

April 18, 2020

Bridge with Richard Ward

US expert and author Marty Bergen developed some refinements to the point-count system (ace = 4; king = 3; queen = 2; jack = 1) which forms the basis of hand evaluation for those learning the game. He noted that, in the interests of keeping things simple, aces and tens had been under-valued whilst queens and jacks were over-valued. Bergen advocated the following: if your hand contains at least three aces or three tens, add 1 point; if your hand contains at least three queens or three jacks, subtract 1 point.

Of course there is a lot more to bidding and play than just looking at the honour cards. The other cards can be just as important. On this hand it is easy to miss the extra chance which the small cards provide.

	NORTH		S/ EW VUL
	♠ 8 5		
	♥ J 7 3		
	♦ 8 7 5		
	♣ K Q 6 3 2		
WEST		EAST	
♠ 6		♠ K 4 2	
♥ Q 8 5 4		♥ 10 9 6	
♦ Q J 10 4		♦ 9 6 3 2	
♣ J 8 7 5		♣ 10 9 4	
	SOUTH		
	♠ A Q J 10 9 7 3		
	♥ A K 2		
	♦ A K		
	♣ A		

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			2C
PASS	2D	PASS	2S
PASS	2NT	PASS	3S
PASS	4S	PASS	6S
PASS	PASS	PASS	

2C showed a big hand, 2D was a negative bid – less than an ace and a king. This pair had a “2nd negative” bid of 3C available after 2S and so 2NT promised some scattered values. That was enough for South who, holding all of the aces, simply blasted into the spade slam.

West led the queen of diamonds and declarer faced the problem of getting across to dummy. This would be easy if West held the king of spades the 8 of spades would be a forced entry by leading a low spade after first cashing the blocking ace of clubs. But there was one more chance, easy to miss. When our expert South led the 7 of spades at trick 3, pinning the singleton 6, and overtook with the 8 of spades the defence was powerless. If West took the king, the tiny 5 of spades would provide access to the club winners. Novices would be amazed to see just how powerful all of these ‘irrelevant’ cards had become.
