**Week 28**

This week I thought I would give two hands from the recent London Congress Teams .

First a bidding problem which proved to be beyond Chris Dixon and myself

AKJxx

Ax

Qxxx

Qx

xxx

x

AKxx

AJTxx

An excellent slam with 6d the best contract and 6s the runner up spot since the former can cater for 4-1 spades the wrong side . We were playing Acol weak No trumps but with a twist in terms of the forcing sequences so the bidding went

1s -2c -2d

That was normal enough and in standard methods  I imagine most would now  bid 4s and it would be a close decision whether the spade hand proceeds .Of course he is unaware of the excellent diamond fit and so the slam would be missed a fair  proportion of the time . In our methods a jump to 3s was forcing as was a raise to 3d so both are better bids than my 4s .The method would show to advantage here provided I had made a more consultative effort .The South hand is worth more than its point count because it has a double fit ,good controls and good intermediate clubs plus a working singleton.

Then a hand where surprisingly we outbid strong opponents

K

KT9xx

Ax

JT98x

Axxxx

Ax

Jx

AKxx

An excellent 6c and we bid 1h -1s-2c-2d-3c -4c-4d ( key  cue bid ) 4h -5c -6c. We play 4th suit forcing as game forcing a method which I commend since it avoids all those ambiguous 2 level sequences where players are in doubt about their forcing nature . When I learnt of a 5th club opposite my hand was very big since the controls are so good and a 9 card fit plays so much better than only an 8 card. Partner ruffed the third round of hearts with the ace planning to ruff the 4th round with the king if required  ( he could afford this because of his intermediate clubs).

**Week 27**

A topic which is much debated by bridge players is whether to open 1nt with certain shape hands in particular those containing a 5 card major suit. Let us assume we are playing weak NT and we pick up

ATxxx

Qxx

Kx

KJx

Your choices are either to open 1s and over 2m to rebid 2s (since 2nt would show a strong No trump) or else to open a weak No trump. What are the pros and cons of each approach?

The risk for those who never open a weak NT with a 5 card major is missing a 5-3 spade fit which is either a superior game or part score to no trumps. The problem for those who prefer opening 1nt is the nature of the rebid; they balk at the idea of rebidding such a poor 5 card suit which does not describe the overall nature of the hand very well and they also cite the benefit of playing the 2s rebid as showing a 6 card spade suit which makes the development of the bidding easier. A middle of the road approach is to look at the quality of your suit and if it is good bid the major and if it is poor open 1nt.

How does the strong NT get on in this area of bidding?  .It is more common to open 1nt (15-17) holding a 5 card major for the reason that you may leave yourself no rebid otherwise

Kx

AJxxx

AJx

Kxx

if you open 1h playing strong NT and partner responds 1s you have no rebid since 2nt is 18/19 and 1nt 12/14 therefore open 1nt. There are methods on the market to assist in this area notably 5 card stayman and its advanced cousin 5 card puppet stayman. These bids ask opener for a 5 card major and so solve the issue on any game going hand but not on hands where responder is passing the opener.

Playing weak no trumps a wide range 1nt rebid solves the problem in one situation. Say the we are 2-5-3-3 weak no trump strength we can open 1h and provided partner responds 1s we can rebid 1nt showing 12-16 balanced. Partner will now know we have 5 hearts otherwise we would have opened 1nt.

The bottom line is neither approach will work all the time on the part score hands so returning  to our example hand

ATxxx

Qxx

Kx

KJx

if partner holds

Kxx

xx

AJxxx

Qxx

2s is far superior to 1nt making 9 tricks probably whilst 1nt might even go off if the defence can take 5 heart tricks.

But if partner holds

x

KTxx

QJxx

KJxx

The no trump contract is comfortable whilst 2s is terrible.

I have found playing both weak and strong no trumps that the 5 card major problem is greater playing weak NT for the simple reason it gets passed more often when it is the wrong contract.  I think the final arbiter on this point should be Andrew Robson whose view is it is better to show the character of your hand and so open 1nt with any 5-3-3-2 shape irrespective of the quality of the major suit.