

# How to accumulate IMPs?!

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I'm still searching for the philosopher's stone that will turn my bidding and card play into IMPs. Then again, perhaps all I really have to do is pay attention to the advice I received from the late Les Lowe, who summarised his approach to IMP events as "bid tight games, then play the cards carefully". I've been looking back through the files at some hands that illustrate the need to do both things.

If one wishes to reach tight games, a key requirement is to get into the bidding early and effectively. Good constructive bidding is important, especially with shapely hands where point count may not be as meaningful. A very practical approach that helps with difficult decisions is the losing trick count (LTC). While I'm far too lazy to try applying the various adjustments recommended by many authorities, and simply use a "raw" LTC, this is a hand that LTC would suggest is an automatic 1♠ opening by West:

Board 20 ♠85  
 Dlr: W ♥972  
 Vul: All ♦AK32  
 ♣K872

♠KQ764	+	♠J92
♥KQ3		♥A86
♦7		♦T8654
♣T543		♣A6
		♠AT3
		♥JT54
		♦QJ9
		♣QJ9

In an event at North Shore Bridge Club last year, 16 of 25 passed with this hand. Why? If a typical opening hand has 7 losers, then 10 hcp, 2 quick tricks and 6 losers must be quite a sound opening hand! At our table the board was passed out, but teammates bid 1♠-2♠ for a quick and easy 4 IMPs. Not a big swing in this case, but in general, striking the first blow, especially with the boss suit, is sound tactics.



The other side of good bidding is knowing when to shut up! From that same event, here is another hand illustrating both the value of the losing trick count and the importance of being careful at least some of the time.

Board 16 ♠95  
 Dlr: W ♥A64  
 Vul: E-W ♦AT64  
 ♣AKJ7

♠KT87632	—	♠QJ
♥J		♥KQT52
♦Q932		♦KJ
♣5		♣Q943
		♠A4
		♥9873
		♦875
		♣T862

Of those sitting West, 9 opened the hand with 3♠, and North could not resist doubling for takeout. This was disastrous, because South then bid 4♥. East doubled and, unsurprisingly, those NS pairs did not score well! One moral of the story is that because of the relatively low LTC, pre-empting on 7-4 shape is almost always a good idea (in this case, even at adverse vulnerability). Another is that when making a takeout double of 3♠, having 4 hearts probably ought to be mandatory unless the hand has a significant excess of high card points.

Playing the cards carefully is usually beyond me. However, I've been given numerous salutary lessons by opponents. For example, at the Swiss Pairs in the Summer Festival nearly 2 years ago, our very good opponents demonstrated how intermediates can be just as useful as honours, if one exploits their potential. On this hand, Deep Finesse assures me that EW should make only 8 tricks in notrump, but our opponents calmly bid to 3NT. Perhaps they took comfort in the fact that I would be on lead as South. Perhaps they were right to do so, because I led 3♣ which solved declarer's problems in that suit. However, 4 club tricks + 2 diamond tricks + 2 spade tricks still doesn't make 3NT. Looks like a bit of a problem, doesn't it?

Board 3 ♠K9754  
 Dlr: S ♥QT65  
 Vul: E-W ♦Q76  
 ♣7

♠A62	♠QJ8
♥73	♥K982
♦T542	♦AK
♣AJT4	♣K962

♠T3  
 ♥AJ4  
 ♦J983  
 ♣Q853

Well, as far as our declarer was concerned, it was elementary ... with no shortage of entries to dummy, he first led the 7 of hearts and let it run, then later led another heart and inserted the eight! Essentially this amounts to playing for split honours twice over.



Also from that event, here's another hand in which intermediates proved to be important. After LHO opened a spade, my partner, sitting North, overcalled 2♣ and shortly thereafter I was in 5♦. The lead was the A♥ followed by another heart, for which I was grateful. What now?

♠AK  
 ♥93  
 ♦J762  
 ♣AKQJ3

♠JT43  
 ♥K52  
 ♦KQ853  
 ♣T



This hand is an interesting illustration of the value of asking yourself "What can go wrong?" After the first two tricks, the only way you can go off is if you lose two trump tricks. That's entirely possible if trumps break 4-0 because you're missing the 9 and 10♦ so, given that you can only cope with 4 trumps in the East hand, the correct play is a small diamond to the jack. It turns out that you couldn't possibly be too careful, because the full deal was:

Board 8 ♠AK  
 Dlr: W ♥93  
 Vul: Nil ♦J762  
 ♣AKQJ3

♠Q9875	♠62
♥AQJ87	♥T64
♦	♦AT94
♣752	♣9864

♠JT43  
 ♥K52  
 ♦KQ853  
 ♣T

Speaking of good bidding, note West's aggressive light opening, first in hand but with both majors and only 6 losers. Oh, and just in case you were wondering, I wasn't sufficiently careful, so I went off ...