**Week 36**

This week I give you a couple of bidding problems from a recent county match.

The weak no trump is played by around 80% of the bridge playing population of these islands (there has been a movement towards strong in recent years and this is particularly prevalent in the upper echelons of the game). The big advantage of 12-14 is pre-emption and the big disadvantage is not suffering vast penalties but rather missing major suit fits. So you hold:

xxx

AQxx

x

KTxxx

partner opens a weak no trump so you pass and score up +90 rather than +620 in 4h since partner holds this unremarkable collection

Ax

Kxxx

KQx

Qxxx

Playing strong no trumps we bid 1c (1s) double (2s) 3h -p- 4h.

Partner had the information that we had a minimum of 8 card fits in both clubs and hearts and playing teams 4h was automatic and lost a trick in each of the side suits to score up game. Food for thought for all you weak no trumpers out there?

Then a slam bidding problem

AKTxxx

AQx

x

Kxx

You hear a weak no trump from partner and must decide the best bidding approach.

There are two possibilities respond 3s showing a 6 card spade support with interest in a slam (all hands with only 5 spades begin with a transfer) or transfer and then jump to 4d showing a slam going hand with a singleton diamond (one bids 3d natural and game forcing in the sequence 1nt -2h -2s-3d).

If you bid 3s partner will bid 4c (cue) and now say you bid 4h she will now bid 5d most probably and now?

A useful method I employ here is to ask myself how many critical cards are required for 6s to be good. We know the minor suit aces are both key and also the HK and SQ plus the CQ. So partner has shown the first two cards but beyond that we know nothing else about their hand so it appears our strong bidding has shown all of our values and we ought now to bid 5s and leave it to partner to decide our next move.

She held

QJx

T9x

AJTx

AJx

So do you wish to play in slam? I think the answer is no since you require the club finesse and also one of the heart honours onside (you held H8 in addition) so the slam is subpar. Here everything in the garden was rosy and slam was a fortunate make so as is often the case at bridge virtue has to be its own reward.

**Week 35**

This week a play problem which is quite old but rather clever from one of the few television series about bridge (Master Bridge 1983 an individual tournament featuring 8 internationals which was hosted by Nicola Gardener and Sami Kehela it is worth checking out on youtube although you will struggle to see the players at times through the plumes of smoke!)

You reach 3nt and receive a low spade lead and view the following layout

JTx

AJ9

JT98xx

x

AK

QTx

KQ

AKxxxx

The problem is the spade lead threatens to establish 3 winners for the defence there together with the DA and HK to defeat you. Is there a certain line?

You win the lead and try K and Q of diamonds but the defence ducks twice; now what? 99% of declarers now try the heart finesse it fails as does the contract. But if you simply wish to establish the diamonds consider the alternative line of playing the HQ to the ace in dummy and playing the DJ discarding the SA! The defence win but if they establish the spades dummy must gain the lead holding SJ and ST to enjoy the long diamonds and you have 9 winners. If they switch to clubs the J9 of hearts provide us with a certain entry to cash the diamonds so we score 9 tricks. Discarding the SA to create an entry to dummy is the certain line of play and the great Robert Sheehan a supreme technician found this line of play.

This was an interesting defensive problem also from the series

Axx

KT84

KJT9

Ax

this is your hand and you don't make any bids since the bidding goes 1nt -p-3nt and partner leads a low spade. Dummy is

xx

Ax

Qx

KQT9xxx

you win the SA at trick one and plan the defence ? You can place all the missing honours on the bidding as declarer is marked with them all with the possible exception of the SJ. You know the clubs will provide enough winners for the contract so priority is to kill the suit and more particularly the entry to those clubs so switch to the  HK to knock out the ace and then duck the first club and win the second round of the suit before exiting with a spade. Declarer has

KQx

QJ63

Axxx

Jx

but there is another twist to the hand since if declarer cashes his spades and top hearts he can play the last heart forcing you to win and lead a diamond away from the king giving him an entry to the clubs. The declarer needs to keep his lowest heart here the 3 in order to achieve this position and his failure to appreciate this difficult point enabled south to unblock the 10 and 8 so when the H6 was led he followed with the 4 avoiding the endplay .A lovely hand and both Jeremy Flint & Irving Rose found this unblocking defence in hearts and entry destroying HK switch.