

The five level's for the opposition....but the 4 level?

One board at Akarana demonstrated that the famous saying of the 5-level belonging to the opposition does generally hold true, while another challenged whether the same might hold true for the 4 level.

Let's give you two hands and two bidding sequences and see what you make of them:

West	North	East	South
			1♥
1♠	2♥	2♠	4♥
4♠	Pass	Pass	5♥
?			

and with both sides vulnerable, as West you hold:

♠ AQJ732 ♥ 7 ♦ 74 ♣ AK82

while, a little later, this was the situation:

West	North	East	South
		1♠	Pass
1NT	2♥	2♠	3♥
Pass	Pass	4♣	4♥
?			

and with just the opposition vulnerable, as West you hold:

♠ 76 ♥ Q7543 ♦ Q2 ♣ K975

There is an awful lot of bidding going on. **Which way now?**

Proving "The Law"

In our first example, it would seem we have 9 or 10 spades while the opposition would seem to have the same number of hearts. That is a

maximum of 20 tricks. For our side to make 11 tricks in spades, they will be two down in 5♥. If they make 11 tricks, we will be two down in 5♠. Both sides may also make 10 tricks. You can gain (-500 against -650 or +650 against +500) by bidding on though if there are only 19 tricks, this could be a big losing action.

It does look that defending 5♥ is the most sensible option. Whether you decided to double 5♥ maybe a different matter but if you think you were pretty close to making 4♠, then perhaps you should. Even if you did not, this time your partner might choose the red card:

<p>Board 7 South Deals Both Vul</p>	<p>♠ 6 5 ♥ A 5 4 ♦ K J 8 2 ♣ 9 5 3 2</p>										
<p>♠ A Q J 7 3 2 ♥ 7 ♦ 7 4 ♣ A K 7 6</p>	<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"> <table style="border: none; text-align: center; width: 60px; height: 60px;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> </div>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ K 10 9 4 ♥ K 3 2 ♦ 9 6 ♣ J 10 8 4</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	<p>♠ 8 ♥ Q J 10 9 8 6 ♦ A Q 10 5 3 ♣ Q</p>										

Just 19 trumps but surely South's extreme shape (and the double fit) adds up to a 20th? 5♥ was just one down, thanks to the ♥K scoring a trick while 4♠, but no more, was also an easy make. Two pairs pushed on to 5♠, once a lucky make, while 4 more defended 5♥ twice doubled. The other 6 tables saw 4♠ as the contract, twice doubled. Maybe I could encourage a few players to invest in Larry Cohen's "Law of Total Tricks" book or at least ask the South players to re-evaluate their hands!

We cannot expect to get all such decisions right but this board does seem to be pretty close to a textbook example of one side pushing to and the other bowing out at the 5 level.

Jack's the key.

Five trumps headed by the queen and partner bidding furiously. It seems obvious to reach for the red card and double 4♥. Yet, the opposition are no beginners and are also bidding very aggressively. Also, you have honour fourth in your partner's second suit..while apart from the queen, your hearts are not robust. The opponents should have a double fit in the red suits. So, a little illogically perhaps, I opted for 4♠. Was I right? It came down to who held the ♦J.

Board 18	♠ J 9										
East Deals	♥ K J 10 9 8										
N-S Vul	♦ K 10 7 5 3										
	♣ 4										
♠ 7 6	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td style="background-color: green; color: white;"></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ A K Q 10 3 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ Q 7 5 4 3		♥ —									
♦ Q 2		♦ J 9 4									
♣ K 9 7 5		♣ Q 10 3 2									
	♠ 8 5 4										
	♥ A 6 2										
	♦ A 8 6										
	♣ A J 8 6										

Swap the ♦J and 10 around and 4♥ will be an easy make despite the trump break. Only three rounds of spades tests declarer who will play two rounds of trumps, finessing, then run the diamonds, losing just two spades and a trump.

However, on the actual hand, North has to lose a diamond and can duck the ♦Q (unless West unblocks a round earlier) and can escape one down.

Meanwhile, good club guessing limits 4♠ also to one down. Most pairs played in spades though only three at the four level with one declarer bringing this contract home. Only three played in hearts, twice making eight tricks and once nine, all three minus scores for the declarer.

So, maybe, the 4 level should also belong to the opposition though the first hand above shows that that statement is an exception which proves the rule.

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