

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- The play of the cards at duplicate is a sufficient pleasure by itself, but players with a competitive nature who want to win must develop two attitudes:
  - Be willing to fight tooth and nail for every trick
  - Have in mind always what is likely to happen at other tables
- The second one is *crucial* and governs the game plan on most deals
- As soon as you see dummy, you should start to worry about the bidding and the contract at other tables

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- Your game plan is clearest when you think you are in the so-called ‘*room contract*’ – the one most other tables will reach
- You then focus on making more tricks than other tables
- However, this is *not* the same as going flat out to make as many tricks as possible
- In general, you should make the play that collects the most tricks in the long haul
- A couple of examples will help illustrate the idea

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

(1)            A K Q 5 2  
                  7 3

(2)            A Q 6 4 3  
                  K 7 2

- You are in NT and have no side entry to dummy
- With (1) you should duck a round: a 4-2 break is more likely than a 3-3 break (42.5% v 33.5 %)
- In the long run you make more tricks by ducking than by not ducking
- With (2), suppose that you need only 4 tricks, so you can afford to duck a round – *you shouldn't*
- A 3-2 break is odds on (68%) and you should play to make all tricks

# ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- *Taking risks for an overtrick*

♠ K Q 10

♥ J 5

♦ 9 7 4 3

♣ A 10 9 5

♠ 9 3

♥ 9 8 6 4

♦ K Q 10 8

♣ K 7 3

♠ J 8 6 5 4

♥ 7

♦ A J 5 2

♣ Q 6 2

♠ A 7 2

♥ A K Q 10 3 2

♦ 6

♣ J 8 4

- You are in 4♥, they lead ♦K and continue. You ruff, draw trumps, finesse clubs, and ruff another diamond

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- After the lead and the ruffing of diamonds twice, drawing trumps and finessing clubs, declarer will be out of trumps
- Should he risk the contract by taking a second finesse or settle for 10 tricks?
- The contract and sequence of play is likely to be the same at most tables, so he should play for the maximum expectation of tricks.
- Restricted choice says the second finesse will succeed twice as often as it will fail, so it should be taken
- In teams or rubber, he makes sure of 10 tricks<sup>5</sup>

# ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- *Beware of logical traps – suit v NT game/slam*

♠ A Q

♥ A 6 3

♦ A J 9 8 3

♣ Q 8 5

♠ K 9 6 5 3

♥ Q

♦ Q 7 4 2

♣ J 9 4

♠ J 10 7 2

♥ 10 9 8 5 4

♦ K 10 5

♣ 2

♠ 8 4

♥ K J 7 2

♦ 6

♣ A K 10 7 6 3

- Charles Goren was in 6♣ and West led the ♥Q. He set about ruffing diamonds, reaching this position

# ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

	♠ A Q	
	♥ 6	
	♦ J	
	♣	
♠ K 9 6 5		♠ J 10 (♠K x)
♥		♥ 10 9
♦		♦
♣		♣
	♠ 8 4	
	♥ J 7	
	♦	
	♣	

- He had taken the first 9 tricks, so the contract was safe.
- He could take a risk-free spade finesse
- But if E had ♠K he could play to squeeze him

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- It was clear that 6NT would be reached at quite a few tables and would make or fail on the spade finesse
- Goren therefore thought: ‘If West has ♠K I have little chance of a good score, and I lose to all those who bid 6NT. The only hope is to find ♠K with East, and then 6NT is unmakeable’. So he tried for the squeeze – and made only 12 tricks
- The reasoning was faulty: at 6♣, whether South scores 1370 (6♣=) or 1390 (6♣+1) makes no difference against those in 6NT (=1440)
- Consider and try to beat only those in 6♣



# ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- *The unquantifiable risk*

♠ A K 8 2

♥ A 10

♦ 10 8 4

♣ K 5 4 3

♠ J 9 5

♥ K 4

♦ Q 7 3 2

♣ Q 10 6 2

♠ Q 10 3

♥ Q 6 5 3

♦ J 9 5

♣ J 9 7

♠ 7 6 4

♥ J 9 8 7 2

♦ A K 6

♣ A 8

- The contract is 3NT and West leads the ♣2. Nine tricks can be made by winning and playing ♥A and another?

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- You force out ♥K and ♥Q and lose at most two hearts and two clubs
- Can you afford not to try for the overtrick?
- Six hearts are missing and you can play West for doubleton honour – win in hand and finesse ♥10
- Snag is if finesse loses to East and he returns a diamond, you will be an entry short to your hand and unable to establish hearts, if the finessed honour is still guarded
- It is not easy to assess whether this is a risk worth taking and what the chances of the defenders making a killing return are

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- The general rule is this: the more certain you are of being in the room contract, the more willing you should be to accept this risk
- In the above example, if you thought some tables might not reach game, you should make sure of your nine tricks
- Here, it is hard to see anyone not being in 3NT
- In general, one should not play as if defenders have x-ray eyes.
- South should boldly go for the heart finesse and expect East to return a club when he wins

# ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- *How to be down but not out*

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

- After 1NT - 3NT, West leads the ♠6, East wins with the ace and returns the ♠3. The ♠10 loses and ♠2 is back<sup>12</sup>

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- Playing teams, trying at all costs to make the contract, you cross to dummy in hearts and play for the diamond deep finesse – diamond to ♦10
- You make the contract 14% of the time, when both ♦K and ♦J are with East. Mostly, you go down two or more tricks when this doesn't work
- At duplicate, in a normal contract, you cannot play against the odds. With 27 points and no major, 3NT will be the room contract and a spade will be led from either hand
- South's aim is to make most tricks most of the time, so he forces ♣A and accepts down one

# ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- *Unusual contracts*

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

♠  
♥  
♦  
♣

♠  
♥  
♦  
♣

♠ K Q 4  
♥ 9 7 5  
♦ A Q 10  
♣ A Q 9 6

- After 1NT - 5NT, Mike Lawrence bid 7NT. West leads the ♠J. Missing an Ace makes this unusual

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- All the other tables will be in 6NT
- However, he knew that ♥A was with East (no DBL and lead 😊), something the other declarers didn't know
- ♥A with East, means that 6NT doesn't make either (only 11 tricks available, ♥J and ♥10 missing)
- In a bold attempt for parity with 6NT-1, he won the opening lead in dummy and led a small heart
- East hesitated but went up with ♥A to ensure defeat of the contract and Lawrence gained a near average !

# ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- *Bad contract – think of a scenario to recover*

♠ 7 6 4 3

♥ 7 6 3

♦ A 9 4 2

♣ K 5

♠ Q 9

♥ A 10 8 5 4

♦ J 7

♣ 10 4 3 2

♠ 10 5

♥ J 9 2

♦ Q 10 6 3

♣ Q 9 8 6

♠ A K J 8 2

♥ K Q

♦ K 8 5

♣ A J 7

- After 2NT - 3NT, West leads the ♥5 to East's ♥J and your ♥K. You play off ♠A – K, dropping ♠Q – 9



## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- The contract is unusual, not because you opened 2NT but because North did not use Stayman
- Most pairs will play in 4♠ and make 11 tricks by ruffing a club in dummy
- You can't join them, so you must beat them
- Cross to ♣K and finesse ♣J on the way back
- If it loses, West may not realise that the ♥Q is bare, but in any case this is your best chance to score points
- Desperate measures may also be needed when the opening lead is unusually damaging

# ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- *Damaging opening lead*

♠ K 8 4 2

♥ Q J 9 3

♦ 10 6

♣ 8 7 5

♠ A 7 5

♥ 8 4 2

♦ A 7 5 4 2

♣ K 6

♠ Q

♥ 10 7 6

♦ Q J 9 3

♣ A 10 4 3 2

♠ J 10 9 6 3

♥ A K 5

♦ K 8

♣ Q J 9

- After 1♠ - 2♠, West leads the ♣K, continues with ♣6 to East's Ace and ruffs next club, exiting with ♥4

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- Could you recover after this venomous defence ?
- With a neutral lead, declarer will take a normal finesse in trumps, playing West for the ♠Q
- If he has it, your chances are dim
- So, lead a trump from hand and boldly play ♠K, continuing trumps if it holds
- You may prevent East from ever getting in to lead back diamonds, and may score very well by discarding a diamond on the hearts
- When you get a lucky lead, slogan is not ‘Who dares, wins’ but ‘What we have, we hold’

# ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- *Lucky (for you) opening lead*

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

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

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

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

- After 1NT- 3NT, West leads the ♦3, dummy plays low and you capture East's ♦J with the Q

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- You play a diamond right back and finesse the ♦9, which holds. This is an excellent start
- You continue with three rounds of clubs, finishing in closed hand so that you can take the spade finesse, if you choose to do so
- On the 3<sup>rd</sup> club, West discards a spade
- Now you must decide whether to go for overtrick
- If the spade finesse loses and ♥A is wrong, you might go down, but the risk of finding two cards badly placed is normally worth taking
- However, you had a good lead and must think<sub>21</sub>

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- The play to the first trick gave you three tricks where you would normally not take more than two
- After such a lucky start, you should be content with nine tricks – sure to be a good score
- Note that the diamond lead cannot have been automatic. West, having a doubleton club, must have another 4-card suit
- Not every other declarer will be so lucky
- Some other Wests will lead the other suit and other declarers will have a tougher job

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- *Sacrifice contracts*
- You are in a non-vulnerable save against a vulnerable game and expect perhaps half the field to be in the same contract
- This is the trump layout, and we will suppose that if trumps are 3-2, opponents could not have made their contract:

K 3 (dummy)

A Q 10 7 5 4 (declarer)

- You play the King and all follow. You lead the 3 and East follows again. Do you finesse, playing East for J-x-x-x ? It makes the difference between 300 & 500<sup>33</sup>

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- Some players will say ‘I shall play East for J-x-x-x because if trumps are 3-2 I have made a phantom sacrifice’
- However, such thinking is itself phantasmal (☺)
- However you play, if you could have set the opponents you will lose to all the pairs who didn’t sacrifice
- If you could not have set them, you will beat all the (same) pairs who didn’t sacrifice
- Conclusion: Consider *only* those who have sacrificed and, in the absence of contrary indication, play for the drop



## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- **Match-point defence**
- Defenders' task is simplest when there has been a normal uncontested sequence and there is no reason to suspect the contract is unsound
- Their objective then is to take more tricks than other defenders, whether this will beat the contract or not
- This has a particular bearing on the opening lead: One does not go all out for the lead most likely to set the contract (as we do in teams or rubber), but instead for the lead that will hold declarer to the fewest tricks
- Basically, try not give away any unnecessary, cheap tricks on the opening lead
- Let's look at a couple of examples

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- South deals and opens 1NT, North raises to 3NT, and you West have to lead:

1    ♠10 5                  ♥10 9 8 6        ♦K J 8 5 3        ♣A 7

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

- With (1) a diamond lead may beat the contract if partner has ♦Q - a rubber bridge player would look no further
- At duplicate, the sound lead is the ♥10: it may not bring South to his knees, but is less likely to cost a trick
- With (2), the lead should be a spade, which is likely to hold declarer to fewer tricks than a club or a heart
- Short-suit leads against notrumps are much more common at duplicate

# ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- *Defending against the room contract*

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

♠ 6 5 2  
♥ 10 8 7 6 5  
♦ J 3 2  
♣ 7 4

♠ K 4  
♥ K Q 4 3  
♦ A 9 8 6  
♣ 10 9 8

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

- South is in 4♠, West leads the ♥6 and your ♥Q loses to the Ace. ♠Q comes back and you win with ♠K. Now<sup>2?</sup>

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- At rubber or teams bridge, defenders assume that by hook or by crook the contract can be beaten.
- East would underlead his ♦A and hope that declarer miss-guesses
- At duplicate *against a normal contract*, this credo has no place: plays that have a good chance of killing overtricks are preferred to those that have a limited chance of beating the contract
- South might have ♦K-J and guess wrong, but is more likely either to guess right or to have ♦K-x or ♦KQx and have no guess. So, cash ♦A and hold him to 10 tricks
- Those threatening clubs mean we take our tricks, especially since the lead helped us

## ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

- *Playing for tops*
- Most players estimate their match point score as they go along. Good ones estimate their score to within 2%
- In a club duplicate the winner's final score is likely to be around 60-65 %. If, towards the end, you think you're in the running, you should play down the middle
- If you estimate you are around 57% say, then perhaps you should play for tops, to try and catch up
- A good way to do this is to make a play that is *only slightly inferior* to the standard play that everybody else will make
- Note: it is not suggested that you go for crazy plays with very low chances of success !!!

# ONLINE LESSONS – THE PLAY AT PAIRS

♠ K 7 5

♥ Q 4

♦ A 7 2

♣ A 8 6 4 3

♠ A J 10 6 3

♥ A K J 7

♦ 8

♣ J 5 2

- You are in 4♠, West leads the ♦Q
- A few pairs will be in 3NT, most will be in 4♠
- Your task is to beat their score. This can only happen on a better guess in trumps.
- Normal play is ♠K and finesse ♠J. Instead, cash ♠A and finesse ♠J the other way – and don't forget to pray!