Week 24

A couple of slam hands to bid this week which proved tricky taken from a recent one day Swiss Teams event.

AKQxxx

x

KQxx

xx

Txx

Jxx

AJxx

AKx

It is a perfect fit of course with no heart wastage facing the shortage. The bidding typically started 1s -2d leaving north with an awkward rebid since he wished both to support diamonds and also rebid spades and a second consideration is the hand has improved by quite a bit so he also wished to show extra strength.

Playing Acol the options are 2s /3s /3d or 4d none of which is ideal. Playing 2/1 game forcing you are better placed as you can raise to 3d hoping to show your 6th spade thereafter.

If north rebids 3s, south should cue bid 4c and if he bids 4d, south will cue bid 5c. If North bids either 2s or 3d it will be hard to reach slam.

The bid which will do the trick here is subtle namely a splinter jump in hearts to show the shortage. Many leading pairs play a jump to 3h here as agreeing diamonds and showing shortage in hearts (1s -2d -3h the logic for which is a rebid of 2h after a 2 level response is forcing and one does not need two bids to show hearts)

If North shows the fit for diamonds and a singleton heart the slam will now be bid.

Then secondly

AKxxx

x

AQTxx

xx

xx

xx

Kxxxx

AKJx

The bidding began with a weak 2h from east passed around to north who tried 2s -p to south? South now tried 3d and north was now looking at "a whale " with 5 card support and short hearts. 5d is inadequate and 4d is not forcing so again the solution is the splinter jump to 4h showing a fit for diamonds and shortage in hearts.

Splinter bids are a superb method but make sure you and partner agree the situations in which you play them or else the wood may end up in your finger!

**Week 23**

For many years the version of Blackwood commonly played counted just the 4 aces and that worked satisfactorily until the idea was mooted that the king and queen of trumps were important cards which we would like to find out about and so Roman Key Card Blackwood was born.

This method adds the extra cards to the responses so we have 5 key cards in the pack plus the trump Queen in the responses which go

5c either 0/3 or 1/4

5d either 0/3 or 1/4

5h   2 without the trump queen.

5s   2 including the trump queen .

The first two responses can be played either way round according to preference for what it’s worth I prefer "1430" 5c 1/4 and 5d 0/3.

Whenever the responses to 4nt is 5c or 5d so the presence or absence of the trump queen is unknown then the next suit up which is not the trump suit asks for the trump queen and a return to the trump suit denies her whilst any other bids shows her and if it is a new suit also shows the king of the suit bid .

5nt following 4nt asks for kings and in the view of most it is better to show a specific king rather than the total number (always of course not counting the king of trumps). If you hold 2 or 3 kings don't mess around just bid seven since partner's 5nt bid promises that all the other key cards are held.

So let’s try an interesting example which cropped up recently in a holiday tournament

x

A

AKxxx

AKxxxx

a very good hand certainly but only a 1c opener since a strong opening bid could easily be pre-empted by their majors .

Anyway the bidding goes uncontested as follows

1c -1s  -2d -4d -4nt -5c ( 1 or 4 ) -5h -5s ?

so what information do we have here

Partner has 4 or more diamonds in a GF hand and has shown the SA and now since 5h asked about the trump queen (5d is to play right there) 5s promises that card and also showed the SK.

So all the key cards are held and the only possible loser may be in clubs so give partner for example

AKxxx

Jx

QJxx

xx

and 7d is excellent but change the hand opposite to

AKxx

Jx

Qxxx

xxx

And we may have a club loser.

So we have seen the responses to 4nt and 5nt and also the asking bid for the trump queen now the really subtle bit which is a bid of a new suit at the 5 or 6 level which is not the trump queen ask which says do you have either the Queen or a third round control ( a doubleton ) in the suit bid so here we bid 6c in response to which partner bids 7d with the first hand but signs off in 6d with the second hand since we may have a third round club loser.

I agree there are some somewhat complicated bits of bidding here but Roman Key Card Blackwood is a convention to add to your bidding arsenal if it is not already there.

**WEEK 22**

Defensive play is about having an ability to visualise the whole hand and the best line of defence and sometimes being very bold in executing that plan. The following is a favourite hand of mine featuring probably the greatest player in the Italian blue team still playing top level bridge at 90 Benito Garozzo.

The contract is 4s doubled and you hold:

x

Axxxx

Axxx

Axx

Dummy is

xx

xx

Q8

KT9xxxx

you have opened 1h in third seat and south has shown a strong hand with 6 or 7 spades and at least 4 diamonds and  your partner has doubled the final contract having raised you to two hearts.

Lead is a low heart to your ace and you return a trump .declarer wins and play a diamond to the Q your plan?

What do you know about the hand? If declarer has 6 spades he also holds 4/5 diamonds and since partner only bid 2h a minimum of 2 hearts so one thing we know for certain is he will not be able to use the clubs in dummy since he is short in the suit .We know we would like to play a second trump to kill the ruff in dummy but we cannot get partner in for this purpose so all looks hopeless .This is where the visualisation skill comes in Garozzo ducked the DQ and when declarer continued with the 8 he ducked a second time ! Since we know declarer has at least 4 diamonds this play can never cost and when the layout is as follows it is a big winner as declarer holds

AKxxxx

KJ

KJ9xx

void

on the second diamond declarer inserted the 9 losing to the ten and now partner could play a second trump ensuring the contract went two light instead of just one. The two ducks are brilliant plays.