

Bridge at the Village Lesson Hand—July 2, 2018

Brian Potter, Club Manager and Club Director

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On this week's lesson deal—board sixteen—North–South venture into the slam zone—grand slam zone if you put much stock in the double dummy analysis. As is often the case with slam hands, the weaker hand must make the first slam move.

Board: 16 Dealer: W Vul: EW	♠J3 ♥A9632 ♦AK ♣AKQ9	♠95 ♥KQJ4 ♦QJ943 ♣82	Possible Auction West North East South Pass 1♥ (1) Pass 1♠ Pass 2♣ (2) Pass 2♠ (3) Pass 4♠ (4) Pass 5♠ (5) Pass ;? (6) . . .																																																																																	
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Bidding Notes—Board 16

- (1) The North hand fringes on the minimum requirements for a 2♣ opening. North wisely chose 1♥ because the hand is playable in hearts, clubs, and notrump. Sorting out denomination *and* level after an auction beginning “2♣–(Pass)–1♦–(Pass); 2♥” might present too many challenges.
- (2) North has high card values for a strong jump shift. Many partnerships agree that a jump shift shows *both* values *and* a *known contract denomination*. Thus, this hand—playable in spades, hearts, clubs, and notrump—does not qualify for a jump shift. North must rebid quietly hoping that South will rebid—likely unless South has a weak, balanced misfit resembling ♠Q10xx ♥Qx ♦Jxxx ♣Jxx.
- (3) South has six spades in a minimum range (5+–9+ points) hand. With a five-card suit, South should usually rebid in notrump (indicating two-card or longer support for each of North's suits *and* forward going values) or take a (nonconstructive) preference to one of North's two suits—perhaps, a false preference to 2♥ with a doubleton heart.
- (4) North makes a non-forcing limit bid showing about 19–22 points with two or three spade cards. This rebid is *not a sign-off!* With 7–9 HCP (or fewer than ten losers), South should usually make one mild slam try.
- (5) Knowing that some mess like ♠QJxxxx ♥Qx ♦Qxx ♣Jx (note the rounded suit fillers and the hint of a third round diamond stopper) suffices for game, consider the relative power of the South hand. It's a monster that produces five–six offensive winners opposite most openers with any two or three spades. 5♠ suggests bidding a spade slam if six fine spades will suffice for the twelfth trick.
- (6) What is North to do? If South's spades are AKQxxx (or longer)—the likely minimum for a slam try with a minimum range hand—there are twelve (or more) top tricks against any lie of the spades other than the two 5–0 breaks. If South is missing the ♠Q, eleven tricks are the likely limit. With spades good

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enough to make 6♠, 6NT also makes—except when South's spades are off the ♠A *and* the defense attacks hearts on the opening lead. What about the ♥K or ♣J? Could South hold one of them? What might approach bids like 5NT or 6♦ mean? Should they indicate a grand slam try or might they be attempts to find the correct small slam? Pass (cowardly as South can hardly have less than ♠AKQxxx), 6♠, 6NT, 7♠, and 7NT are all plausible bids.

Opening Lead Notes—Board 16

- » Assuming a spade contract, West must find a lead. On this auction, West is most unlikely to attack one of North's suits. That leaves a trump or a thrust in the unbid diamond suit where North must have a control. Both choices, attacking in diamonds or reducing any ruffing potential in North are reasonable.
- » Double dummy, the best lead is a heart. Knocking out the heart ace forces South to put the slam at risk to take the club finesse for the overtrick.
- » Against a notrump contract, East should have no trouble finding a top heart lead.

Play Notes—Board 16

- » North–South have twelve top tricks. A successful finesse for the ♣J will yield all the tricks.
- » If North declares a notrump contract—trying for a top board on the extra ten points at matchpoints—East should find the damaging heart lead. Against the threat of losing the ♣J and two hearts, North may settle for twelve tricks and a +990 score.

Thoughts on Board 16

- » With the rounded suit stoppers split between East (holding ♥KQJ) and West (holding ♥107 ♣Jxxx) there is no squeeze for a thirteenth trick. Declarer must choose between cashing out for twelve tricks and risking the contract to take the club finesse for all the tricks. At IMP or total points scoring, the choice is easy: cash out for +980 or +990.
- » Under matchpoint scoring, the choice is far more complex:
 - Declarer believes that most opponents will stop in game: Take the assured twelve tricks (and the 500 point slam bonus) for an above average matchpoint score.
 - Declarer believes that most opponents will bid 6♠ or 6NT:
 - Some declarers will take the finesse.
 - If the finesse works, they make the overtrick, and score +1010 or +1020 to beat all the pairs who refuse the finesse. Then +980 and +990 will be below average scores when many declarers finesse successfully.
 - Some declarers will refuse the finesse.
 - If the finesse fails, they make +980 and +990 to tie for top to above average. Declarers who took the finesse will tie for bottom (or average minus).