

Learning Points – Working Points Find a Light Slam

by Steve Moese (Mike Purcell ed.)

January 26, 2010

Slams LEVEL: Intermediate

West Deals
Both Vul
MPs

♠ K1064
♥ A3
♦ 96
♣ A10632

♠ J753	N	♠ Q82
♥ 1076542	W 20 E	♥ 8
♦ J	S	♦ A753
♣ Q7		♣ KJ984

♠ A9
♥ KQJ9
♦ KQ10842
♣ 5

EW: 4N, 6♦

Tuesday Evening January 26, 2010, Cincinnati Bridge Association
Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513)
631-8070 .

Whether to bid game or slam ultimately depends more on the tricks you can take (before the opponents take theirs) than on the HCP total between the hands. Working points are high cards that pull their full weight by helping develop extra tricks in our long suits.

The Bidding

The 11-15 HCP short ♦ opener in Precision is akin to a weak NT showing balanced or semi balanced hands, or true ♦ hands. South's inverted raise invites game and is unlimited. North chose to show ♠s not because he had 4, but because of concern about sufficient ♥ stoppers for NT. ♥Ax is not a sound stopper for NT. South showed a chunky ♥ suit and a hand with more than game values by bidding 3♥. 3N expressed North's reservation about continuing on given a minimum count opening hand (rich with 5 controls however). South checked for Aces using Gerber. Finding 2, South expected one loser at most between the 2 hands.

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

All Pass

East leads ♥8

1= 11-15 HCP, at least 2♦s (Precision)

2= Inverted Minor Raise 11+ HCP

3= ♠ Stopper on way to 3 NT

4= Good ♥ stopper, ♣ doubt

5= Minimum hand, no ♣ doubt

6= Gerber

7= 2 Aces

The Play

East's opening lead hints shortness as all the top cards were between North and South. Declarer won the ♥A and decided to attack ♦s. Missing 4 cards to the ♦AJ, it's best to plan to lead twice toward the ♦KQ. If West wins the ♦A, then you have a guess on

the 2nd round of the suit whether to finesse. If West doesn't win the Ace but plays a low card then you have a 2nd chance by repeating the lead. If the AJx or AJxx is off side, you will go down. If either honor is onside, then you have a chance to hold your losers to one. North chose to lead the ♦6. In this case the ♦K fells West's ♦J. All that was left was to draw East's 4 trumps and claim top tricks. East West scored their ♦A but nothing more. Making 6♦ was +1370 and a top score.

NS Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
MPs		4.5	4.5	4.5	3	4.5	4.5			0	1	8
Score		690	690	690	Ave-	690	690			620	630	1370

Post Mortem

South judges well that North's ♠ bid and 2 aces meant all our HCP were working. Total HCP mattered little in South's decisions, just Aces, Kings and tricks. By North's 4th bid, South could count 12 tricks.

While there are only 26 HCP between the 2 hands, we have tricks in 3 of the 4 suits and trump to control the 4th. Therefore we need only ¾ of 32 HCP or 24 HCP for a small slam. South expected that north might hold 3-4 ♦s as 2 card holdings are scarce (4423 and 5422 patterns with a 5 card minor).

So how would someone using Standard or 2/1 Game Force bidding approach these hands? North 2½ Quick Trick 11-HCP hand with a 5 card minor – all indicating an opening bid. If North chooses to pass 1st, South might never believe North has enough for slam. One possible auction by standard or 2/1 Game Force bidders follows below. The auction is delicate, with the ubiquitous 4th suit forcing convention employed by South. If you don't use 4th suit forcing, you might have trouble keeping North interested

Standard or 2/1 GF Auction

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

All Pass

1=4th suit Game Force

2=1st round control presumed ♦ fit or search for 3N.

3=1st round control

4=1st round control

5=2nd round control

6=2nd round control

7=2 Keycards no ♦Q

long enough to get there. After South's 3♦ rebid, North can make a free cuebid expecting either to play in 3NT with South declaring, or learning more about South's true intentions. When South cue-bids 3♠ rather than bidding 3N, North can be sure South has serious interest toward slam. North continues cue-bidding the ♣A, and South shows 2nd round control in ♥s. North can show 2nd round control in ♠s and the Roman Keycard Blackwood ask ensures North South have enough 1st round stoppers to ensure a small slam.

Delicate auctions like these are necessary to find how all working points are pulling their full load.

Notice how many North's would be tempted to bid 2N (or 3N) after the 4th suit force. This makes pinpointing prime cards (Aces and Kings) harder. Change North's ♣A to ♣K10 and NT would be a good rebid.

Using ambiguous control bids under 3N when searching for a minor suit fit is a great way to ensure you land in 3NT when right (NT pays more after all). Allowing partner to clarify intentions later, enables several strains and levels to be in play until your information exchange rules out losing options. Generally, cue-bidding below the level of game does not promise extras.

Some expert pairs use 3NT as a serious slam try when pursuing a major fit. If they bypass this "cue bid" then they do not offer extra values. When searching for minor or NT game (no major fit in sight), 3NT can never be "Serious". Indeed 3NT tends to end further search unless partner has a compelling reason to continue. Over South's 3♠ call, North would bid 3NT with doubts about slam or a hand weaker than represented so far in the auction, and South would likely pass.

Learning Points

1. You can find safe thin slams if you think tricks, not just HCP.
2. If a minimum opening hand can possibly give you enough tricks for slam, explore!
3. When forced to game with a minor suit fit, consider cue bidding to find NT stoppers below 3NT. Here the 2♠ bid implied A or K or 2 top Honors and doubts about 1 of the unbid suits.
4. Cue bids below game do not promise extras and are great ways to investigate slams...for free!
5. After a cue-bidding sequence use RKB or Blackwood to check key cards – you don't want an elegant auction ruined by 2 quick losers off the top, do you?
6. The partner who has the best information sets the contract – don't rescue partner.

Key Words: Count tricks, Working Points, Cue bidding below 3NT, Serious 3NT, Ambiguous cue bids