

Trumps Easter Teams 2021

On raising to 4M with 5+ support

by RAKESH KUMAR



Rakesh Kumar describes himself as an enthusiast who makes enough errors to have plenty of material for bridge columns.

The Trumps Easter Teams was my second face-to-face congress this year. It seems Sydney congress players continue to be somewhat reluctant to return to the table in person, because the number of entries remained small. Still, despite there being only 10 teams, the quality of the competition was high.

On the day, the OWEN team (Margaret Owen - Sonny Pang, Mark Guthrie - Julie Guthrie) recorded a convincing win, with a total of 80.75 VPs after the 6 rounds. Next was the RANSON team, comprised of former members of NSW Youth interstate representative teams (Nico Ranson - Crispy Rhodes, Ramanan Rajkumar - Edmond Lee), finishing on 69.4 VPS. Whereas OWEN was never out of the top 3 at any time, RANSON got off to a very shaky start, but clawed their way back up by the close of play.

As always, there were interesting hands that posed challenges in bidding and play. Let's start with an instructive set of responding hands. As dealer, partner has opened 1♠. What would you bid with each of these? Would you do anything different if RHO either made a takeout double or overcalled?

A	B	C
♠ Q9763	♠ K97652	♠ K7654
♥ J5	♥ K87	♥ 98
♦ 6	♦ 93	♦ J43
♣ QJT96	♣ Q9	♣ KQ4

And for a play problem, try this as declarer in the West seat:

♠ AQJ87		♠ 53
♥ J985		♥ K2
♦ T8	W	♦ QJ643
♣ AT	E	♣ KQJ3

After LHO passes, partner opens 1♦ and RHO doubles. You bid 1♠, LHO passes and partner rebids 2♣. You decide to try 3NT and LHO unsurprisingly leads a heart. South takes ♥Q followed by the ace, then plays ♥3. You insert ♥9 and it holds, as North follows suit. Now what?

The first set of hands all came up during this event (well, more or less ... I have swapped the major suits for the third one) and might help you to decide whether you should raise partner to 4M the next time you hold 5+ card support. This was the full deal for hand A:

Board 4

Dealer W | Vul All

	♠ 2		
	♥ K864		
	♦ AJ974		
	♣ K32		
♠ AK854	N	E	♠ Q9763
♥ AT9			♥ J5
♦ KQ83	W	+	♦ 6
♣ 8			♣ QJT96
	S		
	♠ JT		
	♥ Q732		
	♦ T52		
	♣ A754		

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

Every East bid 4♠ and West, who had a strong hand, made the contract without difficulty. However, with this East holding, game might well make opposite a lesser West hand e.g. having only ♦K rather than ♦KQ, but with the ace on side.

This was the deal associated with hand B:

Board 20

Dealer W | Vul All

	♠ A8		
	♥ T2		
	♦ K72		
	♣ AJ8732		
♠ QJT43	N	E	♠ K97652
♥ J93			♥ K87
♦ AJ8	W	+	♦ 93
♣ K5			♣ Q9
	S		
	♠		
	♥ AQ654		
	♦ QT654		
	♣ T64		

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

Again almost no one could resist bidding 4♠, but those who were allowed to play in spades went 2 or 3 down, including one pair who were doubled in 5S for -800! Why was this hand so hopeless for a 4♠ contract?

The answer is the loser count. Opposite a "normal" opening which supposedly has 7 losers, the previous responding hand had a notional 7 losers and was therefore a reasonable pre-emptive raise to game – loser count arithmetic suggests $24 - (7 + 7) = 10$ tricks are possible. However, with no singleton or void, this hand has 8 losers and the extra length in spades is really no help at all. On this deal, opener had a minimum hand with 8 losers and boring 5332 shape, so the outcome was even worse than the arithmetic might have suggested.

The actual deal for the equivalent of hand C involved hearts rather than spades:

Board 2

Dealer E | Vul N-S

♠ JT
♥ J2
♦ Q8752
♣ JT72

♠ 98
♥ K7654
♦ J43
♣ KQ4

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ Q52
♥ AQT98
♦ AT6
♣ 63

♠ AK7643
♥ 3
♦ K9
♣ A985

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

In the light of the discussion above, after 1♥ by East and a 1♠ overcall by South, what should West bid? A pre-emptive 3♥ seems to undersell the hand, while a cue raise of 2♠ might oversell it a bit. However, with 8 losers and no shortage, 4♥ is not a good choice. Yet at 5 tables East-West could not resist bidding 4♥ and duly went down. At our table we stopped in 3♥, which just made. At another 4 tables North-South played in 3♠ or 4♠, which of course also went down.

Now to the play problem, which revisits the first rule of declarer play: count your tricks! This needs to be done not just when dummy comes down but again after the first few tricks. I know that I often fail to revisit the trick count at that stage ...

Board 1

Dealer N | Vul None

♠ 96
♥ 764
♦ 7
♣ 9876542

♠ AQJ87
♥ J985
♦ T8
♣ AT

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 53
♥ K2
♦ QJ643
♣ KQJ3

♠ KT42
♥ AQT3
♦ AK952
♣

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

In this tournament, 3NT went down as often as it made. On the lead of ♥6 by North, things look difficult. However, when you win the third trick with ♥9, it's a very good time to count tricks once more. If you do that, you will realise that you can only take the spade finesse once, so 2 hearts + 4 clubs + 2 spades means you need a trick from diamonds. Therefore play ♦10 now! South will exit with a heart and you can continue diamonds to establish your ninth trick.

As the cards lie, you could have survived even if you didn't attack diamonds. Say you cashed ♥J and all your club tricks, discarding low spades, then took a spade finesse and exited with a diamond. South would now be endplayed. However, that line is against the odds and only works because South has every missing high card! ♠