

CHANCES -- No. 11

by Richard Cowan

All of the CHANCES columns to date have focussed on problems of card play. Yet considerations of the probabilities also arise in bidding; a recent hand from Thursday-night bridge at Lindfield illustrates this.

North
♠AKJ9
♥KQ94
♦AJ
♣AK10

As South you must decide where to place the contract. Your partner has shown 25+ HCP, with no 5-card suit and no singleton. Upon enquiry you learn that he has 3 aces and 3 kings. Do you bid 7NT or subside in 6NT?

South
♠Q106
♥A102
♦Q2
♣QJ954

Very few pairs in the Thursday night GNOT field of May 8 reached the cold 7NT on these cards, vulnerable. Some pairs did not learn of the combined 36 HCP; other Norths who took control of the bidding did not learn of South's 5-card club suit. If South took control, he often did not learn as much as the South cited in our problem.

Motivated by a wish to evaluate, in hindsight, the merit of bidding decisions taken at the table, I have written a computer routine -- still rather primitive at this stage -- which helps me tally the chance that partner will have the right shape and cards, given the information he has shown to that point. I have given the routine a test-drive on this hand.

Solution: Given the information that our South has, there are 128,925 hands that North might have. Surprisingly few, only 23.82%, give 13 tricks off the top; 53.70% have 12 immediate tricks, 27.87% have 11 and 1.68% are so grim that they have only 10.

The chance of success from a 7NT bid is, of course, much higher than 23.82% as there are many hands which are near certainties and more still which make on a successful finesse or favourable drop of an outstanding jack.

For example, 21.12% of North's hands will have the ♣AKx (where $x < 10$) yet still have only 12 sure tricks because only 4 club tricks are certain; all of these hands will come home with a 5th club trick unless West has all 5 clubs including the ♣8. So we can bank on 98.4% of these cases.

In addition, on the 13.77% of deals where North holds ♣AK doubleton and just 12 sure

tricks, we bring home the contract with a 5th club 86.4% of the time.

So our chances have already been boosted to 56.5% without having regard to finesses, J-drops and squeezes involving the other suits. We give some examples below of these cases.

The North hand ♠AJxx♥KQJx♦AK♣AK10 gives 12 sure tricks and a 13th on the spade finesse, whilst ♠AJxx♥KQJ♦AK♣AKxx can convert 11 tricks to 13 with no more than a repeated finesse. Many hands offer a 50% chance, based on a finesse against the missing K.

Others, like ♠AKJx♥KQxx♦AJx♣AK10, allow firstly the 55% chance that 4 tricks may come in the heart suit and, if not, a chance via the diamond finesse (about 77% chance overall).

A few cases combine a finesse with a squeeze. Consider ♠AJ♥KQJ♦AKxx♣AK10x; seven tricks are played leading to the end position

♠AJ	♥-	♦AKx	♣x
♠Q106	♥-	♦2	♣QJ

which proceeds as either a ♠-♦ squeeze or a simple ♠-finesse, depending on the cards played to this stage (overall chance 53%).

There are poorer hands; North could have a hand which needs two pieces of luck in the play. An example needing the 55% chance of four ♠-tricks and the 50% chance of a ♣-finesse is ♠AKxx♥KQJx♦AKJ♣Ax. This has an overall chance near 27%. Some deals may depend on picking up the missing ♣K and ♣10 if North has neither -- note that with ♣Axx/QJ9xx one has only a 15-20% chance of doing this. Some deals, where North misses the K and J in the same suit can offer almost no chance.

All these bits and pieces add up to a number near 75% for the chance of success in 7NT. So, since the threshold for bidding the grand is around 67%, one should bid it. It is a close call though. Certainly those with less information about the combined strength and/or club length had little reason to risk 7NT. Did I bid it? Sitting West I was not put to the test!
