**Week 66**

There are two main scoring methods in bridge.

Matchpoint Pairs where you score 2 points for each pair you outscore irrespective of whether the difference is 10 points or 1000. Therefore overtricks take on great importance as does playing in no trumps and major suit contracts rather than safer minor suits. It is also necessary to double the opposition in certain situations where you set the contract by only 1 trick in order to protect your score where for example they bid 3s over your 3h and you turn +100 into +200 when you would score +140 playing in 3h.

Imp scoring used in Teams Events and for Butler Pairs. Here it is the size of the difference which is crucial so overtricks and undoubled undertricks are not important but the game bonus is much sought after so one bids game much more aggressively than in match point pairs and plays in safe contracts and do not make tight doubles. It is a more conservative in some areas and more aggressive in the game area.

One aspect of teams scoring which is different to pairs is the principle of taking out insurance in close situations where both sides have a good fit.

I will give an example from my Monday afternoon session.

xxx

AJx

KQxx

JTx

JT9xxx

void

Axxxx

KQ

It is love all and you hold this pair of hands. It is teams type scoring. The bidding goes

2h -p-4h by the opposition to the hand which is 6-0-5-2 shape. 2h is weak.

Is 4s too dangerous or not?

The other hands are

Ax

Qxxx

x

Axxxxx

KQ

KT9xxx

Jxx

xx

4h is cold if declarer gets the trumps right since the club suit can be established.

How does 4s play? It has 3 top losers (2 trumps and CA) and if the defence find their diamond ruff it goes 1 off if not it makes.

So the motto here playing teams scoring is you must bid 4s since there are two situations where you will be right.

1 If 4h is cold and 4s is 1 or 2 light when it will be a good save.

2 If 4s is also makeable.

You are only wrong when both contracts fail and if both are each only 1 off then the "insurance action” at this form of scoring is to bid 4s over 4h  since it represents only a very small loss at imps.

Playing pairs with match point scoring one would be prepared to back ones judgement and defend 4h some of the time if you thought 1 off for each contract was probable because small differences matter at this form of scoring.

In many respects teams is an easier game because the aims are much clearer whereas match points pairs requires a deeper assessment of the hand in terms of the probable outcome across the room as a whole.

**Week 65**

This week I thought I would discuss some of the principles regarding the choice of opening lead.

The opening lead is the most important card played on many bridge hands and one must consider the bidding carefully before making your lead .It is not therefore entirely surprising that in high level bridge pairs have sought ways of providing illegal information to partner about this most important card.

A general point which players sometimes forget is that if one is defending a low level contract such as two of a suit or 1nt you will nearly always get a second or third chance to find the optimum defence so an attacking lead is unnecessary and passivity is fine (by passive I mean leading from 3 or 4 small or maybe leading a doubleton against a low level suit contract and by active we mean leading from a holding including an honour or honours). On the other hand if defending a game or slam contracts it is often imperative that we lead the correct suit in order to establish a winner or winners before they are discarded elsewhere.

Defending against a suit contract there are broadly five strategies which are up for consideration.

1 Try to establish a trick or tricks in a side suit.

2 Try for a ruff by leading a shortage.

3 Lead trumps in order to prevent ruffs to declarer. There are 3 common situations where this is correct :- if we think declarer may be able to take ruffs in the short trump hand say if playing in a 5/3 fit, if our side has the balance of power and we have doubled the opposition, where a cross ruff is threatened.

4 Play a forcing game. This is where we hold 4 goodish trumps and opponents are in say a 5/3 fit. Rather than lead from shortage we lead from length to force the long trump hand to ruff with the resultant loss of control which such a defence may produce.

5 None of the above; which is typically a passive lead to get the ball into play and then decide what to do thereafter.

A careful listening to the bidding will often provide the answer.

Against no trump contracts on the overwhelming number of hands we lead from our length in order to set up winners but there is a different style which is often right when defending against 1nt.

I will give an example from a recent event

QJx

AJxx

Qxx

JTx

1nt all pass. Many simply led a low heart and as it happened this proved to be dreadful. The alternatives are SQ or CJ. To my mind both are better and I will try to explain why.

In leading from length we seek to establish a number of winners which is why a 5 card or longer suit should nearly always be led. 4 card suits by definition generate fewer winners and in defending against a low level NT contract where we are bound to get a second chance we do not need to stake everything on a heart lead therefore leading from the spade or club holding is perfectly reasonable. Even a lead from three small is often better than leading from a broken four card suit.

The bidding is the key so take for example 3nt contracts. If the opposition have not looked for a fit in a major we much prefer to lead one over a minor suit but if the bidding has gone 1nt 2c 2s 3nt a major is unattractive since spades are on the right and hearts on the left.