

# Slams from the State Teams Qualifying

Ways of getting there....

by RAKESH KUMAR



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

Once again, this column isn't about hands from a congress. In fact I won't be writing much about congresses at all from now on, because at the time of submitting this I'm in the last stages of completing my move from Sydney to Mittagong following retirement. My regular monthly column for eCongress News, which has been going since November 2013, will become an occasional column about hands of interest from events in which I've been playing.

The State Open Teams Qualifying event at NSWBA was the last event in which I participated as a Sydney resident and it certainly included many interesting hands. Most of these were slams or potential slams, which of course often swing matches.

Most slams don't involve brilliant card play – much depends on effective hand evaluation and some courage. It helps if one's bidding methods allow proper exploration of range and controls without having to jump-raise to establish a game force. While strong club systems may well be the most efficient from that perspective, these days opponents seem to be overcome by an overwhelming compulsion to interfere over a strong club. That leads to altogether too many situations where forgetfulness or an undiscussed sequence derails the auction.

So how can one do better when playing a natural system? One obvious improvement is to use 2/1 game forcing methods. That solves responder's problem, but I believe opener also needs more from the forcing 2♣ bid than just using it to show rock-crusher game-going hands, which are really quite uncommon. I've already written about a more flexible 2♣ opening to show 2-suited distributional hands with 4 losers or better, in my February 2017 column.

What about the not-quite-as-good hands with 5 losers and at least game potential? In the stone age version of the Acol bidding system, these used to be opened as 2 level bids, but these days every kind of weak 5/4 or even 4/4 hand gets opened 2♥ or 2♠. Extending the multi-2♦ opening can take care of the problem. Here's a case in point from the State Open Teams Qualifying, where 8 of 15 pairs languished in game. Five reached a small slam and two managed to bid the grand. What would you have done?

*Some hands have much more playing strength than the high card point count would suggest.*



**Board 25**

Dealer N | Vul E-W

14
4 <input type="checkbox"/> 6
16

♠ J98  
♥ J4  
♦ Q9532  
♣ T92

♠ AKQ7642  
♥ T8  
♦ J  
♣ A76



♠ 3  
♥ AK63  
♦ A874  
♣ KQ85

♠ T5  
♥ Q9752  
♦ KT6  
♣ J43

W	N	E	S
	2D!	P	2S
P	3S	P	4NT
P	5D	P	5H
P	5NT	P	6S
//			

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	7	3	4	7	7
S	7	3	4	7	7
E	-	1	1	-	-
W	-	1	1	-	-

Clearly North's hand is worth much more in playing strength than its 13 working points might suggest, but equally clearly it's not close to being a game force. To tell partner that one holds a 5 loser hand with a long suit, it's possible to use a multi-2♦ opening combined with a jump rebid or raise as appropriate: with this hand the auction might be 2♦-2♠ (correctable)-3♠ or 2♦-2NT-4♠. Now South, also holding a 5 loser hand, can see that a small slam is a near certainty (adding the losers in the two hands and subtracting from 24 suggests 14 tricks are possible!) and might be able to explore the grand slam.

Is there any drawback to this approach? Yes, of course. Partner can no longer bid a "pass or correct" preemptive 3♥ or 4♥ after the multi-2♦ opening. But in terms of frequency, such responding hands are less common and the gain is certainly significant.

The next board illustrates the benefits of the 2/1 game force response. After 1♥-2♦-3♣, responder can jump to 4♥ to show a good fit but a minimum game-forcing hand. Assuming 7 losers opposite, opener with 5 losers should go looking (24-[7+5]=12 potential tricks). Only 7 pairs out of 15 reached this one: many Wests might have been put off by the fact that partner's values appeared to be in opener's short suit.

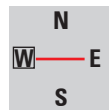
**Board 16**

Dealer W | Vul E-W

6
17 <input type="checkbox"/> 11
6

♠ AQ4  
♥ AKJ43  
♦ 7  
♣ QJT5

♠ KJ53  
♥ Q8  
♦ T98  
♣ 9862



♠ 8762  
♥ 75  
♦ K532  
♣ K74

♠ T9  
♥ T962  
♦ AQJ64  
♣ A3

W	N	E	S
1H	P	2D!	P
3C	P	4H	P
4NT	P	5H	P
6H	//		

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	4	5	6	2	4
W	4	5	6	3	5

Long suits that are a source of tricks are often undervalued. On the board shown below, East at our table decided to open 1NT and when partner transferred and then showed additional strength, jumped to 6♦ to suggest this as a possible slam contract.

**Board 21**

Dealer N | Vul N-S

1
14 <input type="checkbox"/> 16
9

♠ K8  
♥ AKJ85  
♦ T87  
♣ K84

♠ J94  
♥ T7  
♦ 932  
♣ T7632



♠ QT6532  
♥ Q62  
♦ 4  
♣ AJ9

♠ A7  
♥ 943  
♦ AKQJ65  
♣ Q5

W	N	E	S
	P	1NT	P
2D!	P	2H	P
4NT	P	6D	

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	2	6	6	-	6
W	2	6	6	-	6

Remarkably, our opponents were the only pair to reach slam on the board – and there was nothing we could do about it.

Finally, here's an example of courage, with a fair bit of hope thrown in for good measure. In the State Open Teams Qualifying, 8 of 15 East-West pairs reached a somewhat gambling 6NT.

**Board 28**

Dealer W | Vul N-S

♠ J74  
♥ 93  
♦ 542  
♣ K9875

♠ KT8  
♥ AKQJT  
♦ 97  
♣ T32



♠ AQ9  
♥ 82  
♦ AKQJ8  
♣ QJ6

♠ 6532  
♥ 7654  
♦ T63  
♣ A4

W	N	E	S
1H	P	2D!	P
2H	P	6NT	//



	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	–	–	–	–	–
S	–	–	–	–	–
E	3	4	4	4	5
W	3	4	4	4	5

When West was the declarer (4 times) the two Norths who led 4th highest from their longest suit found that it worked out very well. However, when East was the declarer (4 times) South had to find the lead of the club ace and follow this with a low club ... not easy, but that also happened twice. Of course the other 4 times, East-West made 13 tricks. That's bridge! 🍀