

September 12, 2020

Bridge with Richard Ward

Much has been written about the value of pre-emptive bidding. American champion, Justin Lall R.I.P. (1986-2020) put it most succinctly when he wrote: "Pre-empting is a very important part of the modern game. Bidding is so accurate these days that if you allow your opponents to have a free run they will almost always go right. By pre-empting you sometimes force them to guess, and the more they have to guess the more they will go wrong."

He cites the following three factors as important considerations for a pre-emptive hand: 1 Purity – QJ10432 7 Q654 52 is excellent. A765432 K J43 Q52 is awful; 2 Suit texture – prefer QJ108765 to KQ75432; 3 Shape – distributions such as 6322 and 7222 are the kiss of death. Prefer 6-4 or 7-4 where your trick-taking potential increases. Other factors include vulnerability, position and the presence of voids (Lall likes them, others hate them!).

This hand was reported by Peter Gill from a 14-table BBO expert game last month.

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

After two passes, what should West open? Let's do our checklist. Purity? – brilliant. Suit texture? – fabulous. Shape? – outstanding. 3rd position? – great. Vulnerability? – a bit scary. Number of hearts? - oh well, a 6-card is almost 7. And our conclusion? We would open 3H and see what happens.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		PASS	PASS
3H	DBL	PASS	3S
PASS	PASS	PASS	

All but two of the nine pairs in a spade contract made 10 or more tricks so it looks as if our pre-emptive opening has kept the opponents out of game. Operation successful!

For the record, only two pairs started with 3H. Of the remainder, four opened 1H and eight opened a weak 2H (or similar) with mixed outcomes.
