



Tuesday Night Tips

The Sydney Bridge Centre mini lesson

If you have joined our F2F session on Tuesday night, you probably already know the host Martin Clear. He is a big fan of the evening game because of his daytime job, and has been leading the group for bridge discussion after the session. This “discussion” will now continue online - Each week Martin will play in the field and pick an interesting hand from the Tuesday night BBO session. Join your bridge buddy for a game on Tuesday night (7.15pm start)!

The Value of Shape

#3493 BBO – Tuesday Night 31st August 2021

D 9	N ♠ KJ3 ♥ 1074 ♦ KQ107 ♣ K63	W N E S P 1♦ X 2♦ P 3♦ P P P
W	E	S
♠ Q106 ♥ K52 ♦ 965 ♣ 10985	♠ A542 ♥ AQ83 ♦ 84 ♣ AJ7	S
S	NS: 0 EW: 0	
♠ 987 ♥ J96 ♦ AJ32 ♣ Q42		

We often hear of the value of shape in a bridge hand and how it can help you make a lot more tricks than might be anticipated from mere point count. The reverse is true as well: lack of shape can leave you making far fewer tricks than you expected to make.

On Board 9 of the Sydney Bridge Centre & Friends competition on Tuesday Night, 31 August, 9 of the 10 tables felt the flat 12-count held by North was worth opening. East mostly doubled the 1♦ bid, and South mostly bid 2♦. Two North-South pairs ended in 2♦, but 3 were later pushed to bid 3♦.

One of the major innovations in bridge bidding theory in the last thirty years is the Law Of Total Tricks (LOTT). Like much bridge theory, the idea is older: being originally proposed by Jean-René Vernes in the 1950s, but popularized by Marty Bergen and Larry Cohen in the 1990s. LOTT primarily says that the number of trumps possessed by both sides added together in their trump suit equals the number of tricks added together that both sides will get playing in their trump suit. For example (assuming roughly equal points), if both sides have only an 8-card fit, it is likely both will make 8 tricks. If both sides have 9 trumps, both will make 9 tricks. If one side has more high cards, they will make more tricks but the total will be the same: 2 sets of 9-card trump suits may see the stronger side make 10 tricks and the weaker make 8, but the total will still be the 18 tricks suggested by 2 lots of 9 trumps.

How useful is this? Well, a not-very-obvious corollary of LOTT is much more memorable and useful to less theory-based players: in a competitive auction, you should compete in the bidding to the level of your fit. If you have 10 trumps, compete in the bidding to the 4-level. If you have only 9, compete only to the 3-level. And if you have only 8 trumps, you should only compete to the 2-level. This LOTT corollary should not talk you out of bidding making games and slams; it simply shows how high you should let the opponents push you ... and how high you can safely push them. In bidding Board 9 to the 3-level with only 8 trumps, North-South created problems for themselves.

At our table where 3♦ by North was the contract, I felt the bidding called for a passive approach to defence, so I led a trump rather than from any of my three unsupported side-suit Aces. Faced with the horrible matching shape with no ruffing (both declarer and dummy have 4 trumps and 3 in each side suit), declarer tried to hand back the lead with hearts, but another diamond was won in dummy and now declarer led a spade to the Jack, successfully forcing the Ace. Two more rounds of hearts ended with West, and then a diamond exit went to a club lead to King and Ace, club return, spade to King and spade exit, then another club for the defence, leaving declarer forced to ignominiously 'double-trump' the last trick with a trump from both hands. The result was 6 tricks, for -150 in a part-score hand.

Other pairs in diamond contracts fared just as grimly. As long as the defenders played passively, declarer could only grind out 4 trump tricks and a club and a spade. You can make 7 tricks by taking a very deep spade finesse: running the 9!

The Law Of Total Tricks is well worth reading about, even for mid-level players. It is very useful for raising your partner's overcall: if partner bids 1♥ over 1♦, raise him to 3♥ if you have 4 trumps to his assumed 5 ... almost regardless of your actual point count. It is similarly useful in raising partner's weak bid, where partner's suit length is known e.g. if partner's six-card 2♥ opening is doubled, passed or overcalled, raise to 3♥ on any three trumps on almost any point count. It is surprising what a headache these bids can cause to the opponents, and how few times they are in a position to punish you.

Basking in the warm glow of this good score caused by bad shape, I later doubled an overcaller who had bid up to 4♥, simply because I had two trump tricks opposite my partner's opening hand. Declarer had a 6-5 shape, and the two trump tricks were the only two tricks we could make despite our 21 points. You win some match-points on shape; you lose some match-points on shape.

Martin Clear (SBC Tuesday Night host)

Repeat on Demand - The SBC Encore! Mid-Week Swiss Pairs



A lot of players really like the idea of a weekday congress and asked us to run it again. If you didn't manage to join our last time, here comes the opportunity!

The [SBC Encore! Mid-Week Swiss Pairs](#) is a one-day congress to be held on Wednesday 29th September, 10am start. We will play six 8 boards round with a lunch break in the middle.

RED masterpoints awarded. BB\$12 per player. Winners (of 3 categories) will receive FREE entry to the NSWBA Online Teams of Three, details will be announced very soon!

[Enter in advance](#) required on the NSWBA website. We intend to run separate fields for Open and Restricted & Novice players, if number allows. Please nominate the field you would like to compete in.

The Sydney Bridge Centre online sessions on BBO

Our clubroom on Goulburn Street is temporary closed under the current restriction. We are running regular club session online on BBO for the moment and will resume our F2F sessions once we can. Please keep an eye on our [website](#) for the latest announcement.

For BBO sessions:

All are welcome. No need to book. Please find us on BBO / Featured Areas / Virtual Clubs / ABF-Australia. Tournament title "Sydney Bridge Centre & Friends". Tournament will open only 2 hours before the game starts.

24 boards, BB\$4 per person per game.