

# Difficult decisions at Pairs

Whereas discipline in the bidding is a key element of success in Teams events, sometimes mischievous creativity is the only way to get a good score at Pairs.

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

Usually for me, in March I played in only one weekend Teams congress, but I did play in a couple of matchpoint pairs events. These were a forceful reminder that Pairs is in many respects a very different game. For example, should you bid on to a borderline game? At Teams this is usually a no-brainer – if there’s any reasonable chance of making game, the potential gain means it makes sense to just bid it, especially if vulnerable, and if it doesn’t make it will probably be another flat board anyway. Then there are decisions in defence around trying to limit overtricks and decisions as declarer about whether to risk the contract for an overtrick...

I get an awful lot of these decisions wrong. Here are a few problems for you to chew over. Not vulnerable against vulnerable, what would you do as West with this hand after partner passes, South opens 1S, you double and partner responds 3H?

**West**

- ♠ Q8
- ♥ QJ93
- ♦ AQ63
- ♣ K43

You	N	E	S
	P	P	1S
X	P	3H	P
?			

Next, a bidding and defence problem on the same hand. Once again, you are West, they are vulnerable, and North opens 1H. Partner bids 2NT showing the minors and South bids 3S, showing a strong-ish hand. Would you bid? If so, what?

**West**

- ♠ Q732
- ♥ J842
- ♦ A862
- ♣ 7

*Unusual 2NT showing the minors*

You	N	E	S
	1H	2NT!	3S
?			

Suppose you bid 4D and North raises to 4S, would you pass? Let’s say that you are now defending against 4S and lead your singleton club. Dummy turns up with:

**North (Dummy)**

- ♠ 9654
- ♥ AKQ973
- ♦ K3
- ♣ K

You	N	E	S
	1H	2NT!	3S
4D	4S		

The ♣K is played and holds the trick. Declarer leads a small spade from dummy and partner shows out, playing a not-particularly-encouraging middle diamond. Declarer takes the ♠A and lead a club towards dummy. What do you do?

So... back to that first hand. You have 12 working high card points in a 7-loser hand, while partner is showing 9 – 10(11) HCP. Would you have raised to game? I thought my hand was nothing special and passed. However, as you can see looking at all four hands, 4H was cold because the cards lie favourably. In the 17-table Mixed Pairs event at North Shore Bridge Club, which was won by Kim Neale and Michael Cartmell, there were 7 in 3H and 7 in 4H, plus the usual couple of random scores. Not bidding game meant we ended up with a rather ordinary matchpoint score, but there probably are no right answers on hands such as this, which are not about bidding methods or even judgement, but simply part of the Pairs story of things that just happen. Not to mention things that are done to you ...

**Board 5**

Dealer N | Vul N-S

4  
14  10  
12

♠ K74  
♥ T  
♦ T9752  
♣ J875

♠ Q8  
♥ QJ93  
♦ AQ63  
♣ K43

♠ 963  
♥ AK654  
♦ K8  
♣ T96

♠ AJT52  
♥ 872  
♦ J4  
♣ AQ2



W	N	E	S
	P	P	1S
X	P	3H	P
P			

7 pairs in 3H and  
7 pairs in 4H

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

And so to the second problem hand, which posed challenges in both bidding and defence. After North opened 1H, most players sitting East would not hesitate to bid 2NT to show the minors. Against us, South bid 3S showing strength – which raises the question of how you would handle this, because over the unusual 2NT a good alternative is to play 3C as a good raise of partner’s major, 3D as an invitational hand with the other major and 3H/S as purely competitive. Anyway, West has useful cards in both majors so might choose to defend, possibly after a 4D bid along the way. North-South should reach 4S, which is cold, but in fact at North Shore Bridge Club, only 5 pairs played there. Four Norths played in 4H and scored +620. Six East-West pairs sacrificed in 5D. Of these, four scored -300 so were very much better off, while two scored -500 but this was still a good outcome!

**Board 5**

Dealer N | Vul N-S

15  
7  6  
12

♠ 9654  
♥ AKQ973  
♦ K3  
♣ K

♠ Q732  
♥ J842  
♦ A862  
♣ 7

♠ 65  
♥ QJT94  
♣ QJT985

♠ AKJT8  
♥ T  
♦ 75  
♣ A6432



W	N	E	S
	1H	2NT!	3S
?			

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	1	-	4	5	5
S	1	-	4	5	5
E	-	3	-	-	-
W	-	3	-	-	-

Luck plays a big part  
in Pairs results.



If South plays in 4S and takes the line described above, it's possible to save an overtrick by ruffing the low club with the queen and cashing the ♦A. Why should you do that? Well, think about South's hand. Five spades to the AK and unless partner has an extraordinarily shapely hand, probably five clubs to the A as well. Why hasn't declarer played three top hearts to pitch her diamond loser(s)? Maybe she has no hearts and is trying to reach dummy via a club ruff? That doesn't make sense, because she was in dummy at trick 1. In any case, it's time to act. But I didn't, so even though declarer had actually misplayed the hand, we joined 3 others on -680 rather than the sole East-West pair scoring -650. Such carelessness always leads to poor matchpoint scores!

Whereas discipline in the bidding is a key element of success in Teams events, sometimes mischievous creativity is the only way to get a good score at Pairs. Here's an example of this from the 35-table Good Friday Pairs event at Trumps, which was won by Terry Brown and Bob Birch, finishing a colossal 7% ahead in the final. At our table, East opened 1D and partner decided to make a rather lightweight overcall of 1S. This more or less shut West out of the auction and prevented East-West from finding their optimal contract of 2S. Now I bid 2H, which in our methods is forcing for one round, but partner, having decided that he'd already made enough mischief, passed. As 2H is exactly what we can make, this got us a very good matchpoint score, much to the chagrin of our opponents.

**Board 22**

Dealer E | Vul E-W

<p>♠ KT863 ♥ QJ82 ♦ T3 ♣ Q2</p>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W — E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W — E	S	<p>♠ A92 ♥ T ♦ QJ976 ♣ AT43</p>
N					
W — E					
S					
<p>♠ QJ754 ♥ 743 ♦ 85 ♣ KJ8</p>					

14  
8  11  
7

W	N	E	S
		1D	1S
P	2H	P	P
P			

Partner's lightweight overcall of 1S shut west out of the auction

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	1	—	2	—	—
S	1	—	2	—	—
E	—	1	—	2	1
W	—	2	—	2	1

On Easter Sunday, there was a good turnout for the Teams congress at Trumps, which was convincingly won by the EDGTTON team (*Adam Edgton - John Newman, Paul Gosney - Sophie Ashton*). As usual, slam decisions made significant contributions to the larger swings. Would you have reached slam on this hand from round 5?

**Board 18**

Dealer E | Vul N-S

<p>♠ AJT ♥ A ♦ AQT7 ♣ AJT42</p>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W   E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W   E	S	<p>♠ Q42 ♥ Q982 ♦ J9432 ♣ 8</p>
N					
W   E					
S					
<p>♠ 76 ♥ J543 ♦ K86 ♣ Q976</p>		<p>♠ K9853 ♥ KT76 ♦ 5 ♣ K53</p>			

5  
20  9  
6

W	N	E	S
		P	P
1C	P	1S	P
2D	P	2H	

East needs to bid 2H (fourth suit forcing) to allow west to show spade support

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	—	—	—	—	—
S	—	—	—	—	—
E	7	3	4	7	7
W	7	3	4	7	7

Things are likely to be quite straightforward if East can open a weak two-bid showing both majors. However, if West is first to bid, the auction is likely to commence 1C-1S-2D. Now East needs to bid 2H (fourth suit) to establish a game force, which allows West to show the 3-1-4-5 shape and extra strength. Of the 19 East-West pairs, only 6 bid a slam (4 reached 6S, including Gosney-Ashton; one each played in 6C and 6NT) which was rewarded with a double-digit swing on each occasion. 🍀