

POST MORTEM

Part 4

The final week of the event and as usual our two pairs have decided to start at the same table. This week, finally, Vera and Wally have won the cut and Vera is South and Wally North, with Simon West and Dolly East. Our Post Mortem starts with the 'head to head' clash between the two pairs. They both have every chance of doing well against the other pairs but sometimes when both pairs are in the running, a top board to either pair against the other can make a difference overall of 8%. As both are in the running, the two hands played against each other can be decisive.

The first board they play is quite boring and likely to be flat; an easy 4H to bid and make for NS. Both pairs breathe a sigh of relief, though Vera and Wally need to make up a bit of ground. This is the second hand:

BOARD 10 DLR E ALL VUL

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

After two passes, Simon opens 2NT. This shows 20-22 points and a balanced hand. Dolly bids 3C and Simon alerts this. Vera doesn't ask, since she neither needs to know at this stage, nor does she want Dolly to hear what Simon's explanation is. Simon bids 3H and Dolly raises to 4H.

Wally, on lead, now asks the question and Simon explains that 3C is 'Baron' and asks him to bid his four card suits 'up the line'. This allows them to find a fit if they have one. Despite Dolly's awful hearts (Wally is quite hopeful!) she decides to play game in their 4-4 major fit. That is what she has learnt and she sees no reason to do otherwise.

Wally considers his lead options and decides on the nine of spades. While some people like to lead 'MUD' (Middle-Up-Down) with such a holding, Wally does not want Vera to be confused so prefers the nine, 'top of nothing'. This works out very well: Simon covers in dummy with the jack, but Vera produces the king and Simon has to win the ace. The hand hasn't started well for him. He would like to be able to lead up towards his KQ in trumps but entries to dummy are few. He also knows that whoever wins the next trick will persist with spades and he will have a spade loser as well as probably two hearts and a diamond. He decides to try his best anyway, and leads the three of diamonds immediately. Wally realises that if he wins the ace, Simon will be able to discard a spade on the king after cashing the queen, so he has to let the queen win and provide Simon with an entry. Wally smiles to himself as he knows the AJ of trumps are badly placed for Simon, who plays a heart to his king and Wally's ace. A further spade now sets up a spade trick for the defence, but after cashing his top trump, Simon plays on clubs and when they break 3-3, he sighs with relief and leads the fourth, discarding his losing spade. Wally can ruff with his top trump or not, he only makes his jack once and Simon is able to come to ten tricks with a diamond ruff in dummy and spade ruff in hand.

At the end of the session, that is the first hand the two pairs look at. Vera is quite sure that despite Wally's great lead the board will be a bad one for them.

Simon takes up the story.

"Just as I thought!" Vera is not impressed, "a second to top for you guys. I just knew that the other pairs would neither bid 4H nor make it if they did, and that those in 3NT would probably go down or be kept to Three. 3NT could of course either go down on a spade lead or just make, but I can't understand why people went down on a diamond lead. There's absolutely no point in 'second hand low' since the only chance of a second possible stop is by going up with the queen and playing North for the ace. When the queen holds, declarer also is able to lead hearts towards the honours, and with North having all the vital cards, South can't get in to lead another diamond. But why can't they find their 4-4 fit?"

"Maybe they haven't learnt about finding it after a 2NT opener. Most people know to play Stayman after One No Trump, but when partner opens 2NT they don't know what to do. We of course don't play Stayman at all since we play SIMPLE and open a suit and never 1NT, but over 2NT, Baron is a very simple convention to allow one to find a fit in any suit. Much better our way don't you think? But then I suppose you had all top boards apart from that one anyway, Vera?"

"Of course!" Wally butts in, "didn't you?"

BOARD 12 DLR W NS VUL

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

"As a matter of fact, we had some absolutely awful things happen to us," replies Simon, "like Board 12. I couldn't believe how someone could play a hand so badly and get such a good result. Not to mention the bidding! South opened 1C in fourth seat, I bid 1S, North bid 2H, Dolly bid 2S and South bid 2NT!! North raised to 3NT! It was all too much for me, but I led my king of spades anyway, with great hopes of course."

"Surely 3NT is impossible, so how could you have got a bad board?" Wally sounds puzzled.

"Not to that dithery old goat it wasn't impossible," Simon sounds really peeved. "He ducked twice and won the third spade and led a diamond and played the seven from dummy. Dolly won the jack and had no choice but to lead another. Mr. Dithery won the ace in dummy and then led the jack of hearts! His only real chance with that holding is to lead low to the queen and then play the ace to drop a doubleton king, but Dithery doesn't know any better. Dolly of course had to cover. Winning the ace, he now led a club to the king and led yet another silly high card from dummy, the nine of hearts. Look what happens if Dolly covers. My eight drops and declarer runs the hearts. So Dolly didn't cover. Had the old goat now cleared hearts, he would have had to return with the king of clubs and end up leading a diamond from dummy to me, but he cashed the king of clubs first and then played the jack which he allowed to run! Now a heart to hand and he played on clubs. Neither he nor Dolly had any other suit left, so he had to make four club tricks no matter how he played them! But would you believe that someone else actually made Five on the same lead??"

"Some poor East probably didn't cover the jack of hearts and when they realised they should have done so, decided to get it right next time and covered the jack of clubs," Vera has the answer, "there's always a right and a wrong time to do these things. Clearly it can do no good not to cover the jack of hearts, but to cover the jack of CLUBS is surely wrong when there are only two clubs in dummy and the finesse cannot be repeated. Yes, not covering the heart jack but covering the club jack does add up to eleven tricks. Ridiculous!"

BOARD 13 DLR N ALL VUL

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

"You know, it's not just the bigger hands that you can pick up a lot of Match Points on. Or lose them as well, as it was in our case," Simon is talking about Board 13 (lucky for some but not others!). "Most people played that board in One Heart but...there were enough others muddling around in other contracts and going down one for 100 to EW since everyone was vulnerable. No big deal you say? Well, you know I don't believe in letting opponents play in a low level contract if I can bid something, so when 1H was passed to me, I bid 1S. And made it, but that was only worth 80. We actually got 8/20 match points for that."

Wally is sympathetic. "I must say that was very unfortunate. Normally any plus score would be worth lots of Match Points and your bid was very imaginative. In the old days they used to play a bid of 1NT to 'protect' with when the bidding had gone one something, pass, pass. This showed 10-12 points. These days of course people aren't subtle enough and would expect you to have about a sixteen count! I suppose you could have Doubled but you wouldn't expect a 1S overcall to come to any harm would you? And of course those others in 2H, 2NT or 3C going one down shouldn't have been there, nor should those in 2H have gone down, but such are the vagaries of bridge in the C-Grade. But don't give up Simon, the next time you'll score a top for such adventurous and imaginative bidding."

BOARD 16 DLR N EW VUL

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

"It's certainly easier to pretty well guarantee a decent board if you have the big hands. Remember the slam that no one bid NS?" Wally is in full flight. "I should have bid it but decided not to. Being prepared to take my chances in game, I opened 2C which we play as near enough to game forcing. Vera responded 2NT and I was about to bid 6C because I am used to a positive response guaranteeing at least an 'ace and a king' and not just 7+ HCP, but remembered that Vera had been brought up on SIMPLE bridge and may have any balanced 8 or 9 count."

Scarcely stopping for a breath, he continues: "So I did the next most sensible thing and bid 3NT, with nine running tricks almost a sure thing if Vera has a balanced hand. I knew half the field would probably be in clubs and some not even in game, and that proved to be the case. Even though West found the diamond lead Vera took ten tricks which scored an equal top with just two others. Bidding the slam of course would have been worth a clear top but who needs to, as long as you realise that ten tricks in No Trumps scores more than twelve in clubs. You have to bid to twelve tricks in a minor to do better. This hand is also a good illustration of why you should bid the slam most likely to make and not the one that scores the most. It's somewhat of a paradox, I suppose, that you should bid GAME in NO TRUMPS, but the SLAM in CLUBS! Yet it happens quite often at higher levels of play I believe. One of my mates in the A-Grade reckons that the slam bidding there is quite atrocious and a hand like this is quite likely to be played in Three No Trumps most of the time, 6C by a few good pairs, and 6NT by a number of very inept bidders who have the 6NT syndrome, as he calls it. "

BOARD 20 DLR W ALL VUL

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

"There was another hand that might have been played in a minor suit or in No Trumps, remember it?" Dolly had expected it to be a good board for them, because playing SIMPLE they had avoided the pitfalls of a Weak 1NT opening.

"Simon actually opened this hand 1S. Imagine what could have happened to us if he had opened 1NT and North Doubled? Mind you, had North doubled 1S and South passed, we probably would have gone for 800 anyway, but clearly there is a lot to learn about competitive bidding. Our particular North overcalled 2C and South screwed up his face and bid 2D. North now bid 2H, South 2NT and North 3NT. Simon did his best by leading the queen of clubs but our poker faced declarer managed to actually run his nine top tricks."

It was Dolly's turn to be sarcastic, but the result had clearly not been what she had expected.

"And what do you think we would have scored on that board? You'd expect 800's all over the place, plus at least a few 630's. But no, one NS pair in 3NT Doubled making Four, two Wests in 1NT UNDOUBLED down three, and the rest of them in all sorts of part scores! Now why can't they do what the books recommend when an opponent opens a weak 1NT? Double with 15+ HCP. East may or may not bid 2C to run from the potential disaster, only to run into another Double and this should also go for 800. I think we were sitting the wrong way tonight, Simon!"

Simon agrees: "Yes, Dolly, that's true, but at least we got to bid the SIMPLEST slam imaginable, didn't we?"

BOARD 24 DLR W NIL VUL

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

"The 6D one? With fourteen top tricks, and even more in diamonds?" Wally joins in the sarcasm, "it clearly was a very difficult hand for all but you two, since there was only one slam bid. But you only bid it in diamonds, and despite the sixteen tricks (on a squeeze) in diamonds, you still only get one overtrick. Lucky someone else didn't bid 6NT. And isn't your SIMPLE bidding sophisticated enough to find the grand?"

Simon has the last word: "Not quite. I opened 2D, Dolly responded 2H and over my 3C she bid 3D. I managed to find out from a series of very complicated relays that she held the ace and king of hearts plus three clubs to the jack, but couldn't find out about the QUEEN of clubs and wasn't willing to risk the grand slam which, without the jack of clubs also would have required no worse than a 5-2 break in hearts and/or a double squeeze."

Simon winked and subtly gestured towards the next table where the haughty old Dora Dingleby stood with eyes and mouth wide open. They burst out in side-splitting laughter in unison. They had no idea what Simon was talking about and knew that he didn't either, but Dora would be left wondering for the next week at least.