

VERY LONG SUITS.

Hi fellow lepers! To help keep your minds active and maintain your interest in Bridge, I am going to be sending you a series of little articles. They don't presume that you play any particular system, so I hope they will be of general interest. I will be recommending certain actions in your bidding and play, but this does not mean that what I do is right and what you do is wrong. Decisions in bridge are rarely black and white. One action could be right 60% of the time and a different action 40% of the time. Most important is that when you make a bid or a lead or a signal, your partner is on the same wavelength, is dancing to the same tune. You might take a superior action, but if your partner fails to understand you, it is a waste of time. So read, consider and inwardly digest what I have to say, but only adopt anything if you are happy with it and if your partner will also understand your action.

Today's discussion is on very long suits.

To start off, jot down what you would open with each of the following hands:

- A. ♠8 ♥T98764 ♦K93 ♣Q74
- B. ♠8 ♥AQ9876 ♦T93 ♣Q74
- C. ♠8 ♥AKQJ98 ♦T93 ♣874
- D. ♠A876 ♥AQ9876 ♦T3 ♣4
- E. ♠8 ♥AKQJ985 ♦T93 ♣84
- F. ♠8 ♥QJT9876 ♦T93 ♣Q7
- G. ♠8 ♥AKQT987 ♦KJ63 ♣7
- H. ♠8 ♥AQ98764 ♦KJ93 ♣4
- I. ♠- ♥AJT98764 ♦K93 ♣74
- J. ♠- ♥AQJ9876 ♦AKJ3 ♣A4

Done that? Okay, now read on. We shall take as our text for this sermon Hand.

Here it is again writ large: ♠8 ♥AQ98764 ♦KJ93 ♣4

How many hearts do you have? How many hearts are left to be shared among the other three players? So how many hearts on average will each of the other three players hold? That's right, 2. So give your partner his expected 2 and you now have 9 hearts between you, which leaves 4 for the opposition. Have you ever heard of the bit of bridge statistical wisdom that says that an even number of cards are more likely to break unevenly whereas an odd number of cards are more likely to break as close to evenly as they can. What this means

is that the 4 outstanding cards are more likely to break 3:1, which means in turn, that whenever you have a 7 card suit, one of the opposition are highly likely to have a singleton in your suit. Let's say you decide to open 1H with this hand and your left hand opponent has this hand: ♠AQJ85 ♥5 ♦AQ6 ♣JT83.

Do you think for one moment that this fellow will be put off by your 1H bid? Not for one second, because his singleton means that your heart suit is completely irrelevant to his plans.

Now on this occasion your heart suit happens to be AQ98764. Do you think he would be any more worried if he knew that your heart suit were AKQJT98? Of course not. His singleton eliminates your suit, however good it is. Which brings us to a major point: When you have a really long suit, provided it is headed by the Ace, it doesn't matter a great deal quite how strong the suit is in terms of high cards. Length beats strength any day. Here are two 8 card suits: AKQJT987 and AKT65432. The first hand will make 8 tricks every time, but the second hand will make 8 tricks almost as often. Firstly your partner might come down with the Queen. Secondly your partner might have 3 hearts or even 4 hearts and the Queen will drop. Thirdly the Queen or the Jack might drop singleton in one hand and you can finesse against the other honour. Fourthly the QJ might be bare in one hand. Most importantly however, any contract the opposition might make will not depend on their holding in hearts. A four level bid with the second hand will have exactly the same pre-emptive effect as with the first hand.

I would like you to get out of the habit of thinking that a hand like ♠8 ♥AKQJ98 ♦T93 ♣874 is too "strong" to open 2H. It isn't. It is in fact a perfect "weak" two. It is only strong in hearts. It is pathetically weak in any other suit.

And if you continue with the same reasoning, a hand like ♠8 ♥AKQT987 ♦KJ63 ♣7 is not too "strong" to open 4H. In fact, in defence against any other suit, it is even weaker than the previous hand, because the extra length of the suit makes a singleton or void with the opposition more certain.

So returning to our text for the sermon: ♠8 ♥AQ98764 ♦KJ93 ♣4, you should by now have worked out that my recommended opening bid on this hand is 4H. If you are not convinced, just move around the table to the next seat. The lass on your right has just opened 4H and this is your hand: ♠AQJ85 ♥5 ♦AQ6 ♣JT83. You were more than happy to bid 1S over their 1H. Honestly now, how happy would you be to bid 4S over their 4H?

Still not convinced? Okay, move around the table to the next seat. Your partner has opened 1H, your Right Hand opponent passes and this is your hand: ♠J85 ♥T53 ♦A7652 ♣T73. You pass, right? And you have just missed out on game, but don't worry, you were never going to get to play in 4H anyway, because your Left Hand opponent certainly won't pass and they will reach their 4S game..

So how would we define our 4H opening bid? Well, it must have a 7 or 8 card heart suit and it must be too good for an opening bid of 3H. That "too good" could consist merely of an eighth card or else "something extra on the side". In our text hand, that something extra is KJ93 of diamonds. When you open 4H (or 4S, 4C, 4D, 5C or 5D), this is about as much as partner should expect. If, in addition to your long suit, you have much more than this on the outside, you are now really getting too strong to open 4H, because you might miss out on slam. A hand like this would be too good to open 4H: ♠8 ♥AQ98764 ♦AKJ3 ♣A. If your hand is this good you should start with an ACOL 2C game force bid.

Back to our text hand again of **♠8 ♥AQ98764 ♦KJ93 ♣4**, if the opposition ask what the bid means, you should say, "A good seven or any 8 card heart suit and some extra strength outside the suit." If they insist on a point count you have to say, "somewhere between 10 and 16 HCP." When you make this bid, your partner should have a pretty clear idea of the sort of hand you hold. He will not worry about his lack of heart support and if he has outside aces, he might now decide to head towards slam.

When you open 4H you are not guaranteeing to make your contract. With a bit of help from your partner, you might well make your contract, but equally you might have stopped the opposition bidding and making their contract. My recommendation is that whenever you have a very long suit you should start with the highest level bid that the length of your suit justifies.

Change seats again and now consider what this means to the opposition when somebody has opened at the 4 level. Let us say that they opened 4D and you hold: **♠AQT95 ♥KQ84 ♦void ♣A652**. Is your 15HCP enough to come in at the 4 level? Before anybody bid, you knew you had 15 out of the 40 HCP around the table. You knew that you had 37.6% of the total honours. When, however, one of the opposition announces a 7+ card suit, the 10 HCP in that suit are taken out of the equation because you have a singleton or a void. You are now in effect playing with a 30 HCP deck and you have 15 of them, that is

50% of all the available points. You have the equivalent of 20 HCP in a 40 HCP deck. You shouldn't hesitate for a moment in doubling their 4D bid for takeout. My advice therefore is, when they have opened with a 4 level bid and you are short in their suit, bid boldly. (Actually the same thing would apply if you held 4 cards in their suit, because you would know for sure that partner was short.) My advice comes with no cast-iron guarantee and sometimes of course you will come a cropper, but when there is a lot of distribution about, both sides should bid boldly.

Now, what I would bid on those initial hands (using natural weak twos).

- A. ♠8 ♥T98764 ♦K93 ♣Q74 : **PASS**
- B. ♠8 ♥AQ9876 ♦T93 ♣Q74 : **2H**
- C. ♠8 ♥AKQJ98 ♦T93 ♣874 : **2H**
- D. ♠A876 ♥AQ9876 ♦T3 ♣4 : **1H**
- E. ♠8 ♥AKQJ985 ♦T93 ♣84 : **3H**
- F. ♠8 ♥QJT9876 ♦T93 ♣Q7 : **3H**
- G. ♠8 ♥AKQT987 ♦KJ63 ♣7 : **4H**
- H. ♠8 ♥AQ98764 ♦KJ93 ♣4 : **4H**
- I. ♠- ♥AJT98764 ♦K93 ♣74 : **4H**
- J. ♠- ♥AQJ9876 ♦AKJ3 ♣A4 : **2C**

If you don't want to open 4H on hands G, H and I, I have to ask you, "what on earth do you open 4H on then?" Some people simply never use 4 or 5 level opening bids. However, a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still and I accept your right to disagree with me. If you wish send me your counter arguments.

Next time I shall discuss the Weak Two concept in detail.

Stay safe and see you at the other side.

Arthur

