

An interesting hand?

This month's hand is taken from an Eve Harrison Salver pairs event. As North and dealer at love all you hold:

S 5
H Q9654
D 63
C Q6543

You pass, East passes and your partner opens 1H. West overcalls 1S and you must decide how far to support partner. At my table and with only 4 points, North decided to go quietly by raising to 2H. East raised to 2S, South to 3H and West to 3S. With his good shape, North now decided to push further to 4H which was passed round to West who also pushed to 4S. This was passed to South who had good reason to feel somewhat aggrieved and saw no alternative but to double. As you can see from the full hand below, after an opening lead of H5, South cashed his two AKs and because of the club blockage only made DK thereafter, scoring +300 for NS. This was a poor result compared to (the majority of) other NS pairs who had been allowed to play in 4H making 10 tricks for +420. Bidding on to 5H would have been even worse, so was this just bad luck because, at this table, EW were somewhat bolder?

	North	
	S 5	
	H Q9654	
	D 63	
	C Q6543	
West		East
S AKQ873		S J64
H J7		H 32
D 42		D AQJ97
C 987		C J102
	South	
	S 1092	
	H AK108	
	D K1085	
	C AK	

Let's go back to the bidding. The key point came on the first round when North decided to raise only to 2H. Whilst this is consistent with the point count, including allowances for the singleton and doubleton, it does nothing to deter EW. Many readers will be familiar with the 'law of total tricks' which in essence says that in a competitive situation you should support partner at least to the level indicated by the total number of trumps. In this case, North, knowing South had at least four hearts, should have raised to at least 3H. Personally, I would go further in this case and given the additional shape provided by the second five card suit, I would have raised to 4H. I suspect that most of the other Norths who were allowed to play in 4H did just that because it then becomes much more difficult for East (or West) to see the balance of advantage in bidding on to 4S. 4H is much more likely to be the final contract. As you can see the favourable position of DA makes this an easy contract despite the combined point count of only 21. In contrast to last month's hand, where it was sensible to go quietly in order to find the best final contract, in a competitive situation, particularly where your suit is lower ranked than the opposition, invariably it will pay you to support as far as you dare at the outset.

By way of a postscript, have you noticed how the original South might have snatched victory from the jaws of defeat? Had South cashed only HA before switching to CAK, he could have put his partner in with HQ to cash CQ and put the contract three down for +500 and an outright top! It looks reasonable to cash CAK after only one heart, particularly since the second heart may not stand up, but be honest, would you then have found the underlead of HK after North had petered in clubs?!

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