

Trumpitis and Taking a Pessimistic View.

I enjoyed reading a German poem once called Die Verflixte Schriebmischane which can be roughly translated as The Bolody Tipwryter, the original demonic machine. But not only are typewriters devious devilish devices, but so too are dealing machines and the computers that begot them.

I remember once, when the world was young and we sat across the table from players of flesh and blood, that I drew this hand:

♠AKJ52 ♥AT ♦KQ8 ♣A86

As nice a 21 count as anyone would wish to see I am sure you would agree. Things got complicated however when dear partner opened 3S not vulnerable. I kid you not. It actually happened.

So, tell me, are you dreaming of slam? Partner obviously has 7 spades to the Queen, but what else has she got? If she has the AD and either missing K that would come to 9 HCP, surely not too much for a pre-empt and you would then make 7S. If she has just the AD you will still make 6S. If however, she only has one of the two missing kings and they lead the other suit, you are bound to lose two tricks. If she has none of those three missing honours she will be lucky to make even 4S if the ♦Ace is sitting wrong.

What other thoughts flit across your mind before you commit yourself to slam? Well, what agreement do you and your partner have about a non-vulnerable 3S opening bid? A normal 3S pre-empt definitely guarantees a 7 card suit. It also normally has a good 7 card suit, but that obviously is not the case here, because you know her suit is headed by the queen alone. Is your understanding that such a weak suit must always be compensated by an Ace on the outside? Is your understanding that a pre-empt is nothing more than a pre-empt, so that, non-vulnerable, 7 spades to the queen and as little as

possible on the outside is typical? Is your understanding that a pre-empt must not have too much defensive strength outside the trump suit? Unless you and your partner have discussed what exactly a non-vulnerable 3S pre-empt entails, you are going to have difficulty judging where to place, not only this particular contract, but any contract.

My partner and I used to have the understanding that a pre-empt should have a maximum of 1 outside top honour (an ace or a king, but not both). If a hand could hold two outside top honours, then to open 3S would be to corrupt the purpose of a pre-empt which should be to make it difficult for the opposition to find their contract not to make it difficult for your own side to find its contract.

Having that vital understanding I know that we cannot have a grand slam at all and cannot have a small slam unless she has specifically the **♦Ace**. At teams therefore my bid would be 4NT (RCKB) asking for aces and if she told me none then I would sign off in 5S. Incidentally I asked Michael Ware how he would bid the hand and he agreed – 4NT to check for Aces and if partner replies 5C, just sign off in 5S! I know this a dreadful disappointment with your wonderful hand and wonderful fit, but it is the only contract the cards warrant.

On the day however, it was Summer Bridge and it was pairs, so I considered another line entirely. Here's your hand again:

♠AKJ52 ♥AT ♦KQ8 ♣A86.

And here are five possible hands that partner might hold:

- A. ♠QT98764 ♥83 ♦732 ♣5.
- B. ♠QT98764 ♥83 ♦72 ♣54.
- C. ♠QT98764 ♥83 ♦A2 ♣54.
- D. ♠QT98764 ♥K3 ♦72 ♣54.
- E. ♠QT98764 ♥83 ♦72 ♣K4.

Now work out how many hands you would be likely to make with each hand, firstly playing in spades and secondly in no-trumps.

♠AKJ52 ♥AT ♦KQ8 ♣A86.

I estimate these results.

HAND	♠	NT	NT(with ♦ or ♠ lead)
A. ♠QT98764 ♥83 ♦732 ♣5.	[10]	[9]	[10 or 11]
B. ♠QT98764 ♥83 ♦72 ♣54.	[10]	[9]	[10 or 11]
C. ♠QT98764 ♥83 ♦A2 ♣54.	[12]	[12]	
D. ♠QT98764 ♥K3 ♦72 ♣54.	[11]	[10]	[11 or 12]
E. ♠QT98764 ♥83 ♦72 ♣K4.	[11]	[10]	[11 or 12]

Interesting, isn't it? At teams, there is no question, but that 4S is the correct contract. At pairs however, especially if you were in dire need of a top board, 3NT is a bid certainly worth considering. Not simply because in case C it is better, or even in the fond hope that they might lead a diamond or a club, but because you just know that so many of the field will play in 5S, 6S or even 7S and you know that the majority of them will go light.

There is a drawback, inasmuch as you cannot use 4NT (RKCB) because if you insist on playing in no-trumps, you do not want to do so at the 5 level. It's a dark horse and if you are going to bet on it, you had better do it straightaway with a bold 3NT bid.

As the cards lay I made 5NT on a club lead for a top board. Club, diamond and spade leads would allow me to make 5 and only a heart lead would hold me to 3, the heart lead being most unlikely from South's hand. See overleaf for the full deal.

♠T
♥Q98732
♦AJT94
♣9

♠Q987643
♥64
♦52
♣J5

♠AKJ52
♥AT
♦KQ8
♣A86

♠-
♥KJ5
♦763
♣KQT7432

It wasn't a large field but every other EW pair were in some failing spade slam. The worst result when West opened a paltry 2S which enabled Alister Poulgrain to put in a cheeky 3H overcall. Affronted, East bid a quick 6S and George Masters found the phantom 7H sacrifice which ran round to East. A sensible East would have cracked it for a top board but she bid 7S which Alister doubled and it went 2 light for a bottom board for East West.

Now, I personally would not open 3S on West's hand, but I know many who would. Unfortunately their partner's do not always remember that they have agreed it to be okay, hence the inordinate number who stumbled into an unmakeable slam.

Now, lest you think I am encouraging you to bid 3NT on such hands, I am not. I actually took a risk, calculated maybe. At both pairs and

teams, with such a great hand and tremendous fit, it is definitely worth exploring towards a spade slam and nine times out of ten your exploration would be successful. My correct bid should have been 4NT Roman Key Card Blackwood in spades. My partner would have responded 5C (NO key-cards, not the Ace or King of spades nor any outside ace.) That is enough to work out that slam is not on unless they lead a diamond or a spade and unless the diamond Ace is also onside.)

If you used RKCB and you received the reply of one Key Card, then your correct contract should of course be 6NT and if the kings of both clubs and hearts are in the same hand, you have a good chance of making 7 as you run all the spades for a squeeze.

As a devout, nay evangelical, atheist, I do not of course believe in God, but I am severely tempted to believe that there is a devil in the dealing algorithm on the computer. If things appear to be too good to be true, you know damned well there must be a fly in the ointment.

My current partner is always quipping, "What do you call a 7 card suit?", the answer being, "Trumps." There is however a good point to be made for this motto: "What do you call a solid 7 or 8 card suit?", the answer being, "A good reason to think of no-trumps!" This applies especially when your suit is a minor because of the bias of the scoring system. Take this hand for example:

♠AK ♥A ♦K8 ♣AKQJT986

I would open with or an immediate ace-ask of 4NT or an artificial 2C and then use 4NT to ask for aces, but I would never mention my club suit. If they know that's my suit, a good player would lead it as a safe lead and then I would have no chance at all of making 6. If I don't mention clubs then either the Ace of diamonds or a small diamond could be led. If a heart is led then the same player might try to stick

on to both the Ace of diamonds and the King of hearts. It's not much of a chance, but you never know. Certainly, if I decide not to bid slam, why be in a cold 5C rather than the equally cold 5NT. If partner has the missing Ace of diamonds then you would surely want to be in 7NT rather than 7C. My hint for the day: try to avoid mentioning long solid minor suits.