6♦!!! ⁶ |
| Pass | 6♥ | Pass | 6♠ |
| Pass | 7N ⁷ | Passed Out | |

North leads ♦K

1 = 16+ HCP (17+ if balanced)

2 = 5+ Spades, 8+ HCP, GF

3 = **Trump ask** (or Natural side suit-max).

4 = 2nd Suit (Hxxxxx)

5 = 3 Keycards

6 = ♦K or 2nd round control (singleton).

7 = I can count to 13 partner.

North should have any extra spade length if the suit splits badly. Once South's void is revealed, the hand played in a straightforward fashion for 13 tricks. Making 7 was worth 10.5 of 11 Match Points.

Post Mortem

We took the time to discuss whether we wanted auctions like these to be natural or conventional. We agreed conventional for now. Often just remembering our agreement is more important than making the best decision.

West chose to bid 7N confident in 6 spades, 3 hearts, 1 diamond and 3 club tricks. Even if East had only 5 spades then a 4th club, 4th heart or 2nd diamond would likely be available. Importantly, West chose NT instead of Spades protected against the possibility that North was void in diamonds.

In Match Point Pairs it's often right to choose the major and not NT when partner shows ruffing value and our side has all top controls. The extra trick will often come from a ruff. Here the likelihood that 13 tricks are available off the top made NT the better and safer choice.

Standard Bidding: If your favorite approach is 2/1 Game Forcing or Standard American, the auction would have looked like one of these:

The Bidding

Mike and I play Precision. We don't always see our bidding agreements the same way. Luckily sometimes our mistakes don't hurt us. Like many partnerships we tend to err in rare situations when both conventional and natural meanings could be right. To err means bidding differently than our agreements.

While we knew we were in a game forcing auction after responder's first bid, South found encouragement to enter the auction at such a low level. In fact, we are lucky that South chose not to preempt. South's bid of 3♦ or 4♦ would have taken away much space needed for slam exploration.

We were both unclear whether opener's 2♠ bid was conventional (asking for trump suit length and quality) or natural showing a maximum hand (we use fast arrival principles). As a result partner's 3♥ bid was either natural or showing a 6-card ♠ suit headed by one top honor. Either way, subsequent bidding enabled us to see that 13 tricks were likely present. West judged that the possibility of a 5-0 split in spades made 7NT slightly superior. Luckily though the rare 5-0 split did occur on this hand, the outstanding trumps stood under declarer's length.

The Play

South led ♦K won in dummy with the ♦A. Declarer tested the Spades by leading ♠A. Since South overcalled in Diamonds,

| | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------------|
| South | West | North | East |
| Pass | 2N | Pass | 3♣ ¹ |
| 3♦ | Double | Pass | 3♠ ² |
| Pass | 4♦ | Pass | 4N |
| Pass | 5♣ ³ | Pass | 5N |
| Pass | 6♣ | Pass | 6♦!!! ⁴ |
| Pass | 6♥ | Pass | 6♠ |
| Pass | 7N ⁵ | Passed Out | |

North leads ♦K

1 = Stayman

2 = 5+ Spades, 8+ HCP, GF

3 = 3 Keycards

4 = ♦K or 2nd round control (singleton).

5 = I can count to 13 partner.

agree to open most all 15-17 HCP 5332 hands with a 5-card major 1 NT. Over 2NT, some use Puppet Stayman to guard against missing a major suit game when holding one or two 3-card majors. Bidding 2NT holding a 5 card major makes sense only when holding a 5332 pattern. With a 5422 pattern this opening makes finding a 4-4 fit very difficult (open 2♣ instead). Besides, why would you want to tell your opponents you are 5332? When you show a 5-card major in response to Puppet Stayman that is what you say! Hand simulations show that 3NT is as likely to make as many tricks as 4 of a major when a 5-3 8-card fit exists and responder has no long suit of their own. Often 3NT will be the limit of the hand!

One path would include a 3 level overcall by South (wouldn't you?) and a cooperative double by opener (3+ trumps, no specific action in view of the Stayman call).

Notice how Puppet Stayman makes exploration less comfortable, particularly without an overcall by South. →

Puppet Stayman was designed for use over 1NT by Kit Woolsey. It is intended for use where we

| | | | |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------------|
| South | West | North | East |
| Pass | 2N | Pass | 3♣ ¹ |
| Pass | 3N ² | Pass | 4♥ ³ |
| Pass | 4♠ | Pass | 4N |
| Pass | 5♣ ⁴ | Pass | 5N |
| Pass | 6♣ | Pass | 6♦!!! ⁴ |
| Pass | 6♥ | Pass | 6♠ |
| Pass | ??? | Passed Out | |

North leads ♦K

1 = Puppet Stayman

2 = No 4-card major

3 = Transfer to ♠ (Would you do this??)

4 = 3 Keycards

5 = ♦K or 2nd round control (singleton).

6 = Can I count to 13 tricks or not??

If South takes no action in this natural auction, then do you have the tools as responder to show a 5/4 hand in the majors? Do you transfer then bid a 4 card suit (How do you show 5/5?). Do you use Stayman and then Smolen at the 3 level (or will your partner assume some form of garbage Stayman?). You see, conventional agreements have intriguing ways of creating uncertainty even in the "Natural" systems so we continue to discuss our agreements in specific important situations.

Mike and I have an analogy to the bidding principle of fast arrival that we apply to cue bidding. Recall that fast arrival means simply that we jump to game with weak hands and leave more room for exploration (cue bidding) with strong hands.

When we cue bid we look to expose a weakness that might allow opponents to cash 2 quick tricks against an assumed slam contract. If we find such a flaw, we sign off in 4 or 5 of the agreed strain, regardless whether we have more cue bids to make. Therefore when we continue to cuebid showing 2nd round controls, there is an implied agreement that the cuebidder covers partner's announced cue bid gap.

Here's an example. Say we identify a heart fit and game forcing strength. Say we cue bid 1st round controls (Aces or voids) 1st. If partner bypasses spades to cue bid clubs, then s/he shows no 1st round control in spades. If we then cue bid diamonds, we show 1st round control of diamonds **and at least 2nd round control of spades**, the strain partner bypassed. Lacking a 1st round spade control I would simply bid game in hearts (or 5 hearts if that high already). Partner can still continue with a monster hand and 2nd round control in spades.