

16. Using a minor suit runout

Published on Page 2 of the Trail Daily Times, December 21, 2010

♠ 1075 ♥ KQJ8 ♦ KQ ♣ J1087		♠ A6 ♥ 97432 ♦ 109 ♣ AK96																	
	♠ KQJ3 ♥ A65 ♦ AJ8 ♣ Q53																		
	♠ 9842 ♥ 10 ♦ 765432 ♣ 42																		
	<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;">W</td> <td style="width: 25%;">N</td> <td style="width: 25%;">E</td> <td style="width: 25%;">S</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">1NT</td> <td style="text-align: center;">P</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2♠</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">P</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3♣</td> <td style="text-align: center;">P</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3♦</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">All Pass</td> </tr> </table>	W	N	E	S		1NT	P	2♠	P	3♣	P	3♦	All Pass					
W	N	E	S																
	1NT	P	2♠																
P	3♣	P	3♦																
All Pass																			
	--North-South Vulnerable--																		

Recap:

One no-trump is such an important bid that it should be opened whenever one has a balanced 15 to 17-point hand with at most one doubleton and no singletons or voids. Stayman is used when responder has a four-card major including the case when the other major is five cards long. Stayman can also be used when looking for a minor suit slam. Transfers are used when one or both majors are five cards or longer. But what about the minors? It is often best to play in 3NT except when there is a slam possibility or a bust hand.

The runout:

The runout provides a means of escaping to a long minor with a weak (or bust) hand that would be useless in no-trump. With a bust hand, one bids two spades as a relay to three clubs, and then one can pass or correct to three diamonds. Partner is expected to pass three diamonds.

The bidding:

North opens 1NT with 17 high card points, and South has nothing. It does not seem natural to put partner at the three-level with no points, but 1NT has no chance of making. In fact, 1NT will likely go down four tricks for -400, while three diamonds will make for +110.

Competition:

It is unlikely that East and West will find their heart fit especially if South bumps the bidding to three diamonds. East and West are cold for four hearts for +420. South's bidding of two spades, and then three diamonds, not only takes North out of a miserable 1NT contract, it prevents East and West from finding their contract.

If South passes, to make matters worse, West could reopen the bidding with a double which East will pass with his eleven points. East-West only need to set 1NT two tricks doubled to get 500, a reward bigger than any non-vulnerable game. In fact, 1NT doubled will go down for -1100, a reward bigger than any non-vulnerable small slam.

A general guideline to pass a double of 1NT for penalty is that while North needs 22 points to make 1NT, East and West also need 22 points to set 1NT without considering five-card suits. East and West can establish their heart suit while North has difficulty using his diamonds.

The contract:

Three diamonds.

The play:

In three diamonds, South will get the lead of the king of hearts. South takes dummy's ace and ruffs a heart. South plays a diamond up to dummy's holding twice, losing only one diamond. South will lose two clubs, one diamond, no hearts and one spade to make his contract. Even if South goes down one, three diamonds for the above mentioned reasons is a good bid.

The result:

Three diamonds makes for +110.