

BALANCING

LHO opens and is followed by 2 passes. Before you decide what to do with your hand, analyse what you know about the 2 passed hands. Firstly RHO has fewer than 6 points as he passed. Your partner did not make a take out double, so he has either a balanced flat hand with up to 16 points, or has strength in the opponents suit that has been bid. You must if possible protect your partner's hand, and find a bid. This is called Balancing.

Borrow a king from your partner

A good way to judge the value of your hand is to imagine you have an extra king, and bid accordingly. Your partner should now bid as if he had a king less in his hand. Now look at your hand. If you have a flat hand with 10-14 points, bid 1NT. With 15 to 17 points and a flat hand, double first and then bid NT.

Even if you only have 9 points, you should either bid a suit holding 5 cards, or double. Your partner will know it is not a penalty double. You are in the wrong position to double for penalties, being UNDER the opener. A suit bid by you in the protective position does not now have to be as strong as in first overcalling position. Your partner will not expect as much from you, and should realise that you are only protecting.

A note of caution. If you have 3 or 4 small cards in the opponent's suit, then you should pass. This is the dangerous holding. Why? Your partner is marked with some points BUT did not bid. He cannot be short in the opponent's suit, as he did not double. The only one likely to be short is the partner of the opener, so the danger of ruffs is very real.

-- by LIONCUB (Allan) on BBO --

A Rare Occurrence

Dealer: South		Vul: EW
<i>North</i>		
AKJ32		
J		
<i>West</i>	T94	<i>East</i>
9765	AK97	Q9
Q3		T765
AKQJ3	<i>South</i>	87652
63	T4	QJ
AK9432		
—		
T8542		

It is relatively rare for an overcall in one suit to end up in slam in another but that is exactly what happened with this hand which appeared recently at the Invercargill Bridge Club.

West opened the bidding one diamond and North overcalled one spade being at maximum strength for a simple overcall; with a marginally stronger hand many players would double but this would imply a tolerance for hearts which is not the case here. East supported partner's diamonds and South passed, not wishing to get involved at this stage. North now bid three clubs showing a strong two-suiter in the black suits. This turned South's hand into a potential goldmine and after checking for aces, South bid a small slam in clubs.

This was very astute bidding by South who had awaited developments patiently. Unfortunately, the play did not live up to the bidding. On the play of the Ace of clubs East dropped the Queen of clubs giving declarer cause to think. Generally, when declarer holds 9 cards in a suit the odds favour playing for the drop, however the principle of "restricted choice" dictates that where the Queen appears in the first round the odds favour the finesse in the second round of trumps. The odds are 2-1 in favour of the Queen being on its own as opposed to East holding exactly Queen, Jack doubleton. Declarer appreciated this and correctly played the second round finesse losing to East's Jack.

Declarer can still make the slam but relied on the heart suit breaking evenly. When that failed to materialise the final trick was lost to the ten of hearts.

Congratulations to Invercargill Bridge Club members Moss Wylie and Anne Somerville on their recent elevation to Grand Master status. This is the ultimate achievement in NZ bridge and requires performing with distinction at the highest level for many years. The pair recently performed credibly at the trials to select the NZ Open team.

While both players have great all round strength, Moss is an adept psychological player able to create and exploit doubt in the mind of opposing players. Anne is a superb defensive player which is generally regarded as the most difficult area of bridge to master.

NB: This column appeared in the Southland express on 6 May 2010

Sneaky Play

The tactic of leading low from dummy is a powerful strategy that can work wonders at times. Even if you have nothing of value in hand, your right-hand opponent doesn't know this, making it difficult to find the right defence. Witness this deal from a recent tournament.

Dealer: South		Nil Vulnerability	
		<i>North</i>	
		Q876	
		A6	
<i>West</i>	KJT3		<i>East</i>
K54	T53		9
KQJT			7532
852	<i>South</i>		AK764
764	AJT32		QJ9
		984	
		9	
		AK82	

The bidding proceeded:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
1S	Pass	2S	X
3S	4H	4S	Pass
Pass	X		
All Pass			

The bidding was highly competitive – some might say egregious – but that's often the norm in tournament bridge. East made a light takeout double of the spade raise and South bid 3 spades preemptively. West was not going to be shut out bidding 4 hearts, which would have failed by at least two tricks. North succumbed to the tempo and bid 4 spades. West finally doubled the auction.

Lead Heart King

Declarer won the heart lead with their Ace. With the spade finesse destined to lose from West's double, chances were bleak. The only hope (aside from Club QJ doubleton) was to develop dummy's diamond suit for two discards. Leading a diamond honour could never achieve this, so declarer led a sneaky diamond three at trick two. Can you really blame East for winning with the King? Imagine how silly he would look if he ducked and South won with the nine.

East returned the Club Queen won by South. Declarer then led a low spade to dummy's eight (it wouldn't matter if West hopped with the King). Next came the diamond Queen, and the Ace was ruffed out. Declarer then cashed the spaded Ace and gave up a Heart, and both losing Clubs soon went away on the Diamonds. Doubled contract made!

NB: This column appeared in the Southland Express on 25 March 2010

2009 Air NZ Swiss Pairs

In August 2009 the Invercargill Contract Bridge Club hosted a Swiss Pairs tournament sponsored by Air NZ.

The format consisted of six rounds of eight board matches split into three grades with pairs receiving international match points (IMP's) after their scores being compared with the average for the room.

The turning point for the intermediate grade title arrived in the form an unmakeable 6NT contract bid by the father and son pair of Barry and Guy Bouton. The Bouton's struck bidding interference and telling defence on the following board played against eventual winners Bob Atley and Kate Ramsay.

Dealer: South EW Vulnerable

	<i>North</i>	
	965	
	54	
<i>West</i>	A987632	<i>East</i>
KT83	4	A2
AK97		QJ63
4	<i>South</i>	KQ5
QT32	QJ74	AKJ9
	T82	
	JT	
	8765	

The bidding proceeded:

<i>South</i>	<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>
Pass	1C	1D	4C (Ace ask)
Pass	4H (one A)	Pass	5C (King ask)
Pass	5S (two Ks)	Pass	6NT
All Pass			

On the deal North South were not vulnerable, so North felt comfortable in making a lead directing 1D overcall backed up by a seven card suit in the event the bidding got too high. East, due to the overcall, had difficulty bidding his four card heart suit (maybe 1H after an overcall promised a five card suit) and decided not to explore West's hand further by making a take out double with his 20 high card point hand. If this had happened then West would have responded with 1H and East West would have found themselves in the undefeatable contract of 6H rather than 6NT.

South led the JD and dummy's hand went down and North sat and pondered with only one winning trick and knowing partner did not hold the KD or QD after the lead of the J.

With eight diamonds in view and five outstanding, was South's lead a singleton or did he hold either of the missing 10D or 5D? If he did hold one then it would cost nothing to hold up the ace in the hope that South may be able to take a trick and play a diamond to the ace. If North did play the

AD at trick one it was highly likely that East would make his contract by throwing out two losers from the West hand on the KD and QD.

North held up the ace and played an encouraging 9D. South later won a spade trick with his QJxx holding and returned a precious diamond to take the contract one light. The play on this deal was sufficient to decide the first two placings in the intermediate grade.

Brilliant Defence Rewarded

Dealer: East Nil Vulnerability

	<i>North</i>	
	Q2	
	74	
<i>West</i>	QT986	<i>East</i>
JT96	AJ86	75
J92		86
J	<i>South</i>	AK743
KQ743	AK843	T952
	AKQT53	
	52	
	—	

North / South were lulled into a false sense of security on this hand which featured recently at the Invercargill Club. The final contract of 6H was arrived at after a relay sequence, so North was the declarer and East on lead. During the bidding South had called 4C (checking for aces) and West had doubled asking partner to lead a club against the final contract. This would have secretly delighted the opponents; North holding the ace and South having a void in clubs. A dutiful club lead would have given South a fighting chance, although with spades breaking unfavourably 4-2 South still needed to induce West to discard a spade on the run of the trump suit to make the slam.

South knew he was missing an ace and a king, but with the lead directive double he assumed the ace of clubs was the missing one and that was under control by virtue of his club void.

Sitting East was Theresa Holloway and she was very mindful that such lead requests from partner should be respected but not blindly obeyed. As it happened she was staring at the top two diamonds. She immediately cashed the ace and king of diamonds taking the first two tricks. West discarded a club on the second diamond. With the contract defeated already it only remained to ice the cake. With the strong hand on the table as dummy, Theresa led a third diamond having correctly assessed that the best chance for a further defensive trick was playing West for a trump holding of Jxx thereby providing a trump promotion through forcing declarer to ruff the third diamond with a trump honour. When that line of play struck gold declarer was two light and still had to lose an additional spade trick for good measure.

NB: This column appeared in the Southland Express on 24 June 2010

Composed West Sinks Slam

Dealer: South All Vulnerable

	<i>North</i>	
	AKQJ843	
	—	
<i>West</i>	653	<i>East</i>
975	AK7	T
AQ843		T9652
92	<i>South</i>	QJT84
J98	62	Q6
	KJ7	
	AK7	
	T5432	

North figured the spade grand slam was worth a punt after his partner asked for aces and signed off in 6NT. South had shown at least a five card club suit and a minimum of 8 HCP so the clubs looked likely to provide discards for North's losing diamonds. North had not shown his first round heart control in the bidding which further supported signing off in seven spades.

East led the queen of diamonds and when dummy went down declarer had problems. Dummy was without the queen or jack of clubs and had the wrong honour cards. Declarer would have willingly swapped both red kings for the queen of clubs. With only 11 top tricks declarer decided his best chance was to cash the top two diamonds and run the spades in the hope that the clubs were breaking 3-2 and the defender with three clubs would discard a club. Failing a favourable discard, declarer was left with the slim hope that clubs would break 3-2 with one defender holding exactly the queen, jack doubleton; about a 6% chance. The run of a long trump suit puts pressure on defenders to discard accurately; one misjudged discard could allow the contract to make. Declarer counted five diamond discards by the time the seventh spade was cashed so the tenth trick was the six of diamonds. West – who was by now down to three clubs and the ace of hearts – thought long and hard before concluding that North would not have bid the spade grand slam missing two aces without control of the heart suit. As West was staring at the ace of hearts in his own hand, this meant North must be void. West therefore discarded the ace of hearts, retaining three clubs and defeating the grand slam.

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