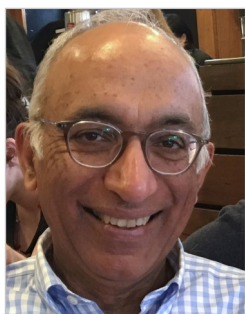


Trumps Festival Pairs 2018

Slamming your way into 2019

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

Between Christmas and New Year, every bridge player who can do so heads to Trumps to play in the annual Festival. This year's Festival Pairs was won by Frances Lyons & Julianne Rocks, who finished just ahead of Peter Jeffery & Wayne Zhu in the major final. The plate was won by Mark Kolodziejczyk & Witold Chylewski.

What made it an exciting and enjoyable day of bridge was the number of potential slam hands that turned up. What made it rather less than satisfying for me was the number of hideous errors I made in the afternoon ... but that's another story. Let's have a look at a few boards of interest – but before that, permit me to set you a few problems.

Firstly, how will you open this hand?

♠ AJ42
♥ AT
♦ A5
♣ AKQ65

Secondly, partner opens 1NT in first seat, showing 15-17 hcp. What will you bid with this hand?

♠ QJT543
♥ K2
♦ 4
♣ AKQ3

Thirdly, RHO opens 1♠, LHO bids 2♦, RHO raises to 3♦ and having checked for keycards, the opponents bid on to 6♠. What will you lead?

♠ 42
♥ KT9842
♦ 8
♣ A762

The first hand is interesting. If you open 1♣, partner will respond 1♠: now how will you effectively explore the possibility of slam? Partner's shape may be even more important than her high-card strength and it's not at all clear to me how natural bidding can find out everything that matters. That's why conveying your own strength via a slightly off-shape 2NT (or 2♣ followed by 2NT if you play that 2NT shows 20-21 hcp) appeals to me. Which brings us to the next question: when partner transfers to spades, what now?

I think a super-accept with a jump to 4♠ conveys the message that you hold good support for spades and an outside doubleton. That ought to work this time. Even though partner has an 8-loser hand, so that slam isn't automatic from her side of the table, an RKCB inquiry with 4NT could hardly get the partnership into trouble, and when it emerges that no keycards are missing, things look promising for 6♠.

Board 5

Dealer N | Vul N-S

♠ T3 ♥ J85 ♦ KQ962 ♣ T74	<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	♠ K9765 ♥ Q962 ♦ 8 ♣ J32
N					
W E					
S					
♠ AJ42 ♥ AT ♦ A5 ♣ AKQ65	<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	♠ Q8 ♥ K743 ♦ JT743 ♣ 98
N					
W E					
S					

W	N	E	S
	P	P	1C
P	1S	P	?

How will you explore slam from here?

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	7	1	3	6	6
S	7	1	3	6	6
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

Only 7 of 24 bid 6♠, however; our partnership wasn't one of them.

The second hand is full of potential, but much depends on your methods. Clearly a spade slam has excellent prospects if partner has a few necessary keycards, but if he is missing the ace of hearts it might be better to have it played from your side rather than transferring. If you play that 3♠ shows slam interest, asking partner to cue with Qx or better support, then it's fairly easy. Our auction was 1NT - 3♠ - 4♦ - 4NT - 5♣ (1 or 4) - 5♠ (just in case it was only one) - 6♠ (it was four) - 7♠.

When dummy came down, it was obvious that the grand slam needed clubs to break, unless the opponents made an erroneous discard on the run of the spades. Fortunately, it was completely cold, so even I could make it. Eight of 24 North-South pairs bid to this contract.

Board 9

Dealer N | Vul E-W

♠ 876 ♥ QJ9 ♦ KJ97 ♣ J94	<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	♠ AK ♥ A853 ♦ AT83 ♣ 862
N					
W E					
S					
♠ QJT543 ♥ K2 ♦ 4 ♣ AKQ3	<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	♠ 92 ♥ T764 ♦ Q652 ♣ T75
N					
W E					
S					

W	N	E	S
	1NT	P	3S
P	4D	P	4NT
P	5C	P	5S
P	6S	P	7S
//			

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

Here's another potential slam hand that got away from us: after 1♦ by West, 1♥ by East and a raise to 2♥, partner inquired with 2NT and I rebid 3♥, confirming a 4-card raise but showing a minimum hand. That turned partner off. However, the 3-3 diamond break meant 12 tricks were cold. Only 5 of 24 reached this slam, which is perhaps against the odds.

Board 7
Dealer S | Vul All

♠ JT952
♥ 42
♦ 965
♣ 843

♠ Q
♥ QJ83
♦ QT732
♣ A65

♠ K64
♥ AKT6
♦ AK
♣ QT92

♠ A873
♥ 975
♦ J84
♣ KJ7

W	N	E	S
			P
1D	P	1H	P
2H	P	2NT	P
3H	P	P	//

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

For a real challenge, try this next one: although 7♥ is cold, how will you reach it? Our opponents bid 1NT by North (15-17, may include a 5-card major) - 4♣ (Texas transfer, long and potentially strong hearts) - 4NT - 5♣ (0 or 3 keycards) etc and reached the grand slam. They were the only pair across the field to get there!!

Board 8
Dealer W | Vul Nil

♠ AKQ92
♥ J84
♦ Q96
♣ AT

♠ J76
♥ T65
♦ T52
♣ Q743

♠ 853
♥ 3
♦ KJ73
♣ KJ862

♠ T4
♥ AKQ972
♦ A84
♣ 95

W	N	E	S
P	1NT	P	4C
P	4NT	P	5C
P	5D	P	6D
P	7NT	//	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	1	3	7	7	7
S	1	3	7	7	7
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

And so to the lead problem. Would you try your singleton diamond? Or a low heart? Or would you lay down the ace of clubs?

Board 25
Dealer N | Vul E-W

♠ KQ853
♥ Q
♦ Q75
♣ QT95

♠ J96
♥ J7653
♦ T4
♣ K83

♠ 42
♥ KT9842
♦ 8
♣ A762

♠ AT7
♥ A
♦ AKJ9632
♣ J4

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

In fact 11 of 24 bid a slam on this hand (either 6♠ or 6♦) but only 5 found a club lead to beat it ...