

Improve your bridge with me

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♠ AKQJ1076
♥ AJ7
♦ A3
♣ 7

What do you open?

With 9 playing tricks and 19 points we should open 2♣ because the hand is clearly too strong for anything else.

Partner replies with 3♦, showing a positive reply with at least 8 points, and repeats the suit with 4♦ over the 3♣ rebid.

What now?

Since we have solid spades and partner showed a positive over 2♣, we have excellent chance for a slam even facing a spade void. While a slam in diamonds may well be a possibility, it is likely to be more difficult if partner is short in spades and/or has a broken diamond suit (something like K10xxxx). So we should continue with 4NT, which on this sequence is RKCB for diamonds to find out about the important ♦K, but aiming to play in spades.

Partner bids 5♥ over 4NT, showing two keycards out of five (the ♣A and the King of what he thinks is trumps = diamonds). We continue with 5NT but partner answers negatively and we sign off in 6♠.

West leads the ♠K and this is what we see:

♠ 98
♥ 653
♦ K109764
♣ AJ

W N E
S

♠ AKQJ1076
♥ AJ7
♦ A3
♣ 7

How many losers do we have?

Two in hearts.

Can we get rid of at least one of them?

Probably we can pitch on the diamonds if we succeed in setting up the suit. The other very small chance is to find KQ of hearts onside and get to dummy twice to play hearts from there.

What are the chances of each line?

We can set up the diamonds if they split 3-2, which happens roughly two-thirds of the time, while the second possibility has less than 25% chances of success (half the time the honors will, in fact be split between the two hands, then they can both be behind the AJx). So it is best to try and play on diamonds.

Is there a problem with this plan?

We seem to be short of entries after the ♣K lead. We can only get to dummy with the trumps and the ♦K. That means that at a first look it seems that if we try and set up the suit we can only enjoy the diamond winners if spades are 2-2 after we draw trumps ending up in dummy.

Is there a way to make if trumps are 3-1?

There is if we immediately proceed to play on diamonds, cashing the top two honors and ruffing a third one high. We can get to dummy with a spade and continue diamonds. Whenever one of the opponents ruffs, we take whatever he sends back and go back to dummy with a spade, thus also drawing the last trump, and play the remaining diamonds on which we pitch the last heart.

Here is the complete hand:

♠ 98		♠ 2
♥ 653		♥ K1082
♦ K109764		♦ Q82
♣ AJ		♣ 98532
♠ 543	W N E	♠ AKQJ1076
♥ Q94		♥ AJ7
♦ J5		♦ A3
♣ KQ1064		♣ 7



In a previous article I went to some length to illustrate when and how to consider investigating the possibility of slam. This month I would like to go one step further and introduce the expert concept of "mapping an auction".

What do I mean by that? Quite simply to plan the auction in such a way that we will be able to obtain exactly the information we need from our partner, when it is already clear at a very early stage of the bidding that slam is a distinct possibility.

An easy example:
We hold:

♠ AK876
♥ KJ643
♦ K9
♣ A

and surprisingly enough we hear our partner open 1♥, we reply 1♠ and partner rebids 1NT. Naturally we know that our minimum objective is now a small slam and we need to check if a grand slam is possible.

How would you plan the auction to get the right information from partner?

The worse approach would be to leap and jump all over the place, without any clear idea as to what we are trying to find out.

The cards we need from partner for 7♥ are the ♥A, the ♦A and either a doubleton spade or the ♠Q, therefore the best thing to do is to quietly answer 2♣, checkback. If partner can now bid 2♠ we will know that he holds three spades and can now ask 4NT to find out about the ♥A, the ♦A and the ♠Q, after his reply we will now be in an excellent position to judge where to place the contract.

Let us now look at a real hand:

IMPs, Vul. N-S, Dir. S

You are in South and you hold: