**Week 32**

Two hands this week.

The first comes from the Curtis Cup last Sunday at the club which was a lovely event and won by Jane Hague & Mike Letts.

It was a bidding problem for the east/west pairs and I did not hear of any who reached the grand slam.

QTxxxx

KQxxxx

void

A

A

AJxx

AQJxxx

Jx

Quite a few pairs reached 6h including my opponents. The key to the hand was being able to identify that you did not hold a spade loser which is far from easy. I would propose

1d -1s -2h -3c -3d -3h (GF following 3c and interested in bigger things) -3s-4c-4d  ( control bids) now what to do ? I do not normally cue bid a void in partner's main suit but perhaps this is an exception. I still do not see an obvious way of bidding 7h with any certainty here though. I await the correspondence later this week.

Secondly a play problem from a recent match

xxx

KQxx

Qxx

KTx

AKJ

Axxx

KT

Q9xx

Partner and I bid 1nt (15-17) -3nt missing the heart fit but this was not a problem and stayman with the 3-4-3-3 north hand is dubious in any case.

The lead was a low diamond (5) to the jack and your king.

If hearts are 3-2 you have an easy 9 tricks by way of 4 of them, 2 spades, 2 diamonds and 1 club. The lead appears to be from a 5 card diamond suit. You play a club to the king and ace at trick 2 and a diamond comes back ducked and you are  fairly sure the suit breaks 5-3. When you test hearts LHO turns up with 4 along with the probable 5 card diamond suit.

You have 8 winners and require a further black trick with a choice of plays for it either finesse in spades or clubs with the known black suit length on your right. In such case it is best to play the top card in the longer of your suits in order to drop an honour and then finesse in the shorter (you have 7 clubs and 6 spades) so cash the CQ in case the knave drops cash one top spade and then finesse the jack of spades.

I think this line is good but unfortunately although the operation was a success the patient did not make it as LHO held

Qx

JT9x

Axxxx

xx

**Week 31**

First a hand from Thursday evening, which was difficult in the bidding.  I held

Ax

void

ATxxx

Q9xxxx

Partner opened a strong No Trump and I tried 3c which was a slam try type hand better you may say to transfer to clubs and then bid 3d to show both suits - indeed it would be better but we were not playing minor suit transfers. Partner bid 5c, which here should be less suitable than 4c, which is of course forcing. I gave the matter some consideration and partly because 3nt might be better at match points I raised to 6c (the controls are good) LHO found himself on lead holding both the CA and also the HA and he duly tried to cash the HA which was unfortunate dummy held

KQJx

KQx

Jx

KJTx

So now the slam was cold since the hearts provide two extra diamond discards . Should LHO find the winning lead ? I guess it depends how much you trust the 6c bidder.

Secondly a defensive problem. You hold

Qxx

KQx

QJ98x

Ax

The bidding has gone 1d from you, double on your left, pass from partner, 3c  from RHO, 3h from LHO and 3nt from RHO. You kick off with the DQ and dummy is

AKx

AT8xx

Txx

KJ

Declarer wins the DK (partner following with the D7) and leads a club? You go in with the CA (if declarer had a guess holding 7 low clubs without the CQ he will get it right by rising with the king in any case since you opened the bidding) and declarer unblocks the CK while  partner follows with the C2?

How to defend? Examine the evidence Declarer has DK and DA and partner has petered showing 2 diamonds so a continuation will cost a trick as the DT will win. Declarer also holds the CQ. How many clubs does declarer hold? Either 6 or 4 as partner showed an odd number and if the latter surely he would have played on a major not clubs so he holds a 6 card club suit and DA and DK.

There are 3 key things to count on a bridge hand

1 The High Cards

2 The Distribution

3 The Tricks

Here the last of these is critical. Count those for declarer 2 diamonds, 3 in the majors and 5 club tricks assuming he has 6 of them so 10 in total.

Does the answer now become clearer?  Imagine partner holds Txx in clubs. Win the CA with the club suit blocked and return the DJ knocking out the DA which is the entry to the club suit. Declarer holds

xxx

x

AKx

Q9xxxx

the DJ costs a diamond trick indeed but it kills the club suit so leaves declarer with 3 major suit tricks, 3 diamonds and 1 club so whilst it costs 1 trick it gains 3 tricks by killing the club suit. This play has a name with an historical significance it is called a Merrimack Coup; so named after an American battleship built in the 1850s in Boston which saw action in the US Civil War. The ship was scuttled and the bridge analogy is the play of the DJ "scuttles the long club suit ".