

Rick's Tricks

TIPTOEING THROUGH THE TULIPS

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How many times have we heard that “Bridge is a bidder’s game”? While generally so, a more accurate axiom would be “Bridge is a listener’s game”.

In MPs, you pick up, in 3rd seat, at favorable:

♠Jxx ♥10xx ♦Kxx ♣AKQx

Your call after:

PARD	RHO	YOU
1♣	1♦	?

Let’s examine the 3 possibilities:

1. 3NT

An opening bid opposite an opening bid means we should bid a game, right?

Generally true. However, bridge is a beautiful game dotted with exceptions to the rule.

Should we plow on to game? The fact that your ♦K has grown in value suggests so. However, your sterile distribution is about as exciting as the blind date I had 30 years ago. Your club fit is partly negated by the lack of any ruffing value.

You are going to get a diamond lead. If Pard has no diamond stopper, you will likely have to take 8 fast tricks after your diamond King is dislodged. If Pard has 5 clubs and 3 quickies in the majors, bingo. But, otherwise, the outcome will be similar to a blind date I had 40 years ago.

While many will bid 3NT, the bid is a gamble. Can we do better?

2. 2NT

This invite is certainly a meek bid opposite an opener but it does give Pard a chance to vote. After the infinite urgings to vote we were given in the 2020 Presidential election, the right to vote seems to be pretty important.

Pard will certainly accept with 14 counts and any 13 count with 5 clubs.

Here is a robust 14 count Pard could have:

♠AQx ♥AKxx ♦xx ♣Jxxx

Would you be confident that 3NT is a maker? I wouldn't be. You can count 8 tricks with your 9th likely coming down to the spade finesse. One of the benefits of going low with 2NT is that any needed finesse for a high honor rates to fail once Righty has shown enough strength to overcall.

2NT is certainly not a perfect call. Give Pard:

♠AKx ♥Axx ♦xx ♣Jxxxx

Would Pard accept the invite? Quite doubtful. While a 5-card suit ROCKS in No Trump, this 5-carder has not been going to the gym to work out even after given an offer for the first 3 months free.

Here is another benefit of the timid 2NT call. Suppose Pard holds:

♠AQx ♥Axx ♦x ♣Jxxxxx

Pard will bail out to 3♣ after you bid 2NT. For a minute, you will give Pard indigestion when you override and bid 3NT with your surprise club holding. A happy result, which will help Pard forgive you for the 9 misbids you made earlier in the session.

3. 2♦

This bid shows club support and at least values for a limit raise. This certainly is reasonable but may merely defer your problem. What would you do if Pard rebids 3♣? Will you go low or bid 3NT?

One advantage of bidding 2♦, particularly with a savvy partner, is that Pard could bid No Trump with ♦Qx, ♦Qxx or ♦AJ. Holding ♦Qx, would Pard summon up the courage to bid 2NT with a balanced hand? My sense is that most experts would, but most non-experts would not.

Other considerations may affect your decision. If faced with this problem late in the session, you will have a good feel as to how you are doing. If you need a top, I like the idea of bidding 2♦. If you are having a good game, you might "try to stay in the middle" and make sure to bid game on the theory that most will do so.

What actually happened? I was playing with a Robot. If playing with an expert, I would have bid 2♦. With the robot, I settled for 2NT. I sighed when I saw dummy as the Robot held the "magic" diamond holding.

Robot held:

♠KQxx ♥AJxx ♦Qx ♣109x

However, when I reviewed the outcome, I was very pleasantly surprised. With 22 results, I garnered a 3-way tie for top with +120. Which leads to another axiom: "Matchpoints is a game of plus scores." Given a close decision, tiptoeing quietly through the tulips and settling for a plus score is often an underrated approach! ♣