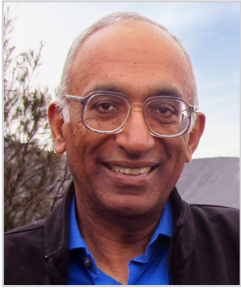


On Bidding Five of a Minor

What does it take to make 5C/D a good contract?

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

This month I haven't played in any congresses, but I did go to Canberra to play in the Seniors. Over the course of 9 matches, one theme that emerged in relation to bidding judgement was that of playing in 5C/D. Back in the dark ages I seem to remember being told that one needed a combined 25-26 hcp to make game in a major, but more like 28-29 hcp to make game in a minor. The former is clearly not true, especially with a 9-card or better fit. The latter is mostly irrelevant, because with enough high card points and controls in all suits, the partnership wants to be in 3NT, not 5m.

So what does it take to make 5C/D a good contract? The answer seems to be: shape and top controls. With a lot of shape, there will often be a suit that is not adequately stopped for 3NT. However, without controls, 5m is usually doomed.

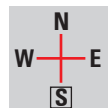
That was certainly the case in this hand from round 4:

Board 7

Dealer S | Vul All

♠ 98642
♥ 8
♦ AT862
♣ 82

♠ 3
♥ KJ652
♦ QJ9
♣ J764



♠ AJT7
♥ Q9743
♦ 543
♣ A

♠ KQ5
♥ AT
♦ K7
♣ KQT953

8
4 11
17

W	N	E	S
			1C
P	1H	P	?

To avoid an ill-fated 5C contract, a rebid of 2NT will be a better option

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

A contract of 5C is a very bad idea on this hand. Across the field, there were 22 NS pairs in in 3NT, making comfortably, but there were 17 in 5C, all of whom went down. How does one avoid this mess? After 1C-1H, perhaps South could upgrade the hand on the basis of the good 6-card club suit and controls in all other suits, to rebid 2NT rather than 3C. The latter is much more likely to lead to the ill-fated 5C contract.

Shape and top controls are the considerations of bidding a minor contract.



In the same round was an interesting hand that posed a different kind of bidding conundrum, the outcome of which depended in part on your system:

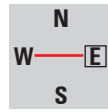
Board 6

Dealer E | Vul E-W

3
15 12
10

♠ J6
♥ 5
♦ KJ85
♣ AKQJ42

♠ 53
♥ K742
♦ T9642
♣ 95



♠ KQT984
♥ QJT8
♦ Q
♣ 83

♠ A72
♥ A963
♦ A73
♣ T76

W	N	E	S
		?	

The end contract depends on your system.
In the Seniors, 24 pairs in 3NT, with 15 in 5C, and 1 in 6C.

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	—	—	—	—	—
S	—	—	—	—	—
E	6	4	1	—	5
W	6	4	1	—	5

Playing better minor, if East opens 1D and rebids 2NT over West's 2C, the likely outcome is 3NT. If 1D by East would promise 4 cards then after a 1C opening, EW may reach 5C via a strong raise and East's rebid showing a diamond stopper. A weak 1NT opening might be raised directly to 3NT. As it turns out, either contract is fine, because of all the top controls. In the Seniors there were 24 pairs in 3NT, with 15 in 5C. And yes, there was one adventurous pair in 6C (!) which happened to be cold on the 2-2 trump break, allowing a diamond to be ruffed in dummy.

At the other end of the scale is a hand such as this, from round 9, where playing in 5C is more or less a no-brainer because of the shape, top controls and lack of a stopper in diamonds:

Board 1

Dealer N | Vul None

19
8 6
7

♠ KJ854
♥ J962
♦ K96
♣ 5

♠ AQ2
♥ AKT5
♦ T
♣ KQJ93



♠ 96
♥ Q73
♦ J32
♣ AT862

♠ T73
♥ 84
♦ AQ8754
♣ 74

W	N	E	S
	1C	P	3C
P	5C		

Almost the entire field played in clubs

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	6	—	4	—	1
S	6	—	4	—	1
E	—	1	—	1	—
W	—	1	—	1	—

Almost the entire field played in clubs, usually at the 5-level, although 2 very bold pairs bid to 6C and made it. Remarkably, 4 pairs played in 3NT (you wouldn't, would you?) and 3 of those were allowed to get away with it on a non-diamond lead, presumably because South bid no-trumps first.

While the combined hands above had plenty of high card points, there were quite a few boards in the Seniors that illustrated the gains to be made by gutsy bidding based on distributional values and top controls. Here's a good example from round 9:

Board 17

Dealer N | Vul None

16
9 11
4

♠ Q
♥ A9632
♦ T642
♣ QJ7

♠ 764
♥ K4
♦ AKQJ93
♣ K9



♠ J985
♥ QJT87
♦ 87
♣ 52

♠ AKT32
♥ 5
♦ 5
♣ AT8643

Me	N	E	S
	1D	2D	P
3C	P	5C	

Ghestem 2D overcall = spades + clubs

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	—	—	—	—	—
S	—	—	—	—	—
E	6	—	1	5	1
W	6	—	1	5	1

After 1D by North and a Ghestem 2D overcall by partner, showing spades and clubs, I bid a quiet 3C. Partner raised this to 5C! He had a beautiful 5-loser hand with top controls and inferred that my 3C bid meant I had no more than 2 spades, so there was some chance to ruff the suit good. In fact, with all my high cards working and the club finesse proving to be successful, there turned out to be 12 tricks available.

Across the field, 17 played in 5C, 13 in a part-score in clubs, and somehow one pair reached 6C – there’s always one! There were many much less courageous EW pairs, however, because 12 NS pairs were allowed to play in a diamond part-score, mostly failing but still a cheap save.

Speaking of saving, what about saving in five of a minor – or even more? This can be dangerous, but here is a fascinating hand from round 8 of the Seniors. NS are cold for 5S, but EW are likely to compete vigorously to at least 5D. The question is would you take the vulnerable-against-not 6D save? Based on shape (shown by West) and top controls (which East certainly has) it actually makes sense to do so. Especially when this turns out not to be a save at all, because 6D is cold!!

Board 6

Dealer E | Vul E-W

8
15 <input type="checkbox"/> 9
8

♠ Q97
♥ 6
♦ 5
♣ AQT76542

♠ 843
♥ AJ752
♦ A976
♣ 3

♠ AKJT652
♥ T843
♦ T
♣ 8

♠ KQ9
♥ KQJ8432
♣ KJ9

N
W — E
S

W	N	E	S
		P	4S
5D	5S	?	

would you take the diamond "save"?

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	2	—	—	5	—
S	3	—	—	5	—
E	—	6	5	—	—
W	—	6	5	—	—

In Canberra, 18 NS pairs played in 4S or 5S, sometimes doubled; three NS pairs who played in slam were allowed to make – two of them were in 6C; while 18 went off in 6S, usually doubled. Three EW pairs who took the diamond “save” against 5S played there and are probably still grinning about it! 📺