

Intimacy with a Traveler: A Matchpoint Part Score Battle

A detailed analysis of a hand from the Mentoring Team-of-Two-Pairs Game on 12/30/2011

Keith Thompson, director of the Minnesota Bridge Association's bi-weekly BAM game at the Officer's Club, sent me a note about a top board they received in the 499er section from the Minneapolis Grand Slam Club's mentoring Team-of-Two-Pairs party at the TCBC on December 30.

Mike: the North hand on Board 20 has several features which make a follower of disciplined preempts pass. A four card outside major, and a singleton besides, make this a potentially powerful supporting hand for partner. At our table, West passed, responded INT to East's opening club bid, and ended up in 2 NT with North on lead. A spade to partners' King, a spade back, and an upside-down signal for a lead to Souths' Diamond Ace gave us a tie for a top. I have lost a knockout semifinal with a new partner because of different, and undiscussed, styles of preemption. The C.C.Wei, Ron Andersen book Profits From Preempts sent me on the road to disciplined preempts. Do you think that the results from the mentoring game merit a discussion of this topic?

Thanks.

Keith Thompson

Board 20 ♠ A Q 10 8 6 3
 West Deals ♥ 8 5 4 3
 Both Vul ♦ 6
 ♣ Q J

♠ J 4 ♠ 7
 ♥ A K 6 ♥ Q 10 9 2
 ♦ Q J 3 2 ♦ K 8 5
 ♣ 9 8 6 4 ♣ A K 7 5 2

♠ K 9 5 2
 ♥ J 7
 ♦ A 10 9 7 4
 ♣ 10 3

Contract	Contract Scores		Matchpoints	Pai
	N-SE-W	N-S		
3 ♠ x N	730	6.50	0.50	A3
3 ♠ x N	730	6.50	0.50	A6
3 ♠ N	140	5.00	2.00	A9
4 ♣ E	100	4.00	3.00	A2
4 ♣ W	130	2.50	4.50	A4
4 ♣ E	130	2.50	4.50	A5
4 ♠ x N	200	0.50	6.50	A1
4 ♠ x N	200	0.50	6.50	A7
2 NT W	200	6.50	0.50	B2
2 NT W	200	6.50	0.50	B3
3 ♠ N	140	4.00	3.00	B4
2 ♠ N	140	4.00	3.00	B6
3 ♠ S	140	4.00	3.00	B7
2 NT W	100	2.00	5.00	B1
3 ♣ W	150	0.50	6.50	B5
3 ♣ E	150	0.50	6.50	B9

Bidding Considerations

In the A Section **all** contracts were contested at the **3 & 4 level**. Only 1 spade contract was not doubled

In the B Section **no** contracts were contested at the **4 level** and no contracts were doubled.

Those familiar with the 'Law of Total Tricks' count 10 NS trumps (♠) and 9 EW trumps (♣) for a total of 19 tricks.

In fact NS can take 9 and EW can take 10 (barring a double dummy defense) = 19.

The Takeaway

Experienced matchpoint players fight for par scores, and fight for plus scores or a minus score smaller than an opponent's plus scores for a partial. -200 is 'the kiss of death'.

<http://clubresults.acbl.org/Results/101691/2011/12/111230E.HTM>

Preempts

I believe the North hand below to be a classic weak 2 in spades except for the side 4 card heart suit. 2♠ would be automatic if the side suit was a minor and would still be the popular bid by most experienced players. It has a losing trick count of 7 including 3 of the top 5 spades. Another way to look at the heart picture: if you have 4 and there are 9 outstanding split among the other 3 hands, how often will it be your partner with 4 or more? Not that likely.

What you lose by missing an occasional heart fit is more than offset by the preemptive value of making your opponents start exchanging information at a high level. Preempting has become more aggressive since the book was written in the 1970s and very disciplined preempting styles are not the norm any more. What is important is that you and your partner are on the same page, whatever page, wild or disciplined as you choose.

I think what merits discussion has less to do with the preempting style of a partnership and more to do with understanding matchpoint tactics and how advancing players can profit from studying the travelers of hands that are part score battles. I

would say that, indeed, there are Profits from Preempts but only if NS recognize their limitations and don't push to 4♠. It's not only losing trick count (7 losers in each NS hand, but also cover cards (As&Ks) that can sink contracts).

W N E S

P - P - 1♣ - P

1♦ 2♠ *- X - 3♠

4♣ - all pass.

More Bidding Considerations: Competing in the absence of a North weak 2♠

Even if a disciplined(?) N passes in 2nd chair and the auction begins as described, N can preempt 2♠ after W bids 1♦. If your partner couldn't overcall 1♥ then you no longer need worry about missing a heart fit. East has a 6 loser hand with support for all side suits. Even though the hand has but 12hcp it would make a fabulous dummy if partner has 4 hearts or 5 diamonds. Neither will East mind declaring 3♣ if W cannot bid a red suit at the 3 level, so a double of 2♠ looks right.

I would suggest that the 3 Wests who bid NT on this hand need a better grasp of bidding techniques. Responding 1N with 11hcp and Jx of spades has a certain preemptive value over a 1♣ opener, but at a significant cost, including preempting partner who might have 14hcp and think you had 6-10hcp. Partner didn't open 1♠. Unless partner has a hand with 10 or 11 black cards the most number you can have is 6. If NT is to be played it would be best to have it played by E as the W hand has no tenaces. The primary goal of an auction is to assess a partnerships assets to determine the right strain and right level. What is your **TARGET** in the auction? With 11hcp and 8 minor suit cards, if there is a game, then 3N is probably best and E should be declaring.

Note that none of the pairs in the A section played NT. Not every balanced hand is a notrump call. Only in the 499er section do you see this inferior strain. Even should West bid 1N, a thoughtful E would know that there are 9 spades in the opponents' hands, and that an 8 or 9 card minor suit fit is 100%, maybe even two minor suit fits. How, in fact, did your opponents climb to the 2 level in NT? East has a 12hcp hand and no reason to raise NT. And if E did take 1N back to 2♣ why did W not honor the retreat?

As a matter of practicality the realistic par on the board is +130 EW. The absolute par result is NS +140 as NS can be +200 in 4♣X even though the defense is unlikely unless South has a conventional bid to ask North to show a singleton. Profits from Preempts, Vol. 3 in the Bidding Precisely series, recommends two game tries over weak 2 bids: 2N to ask for shortness and 3C for a feature and jump shifts as suit control asking bids.

Play Considerations

Only one pair got 4 tricks to beat the contract. It takes a diamond A, diamond ruff, underlead of ♠A, and a second diamond ruff to obtain 4 defensive tricks, very tough defense to find... leading an unsupported Ace.... nearly impossible. 3S is unbeatable losing 2 clubs and 2 hearts.

Also note in the B section that 2 pairs in clubs made 5. North has to shift to the singleton diamond at trick 2. Continuing spades loses a ruff. Once partner has raised spades you do not know if he has 3 or 4 card support. Holding a singleton diamond, you can score a trump trick with your ♣QJ if partner has either minor suit A. There is no trick source in the dummy to pitch a second spade loser unless partner has no minor suit cards in which case your opponents have missed a club game. Visualizing and counting high card points in the unseen hands is necessity to advance in bridge.

Learning by osmosis vs. learning by study

The more you play the more experience you gather and the more you recognize recurring situations. **But how many beginning and advancing players use the travelers that are online to study their results?** You have the opportunity to gain, not just from your own results, but that of every time a hand is played. From this mentoring game you see that even though EW have the preponderance of hcp power, 23 vs 17 it is NS that can make 9 tricks... and why? because dummy's 4 card spade support lets you ruff 2 of your 4 hearts. Knowing your partner is likely to be short after your 2S preempt is doubled (usually promising heart length on your left) is actually a plus.

The top EW scores were for 4SX. 10 trumps but 9 tricks and -200. The fact that both sides are vulnerable makes matchpoint part score auctions pretty exciting at times, and you see that the more experienced A section had higher level competition and 4 of 8 contracts were doubled.

These kind of hands can help inform newer & advancing players on many levels. Thanks for your comment, Keith, which has merited a lot of discussion! Studying travelers can really improve your game. I hope to see more mentoring games, and further opportunities for newer players to take advantage of the experience of those who have been playing longer.

The Minneapolis Grand Slam Club will be sponsoring a second Team-of-Two-Pairs mentoring game at the TCBC on March 23. 499er pairs will play the same hands from the same direction in their own section as their teammates in the 'A' section. The matchpoints from each section are added to determine the overall winning team.

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