

Excited by slams

Fun and games at the 6-level and beyond

by RAKESH KUMAR



Rakesh Kumar describes himself as an enthusiastic non-expert who makes enough errors to have plenty of material for bridge columns.

Bidding slams is exciting – it's where the action is. In congresses, match results are often determined by swings around slam hands. Recently, I learnt how much excitement can be generated by hands with slam potential in a Board-a-Match (BAM) competition, which was the format for this year's City of Sydney Teams at the NSWBA. My partner Julian Abel and I were playing with Nico Ranson and Chris Rhodes, who are members of the under-25 Team representing Australia at the Asia Pacific Bridge Federation Championships in Seoul in mid-year. Believe me, there's nothing quite as exciting as having youth players as teammates ... witness this, for example:

Board 2

Dealer E | Vul N-S

<p>♠ KJ863 ♥ KT7 ♦ 65 ♣ JT3</p>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td> </td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<p>♠ 9 ♥ 96543 ♦ T83 ♣ 8752</p>
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td> </td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	<p>♠ T7542 ♥ A2 ♦ KQ942 ♣ Q</p>										

21
8 0
11

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	7	7	4	4	7
S	7	7	4	4	7
E	–	–	–	–	–
W	–	–	–	–	–

People like you and me might reach 6♦ (boring, and not likely to win at BAM) or 6NT (a sound contract). However, playing BAM and trying for the equivalent of a pairs "top" to win the board, our teammates reached 7♦. This makes because JT drop in 3 rounds and the spade finesse works ... whew!!

Nico and Chris struck again by (over) bidding to slam on this board. Well, in BAM, having bypassed 4♥ there's no point playing 5♦, is there?

Board 9

Dealer N | Vul E-W

<p>♠ T92 ♥ A64 ♦ 9 ♣ J86542</p>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>—</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W	—	E		S		<p>♠ KJ4 ♥ ♦ AKJ852 ♣ KQ93</p>
	N										
W	—	E									
	S										
	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>—</td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W	—	E		S		
	N										
W	—	E									
	S										
	<p>♠ Q8753 ♥ K82 ♦ T73 ♣ AT</p>										
	<p>♠ A6 ♥ QJT9753 ♦ Q64 ♣ 7</p>										

17
5 9
9

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	1	5	3	1	3
S	1	5	3	1	3
E	–	–	–	–	–
W	–	–	–	–	–

Of course 4♥ shouldn't make, but in practice it often did because West failed to get a diamond ruff. However, the aggressive 6♦ bid probably induced the lead of ♣A, after which the contract is cold – to beat the slam requires a trump lead and continuation. It has long been true that pushy bidding can be effective simply because it puts the opponents under pressure.

Whether it's age or experience that eventually snuffs out the search for excitement, I'm not entirely sure. Perhaps it's just a consequence of having had too many disasters. Certainly one of the lessons of experience is that a flat hand opposite a flat hand needs to avoid getting too high. That may be why, in the North Shore Bridge Club Watermark Teams event, only 15 of 24 pairs reached slam on this board:

Board 16

Dealer W | Vul E-W

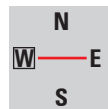
♠ J9763
♥ T72
♦ K942
♣ 4

21
4 4
11

♠ A8
♥ KQ
♦ AJT5
♣ AK876

♠ T52
♥ J86
♦ 63
♣ QJ932

♠ KQ4
♥ A9543
♦ Q87
♣ T5



W	N	E	S
P	2NT	P	?

what will you bid when partner shows a strong hand?

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	5	6	7	5	7
S	5	6	7	5	7
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

The North hand is interesting in Standard bidding methods: it could be opened 1♣, but given the strong major suit doubletons, 2NT or an equivalent bid is probably a better alternative. Let's say that partner opens 2NT showing something like 21 hcp. South's 11 hcp holding suggests the possibility of a marginal slam, but it's a flat hand. What would your approach have been?

At our table, I transferred to hearts and then bid 3NT, intending to move towards slam only if partner corrected to 4♥. Partner didn't, but received a club lead and inserted the ten, which held. As hearts broke 3-3 and the ♦K was on side, he then made 13 tricks – for a flat board! Slam is indeed marginal, but everything works.

Finally, here's another slam that's difficult to reach, from the Maitland Teams Congress. Not that I played in that event, but Steven Bock told me about it. How would you bid this?

Board 21

Dealer N | Vul N-S

♠ K54
♥ J875
♦ Q8764
♣ 2

19
6 6
9

♠ AQ63
♥ AKQ6
♦ T
♣ A864

♠ J872
♥ 94
♦ KJ53
♣ J93

♠ T9
♥ T32
♦ A92
♣ KQT75



W	N	E	S
	1C	P	1NT
P	3NT		

Is there a better way to show a strong 4441 hand?

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	7	1	6	3	5
S	7	1	6	3	5
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

Strong 4441 hands are always a problem for Standard. The bidding is likely to start with 1♣-1NT, in which case the auction may well die in 3NT or a Moysian 4♥. Acoll players will do much better, while those using a strong club system like Precision should not have a problem.

One solution for Standard bidders is to incorporate a specific bid for such hands, either into their overall 2-bid structure as Steven does, or into the rebid scheme for a strong 2♣ opening. With my partners, I play the method described by Chris Ryall (see <https://chrisryall.net/bridge/two/clubs-4441.htm>) which uses a 2♣ opening and a 2NT rebid to show a good 16+ hcp 4441 hand.

At Maitland, 20 of the 40 North-South pairs played in 3NT and 6 played 4♥. Seven pairs played in 5♣ but only four reached a slam in clubs. It could have been so exciting ... 🍀