

A dozen red ones ...

In lieu of roses for Valentine's Day, let me offer you twelve red hearts ... or at least three contracts of 4H. These hands are from the Double Bay IMP Pairs, which was won in convincing fashion by Anne Lamport and Tony Ong. However, even they didn't manage to bid 4H on this first hand.

Board 12	A9432				
Dlr: W	T932				
Vul: N-S	98				
	Q7				
	K876			QJ5	
				Q64	
	AK3			QJ2	
	JT9852			K643	
	6 T			N: 2 5 2NT	
11	11 AKJ875			S: 2 5 2NT	
	T7654			E: 5 2	
12	A			W: 5 1	

Would you reach 4H after a 1C opening by West? Regardless of whether North overcalls, if East bids 2NT, it could be difficult. After 3H by South, not much is likely to happen, although if West competes, s/he may regret it. Competition was conspicuously absent at our table, because partner was allowed to play in 3C, making 11 tricks for the only plus score in the EW column. Of 11 tables, only 3 NS pairs played in game in hearts, two of them in 5H doubled, which made. One of those pairs was Marlene Watts and Michael Prescott, who won the first session.

Hands with a 5-card minor and one 4-card major, but lacking tolerance for the other, have a problem in a competitive auction, especially if the major suit is poor. On this next hand, after North opens 1C, East inevitably overcalls 1D and South passes. Assuming that West finds the cue raise to 2C and North passes (which is what happened at our table) how do you feel about rebidding that apology for a heart suit? Somewhat doubtfully, I did show it, and partner raised directly to 4H (although if he had bid an invitational 3H, I would have converted to 4H anyway). This turned out to be bullet-proof even with trumps breaking 4-1, but only 4 pairs reached the contract.

Board 1	KQ74				
Dlr: N	A				
Vul: Nil	QJ2				
	K9642				
	A53			J2	
	KQJ3			T952	
	986			AKT74	
	T53			A8	
	15 T986			N: 2 2	
10	12 8764			S: 2 2	
	53			E: 3 4 2NT	
3	QJ7			W: 3 4 2NT	

Now to a play problem. After East opens 1S, passed to North who doubles, I think South should bid 3H. Partner raised this to 4H and even though the spade lead was friendly, I didn't feel that good when dummy came down. Trumps broke 3-2 but there were apparently 4 possible losers *viz.* a spade, a diamond and potentially two clubs.

Board 2 ♠62
 Dlr: E ♥KT85
 Vul: N-S ♦A543
 ♣AJ8

♠875 ♥73 ♦JT97 ♣KQ52		♠AQJT9 ♥642 ♦KQ2 ♣T6
12 ♠K43 6 12 ♥AQJ9 ♦86 10 ♣9743	N: 2♣1♦4♥2NT S: 2♣1♦4♥2NT E: 1♠ W: 1♠	

One of the lessons of Mike Lawrence's classic book "How to Read Your Opponent's Cards" is that if making your contract needs a particular lie of the cards, assume that it is present and then play accordingly. This makes really good sense if there is only one possible lie that will work. However, with the 8 and 9 of clubs between the two hands, I had options -- the contract will make if West has both the king and queen of clubs, or if West has either honour and the 10. When I led a club towards dummy, West played low smoothly. So of course I took the wrong option, playing the club 8 and going down. In fact two pairs in 3H did make 10 tricks, but the two in 4H both went one off. I'm still wondering if there was any way I could have correctly figured out what to do ...