even when East is a fiend, we’d play him for the ace.) Sometimes, there are also valuable inferences that can be drawn from even lower cards played (compare with the Celebratory deal in the July 2003 issue). A full catalog would strain even the generous space allocations of the Celebration, but feel free to indulge yourself.

**Solution B**

**North**

164 2 0 76 4 165

**West**

A 10 8 0 9 15 9 10 3 9 5 2

**South**

K 3 0 0 0 0 0

Two hearts by South: Lead: Diamond ace

West must have a balanced hand, so he presumably has both black aces and exactly one of the queens. East’s bidding tells you that the West-East shapes are 3-2-4-4/13-2-3-4; the only missing suit is who has which queen. West has very strong diamonds, so, with no agreement on the choice of minors, presumably would have opened one diamond whichever black queen he holds.

When you run hearts, reducing the North-South hands to two black honor-doubtions, both opponents must keep two-two in the black. East bears down to a singleton ace, you will throw him in with it, keeping a diamond won’t help him. When West keeps two-two, if East bears down to at most a singleton in either black suit, you exit with the king of that suit for a sure-fire endplay.)

When both opponents are wise enough to keep two-two in the blacks, you must guess who has which queen. Perhaps you will be able to deduce this or to make a high-percentage decision from the discards. If not, you will want to use the odds of the deal. West can have been dealt Ax(AxQx in spades/clubs in 150 ways (10 spade combinations times 15 club combinations) but AxQx(AxQx in spades/clubs in only 100 ways (5 spade combinations times 20 club combinations). So, playing West for the queen of clubs (by exiting in clubs rather than in spades) is a 50-percent-better chance.

If you want to get the answer to the arithmetic problem without doing all that tacky counting—even the best declarers sometimes have trouble with numbers above 13, focus on the opponents’ black cards below the queen. If West has the spade queen, those x’s break 1-4 and 3-5 (which you know from experience are about 14 percent [half of 28 percent] and 36 percent chances when independent); if West has the club queen, those x’s break 2-3 and 2-4 (when independent, about 34 percent [half of 68 percent] and 24 percent [half of 48 percent] chances. In the current context, these familiar numbers are only rough approximations—because the standard figures assume that the opponents have 26 unknown cards, and because the pre- suspicion of one suit’s split affects the chance of the other’s—but they should often safely ignore the defenders’ carding, and usually should against

**IMPROVING AT MATCHPOINT**

**by Danny Kleinman**

Tighten Up the Defense!

Most matchpoint contestants think they can do better with good cards than bad. I’ve often heard a pair that has finished with a fair-to-middling score, say about 54 percent in a 12-table duplicate, complain, “What bad luck! We had no chance to win. The cards were running North-South; we were on defense 17 times out of 27. Our opponents got overboard only twice.”

Have you ever heard that? More pointy, have you ever said that? I haven’t said it and never will. In the same session that the complaining pair had a 54-percent game, another East-West pair may have scored 65 percent. It was not necessarily a pair that skipped a different nine boards and declared five more contracts. More likely, it was a pair that tightened up the defense.

A good defensive attitude includes not getting depressed by minus scores. How would you feel after starting an event with these six minutes: 620, 630, 450, 420, 600, and 420? When it happened to me, I felt hopeful, for, significantly and unusually, none of those routinely bidable games had partner or I blown a trick. Although there are flat boards, on most deals, defenders at many tables throw away tricks. Perhaps it is because weak hands hate them, so they lose interest when defending. Whatever the reason, taking the normal number of tricks as declarer is not nearly as favorable an occurrence as taking the normal number of tricks as defender.

In a way, defense is more difficult than declarer play. As many writers have noted, declarer sees his side’s combined assets, but the defenders do not see theirs. Though the bidding often gives the defenders clues as to declarer’s distribution, it seldom tells the defenders much about the location of the unseen high cards, so defenders must figure out (or make educated guesses about) which suits to attack or how to attack. Consider that the Official Encyclopedia of Bridge contains many pages on declarer’s play of “Suit Combinations,” but there is nothing comparable for defenders.

On defense, accurate carding is essential. (In contrast, declarers can often safely ignore the defenders’ carding, and usually should against...
The defense—if you are careful, which requires attentiveness (even down to the level of checking for reveals), which in turn requires a good attitude toward being a defender. Very few of the dance, or the plays you must make to achieve them, will be spectacular. If you hold an opposing one trick to contract when most other defenders surrender an overtrick, you won't get your name in a newspaper column. And some of the matchpoints added to your score will be "invisible." As you improve your defense, your competitive bidding will improve. A player confident of his defense will suffer fewer disasters 200-300 points against opposing partners or Frosty games.

**Fight the Offense!**

Most players do better as declarer than as defender, but this cap leads to damaging overdependence. Here is a deal of the kind that makes the careless performer to whom S. J. Simon directs most of the technical advice in Why You Lose at Bridge, means up "by failing to use the skill he already possesses." See if you can outperform him (and "the kid") in a club game. Don't look for squeezes or coups, because there aren't any.

North: 2S 7 3 3 3 5 5 3 2 2
South: 7 2 7 7 5 5 7 2 2 4
West: 7 5 3 3 2 2 2 2 2 2
East: 7 7 7 2 2 2 2 2 2 2

**Notre Dame vulnerable.**

**Chris.** After winning trick one with the ten of diamonds and having only one dummy entry, declarer can avoid losing more than one spade trick in any of three ways: (a) by playing West for a short king or queen, (b) by playing East for a second trick, (c) by playing East for both missing honors. Given as opening lead from diamond length, West is more likely than East to be short in spades. So, rather than use dummy's entry to finesse through East, a better try would have been to lead the jack of spades at trick two. If West plays in honor which would be tempting with a doubleton honor, declarer could use dummy's diamond entry to finesse against East for the other spade honor. If West plays low, declarer can choose between trying for (a) or (c).

**Strategy:** Full-deal strategy, species-specific and tactics. Who needs finesse? Just count your tricks. You can take two spades without a finesse by playing ace, jack, and later another. That should be your basic plan. However, within that general approach you should maximize your chances of making an overtrick: Win the first trick with dummy's nine of diamonds and lead a spade to the jack in the hope of finding both honors on East or West with a doubleton honor. When West wins and continues diamonds, win in hand and play spades from the top to drive out the ensuing honor.

**The Point of this Deal is that you can earn tops with nothing more than tight declarer play.**

**Tips for the Bidding:**

Some estimates of the "percentage" of bridge success attributable to bidding are outrageously high. I wouldn't try to correct them, because there is no true figure. All depends upon context. Among top players, technical skill has increased. The world's best card players will sometimes succeed as declarers where the thousand-best will fail, or defeat a contract that the thousandth-best player loses through, but that's a rare event. Most of the swings in world championships and late rounds of
national knockouts arise from the bidding, where technique is subordinate to judgment. Among rank beginners, the scale tips the other way, as seemingly random card play outweighs the ability, semi-random bidding in the middle lie most games at local clubs and sectionals, and even at regional, Strato-Pairs events. To get a handle on where points are low, I studied 500 errors made in recent-year results by the mix of clients, who range from novice-beginner to near-expert, and developed these estimates for the distribution of errors in "mid-level": opening lead, 5 percent; declarer play, 10 percent; defense, 25 percent; bidding, 60 percent. It's probably wise for players who seek to improve to apportion their efforts accordingly. Note, however, that bidding errors are the ones most often go unpunished. Bid a 23 percent grand slam, and you'll get a top 23 percent of the time. Take a 17-point hand where odds are you'll get a top 23 percent of the time. Take a 17-point hand, and you've got a 23 percent chance of falling 23 percent of the time.

Take care of the game; take care of yourself. I take care of the clubs, but I'm not made of steel. The same principle applies to training: if the player is overcapitalized, the results will be overcapitalized; if the player is undercapitalized, the results will be undercapitalized.

IMPROVE YOUR PLAY

Problem A
Rubber bridge; South dealer; none vul.

NORTH
Q 5 4
K 3 6
10 6 4
4 3 8

SOUTH
A 10
Q 9 7 5 2
A 5
Q 10 4

W EST
PASS 2 NT Pass
3 2 Pass 4 1 Pass
6 Pass

SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
PASS Pass Pass Pass
PASS Pass Pass Pass

Diamond queen, four, seven, ace.
Heart five, deuce, king, four.
Heart six, nine.
Club four, six, ace, two.
Club king, three, ten, nine.
Club eight, five, queen, diamond deuce.
Club jack, spade three, diamond six, club seven.
Heart queen, spade seven, heart eight, spade deuce.
Diamond five, jack, ten, three.
Spade nine, 7.

Plan the play.

(Solutions on page 75.)

Problem B
Rubber bridge
South dealer
Neither side vulnerable

NORTH
K 3 5 4
Q 9 3 5 4
K 7 4

SOUTH
Q 9 6 5 3
Q A 2
Q 7 6

SOUTH WEST NORTH EAST
PASS Pass Pass Pass
PASS Pass Pass Pass

Diamond queen, ace, three, seven.
Heart eight, ten, nine.
Heart ten, queen.
Spade queen, seven.

Plan the play.

(Solutions on page 75.)

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The South hand as 16; 00; my personal approach yields a strong 16. However, you needn't be calculating whiz to see that in context South's hand is worth more than that. Look at those three aces and the good spot cards (especially the ten of hearts) behind the opening bidder. South had a fine 17-point hand (indeed, every South overcalled one notrump). The real bidding problem belonged to West, and no other West was wise enough not to bid two clubs. All the others landed in deep trouble, minus 200 or worse. "Seven points and a strong six-card suit" is the way a textbook might describe a typical new-suit response over an intervening one notrump overcall, with a bit more, responder would double.

However, West's hand is wrong for a two-club bid, because it is not of intensively-oriented. Two clubs would be ideal.

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between offensively- and defensively-oriented hands is as hard as anything in bridge for most players to grasp, and most hands are not so easy to classify as the actual and hypothetical West hands discussed here. On top of that, the refined-value-at-point-count misleading inexperienced users into thinking that it serves more functions than in fact it does. The less-precise honor-trick valuation method served players better, not only in placing emphasis on controls over lower honors but also in making clear that just putting a number on a hand does not reveal enough to solve all of one's bidding problems.

Much of the difference between hands that evaluate the same point-count resides in shape. I keep this in mind by frequently asking my partner, "Balanced Hand or Defend, but the remaining factors, usually based on the nature and location of the high-card strength, cannot be described so simply. Thus, it is an error to believe that picking the best shortcuts is the royal road to success; there is no substitute for the experience of playing, attempting and analyzing.

It is easier to develop good judgment in constructive bidding, where one need be concerned only with offense. Still, there are plenty of situations where even the best textbook learning won't help. This situation arose in a Unit Championship. I am able to recall it easily, because such events supply deal records—why don't all tournaments do that? Have you handled it?

With North-South vulnerable, you, South, held:

**K Q A 10 2 A Q 4 3 J 6 5**

**South West North East**

Pass 1 NT Pass 4 Pass 4 Pass

**12-14**

"Artificial checkback"

"Three spades, maximum"

Did you bid four diamonds? Very good.

Ooops, 1 cred. The board was mis-duplicated and the hand record was wrong. South actually held:

**K Q A 4 2 A 10 4 3 J 6 5**

Do you still want to bid four diamonds?

The actual South did, eventually, North, who held,

**K 10 3 J 9 4 8**

**South West North East**

Pass 4 Double Pass Pass

"Heart ace, four, nine, three."

Plan your defense.

(Timeout on page 74.)

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**AJ 962 V J 98 0 K A Q 10 9** drove to six spades, reaching a slam one would rather not bid. This is not a contract that makes one shriek in horror, but what can we learn from the deal?

Was there anything wrong with the bidding? Well, North was a bit aggressive in trying for slam, but six spades would have been fine facing the South hand that I showed in error, with the ace-queen in diamonds. When control-bidding towards slam, most authorities suggest showing the most-economical control. Here's what Hugh Kelsey wrote in his book Slam Bidding: "In the standard style, a player starts a control-bidding sequence by bidding the cheapest of his first-round controls."

To his credit, Kelsey also cited Jeremy Flint's method: "the higher-ranking of touching aces, and the lower-ranking of non-touching aces, should be control-bid first."

Flint's approach is a big improvement in two ways. It states an order that is usually more efficient for subsequent control-bidding, and it refers to aces instead of first-round controls (i.e., aces or voids). Though voids are wonderful, and I love to be able to show them, control-bidding is not the way. If you control-bid a void, partner will love his king opposite, for he'll place you with the ace (which is much more common than a void) and think the hands mesh well, when actually his king-value may be entirely wasted.

Still, Flint did not have control-bidding quite right, for he formulated a "rule" that excludes judgment. A better rule: Make the control-bid that will help the partnership most. In those cases where you are trying to help partner decide whether or not there is slam potential, control-bidding an ace-king-queen suit won't help, control-bidding an ace-queen suit will help substantially, control-bidding an ace-queen-suit will help most of all.

Holding the hand with ace-queen of diamonds, South would be right to bid four diamonds, because that helps North to evaluate the king of diamonds correctly. With his actual hand, with the ace-queen of hearts, South would do better to bid four hearts, in order to help North evaluate the productive king of hearts positively. Had North held the king of hearts instead of the king of diamonds, six spades would have been excellent, requiring luck in only one of two suits, spades or clubs.

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**Summing Up**

Increasing your matchpoint scores requires effort, and you want that effort to be applied efficiently. Consider both where the points are available and the type of improvement that will pay off the most. Don't be distracted by occasional spectacular gains or come, nor by shortcuts to skills that develop only with experience and learning from the deals.