

PUSHING THE RULE TO THE LIMIT.



You may have heard of it, “Hamman’s Rule” where if 3NT is a possibility from among your options, then you should give it a go. The boards at Akarana this week did little to doubt the wisdom of this rule.

It started with [Board 7](#) and your holding as East of:

♠ A ♥ K65 ♦ Q86 ♣ AQJ872 You saw:

West	North	East	South
1♣	1♦	2♦	Pass
3♣	Pass	?	

2♦ agreed clubs with partner owning up to no more than a minimum with longish clubs. It was strange no-one had mentioned spades. Surely that meant your partner had some reasonable holding there? There were two routes to success by either bidding 3♦ which would seem to ask for a half-hold (partner might have bid no-trumps with a full one) or simply taking the 3NT plunge yourself. Any route which ended in 5♣ was to end in disaster:

Board 7	♠ K 10 7	
South Deals	♥ 9 8 7 2	
Both Vul	♦ A K 10 9 3	
	♣ 6	
♠ J 2		♠ A
♥ A Q 3		♥ K 6 5
♦ J 7 5		♦ Q 8 6
♣ K 10 9 4 3		♣ A Q J 8 7 2
	♠ Q 9 8 6 5 4 3	
	♥ J 10 4	
	♦ 4 2	
	♣ 5	

As you can see, never predict anything in bridge, here West’s supposed spade hold. North led a high diamond against 5♣ and disbelieved declarer’s jack on the first round. 3NT was rather more successful. Watch West’s diamond holding. It will soon reappear, well more or less:

As West, you hold:
 ♠ K2 ♥ K943 ♦ J92 ♣ K764

and with no interference, you hear:
West **East**
 1♣
 1♥ 2♣

You raise to 3♣ “out of courtesy”, always a good excuse when the limit is 8 tricks! However, partner comes alive with 3♥. Now what? There’s 3 possible games, 3NT, 4♥ or 5♣. Which one? Bob H would have had a quick 3NT on the table. I played for time with 3♠, looking for a diamond hold which ended us in the 4♥ moysian. As usual, Jxx was a hold (just!) and Bob H was spot on:

Board 13
 North Deals
 Both Vul

♠ 10 9 6 5
 ♥ 10 8 6 2
 ♦ A Q 8 6
 ♣ 3

♠ K 2
 ♥ K 9 4 3
 ♦ J 9 2
 ♣ K 7 6 4



♠ A Q J 4
 ♥ Q 7
 ♦ 10 7 5 4 3
 ♣ 9 8

♠ 8 7 3
 ♥ A J 5
 ♦ K
 ♣ A Q J 10 5
 2

♦A followed by a spade switch would give West a horrible diamond guess in 3NT though no defenders were up to that with all 6 pairs in 3NT making their contract comfortably. I hope I would not be labelled a “result merchant” but a second round “value” 3♣ bid from East would have ended the auction quickly and successfully in 3NT.

As it was, after two rounds of spades and the doubleton ♥Q taking the first round of that suit in 4♥, that contract was doomed, down 3! What, though, would Bobby Hamman think of the following? Let’s look at the bidding through the eyes of the player in the North seat who holds, with neither side vulnerable:

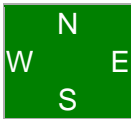
♠ 94 ♥ KJT7542 ♦ 9 ♣ 963

Your right hand opponent starts proceedings with 1NT (11-14). Someone once said bridge is a bidders’ game and so, rightly or wrongly, you decide to enter the fray. A 3♥ pre-empt might appeal. Showing a single-suited hand at the 2 level appeals a little less but bidding 2♣ which partner alerted and announced as “showing both majors” was rather the least appealing of all options!

That, of course, was what happened. Then, there was the relief of your left-hand opponent bidding 2♠. It was only short-lived relief as out came the stop-card from partner and 3NT hit the table.

What to do? Ethically correct as North had unauthorised information, they passed (4♥ would surely be “less down” but North could not justify that bid as in his mind he had already shown hearts.). There was to be no tame ending as the 2♠ bidder doubled the final contract.

If it was ethically correct to pass 3NT undoubled, then the same could be said re the doubled contract. Barring an unlikely heart holding of Ax, it seemed almost impossible that this would be a making contract. Partner had nothing as good as that in the heart department but rather made up for it in the other red suit!

		<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
<u>Board 24</u>	♠ 9 4	1 NT	2 ♣	2 ♠	3 NT
West Deals	♥ K J 10 7 5 4 2	Pass	Pass	Dbl	All pass
None Vul	♦ 9 ♣ 9 6 3				
♠ A 5		♠ K J 10 8 7 3			
♥ A Q 9 3		♥ 8 6			
♦ 7 6 4		♦ J 5			
♣ Q 8 4 2		♣ K 10 7			
	♠ Q 6 2				
	♥ —				
	♦ A K Q 10 8 3 2				
	♣ A J 5				

West led ♠A and continued the suit, which gave South an immediate 9th trick. To beat this unlikely contract, West must lead their small spade to East’s king with East switching to the ♣10, thus rendering the ♣9 in dummy powerless..try it! You may not be surprised to know that none of the five pairs defending 3NT, twice doubled, found such scintillating defence!

Was it for a hand like the above that Hamman developed his rule? He has at least 5 disciples who all scored well on the board. There will obviously be boards where this rule does not apply but it is a good yardstick.

Finally, great ethics from Chris Stuckey in passing the doubled contract. Time for a quick system review with partner but he was well rewarded on the night for his ethics. I wish my partners “looked after” me so well.

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