

FITTING LIKE A GLOVE



We are programmed, have it drummed into us to beware of misfits, that high-card points are not everything and to be cautious in our approach to bidding.

Over-cautious would be my impression if one looks at the results of the second match this week at Akarana.

Three cold slams, nine tables in play and with 27 opportunities for slam, the six level was reached only 5 times. Let's check them out:

Board 15

South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ Q 10 7 6 5
♥ 8 2
♦ 9 7 4
♣ J 8 6

♠ A 8 2
♥ Q 10 7
♦ A Q J 6 5
♣ A 10



♠ K J 4 3
♥ A 5 4
♦ 2
♣ Q 9 7 4 2

♠ 9
♥ K J 9 6 3
♦ K 10 8 3
♣ K 5 3

South has a near opener, maybe 2♥, hearts and a minor if that is your style...ok at adverse vulnerability. Were North to enquire and discover their partner was maximum with diamonds, they might just head slam-wards.

However, how good is that North hand? Very good, too good really for a strong 15-17 1NT...all those aces and a good 5 card suit. Upgrade and open 1♦. After 1♥ from South, North calls 2NT and South must be at least mildly interested in slam. Checkback, maybe, and three card heart support is shown. It's getting better all the time. Key Card and 5♣ 0 or 3 response. Surely now if partner holds the trump queen, slam is worth a shot. What? They do. Wonderful and there you are in 6♥ or maybe 6♦.

Good hand evaluation and a slight touch of optimism... and you are there. Well, one pair was. Onto board 18.

<u>Board 18</u>	♠ K Q 9 7 5 4	
East Deals	♥ 9 8 6 5	
N-S Vul	♦ 6 2	
	♣ 2	
♠ A J 8 3		♠ 6
♥ Q J 3		♥ K 7
♦ 9 8 5 4		♦ A K J
♣ Q 3		♣ A K J 10 9 6 5
	♠ 10 2	
	♥ A 10 4 2	
	♦ Q 10 7 3	
	♣ 8 7 4	

Few pairs have a bid for an old-fashioned 8 playing trick hand in a minor. The bid may have gone out of fashion but the hands still exist! Like East's opener. Too strong for 1♣ followed by 3♣ but not a game-force hand. This is nearly "9 playing tricks!" You need some way of showing this hand type. I like the good "old fashioned" 3 way "Multi 2♦". When West bids 2♥ relay and East 3♣ to show the hand type, West must be interested with good values for their 2♥ call and the ever so useful ♣Q.

A raise to 4♣ followed by key card will be a very painless way to reach 6♣. East does not mind which ace West has and can rest in 5♣ if they hold neither. Were West's values to be in spades, then you might need to invoke your finessing skills. As you can see, partners can produce good hands too. No need to be pessimistic when partner shows interest. Two pairs out of nine took a small chance and reached the club slam.

Finally, board 27:

<u>Board 27</u>	♠ —	
South Deals	♥ A J 9 8 7 5	
None Vul	♦ Q 5 2	
	♣ A K J 7	
♠ Q 10 7 2		♠ A K 9 8 6
♥ 4 2		♥ 10 6
♦ J 7 6		♦ K 10 8 4
♣ 10 6 4 3		♣ 9 8
	♠ J 5 4 3	
	♥ K Q 3	
	♦ A 9 3	
	♣ Q 5 2	

It would be interesting to compare the thoughts of North and South as they sort their hands. North: full of hope. South: I know I really should pass but we do open 12 counts, even this terrible one.

So, strong no-trumpers open 1♣ while those that can open 1NT. North must muse that if partner's high card points are in spades, then slam opposite a weak no-trump is very unlikely. However, if they have little or nothing in that suit, then the sky is the limit (imagine South holding ♠9543 ♥KQ3 ♦AK3 ♣Q52. That is still a weak 1NT opening and there are very few ways of going down in 7♥. Hey, that is nearly what South held!). So, either

North	South		North	East	South
	1NT	or			1♣
3♥			1♥	(1♠)	1NT or x showing 3 hearts

It's a little harder if East does get to bid 1♠ and West raises pre-emptively to 3♠ though if most of their high card points are in spades, then North might muse about what South has.

In the left-hand auction, 3♥ is a slam try. Although South's shape and strength have not improved, those heart cards look useful..and it is not about South's shape but about what North has. Therefore, one optimistic but not stupid cue-bid, 4♦ and North must wonder not just about what South bid but what they did not bid. No 3♠ cue-bid and if that denies both the ♠A and ♠K, then it is beginning to look like South's high card points could be more than useful.

Pessimists (do we have to say "realists"?) might argue that were trumps not 2-2, then the ♦K needs to be with West. That seems to put the slam in the mid 70'% category. That's good enough for me..and it was for two out of nine pairs.

Five slams out of 27. Not a great percentage, really. Will those who languished in game be saying that those who bid the slams were a little lucky? Perhaps, but in each case, there were sound reasons to be aggressive. Whether it is being aggressive or maybe being conservative on a board, it is positive thinking that usually wins the day...and on this night, those who bid slams were justifiably rewarded.

Richard Solomon