**Week 47**

Two areas of bidding which I wished to discuss this week.

First when to raise partner's 1M opening holding 3 card support?

Say you hold

Axx
Xx
Kxxxx
Xxx

or

Kxx
Xxxx
Axxx
Xx

And partner opens 1s

Do you respond 1nt or 2s?

A little theory about the opening first .Let us assume we play weak no trump and 4 card majors. Playing this method have you discussed your opening bid style with the following hands?

AQxx
Jxx
KQxx
Ax

Or

KQxx
Qxx
Ax
AJxx

If you always open 1m with the above hands and indeed all strong no trump strength hands with 4 cards in a major and also 4in a minor then an opening bid of 1s will be 5 cards or more almost all the time ( the only exception being 4 3 3 3 shape with 15 -19 points ).The big advantage of this opening bid approach it is makes the raise to 2s a no brain decision since it will almost always be an 8 card or bigger fit and so 2s is the right choice ( note one would not raise to 3s with 3 card support and an invitational hand since there is a problem with possible misevaluation if the hand is a slam deal since there is a massive difference between the way 8 and 9 card trump fits play in terms of flexibility and control in the play ).

A word or two about the 2 level overcall ( a favourite bug bear  of mine ).One sees much misuse of this overcall at all levels of play.

Say you pick up hands such as

Kx
AJxxx
Qxx
Qxx

Or

Kxx
KJxxx
Qxx
Qx

Kxx
Qx
AJxxx
Kxx

If you hear a 1s opener to your right and you consider your options? All of the above hands would be fine for a one level overcall but how about bidding at the two level?

All are unsound two level overcalls since you hold only a 5 card rather than a 6 card suit with minimum strength and balanced distribution .If you fail to find a fit the overcall has the potential to go for a significant penalty on only a part score deal. On the first example if you forced me to bid a take out double holding a doubleton spade is better than 2h but all the above hands are best passed.

A 2 level overcall should normally be a 6 card suit in a hand of opening bid strength conservative you may say but the sound way to play.

**Week 46**

This week two bidding problems which proved surprisingly difficult. The aim on both is to avoid bidding a slam.

Firstly

Jxxxx
AK
Jx
KQJx

AKQxxx
Jx
Axxx
X

A common start was 1s 2nt showing a game forcing spade raise and the key point of the hand is for south is to discover that north has a club suit missing the ace and not a singleton diamond so partnerships with very good agreements about the rebids will do well if they can pinpoint these features .When the hand cropped up all 8 tables reached the slam down one.

Then secondly, a hand from a recent match.

AJx
AKQ
X
KJxxxx

KQx
Jxx
KQJxxx
Q

32 points missing the minor suit aces. A common sequence was as follows

1c - 1d and now the choice of rebid was between 2nt and 3c and the latter works better since following the former south expects at least a doubleton diamond and so like their hand more .Where  2nt was selected the bidding continued 4d - 4h 4s the latter two bids showing controls and now it proved awkward to stop since even if you use Blackwood and discover the 2 missing aces you now must play in 5nt the last making spot and the only way this is possible is if you play the very subtle 5s bid as a transfer to 5nt.This hand also had several casualties including my partner and I.

**Week 45**

**This week an interesting play problem which cropped up at one of my afternoon sessions.

You reach 6s on the following lay out

AKJ
Jxx
K
AQJxxx

Q9xxxx
Ax
Axxxx
Void

It is an excellent Slam against which the defence leads a low heart which goes small, ten, ace.

There are two possible lines of play pitch the heart loser on CA and play to ruff two diamonds in dummy potentially making all 13 tricks if the suit breaks 4 -3 .

The alternative is to test trumps and then play to establish clubs.

I think it is correct to play a trump at trick 2 and you discover that rho is void in spades .This means that the line of ruffing two diamonds is a non-starter as two trumps will be promoted for the T8xx on your left .You must therefore set up clubs so cash CA and ruff a club in hand returning to dummy with a second trump and now you must take the ruffing club finesse leading the Q and running it if not covered .The reason for this play is if you ruff 3 clubs in hand you will shorten your trumps to a fewer number than lho and the contract will fail . By taking one ruff and then the ruffing club finesse you establish the club suit with only two rather than 3 ruffs when the suit breaks 4-3 and still have the critical two entries to return to dummy leaving one trump on your left and so can run the clubs with the DK as the second entry.

A deceptively awkward hand I think.**