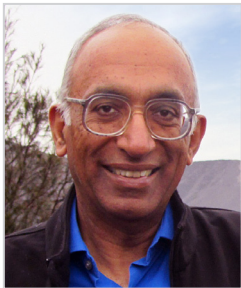


When the bidding doesn't quite go to plan...

After you've stopped panicking, concentrate on making your contract. With a bit of optimism and careful play, these "crazy" moments can have a happy ending.

by RAKESH KUMAR



Rakesh Kumar describes himself as an enthusiastic non-expert who makes enough errors to have plenty of material for bridge columns.

I'm sure you've experienced some of those "How did we end up in this crazy contract?" moments – of course it was your partner's doing, but here you are as declarer! This is the story of a few such hands

The first exhibit is a distinctly weird 6D contract, from a teams event at Kings & Queens:

West – East

♠ KQT52	♠ AJ96
♥ 4	♥ AQT3
♦ AJ72	♦ Q986
♣ A52	♣ K

W	N	E	S
	3C	X	P
4C	P	4D	P
6D		o o 6D?	

North opened 3C and East doubled. West responded 4C, apparently intended as a first step on the way to showing extra strength. However, East interpreted this as showing equal length, so responded 4D, trying to say "You pick a suit, partner". West now interpreted this as a strong hand with a long diamond suit and bid 6D!

When something like this happens, apart from cursing partner under your breath, you have to focus on making your contract. On South's lead of a club, East won the king. In the light of North's pre-empt, it seemed reasonable to assume that ♦K (and quite possibly ♦10 as well) might be with South, so East now led ♦Q ... ♦3, ♦2 and North showed out!!

However, this did not mean it was time to curse out loud, nor was it the time to panic! In fact the contract can still be made. At trick 3, East led ♦6 and when South played ♦4, took the trick on table with ♦7. Now a small club was ruffed with ♦8, another diamond finesse taken and the ♦A cashed. Declarer now played on spades. South could win her ♦K at any time, but the defence had no more tricks.

Here's the full hand – on the day there were 9 East-West pairs in 6S, 6 in 4S, and a lone pair in 6D.

Board 25

Dealer N | Vul E-W

♠ KQT52	♠ 87	♠ AJ96
♥ 4	♥ KJ87	♥ AQT3
♦ AJ72	♦	♦ Q986
♣ A53	♣ QJ98642	♣ K

♠ 43	♠ 87	♠ AJ96
♥ 9652	♥ KJ87	♥ AQT3
♦ KT543	♦	♦ Q986
♣ T7	♣ QJ98642	♣ K

7
14 16
3

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	–	–	–	–	–
S	–	–	–	–	–
E	2	6	4	6	7
W	2	6	4	7	7

The second oddity is from Match 4 of the Spring Nationals Open Qualifying/Restricted Teams. East bid diamonds, West inquired, East showed clubs and West showed spades, looking for a 5-3 fit. East decided to raise to 4S on the basis that "I liked my doubleton king, partner!"

West – East

♠ J7543		♠ K8
♥ AJT		♥ Q7
♦ A		♦ KQ964
♣ QJ72		♣ KT53

There was more inaudible cursing as West tried to focus on making an apparently ridiculous contract.

The ♦5 was led to the ace and a low spade played towards the king. North flew with ♠A and returned a diamond to the king in dummy. Two hearts were discarded, but West was then just about ready to give up, as it seemed inevitable that there would be 2 more spade losers to go with the ♣A. However, it wasn't so – the ♠Q popped on the next round, so declarer drew one more trump with the jack and conceded just 3 tricks. Here's the full hand:

Board 14
Dealer E | Vul None

♠ J7543		♠ AQ
♥ AJT		♥ K432
♦ A		♦ T752
♣ QJ72		♣ 986

N
W E
S

♠ J7543		♠ K8
♥ AJT		♥ Q7
♦ A		♦ KQ964
♣ QJ72		♣ KT53

♠ T962	♠ T962
♥ 9865	♥ 9865
♦ J83	♦ J83
♣ A4	♣ A4

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	–	–	–	–	–
S	–	–	–	–	–
E	4	3	1	3	3
W	4	3	2	3	4

9
13 13
5

Of the 54 tables in the Open Qualifying, 44 played in notrump and 6 in spades ... of course 4S can be beaten, for example on the lead of a club and a heart return, but in the real world, that isn't going to happen.

Also from the Spring Nationals Open Qualifying is this hand from Match 7, perhaps not as crazy but certainly very optimistic:

West – East

♠ J873		♠ A
♥ T9752		♥ AK3
♦ A73		♦ KT6
♣ 3		♣ QJ9872

W	N	E	S
		1C	2S
P	P	X	P
3H	P	4H	

East opened a club and South made a weak jump overcall of 2S. West passed and East reopened with a double, then for some reason decided to raise West's bid of 3H – which could have been made with zero points – to game. North led the ♠K to dummy's singleton ace.

Curse, mutter ... if 10 tricks are somehow to be made, something will have to be done with those clubs. But as West thought it through, things didn't look promising because it seemed as if clubs and hearts would both need to break nicely, which wasn't likely given that spades were almost certainly 6-2. Oh well, he played ♣Q, taken by North with the ace, and a spade duly came back. Declarer ruffed with ♥3, ruffed a club low, played a heart to the ace and ruffed another club, discovering that they did indeed break 3-3. However, a heart to the king now revealed a disappointing 4-1 trump break.

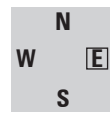
Again, it was important not to panic. A winning club was played from dummy, West discarding a spade. North ruffed this and returned a diamond, which declarer took in hand. As North had no more spades or clubs, declarer could now exit with the ♥10 to North's queen, pitching a losing diamond from dummy, and the forced diamond return yielded the last 3 tricks. So West lost just 2 trumps plus the ♣A, and 10 tricks were made.

Board 14

Dealer E | Vul None

♠ J873
♥ T9752
♦ A73
♣ 3

♠ K4
♥ Q864
♦ J952
♣ AT6



♠ A
♥ AK3
♦ KT6
♣ QJ9872

♠ QT9652
♥ J
♦ Q84
♣ K54

10
5 17
8

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	1	-
S	-	-	-	1	-
E	3	1	3	-	1
W	3	1	3	-	1

This was once again a minority outcome! Note that if the defence leads diamonds, 4H will always be beaten, but again that's not likely in the real world. Out of 54 tables, 6 East-West pairs made 10 tricks in hearts, with 4 playing in game – there's no shortage of optimists! However, minuses in partscores, either in clubs or hearts, were the norm. 📈