

## Learning Points – If 3N is an Option....

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N Deals

♠ 8

EW Vul

♥ 109532

♦ 93

Steve

♣ 108742

Mike

♠ KJ762

N

♠ 1043

♥ A7

W 9 E

♥ KJ864

♦ A82

S

♦ K1054

♣ K53

♣ Q

♠ AQ95

Duplimate:

♥ Q

NS: 1♣

♦ QJ76

EW: 2♦, 4♠, 1N

♣ AJ96

E: 3♥

W: 2♥

January 13, 2009. Tuesday Evening Open Pairs, Rob Weidenfeld, Director, Cincinnati Bridge Association Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513) 631-8070 . 19 Tables across 2 sections.

We didn't get to the top spot on this hand, but the old saw "if 3N is a possible contract, bid it!" sure paid off. Competitive bidding often makes getting to the best spot more difficult. When you aren't in the best contract, try hard to make what you can. Often a positive score will yield many match points.

### The Bidding

After 2 passes, West had decided to open 1NT but South's 1♦ opening bid meant settling for a ♠ overcall. East chose an off shape 1N value advance, concerned that the 5 card ♥ suit might not play well unless West had cover cards. 1N is right on values but wrong on shape; and is a play to steal a game from NS. This tactic is common – a one step distortion from the field in search of a good match point score. South's 2♣ rebid suggested 5-5 or

North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	1♦	1♠
Pass	1N	2♣	3N
	Passed Out		

South leads ♣ 6

5-4 with a sound opener. The actual 4144 shape wasn't out of the realm of possibility, but not top of mind. West could have chosen a 2♦ or 3♣ cue bid to seek 3 card support for ♠. However the 5233 shape and somewhat weak ♠ suit suggested a different course.

Partner's 1NT shows 9-11 HCP. That means EW owns 24-26 HCP. With North passing twice it's highly unlikely North holds as many as 5 HCP. Opposite a balanced partner, 3N seems like the most likely game. Jumping directly to 3N seems right and might silence North, who might act with distributional support and a weak hand over a 2♦ cue bid. In situations where opponents bid 2 suits freely, we use cue bids to invite or force game. East can offer a delayed raise with 3 card ♠ support when that path seems best. Were North to bid 4♣, East would likely choose between ♠ and Pass, allowing partner the last say. West would likely double 4♣ on strength and the expectation of one trump trick. Opponent's can't have enough side suit strength to take 10 tricks (but distribution is a possibility here).

### The Play

Partner won the ♣Q and led the ♠10 intending a finesse. At this point declarer has 6 tricks and must develop 3 more before South develops enough minor suit tricks to set this game. South rose with the ♠A and cleared the clubs with ♣A and ♣9. Declarer returned to hand with the ♦2 to the ♦K. The ♠4 developed 2 ♠ tricks to go along with 2 ♣, 2♦, and 3♥ tricks. It's hard to figure South for 4 spades in this auction, yet easy to figure South for 3 spades when they duck the 2<sup>nd</sup> spade. If North has ♠98 and then runs clubs I have a lot of explaining to do. Declarer hoped to finesse or drop ♥Q of hearts to make 3NT at this point as South should not have many ♥. Once North shows out of ♠, declarer's confidence is high 3NT is coming in on this strategy no matter what. Just making the contract will yield a good matchpoint score.

3N+3 and +600 scored 7 of 8 Match Points.

Bd 11	A1	A2	A3	A4	A5	A6	A7	A8	A9
MP	3.5	7	1	3.5	3.5	3.5	8	6	0
Score	140	600	-100	140	140	140	620	170	-200

## Post Mortem

After East's 1N advance, West can cue bid 2♦ forcing a descriptive bid by partner. A delayed ♠ raise might steer us to game and best spot on this hand. A 3♣ cue bid carries an additional message – Do you have a ♣ stopper partner? (Western Cue). Since West is confident a partial ♣ stopper in East will be enough for 3N, bidding game directly has appeal. If East decides to bid a constructive 2♥ advance (is this your agreement?) West might bid 2NT showing extras and a ♦ stopper. East can then reach for the major suit game. 7 out of 8 isn't bad for 3NT.

On the play, South's haste to play the ♠A would normally indicate either a singleton or a holding including the ♠Q. Not holding the ♠Q most would duck the ♠A in hopes declarer finesses the ♠J and partner's hypothetical ♠Q wins. I think there's a pretty good inference when South plays a ♠ to the 2<sup>nd</sup> ♠ trick that South also holds the ♠Q.

There was an additional play opportunity declarer did not attempt. Once the ♣Q holds, the play of the ♠10 gains whenever North holds a singleton ♠8 or ♠9. When the ♠8 falls on the 1<sup>st</sup> trick South should consider finessing the ♠7 on the 2<sup>nd</sup> trick. That yields an additional ♠ trick and top board here. Since South represented both minors freely, declarer cannot rule out 55 or 54 shapes, and therefore few ♠ in the South hand.

South made a reasonable lead on the bidding. A heart couldn't be right and a ♠ was clearly wrong. That left the choice of the minors. Declarer appeared prepared to handle a ♦, so a ♣ was a reasonable shot. South won't expect the NT bidder to win that trick with a singleton ♣Q often.

## Learning Pointers:

- 1) Sometimes a simple departure on just one dimension of a bid can yield big dividends, especially when moving the partnership to a higher scoring contract. Tops can come from small differences at relatively low risk. Large distortions often carry high risk and are less attractive over the long haul.
- 2) If you are close to game strength and expect controls in all 4 suits, 3N will often work well. Making 9 tricks can be easier than making 10 in a major. Don't forget to bid 3N if it's a logical possibility. You might be pleasantly surprised.