

Learning Points – GNT Bidding a 28 HCP Slam

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N Deals

♠ QJ73

NS Vul

♥ 97643

♦ 852

Mike

♣ J

Steve

♠ 10

N

♠ AK4

♥ AKJ85

W 5 E

♥ Q

♦ J74

S

♦ K1093

♣ A1054

♣ K9762

♠ 98652

Deep Finesse:

♥ 102

EW: 4♦, 1♠,

♦ AQ6

5N, 3♥

♣ Q83

E: 6♣ W: 5♣

Saturday Afternoon July 18, 2008. Grand National Teams Flight B Semi-Final Round. Special thanks to my District 11 teammates: Mike Purcell, Lorna Davis, Arun Goyal, Arachna Goyal and Vijay Vasudevan. Reaching the semi-finals of a National event is an honor we share. Together we finished 3 / 4 overall.

This series selects key hands from this semi-final match that could have changed the result in our favor. In the afternoon round of 32 hands, 9 hands had slam potential based on double-dummy analysis. Talk about exciting.....

The Bidding

Mike and I play Precision. East's opening was limited to 15 HCP and showed at least two cards in the ♦ suit. West's ♥ bid was natural. East chose 1NT rather than jump in ♣ for positional and texture reasons – the minor suits were not strong and the ♥Q might be a worthy stopper. West's 2-way New Minor Force was game forcing implying 5+ Hearts. 3♣ showed a maximum denied a 4 card major, and implied longer ♣ than ♦. The auction unfolded naturally from there. West might be a little unsure whether ♥s are a possible strain on this auction. West expects we have 11 winners – with room to find the 12th. Here East's singleton ♥Q now feels to be pulling full weight. East can infer West holds 9 cards in the round suits, and can conclude East's hand stops 3 of the 4 possible pointed suit losers. Having ♦K to the right of the opening lead is critical in the decision to bid slam.

The Play

The combined 28 HCP makes it likely that our opponents will not bid this slam even with 2 useful singletons. Declarer can see 6-7 top winners (depending on how ♥ split) and must develop 5 tricks to make this slam. 3 more can come from ♥ once trumps are handled. East should insure that North never gains the lead to protect against ♦s lying unfavorably. Declarer decided to try for 2♠ and a ♠ ruff, 5♣, and 4 or 5♥ (12-13 tricks), eventually pitching losing ♦s on the long ♥s.

South led ♠9 to dummy's 10, North's ♠J and Declarer's Ace. Declarer chose to ruff a spade immediately, and lead a small trump to hand. North's ♣J was pause for thought.

The **Principle of Restricted Choice** says play West for Queen 3rd in trumps. However a failing finesse for the ♣Q at trick 4 would put the contract down immediately. Our opponents would surely find the diamond switch and set us. It appeared to declarer (*wrongly*) that there was an extra chance that catered to either a 2-2 trump split or the actual distribution. Cashing the ♥Q, then the ♣A (leaving the ♣Q outstanding at worst) would allow declarer to run the hearts pitching all the diamond losers from hand. The defense would only take their ♣Q ruff. Declarer played on these lines (*wrongly*) and went down 1 when South ruffed the 3rd round of ♥ and cashed the ♦A.

6♣ down 1 lost 10 IMPS, as our opponents stayed in 3NT making 4. Making 6♣ would have gained 11 IMPS. Comparing scores on this hand will not be fun.

North	East	South	West
Pass	1♦ ¹	Pass	1♥
Pass	1N	Pass	2♦ ²
Pass	3♣ ³	Pass	3♥ ⁴
Pass	3♠ ⁵	Pass	4♣ ⁶
Pass	4♠ ⁷	Pass	5♥ ⁸
Pass	6♣	Passed Out	

South leads ♠9

1 = 11-15 HCP – 2+ ♦

2 = Two-way New Minor Forcing - Strong.

3 = 14-15 HCP unbalanced. 5 ♣ not 4♥/♠.

4 = Cue bid. Slam interest.

5 = Cue bid. Slam interest.

6 = Our suit.

7 = 2nd round control too

8 = 2nd round control too

Post Mortem

Declarer fell victim to fuzzy thinking and fatigue. **The odds favor a 2nd round finesse in trumps by more than 83%.** See Richard Pavlicek's Suit Break Calculator at <http://www.rpbridge.net/xsb2.htm>.

4 Cards Missing <i>a priori pct</i>	Any Possible	One Specific Holding	Restricted Choice Pct	Success Likelihood
2 – 2	40.70 %	6.78 % (xx – QJ)	3.39 %	35.3%
3 – 1	49.74 %	6.22 % (Qxx – J)	6.22 %	64.7 %

When the suit splits 2 – 2 the defender holding both the QJ has to play either the Q or the J. Assuming no bias, there's a 50/50 chance that they will play either the J or the Q *to the 1st trick*. Restricted choice simply reflects the impact of this 50/50 choice on the likely outcome. With the likely 3 – 1 split there is no adjustment as the defender plays the only card they have. The success likelihood is simply the ratio of each to the total pct for the 2 cases.

Yes, taking the less probable course (playing for the 2 – 2 split) might have paid off handsomely if trumps were 2 – 2 hearts at least 4-3 and our opponents were in the slam too. Anti-percentage plays can win matches against superior opponents who are likely to play the percentages. However declarer overlooked important considerations. Our opponents would have to find the slam, and South would have to hold at least 3 heart cards for the chosen line of play to work. Since there's a high likelihood that the slam would not be bid at the other table, the restricted choice trump finesse is best. Better to play with the odds and take the advantage one's bidding offers.

Note with East as declarer opponents could not profitably attack diamonds.

Finally a comment on the bidding. We do not routinely bid 28 HCP slams. Slams like these happen with two lines of thinking: 1) Bidding allows us to count to 12 tricks independent of HCP, and 2) working points – complementary shortness increases the trick taking potential of both hands together.

Counting Tricks

By the bidding, West can count 12 tricks if clubs, hearts and spades come home. The only question is whether Diamonds are stopped. From East's viewpoint, partner rates to have extra strength and good Club support (4+) since s/he chose to bypass 3NT. In addition East knows the ♥Q and ♦K are well positioned and that the ♠AK takes care of 2 of West's side suit losers. RKC shows no keycard miss. Remember we use RKC or Blackwood to stay out of slams we cannot make, not to find ones we can.

Complementary Shortness

But a 28 HCP slam? Really? Here's a way to think about it -**Working Points** (Thanks to G. S. Jade Barrett at the Ft Wayne Regional and Lawrence/Wirgren's Book on "I Fought the Law of Total Tricks" for this concept). Working points represent the HCP necessary to make the contract given the distribution of declarer's and dummy's hands. You know the HCP benchmarks for games and slams. Working Points takes valuation further.

Strain	HCP	% Tot HCP	% Tricks
3 NT	25	62.5	69.2
4 Major	26	65.0	76.9
5 Minor	28	70.0	84.6
6 Slam	33	82.5	92.3
7 Slam	37	92.5	100

With the hand in question:

West	East	Total HCP	WP	Comments
♠ x	♠ AKx	7	4	Only ♠A matters w/West's singleton. Note ♠K reduces the need for ♦ WPs.
♥ AKJxx	♥ Q	10	4	Got 'em all, but only 4 are working because of East's singleton. West's top ♥'s might eliminate ♦ losers.
♦ Jxx	♦ Kxxx	4	9	West has 3 ♦. Count ♦AKQ
♣ Axxx	♣ Kxxxx	7	10	Missing ♣QJ – can lose them both in some cases
Total		28	27	We hold > 100% of working HCP for this fit

With more than 82.5 % of the working points a small slam is normally possible (from the preceding page). Holding more than the working points necessary would suggest slam is possible if not likely. Cue bidding exposes the lack of the ♦A and no other 1st or 2nd round loser. A small slam should have better than average chances. Here the ♥ tops will be pulling more than their value because we can pitch losers.

Notice how points working in long fitting suits develop more tricks than points in short suits. Notice as well that other evaluation approaches can arrive at the same decision.

Notice as well that if declarer held the ♦A instead of the ♦K, a grand slam is likely (again, see the working points analysis). Could you bid a grand slam on 29 HCP?