





FOUR MIGHTY HANDS

What have the following four hands got in common other than they all appeared at Akarana this week and they, one in particular, are all hands you would like to hold? (Just to even matters up, at least 12 of the 28 boards played were part-score battles.)

♠ K3 ♥ AK ♦ AK972 ♣ AQT7	♠ AK8432 ♥ AKQ9 ♦ J9 ♣ K	♠ AKJT32 ♥ Q5 ♦ - ♣ AKJT2	♠ - ♥ A ♦ AQJ83 ♣ AKQJ10732
23	20	18	
			

In case you are wondering, they all occurred on different hands and fell to three different compass directions (lucky East!).

So, I will dip my toe in the water and say that all four are strong 2♣ openings. (only the 21 count may have suffered an opposition opening bid first.)

The 23 high of the first hand makes it a fairly uncontroversial decision though the decision of many to treat it as a balanced hand meant that the opportunity to reach a reasonable small slam was lost. Only 2 out of 11 pairs reached 6NT and no-one the better 6♦ contract with these cards:

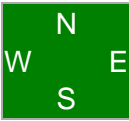
♠ K 3		♠ J 8 5
♥ A K		♥ 10 8 4 2
♦ A K 9 7 2		♦ Q J 10 6
♣ A Q 10 7		♣ K 5

Whether you open 2♣ and rebid 2NT or have a different 2 level opening to show a flat 22/23, it is hard for East to get too excited after discovering West has no major suit. Simple Baron (3♣) would unearth the diamond fit. Otherwise, 3NT would seem to be the resting point.

If East responds 2♦ to a 2♣ opening, they would “steal” the best contract off their partner. 6♦ (especially by West) makes on a spade lead, when ♣J is not in the four- card suit or if South holds the ♠A (the last was true on the actual hand).

I could not stand the wait of opening the second hand, my 20 pointer at the 1 level and hear one player after another pass. I know my ♣K is of dubious value but that was counter-balanced by the sixth spade. So, in these days where “Acol 2s” are out of fashion, 2♣ it had to be.

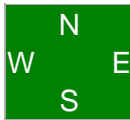
As it happened, partner would have responded to 1♠. Partner did make a slam try but the diamond weakness was soon identified and we played in the safety of game:

♠ J 7 5 ♥ J 10 8 2 ♦ 10 7 6 ♣ A Q 6		♠ A K 8 4 3 2 ♥ A K Q 9 ♦ J 9 ♣ K	
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		2♣	Pass
2♦	Pass	2♠	Pass
3♠	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♠	All pass		

Three pairs did reach slam which required South to find a diamond lead from ♦Q854 and no other honour cards. Twice, the slam made.

Our third 2♣ was the “weakest” of the four but despite its mere 18 high had a good feel about it. In view of the few slams bid (3 small and no grand slams), it would seem the majority started with 1♠. These were the four hands:

Board 26
 North Deals
 None Vul

♠ — ♥ A 4 ♦ Q J 7 6 2 ♣ Q 8 7 5 4 3		♠ 9 7 6 5 ♥ 7 3 2 ♦ 10 9 5 3 ♣ 9 6 ♠ A K J 10 3 2 ♥ Q 5 ♦ — ♣ A K J 10 2	
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	2♣	2♥
3♣	Pass	4♣	Pass
4♥	Pass	7♣	All pass

The above sequence assumes 4♥ is first round control. If it could be second round, then a Blackwood style ask would be needed to check. Granted that

partner will not always have six-card support for one's minor but one would surely want to try some game with those East cards (I suspect one would make at least 10 tricks if the above North hand was its partner), then a strong statement with the opening bid seems a good way to begin.

On then to the star of the show, with once more, the minor suits starring. Only an absolute pessimist would describe our fourth hand as anything worse than a 1 loser. Our bidding should be about discovering whether our partner has the ♦K. Although we have a strong 2-suiter, we really should say firmly to partner that clubs must be trumps:

Board 19

South Deals

E-W Vul

♠ —

♥ A

♦ A Q J 8 3

♣ A K Q J 7 3 2

♠ A Q J 8 3

♥ 9 8 6 4

♦ K 4 2

♣ 6

♠ K 5 4

♥ J 10 5 3 2

♦ 7 6 5

♣ 10 9

♠ 10 9 7 6 2

♥ K Q 7

♦ 10 9

♣ 8 5 4

		N	
W		E	
		S	

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			Pass
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	4 ♣	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	6 ♣	All pass	

4♣ set clubs as trumps with South required to cue-bid. 4♥ was not what North wanted to hear...hence the third club jump by North in so many bids. No grand slam this time (far too risky!) but enough exploration done on the way.

So, 4 x 2♣ openers in one evening. Whoever said such a bid was under-utilised. Not by me, anyway.

Richard Solomon