

Tidbit 12

Length is better than Strength

Interpretation: This relates to trump contracts where having a lot of trumps in your own hand and dummy can more than compensate for having a lesser number even if you have fewer high cards. Having at least 8 cards between the two hands in a trump suit is considered the minimum desirable and is termed the “Golden Fit”.

Playing in a seven-card fit, especially a 4-3, is possible but avoided if practicable even if all the high cards are held. This is because the defenders will hold six trumps between them and about 50% of the time one of the defenders will hold four trumps and 15% of the time either five or six, making it difficult for the declarer to maintain control of the hand with her trump suit, the very reason the partnership has elected to play in trumps rather than NT in the first place.

Examples:

BOARD 24					
BD: 24	♠ J8765				Dir: W
	♥ J752				Vul: Nil
	♦ AQ53				
	♣				
♠ A2				♠ Q3	
♥ 94				♥ T863	
♦ KJ974				♦ T62	
♣ AJ95				♣ 8432	
				♠ KT94	
				♥ AKQ	
				♦ 8	
				♣ KQT76	
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	3	2	4	6	4
S	3	2	4	6	4
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-
					8
					13
					2
					17

North-South hold 9 combined cards in spades missing the AS and QS and 7 combined cards in hearts holding all the honours from AH down to the JH.

Trump length outdoes trump strength in this example since 6S can be made versus 4H. In a heart contract, on a club lead by East, despite dummy’s strong club holding, North as declarer either has to concede a club trick immediately to the AC or ruff in hand and reduce her trump length to fewer than East. Fortunately, N/S have enough good cards in all the other suits to allow North to play as if in NT but with an inferior outcome to playing in spades.

BOARD 13					
BD: 13	♠ T764				Dir: N
	♥ J				Vul: ALL
	♦ KQJT75				
	♣ T6				
♠ A2				♠ J85	
♥ 952				♥ A874	
♦ A982				♦ 64	
♣ J952				♣ Q873	
				♠ KQ93	
				♥ KQT63	
				♦ 3	
				♣ AK4	
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	1	3	2	4	2
S	1	3	2	4	2
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-
					7
					9
					7
					17

Assuming South is first to open with 1H what does North bid? The diamond suit is potentially very powerful and should yield 5 tricks by itself but a bid of 2D over-states the HCP count.

It is quite acceptable to respond 1 of a major with only 4 in the suit even when holding a longer minor if insufficient HCPs are held to be able to bid the major later on.

Because a spade (golden) fit exists, this example illustrates how well a spade contract plays even when North holds none of the top four honours. Game in spades is possible but only nine tricks can be made in diamonds.

Exercise:

♠ 8532
♥ A75
♦ KQ8
♣ A64

You are East. North passes, you open 1C and partner responds 1D. You are "bidding up the line" so partner is not denying holding a major. Do you re-bid 1S, 1NT or something else?

Answer to Tidbit 11 exercise:

Switch the East and West hands and think of how another type of trump promotion play could be executed by the defence to enable an additional trick.

	North	
	♠6542	
	♥4	
	♦QJ1042	
	♣AJ9	
♠KQ83		♠AJ97
♥J2		♥10853
♦A6		♦K753
♣107542		♣Q
	♠10	
	♥AKQ976	
	♦98	
	♣K863	

This is the board discussed in Tidbit 11 but with the East and West hands switched. West leads the AD and another diamond to East's KD. East must now cash the AS (one round of spades) before playing another diamond. Declarer, South, now has no certain loser to discard. If she trumps low, West will over-trump with the JH and East is still likely to make her 10H. If South trumps high, East and West will definitely make 2 trump tricks. This is another form of a trump promotion play by the defence.