

INTERESTING ONLINE HANDS

The Polish Bridge Union ran the PBU Online European Seniors' Cup, comprising 11 x 20-board matches, with a Swiss draw (which sounds very 'Australian'). There was a lengthy report provided by Marek Wojcicki in the IBPA Bulletin in November 2020. I have selected a few of those hands for you – all educational.

LIGHTNER DOUBLE

In football, derby matches are always the most interesting, with the supporters of each team being loyal and fanatical. In bridge it is the same – during prestigious events – when two top teams from the same country play against one another. When the two Netherlands team met in the second match, it was exactly as everyone expected; the teams exchanged close to 100 IMPs in the 20 boards!

The big swings started on Board 4, where disciplined passed by the Netherlands II players at both tables led to a large gain:

Dlr West	♠ 9 4 2	
All Vul	♥ J 6	
	♦ 7 4	
	♣ A K Q 9 5 2	
♠ K J 8 7		♠ A Q 10
♥ 5 4 2		♥ A K 9 8
♦ A Q 9 5		♦ J 6
♣ J 6		♣ 8 7 4 3
	♠ 6 5 3	
	♥ Q 10 7 3	
	♦ K 10 8 3 2	
	♣ 10	

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	1♦ (hearts)	Pass
1♥ (2-3 hearts)	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Double	All Pass	

North, with such sterile shape, declined to enter the bidding in his opponent's "suit". However, he expressed his view of the final contract with the double, asking for a club lead (first suit bid by dummy). What could East-West have done? East had four cards in club, West the Jack. A disciplined South led the ♣10 and defenders cashed the first six tricks: +500.

At the other table, West didn't open, and the bidding was 'won' by North:

West	North	East	South
Pass	3♣	All Pass	

If West had balanced with a double, it would have been a true bloodbath, given the merciless defence.

East led the ♥A, cashed the King, then switched to the ♦J – King – Ace – 4. West shifted to the ♠7 to the ♠10, then the ♠A and ♠Q were cashed. The contract was already down two, but it wasn't the end of the story. West let the ♠Q win, so East continued with his remaining diamond. West won the trick, then played another diamond which promoted East's ♠8 into a trick. Four down, +400, and 14 IMPs.

(A double would only have garnered an additional 3 IMPs.)

BIDDING MATTERS

In my opinion, in today's high-level competitions, bidding is the crucial factor. The technical skills of most top players are on a similar level, so a board where better card play can result in a substantial gain are no more than one in 30 or 40. In the bidding, decisions are much more random, as there is usually some level of uncertainty, so the swings created in that field are much more frequent. Here's a board from the Quarter Final between Italy II and Poland I:

Dlr West	♠ K 9 8	
All Vul	♥ A 8	
	♦ Q 10 6 3 2	
	♣ 9 8 4	
♠ J 7 3		♠ 5 4 2
♥ Q J 5 4 3		♥ K 10 7 2
♦ 9 4		♦ K J
♣ J 7 3		♣ Q 10 6 5
	♠ A Q 10 6	
	♥ 9 6	
	♦ A 8 7 5	
	♣ A K 2	

The 'normal' auction on this hand is for South to open 1NT and North to raise to 3NT. A heart lead is obvious from both hands and, when there is no miracle in the diamond suit, it is one down. That is exactly what happened at one table in the match. But at the other table:

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	Pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	3♦ (1)	Pass	3♠ (2)
Pass	4♠	All Pass	

At this table, North had a useful tool – 3♦ asked for a 5-card Major.

South knew that North, when asking for 5-card Majors, is often afraid about a low doubleton in a major than a minor, so – if North held two low spades his 3♠ was a cost-nothing bid; if North held two hearts...

Taking that into consideration, Kwiecien (South) decided to show his strong 4-card spade suit as five, and it was like Coke – the Real Thing!

After a trump lead, 11 tricks were taken, and 13 well-deserved IMPs went to Poland 1.

DRAWING INFERENCES

Declarer can usually be proud when he avoids finessing to a singleton King behind the Ace. Sometimes it requires luck, sometimes it is simply a matter of logic. During the last segment of the Semi Final between Sweden and Germany 1, Jurek Kozyczkowski landed in a heart game.

♠ K J 7 4		♠ 8 3	
♥ A Q J 10 8		♥ 7 5 4 3 2	
♦ A K		♦ 5	
♣ 9 5		♣ J 8 7 6 3	
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	1NT (14-16)	Pass	Pass
Double	Pass	2♣	2♦
2♥	3♦	4♥	All Pass

North led the $\heartsuit 2$ (3rd and 5th highest), South playing the Queen. It was obvious to declarer that North, who did not lead a club, did not have the $\clubsuit A-K-(Q)$ so, in the minors, he had a maximum of the $\heartsuit J$ and $\clubsuit A-Q$. Together with the $\spadesuit A-Q$, this gave him 13 HCP. That pretty much ensured that the $\heartsuit K$ was in the North hand. Even if South had it (and North had 13 HCP), it would have been a singleton (in South's hand). Without much hope, at trick 2, he cashed the $\heartsuit A$, and the King fell, since North's 1NT was slightly off-shape (4-1-5-3). Discarding a spade from dummy limited declarer's losers to 1 spade and 2 clubs, for +420. [BT: Keep counting!]

USING SUIT PREFERENCE ON TRUMPS

West	North	East	South
		1 \heartsuit	1 \spadesuit
Pass	2 \heartsuit	Pass	2 \spadesuit
Pass	4 \spadesuit	All Pass	

Partner leads the $\heartsuit J$ and you see:

\spadesuit 6 5 2	
\heartsuit A K	
\diamonds A K 10 8 5	
\clubsuit Q 8 6	
	\spadesuit A 9
	\heartsuit Q 8 6 5 4 3 2
	\diamonds 6 2
	\clubsuit A 10

Declarer plays the $\heartsuit A$ from dummy and leads a spade. You take the Ace – 3 – 8 from partner. What now? I don't know the defenders' signalling style, but if it is more or less standard, then the $\spadesuit 8$ suggests a heart. East played a heart, but partner did not ruff. This was the complete deal:

\spadesuit 6 5 2	
\heartsuit A K	
\diamonds A K 10 8 5	
\clubsuit Q 8 6	
\spadesuit 10 8 4	\spadesuit A 9
\heartsuit J 7	\heartsuit Q 8 6 5 4 3 2
\diamonds 9 4 3	\diamonds 6 2
\clubsuit K 5 4 3 2	\clubsuit A 10
\spadesuit K Q J 7 3	
\heartsuit 10 9	
\diamonds Q J 7	
\clubsuit J 9 7	

At the other table, the Italian West, in the same position, followed with the $\spadesuit 4$, suggesting clubs. East cashed the $\clubsuit A$ and, on receiving an encouraging signal, continued with the $\clubsuit 10$ to West's King. A club ruff set the game by one trick.

BT: I'd have led the $\clubsuit A$ at trick 3 anyway. Partner will discourage if they can trump a heart, but will encourage if they have the $\clubsuit K$. Problem solved. However, I also **play suit preference signals on declarer's trump leads** – which simplify the situation!

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