

Learning Points – Making Small Trumps Count

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by Steve Moese; edited by Mike Purcell

E Deals

♠ 108

← Steve

E/W Vul

♥ A8632

♦ J72

♣ 742

April 10, 2008 Thursday Evening Open Pairs, Ms. Annease Comer, Director, Cincinnati Bridge Association Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513) 631-8070
<http://www.cincybridge.com> My Partner: Kim King

♠ QJ532	N	♠ K64
♥ K10	W 22 E	♥ QJ97
♦ 10854	S	♦ 93
♣ Q8		♣ K1065

How do you handle a weak trump suit? The answer might depend on the fall of the cards.

The Bidding

Partner opens 1NT in 2nd seat, 16-18 HCP by our methods. I think a pass might be right given the empty 5 card heart suit, but then again we will have a minimum 7 card fit in hearts and we might be able to manage an extra trick or two with a trump suit. When West passes I bid 2♥.

Kim →

♠ A97

♥ 54

♦ AKQ6

♣ AJ93

East	South	West	North
Pass	1NT	Pass	2♥
Passed Out			
East leads ♣5			

We do not use Stayman or Transfers. I don't like the strong hand on the table, but this is what our methods do. The opponents let us play 2♥. I can't wait to see how the field handled this hand.

The Play

East's opening lead looks like 4th best. I can count 6 winners and 7 losers. We need to develop tricks in a hurry. One thing I must not do is cover the ♣5 with a higher card. While playing the ♣3 might look like a losing choice, I am counting on my right hand opponent to play 3rd hand high. Indeed West rises with the ♣Q (wouldn't you?). This is a revealing card. Either West has both ♣KQ or I can finesse clubs twice now and win 3 tricks in the suit. Back comes the ♣8 – West must have a doubleton club! We will now score 3 club tricks. East played the ♣K and the ♣A wins on the board. I now have to clear trumps in a way that minimizes the risk of West scoring more than one club ruff.

Normally I would play a small trump from both hands, intending to play for a 3-3 split (♥A and another when in next). The flaw here is that West is ready to ruff clubs. Therefore I decide to play a small trump to the ♥A and another. When West plays the ♥K on the second round of trumps, I believe West holds 2-2 in Hearts and Clubs. That means East holds the ♥QJ and is the danger hand.

I can no longer afford to play trumps – the 4-2 split will allow opponents to draw 2 trump tricks I want to win for our side. How can I do that? I need to establish spade ruffs. I could allow West to win the 1st spade trick for their side. I don't want East drawing trumps before we finish ruffing. However the club position offers a way to handle spades with no losers. West leads the ♠Q which I win with the ♠A. I lead my small diamond to the ♦J. A club finesses the ♣10 in East. I run clubs dropping the losing ♠10 from my hand. I ruff 2 spades in hand as East follows harmlessly. In all we lose 3 trump tricks and the ♣Q. 2♥ making 3 for 140 was top board.

The Press Recap showed the following results:

22> NS Scores

Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
MPs	6.25	2.31	6.25		2.31	7.94	0.06	2.31			4.56
Score	110	-50	110	----	-50	140	-100	-50	----	----	100

(Fractional MP scores from sit-out calculations by ACBL Score).

2 pairs bid and made 2♥, and 4 pairs went down in their contracts – likely from overbidding to 4♥ or from failing to find the spade ruffs in hand. One pair set E/W one trick in a contract (presumably some number of spades). Surprisingly no N/S pair made a NT contract. I had expected to see more.

Post Mortem

When declaring a hand, always start with a count of winners and losers. This helps focus on what's necessary to make the contract and what could go wrong. This also gets me thinking about where to develop most tricks earliest. We have to win the race – we win tricks to make our contract before they win tricks to set us. I find it useful to assume perfect defense – that is, when I let my opponents in, they will find the exactly right play to do the most damage to our plans.

Finally as this hand illustrates, we often have to make many mid-course adjustments based on what we learn from each trick. While playing for a 3-3 trump split holding weak trumps and the Ace is one way to limit opponent's trick-taking on a hand, sometimes we have to change paths and run a race to win our small trumps before they can win their big ones. East eventually won tricks 12 & 13 with the ♥QJ but didn't feel too good about that.

Many play 15-17 HCP 1NT opening bids, and would open the South hand 1♦. West might choose a frisky 1♠ overcall after which North will pass (some will make a negative double here to show hearts and 5-10 HCP. E/W appear to be within reach of making 2♠, but this is a dicey contract). Minus 110 our way would be a bad result.

Without the overcall, North will call 1♥ and East will surely pass. South will then jump to 2NT showing 18-19 HCP. Here's where things get interesting. North is too weak to continue so some pairs will play in 2NT. There are 7 tricks off the top and an 8th can be developed in clubs (9th if East opens the suit on defense – not likely now).

Some pairs will play 3♣ - the Wolff Signoff convention – a way to stop in a suit after partner's 2NT rebid. This is valuable playing Standard American or 2/1 Game Forcing when responder has a very weak hand (5-6 HCP) opposite 18-19 balanced HCPs. Playing Wolff over the 2NT Jump Rebids, 3♣ puppets to 3♦ which responder can pass or correct to 3 of a major to play. 3♦ is New Minor Forcing, and 3♥ or 3♠ are game forces as in natural bidding:

Wolff Signoff Convention

"The Wolff Relay" by Mr. Lex De Groot, IMP Bridge Magazine April/May 1997 Volume 8, #3 article at <http://homepage.mac.com/bridgeguys/pdf/WolffRelayIMP.pdf>

After 1♣-1♥/1♠-2NT:

3♣ – Opener must bid 3♦. 3♣ is a puppet bid to signoff at 3 level or begin a slam try

Responder can pass opener's 3♦ to play

3♥, 3♠ are to play if rebids.

Responder rebids 3♥ after 1♠ (55+), opener corrects at the 3 level.

Reverse - responder rebids 3♠ after 1♥ shows 44 in majors and is **game force**

3NT **Slam Try** in Opener's Minor Suit

3♦ – New Minor Forcing (guarantees 5 card Major and offers choice of games – Major or NT).

1♣-1♥/1♠-2NT-3♦-3♥/1♠-3NT can be a mild slam try with 4 Hearts and 5+ Clubs.

3♥, 3♠ – Game Force

3NT, 4♥, 4♠ – To play