

AN HONORS EBOOK FROM MASTER POINT PRESS

Rakesh K. Kumar

# A Swiss Teams Challenge



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ISBN: 978-1-77140-356-6

Cover Design: Olena S. Sullivan/New Mediatrix

1 2 3 4 5 6    25 24 23 22

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## INTRODUCTION

Three of the most well-thumbed volumes on my bookshelf are *Play a Swiss Teams of Four* by Mike Lawrence (1982), *Spingold Challenge* by Allan Falk (1988) and *Swiss Match Challenge* by Jeff Rubens (1992). Their somewhat dilapidated state reflects my long-standing interest in IMPs bridge, which is what my last two books were about.

This book in some respects pays homage to those classics. You are playing in a two-day teams tournament, with 8 rounds of 7-board matches each day. Scoring is IMPs converted to Victory Points (using the decimalised WBF or NABC+ scale) and the top half of the field after day one qualifies to play in the final on day two, when the Swiss movement re-starts. As in the above books, you face many more decisions per match than you would in a typical tournament. Indeed you have to make a decision on every board, which is after all the whole point. The hands are presented in quiz format, followed by a discussion of the various considerations that are relevant to doing well in teams tournaments.

The Lawrence, Falk and Rubens books have interesting narratives associated with their matches. This book also has an underlying narrative of sorts, but because it's unlikely that I will be able to predict your progressive score correctly, the story probably will not accurately reflect your situation after any given number of matches. Never mind. If you belong to the group of readers to whom this is targeted, namely advanced but not expert bridge players, it may be quite close.

As in the books mentioned above, the dealer and vulnerability on successive boards "follow a progression all of their own" (to quote Mike Lawrence) and so does your position at the table. Please ignore these wrinkles in the fabric of reality, because it's the problems that matter.

In this imaginary event, your teammates are sound and sometimes enterprising, but certainly not top-class experts. The deals, however, are not imaginary – the vast majority are from actual Swiss Teams tournaments, some with large fields and some fairly small. Where

available and appropriate, I have parenthetically provided an across-the-field review of the real-life outcomes on each board. However, it isn't necessarily the results that matter, but the approach and the thought processes. It's my hope that the commentaries will help you refine your strategies for Swiss Teams events.

If you believe that your personal favourite bidding system earns IMPs every time you sit down for a match, you may feel disadvantaged being stuck with what is played in this book, but unfortunately you'll have to live with it. Here the assumption is that you have agreed to "standard" natural methods i.e. 5-card majors with a forcing 1NT and 2/1 game-forcing responses, a strong (notionally 15-17 hcp) notrump opening and weak two openings in diamonds, hearts and spades (often with a 5-card suit and some shape). Your leads are also old-fashioned "standard" (including top of a sequence or internal sequence, high-low from a doubleton etc.) and your signals are low to encourage and reverse count (a.k.a. upside-down carding and attitude). The opponents play whatever they happen to be playing – which will sometimes be quite different from your methods.

The 112 deals in the book are almost equally distributed between constructive bidding, competitive bidding, play and defence. I hope you will find this collection interesting and informative!

Rakesh K. Kumar  
November 2022

## DAY ONE – MORNING

### DAY 1 MATCH 1: HANDS

Here you are at the start of a 2-day national teams tournament, with 8 rounds of 7-board matches on the first day. The top half of the field qualifies to the final on the second day, when the Swiss movement starts all over again. In a fairly large field of 76 teams, your first-round opponents are unfamiliar. Not to worry, you and your teammates have been looking forward to playing in this competition, and it's game on ...

**Deal 1:** You are the dealer, with neither side vulnerable. This is your hand:

♠1072  
♥5  
♦KQJ  
♣K98764

What, if anything, will you bid?

**Deal 2:** Vulnerable against opponents who are not vulnerable, you are looking at a promising hand: ♠Q97 ♥KJ85 ♦AQJ972 ♣-. Then to your surprise, partner as the dealer opens 1NT. You decide not to investigate for a fit in hearts and the auction continues as below.

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	4♦
Pass	4♠	Pass	6♦

All pass

Your 4♦ bid sets suit and you have agreed to play this jump bid as Roman Keycard Blackwood (RKCB) in diamonds (a.k.a. Minorwood). Partner's 4♠ reply promises 0 or 3 keycards. So here you are in 6♦.

Dlr: N      ♠AJ83  
 Vul: NS    ♥A73  
               ♦K104  
               ♣QJ4

Lead:  
 ♣K



♠Q97  
 ♥KJ85  
 ♦AQJ972  
 ♣-

The lead of ♣K asks for count, but you ruff and draw trumps in three rounds, West having a singleton. Now you successfully finesse ♠J, but when you play a low heart to your jack, West wins with ♥Q and returns ♥10. How will you play from here? Hearts break 3-3.

**Deal 3:** Not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, you open 1♥ as the dealer and your LHO doubles. Partner raises to 2♥ and RHO jumps to 4♠. You lead ♥K and see this dummy:

Dlr: W      ♠K76  
 Vul: NS    ♥106  
               ♦AJ95  
               ♣K974

♠J10  
 ♥AK852  
 ♦8  
 ♣AJ865



West	North	East	South
1♥	Dbl	2♥	4♠
All pass			

Partner plays ♥Q, promising the jack. How are you going to defend?



**Deal 4:** Now with both sides vulnerable, as South you hold:

♠4  
♥J3  
♦K85  
♣Q1098753

This has been the auction so far:

West	North	East	South
1♥	Dbl	3♥*	?

East's raise to 3♥ was pre-emptive. Will you bid 4♣? Whether you do or not, North bids spades (3♠ or 4♠ as appropriate). What then?

**Deal 5:** You are still sitting South, with neither side vulnerable.

Dlr: E           ♠QJ1072  
Vul: Neither   ♥KQ65  
                 ♦9  
                 ♣743

Lead:  
♣K



♠A6543  
♥J43  
♦AK106  
♣10

West	North	East	South
2♣	4♠	Pass	1♠
		All pass	

East passes as dealer and you open 1♠. West overcalls 2♣ and your partner jumps to 4♠, which is passed out. West leads ♣K, asking for count, then continues with the ace. How will you play the hand?

**Deal 6:** Both sides are vulnerable and as the dealer, you open 1♦ with this hand:

♠A1075  
♥Q7  
♦AKQ107  
♣92

The auction continues thus:

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	1♠	Pass	1NT
Pass	?		

What will you do at this point?

**Deal 7:** You are the dealer, vulnerable against opponents who are not vulnerable. This is your hand:

♠109  
♥KQ3  
♦92  
♣KQ9865

What, if anything, will you bid?

## DAY 1 MATCH 1: COMMENTARY

Have you ever sat down for the first board of the first match of an event feeling less than fully focused on the game? Perhaps you had a late night, you haven't had enough coffee yet, or whatever ... this is a dangerous time. Many a match has been lost on the first board because one member of one of the partnerships was there in body but not in spirit, fervently hoping that the first one or two boards might prove to be just boring part-score deals. Unsurprisingly, that's not happening here!

**Deal 1:** Did you open 3♣ with the North hand? Whether you chose to do so or not had a major impact on the outcome of the deal:

	<b>♠1072</b>		
Dlr: N	<b>♥5</b>	N	<b>♠964</b>
Vul: Neither	<b>♦KQJ</b>	W     E	<b>♥AQJ82</b>
	<b>♣K98764</b>	S	<b>♦10963</b>
<b>♠J853</b>			<b>♣10</b>
<b>♥764</b>			
<b>♦8754</b>			
<b>♣J3</b>			
	<b>♠AKQ</b>		
	<b>♥K1093</b>		
	<b>♦A2</b>		
	<b>♣AQ52</b>		

West	North	East	South
	3♣	Pass	4♦
Pass	4♠	Pass	6NT
All pass			

After a 3♣ opening, your partner inquired for keycards with 4♦ (4-of-the-other-minor as a keycard inquiry after a minor suit pre-empt is a very useful gadget: opener responds in steps showing 0, 1-Q, 1+Q,

2-Q, 2+Q). When you showed one keycard, partner figured your side ought to be able to take 7 club tricks, 3 spade tricks, a diamond and hopefully a heart trick. To protect ♥K, South chose to play in 6NT.

This turned out to be an unbeatable contract, although partner's initial assessment of where the tricks might be coming from proved not to be entirely correct. What made the North hand worth a 3♣ pre-empt even with a very ordinary 6-card suit? Four things: a singleton in a major suit; values in the other minor suit; you were bidding in first seat, so did not promise anything special; and you were not vulnerable.

Every partnership needs to have clear agreements about the style of pre-emptive bids that will be played, depending on both position and vulnerability. Many modern partnerships choose to employ wide-ranging disruptive pre-empts, believing that the benefits exceed the risks. Nevertheless, when neither side is vulnerable, there is little to be gained by pre-empting on rubbish. With that understanding, it became automatic for your partner to look for slam.

On this deal, there was another advantage of the pre-emptive bid in first seat – it shut East out. At the other table, your counterpart in the North seat passed and your teammate sitting East opened a weak 2♥. Now the opposing North-South languished in 3NT, making 13 tricks when West led a top-of-nothing ♥7 and East inserted the queen. So if you bid 3♣ with the North hand for +990 against -520, you collected 10 IMPs; otherwise the board was flat (a push).

(In the event in which this was played, North-South were in 3NT, making 12 or 13 tricks, at 34 of the 52 tables. However, at 5 of the 6 tables where North opened 3♣, slam was reached without difficulty, although only one pair bid the more sensible 6NT which protects ♥K. Another 11 tables also reached slam, but interestingly, they all played in 6♣ and all but 2 were played by North.)

**Deal 2:** If you could somehow have divined that finessing for both spade honours on your left would yield 4 tricks, there would have been nothing to worry about on this deal. Now, though, you needed to find hearts 3-3. When they were, you still had to cater for a potential spade loser. The full board is shown on the next page:

Dlr: N  
 Vul: NS

♠AJ83  
 ♥A73  
 ♦K104  
 ♣QJ4

♠K1042  
 ♥Q102  
 ♦8  
 ♣AK1073



♠65  
 ♥964  
 ♦653  
 ♣98652

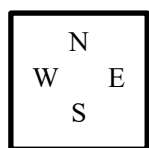
♠Q97  
 ♥KJ85  
 ♦AQJ972  
 ♣

West	North	East	South
	1NT	Pass	4♦
Pass	4♠	Pass	6♦
All pass			

By this stage, you knew enough about the deal to be able to solve the problem. After cashing two more tricks, the position would be:

♠A8  
 ♥-  
 ♦-  
 ♣Q

♠K10  
 ♥-  
 ♦-  
 ♣A



♠6  
 ♥-  
 ♦-  
 ♣98

♠Q9  
 ♥-  
 ♦J  
 ♣-

When you led  $\heartsuit J$ , West would be squeezed. He would either have to yield a club trick or discard  $\spadesuit 10$ , in which case you would throw  $\clubsuit Q$  and take the last two tricks with the ace and queen of spades.

At your teammates' table, North-South played in 3NT making 11 tricks, so if you successfully executed this straightforward squeeze, you gained 12 IMPs. Otherwise, you lost 13 IMPs!

(In the tournament in which this board turned up,  $6\heartsuit$  was reached at 13 of 28 tables, but only 6 declarers made it. At the other tables, 8 played in  $5\heartsuit$  and 6 in 3NT.)

**Deal 3:** The full deal is below. Your opponents bid a little more aggressively than some others in the field, because after West opened  $1\heartsuit$ , several Norths did not make a takeout double, while others left South to play in  $3\spadesuit$ . In fact at a few tables where North did not double, South was unwilling to overcall at adverse vulnerability after East raised to  $2\heartsuit$ , so that was the end of the auction!

Dlr: W	$\spadesuit K76$										
	$\heartsuit 106$										
Vul: NS	$\diamondsuit AJ95$										
	$\clubsuit K974$										
$\spadesuit J10$	<table style="margin: 0 auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <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		$\spadesuit 842$
	N										
W		E									
	S										
$\heartsuit AK852$		$\heartsuit QJ3$									
$\diamondsuit 8$		$\diamondsuit 107643$									
$\clubsuit AJ865$		$\clubsuit Q3$									
	$\spadesuit AQ953$										
	$\heartsuit 974$										
	$\diamondsuit KQ2$										
	$\clubsuit 102$										

West	North	East	South
$1\heartsuit$	Dbl	$2\heartsuit$	$4\spadesuit$
All pass			

In principle, the 4♠ contract is unbeatable: 5 spade tricks, 4 diamond tricks and a heart ruff. There is, however, one chance. Did you spot it? If you continue with ♥A and a third heart to make dummy ruff, then follow with ♠J under the king on the first round of spades, you just might succeed in persuading declarer to finesse, playing East for ♠10842 (although even following with ♠10 could induce a finesse).

If you found this defence, your falsecard yielded a result ... declarer took the finesse and 4♠ went one down as you immediately cashed ♣A. So you scored +100 to almost compensate for the -140 scored by your teammates, who did not compete past 3♥, for a 1 IMP loss. Otherwise, you scored -620 for a 13 IMP loss.

(In the relevant event, 4♠ was reached at only 9 of 23 tables and 5 declarers were successful – but the others believed the falsecard.)

**Deal 4:** Did you bid 4♣? With 7 losers and a 7-card suit, that makes good sense. Then did you pull partner's 4♠ to 5♣? As you can see, that is exactly what you should do. Here's the full deal:

	<b>♠AK10973</b>											
Dlr: W	<b>♥A10</b>											
Vul: Both	<b>♦Q2</b>											
	<b>♣KJ6</b>											
<b>♠Q865</b>	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		<b>♠J2</b>	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
<b>♥K9652</b>		<b>♥Q874</b>										
<b>♦A97</b>		<b>♦J10643</b>										
<b>♣A</b>		<b>♣42</b>										
	<b>♠4</b>											
	<b>♥J3</b>											
	<b>♦K85</b>											
	<b>♣Q1098753</b>											

West	North	East	South
1♥	Dbl	3♥*	4♣
Pass	4♠	Pass	5♣
All pass			

The basic principle here is that a weak hand always plays better in its long suit. In this case that meant playing in the 11-trick game, but opposite a strong hand which was likely to at least have tolerance for clubs, it was reasonable for South to insist on 5♣. That proved to be a sound contract, whereas 4♠ would have gone down.

At the other table, North-South did reach 5♣, so if you arrived in the same contract you had a flat board. If you passed 3♥, partner backed in with 3♠ and, being consistent, you passed that – fortunately for you, partner made 9 tricks (even though 3♠ can go down) so you lost "only" 10 IMPs. If you bid 4♣ and then passed 4♠, partner still managed 9 tricks, but now -100 and -600 meant you lost 12 IMPs.

(In the event in which the original version of this slightly modified deal was played, only 4 of 24 bid to 5♣. Another 3 played in 4♠, 14 played in a spade part-score and 3 played in a club part-score.)

**Deal 5:** To recap, West led ♣K followed by the ace. No doubt you ruffed this. Did you then ruff a diamond in dummy to take the spade finesse? This was the full deal:

Dlr: E  
 Vul: Neither

♠QJ1072  
 ♥KQ65  
 ♦9  
 ♣743

♠K8	N W     E S	♠9
♥10		♥A9872
♦Q732		♦J854
♣AKQ862		♣J95

♠A6543  
 ♥J43  
 ♦AK106  
 ♣10

West	North	East	South
2♣	4♠	Pass	1♠
		All pass	



If you tried the spade finesse, you would have had cause to regret it. The finesse lost and West returned ♥10 to East's ace, after which a heart back yielded a ruff with ♠8 and set the contract.

What you needed to do – as on every deal – was to count your winners and losers before playing to the first trick. Of course you will lose a club and a heart trick. You may also have to lose a spade. However, even if you do, you will still have 10 tricks: 6 trump tricks including two ruffs, 2 hearts and 2 diamonds. Provided spades break 2-1, you cannot go down unless West holds ♠K plus another spade and manages to get a heart ruff with the low spade. At IMPs, you need to suppress matchpoint tendencies and take the safest line. Lay down ♠A and when both opponents follow, you can claim. If by any chance someone has a singleton ♠K, that makes things even better.

If you played ♠A at trick 2, you scored +420 and a flat board. If you crossed to dummy to finesse, you promptly went one down and lost 10 IMPs.

(In the field of 54 teams, 23 declarers made their game, but 12 went down in 4♠ because they took the finesse. At several tables East-West went on to 5♣, which proved to be a cheap save; at a few, North-South stretched to 5♠, which was always down.)

**Deal 6:** After 1♦-1♥-1♠-1NT did you feel you had done enough? At teams you always need to be on the lookout for a possible game. As it turns out, 3NT makes on the deal shown on the next page, but how will you get there?

A reasonable approach is to rebid 2NT. Partner will assume you are showing a good 16-17 hcp hand. Although you're a point or two short, you do have a couple of tens and a source of tricks, so it's only a very slight overbid. Despite having a "quacky" hand (i.e. quite a few queens and jacks) partner had enough to accept the invitation when playing IMPs.

In this book, you are in the hot seat for a two-day Swiss Teams tournament, consisting of 8 rounds of 7 board matches each day. Your first goal is to finish in the top half of the field at the end of day one, so that you qualify to the final on day two. After that, you don't have unrealistic ambitions, but would really like to play well enough to achieve a top ten finish. Can you manage that?

Of course, you will face many more decisions per match than you would in a typical tournament — indeed, you have to make a decision on every board. The hands are presented in quiz format, followed by a discussion of the various considerations that are relevant to doing well in team games. Some of these include:

- agreements about pre-emptive bidding
- pushing for game
- bidding to the right slam
- playing to avoid trouble
- looking for the setting trick.

The great majority of the problems come from real tournament play and are almost equally distributed between constructive bidding, competitive bidding, declarer play and defense.



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