**Week 70**

I thought I would ask a question this week "To respond or not to respond?” It has been considered that 6 points represents the standard yardstick for responding to an opening bid from partner and so with less than that we pass.

Partner opens 1h and we hold the following hands

xx

xx

xx

KJxxxxx

KQxx

xxx

xx

xxxx

x

x

Kxxxxx

JTxxx

xx

Axx

xxxxx

xxx

JTxxx

JTxxx

xx

x

xxx

x

QJxxx

Qxx

KJxxx

xx

xxxx

xx

 On which of these would you pass and which would you respond?

 Let’s consider the reasons for bidding and also passing.

 The danger is partner holds a good hand and we consequently get too high.

 The advantages are threefold

 1 We reach a superior part score

 2 We reach a good game contract

 3 We inconvenience the opposition when it is their hand preventing them from reaching their best contract.

 By my calculation that is 3-1 in favour of bidding in the majority of situations when holding hands  with shape, a fit for partner or the other major.

They may be only a random selection but responding works well on 6 out of 7 of the above hands and only the penultimate hand would result in you getting too high when pass works better.

1 We reach a making 3c

2 We reach a cold 4s.

3 We inconvenience the opposition by bidding 1nt .

4 We reach 4h

5 We pre-empt their fit in the minors by raising to 4h.

 7 we reach a spade contract.

 So when should you bid on less than 6 points?

A few guidelines

1 Holding a fit for partner bidding is best.

2 look at your major suit holdings bidding is better with majors rather than minors.

3 Bid with a long suit you can bid following a 1nt response by you and a second suit from partner or rebid of his first suit.

4 With a 6 card major bidding works well and quite often with a 5 carder .

5 Bidding 1nt can improve the contract and also make it more difficult for the opposition to find their fit.

My regular partner and I ALWAYS respond to a one bid holding an ace.

The hands I like least are hands without the majors and balanced hands when pass is still generally best.

So responding lighter is winning bridge unless you find yourself playing against me when I do prefer quiet opposition who like to play conservatively!

**Week 69**

In the bidding the ability to realise a hand has turned to dust will cause you to avoid some serious penalties.

You hold

KQ

KJxx

Ax

AQxxx

At game all playing teams you open 1c and hear lho bid 1h pass 2d ?

Your nice hand has turned to dust since the heart values are now badly placed and you have  limited prospects of a spade fit and only a moderate club suit.

If you take a second bid you will lose a sizeable penalty on a part score hand .Pass here is clear cut.

Playing teams in particular it is dangerous to bid in situations where the potential gain is a part score whereas the down side is losing a significant penalty .If the reward is low and the risk is high it  is a situation when going quietly playing teams is the most prudent action.

I recollect the biggest hand upon which I did not bid. It is Teams scoring and the opposition are vulnerable and you are not and you hear 1s to your right and you hold

AKJTx

K

AQxx

AQx

Vulnerability is always a factor and here with them vulnerable and you not vulnerable you can defend 1s and anticipate that it will go around 3 off for 300 to your side against at most a not vulnerable game worth 400 so not much difference. It is true if partner holds a long minor you may be able to make a slam but the odds favour them holding hearts rather than a minor.

Week 68

First we have a play problem courtesy of Andrew Robson which involves counting and inference. 3nt is the contract on the lead of the two of clubs

xxx
AQTx
Kxx
Axx

Txx
Kxx
AQx
Kxxx

You can count 8 top tricks and so we need a fourth heart trick for our contract. Based on the club lead we reason that playing the heart suit from the top offers the best chance since it is more likely that rho holds length in the suit since he only holds two clubs. Can you see a small extra chance?

It costs us nothing to cash two top diamonds and lo and behold lho discards on the second of these.The whole hand has now become an open book since lho led his fourth highest club and holds a singleton diamond so must be 4 4 1 4 shape since otherwise they would have led their five card suit so with this information to hand we cash two to hearts and finesse the heart ten for the contract.

Next a spade game contract which requires good timing to make.

Axx
Xxx
Xxxx
Axx

Kxxxx
AKxx
AK
Xx

The lead is CK. A count of winners and losers reveals a club loser one trump if the suit breaks 3 -2 and one heart with the danger of a second heart loser if the suit is not 3-3.

We should like to be able to ruff our fourth heart to cater for the suit being 4-2 but how to arrange that?

At the table declarer cashed two top trumps and nodded when they broke 3-2 and then played Ace, King and a third heart but the defence won cashed SQ and still had a long heart to defeat the contract with the suit not dividing evenly. Playing three rounds of hearts before drawing trumps would also fail as West can win and play a fourth heart promoting a second trick for partner.

It is good technique to duck the opening lead since we may then be able to keep the danger hand off lead. The key play here is not easy to see but try the effect of ducking the first round of hearts. The defence will doubtless cash their club and play another round we ruff and can now play two high trumps and then turn to hearts playing ace king and ruffing the fourth round in dummy with the master trump still at large as our only other loser. The difference with this line is the defence are unable to draw a third round of trumps or promote a trump trick.

**Week 67**

Many Bridge publications have bidding competitions where you are provided with a single hand and given a bidding sequence and you must then choose the best bid.

I confess at one time I loved these problems and think it provides one with a stronger judgment in the bidding and that crucial ability to visualise the whole hand.

Try your hand at the following problem

x
Txxx
Jxxx
AKJx

The bidding goes three passes to partner who opens  1d you respond 1h lets say and now partner bids 1s? As an aside you might decide to support diamonds immediately but you would maybe only do that on a dead minimum with a poor four card major.

Your next bid is of course a choice between bidding 2d and 3d, to bid no trumps rather than showing our support for partner would be a bad mistake .The hand is far from minimum so the latter is ok but say you bid 2d partner continues with 2nt now what?

This is the point where you must do some serious visualisation of the hand .First what shape is partner? In my usual style they will hold five diamonds and four spades together with a club guard and since Qxx in clubs is very likely here because of our own club holding that leaves a singleton heart or at most two cards in the suit.

Your hand on a scale of one to ten where one is dreadful and ten superb is worth eleven! So you must show some serious life and also immediately reject no trumps as a place to play .Our previous bid of two diamonds was an underbid and we know diamonds is the correct contract as partner is showing around sixteen to eighteen points here so a bid of Five diamonds is in order the only worry being we might miss slam.

Partner held

AKJx
X
AKxxx
Qxx

So six diamonds was reasonable and would you believe that many pairs played in three no trumps. If you can picture the shape opposite which is not difficult here then the final contract becomes clear.