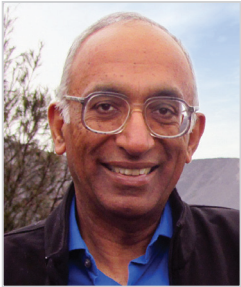


Glory without Power

Distributional hands without a lot of high card points

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

It was in the late 1960s that I first learnt about distributional bridge hands – even though I hadn’t yet learnt to play bridge! But back then I had a bit of a thing for James Bond novels, and anyone who has read Moonraker will know that this features 007 playing bridge against the evil Sir Hugo Drax, who is cheating. Bond out-cheats him with a fixed highly distributional hand – you can see it here: http://www.bridgebum.com/james_bond.php

The hand below, from the Wollstonecraft Pairs in September 2016, is nothing quite as extreme, but it is interesting:

Board 21

Dealer N | Vul N-S

<p>♠ 95 ♥ AQJ62 ♦ AQ6 ♣ AQJ</p>		<p>♠ KJ873 ♥ K7 ♦ ♣ 987642</p> <p>♠ T ♥ T9854 ♦ KT87 ♣ KT3</p> <p>♠ AQ642 ♥ 3 ♦ J95432 ♣ 5</p>
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7		6
20		7

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	2	–	–	5	–
S	2	–	–	5	–
E	–	–	4	–	1
W	–	–	5	–	1

This is a hand where bidding strategically to slow down the auction might pay off. I assume that as North you won’t open a weak 2-bid, vulnerable against not, with such rubbish. In that case, South will almost certainly do it for you if you have a 2-level spades+minor opening as part of your system. West will surely double. Now what? If you jump to 4♠ you will propel EW into 5♥, which can only be beaten on a diamond opening lead – not very likely! If, on the other hand, you first redouble (or just bid a tame 3♠) and then allow yourself to be “pushed” into 4♠, you might get to play there and make it. As it happens, even 5♠ makes (North’s clubs can be set up) but if East-West go on to 5♥, it doesn’t make sense to sacrifice at this vulnerability.

Here’s another distributional hand from the first round of the NSWBA State Teams Qualifying event in August 2016. As the dealer, I was happy to open this quite reasonable hand. The bidding proceeded 1♥-double by LHO-3♥ by partner (which we play as a limit rather than a pre-emptive raise)-4♠ by RHO. In my position, would you bid 5♥?

♠ AJ
♥ AJT765
♦ T73
♣ J4

You	N	E	S
1H	X	3H	4S
?			

Let’s say you don’t. The hand then illustrates some interesting aspects of both play and defence. On lead, you should realise that hearts aren’t likely to yield too many tricks. If you’ve read the Bird & Anthias book on Winning Suit Contract Leads, you might instead lead ♣J to try to get a ruff. In fact this is a good idea, but a club was led at only 3 of 16 tables. Dummy puts this down:

♠ KQ65
♥ K42
♦ J2
♣ AT53

Declarer takes the ♠A, plays a diamond to her ace and leads a spade. You rise with the ace and play the ♣4 to partner's nine, which holds. Partner now plays the ♣K, declarer following. What do you play?

Here's the full hand. By the way, if you seriously considered bidding on, you can see that would have been very unwise. One pair that did bid 5♥ was doubled and went for -1100.

Board 22

Dealer E | Vul E-W

♠ T3 ♥ Q983 ♦ Q96 ♣ KQ96	♠ 98742 ♥ ♦ AK854 ♣ 872	♠ AJ ♥ AJT765 ♦ T73 ♣ J4
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7 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 11 13	♠ KQ65 ♥ K42 ♦ J2 ♣ AT53
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	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	2	3	-	5	1
S	2	3	-	5	1
E	-	-	1	-	-
W	-	-	1	-	-

Meanwhile if you discarded anything other than a highly discouraging heart on partner's ♣K, partner isn't likely to believe that you will be able to overruff on the fourth round of clubs, so will attempt to set the contract by leading a heart. At our table, this is what happened after I foolishly discarded a non-specific diamond, and of course declarer now made her contract.

Looking at the full hand, you can see that Deep Finesse indicates 4♠ is unbeatable, even though we had a chance to beat it. What did declarer do wrong?

The answer is, of course, hasty play at trick 1. If declarer ducks the club lead and takes the continuation with the ace, the defence is helpless.

Here's another lead question. The bidding has gone 1♠ by you, 2♠ by LHO (a Michaels cue bid showing at least 5/5 in hearts and a minor), 3♠ by partner (another limit raise) and 3NT by RHO (after some thought). What would you lead from this?

♠ AJ753
 ♥ A
 ♦ 873
 ♣ Q643

W	You	E	S
	1S	2S	3S
3NT	P	P	P

Declarer must surely have a long diamond suit and a spade stopper. Do you lead fourth highest of your longest suit or try a low club instead?

Board 17

Dealer N | Vul None

♠ K2 ♥ 65 ♦ AKQT952 ♣ T9	♠ AJ753 ♥ A ♦ 873 ♣ Q643	♠ 86 ♥ Q9843 ♦ J ♣ AJ875
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11 12 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 9	♠ QT94 ♥ KJT72 ♦ 64 ♣ K2
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	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	1	-	1	4	-
S	1	-	1	4	-
E	-	2	-	-	-
W	-	2	-	-	2

The distributional hand strikes again! It turns out that leading a spade gives declarer his 9th trick, and any other lead is better. If South were to bid 4♠ that would be better still, but at Wollstonecraft, only 5 out of 17 pairs made that (one was doubled) while 3 East-West pairs made 3NT (and again one was doubled).

There's no moral to this story, because there are no clear answers in a situation such as this. That's why distributional hands are so interesting, both to play and to defend against ♠