

2017 Gold Coast Congress by Nikolas Moore

My favourite Bridge Congress of the year, likely many people's favourite, is the Gold Coast Congress being an excellent location and an ideal venue at the Broadbeach Convention Centre. This year I partnered Abby Wanigaratne in the Pairs and Teams Championships. Here is a hand from the Pairs where a Splinter bid worked well:

Board 1 ♠ JT6
 Dealer N ♥ T
 Vul None ♦ T975
 ♣ AKQ84

♠ 732	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto; text-align: center; line-height: 40px;"> N W E S </div> </div>	♠ K5
♥ 873		♥ K964
♦ K643		♦ AQJ82
♣ T62		♣ 73

♠ AQ984
 ♥ AQJ52
 ♦
 ♣ J95

Makeable contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	7	2	3	7	2
S	7	1	3	7	2
E	-	-	-	-	-
W	-	-	-	-	-

10		13
3	14	

North	East	South	West
1C	Dbl	1H*	Pass
1S*	2D	4D	Pass
4NT	Pass	5S	Pass
6S	All Pass		

I chose to open the North cards because I have such a good suit, some shape and high spot cards. Abby's 1♥ bid showed at least four spades. My 1♠ rebid showed exactly three spades and a minimum hand. Abby's 4♦ bid was a Splinter – confirming a spade fit and indicating diamond shortage – and looked very likely to be a void. With four small diamonds, this suited my hand perfectly, and I bid the slam despite being so weak. The cards behaved and I did not bother playing for an overtrick as this slam was unlikely to be bid at other tables, with 980 being the best score in the section except for 1100 from 5♦x.

On the topic of Splinters, when partner is short in a side suit, not only is it best to have no values in that suit, but also length. If you and partner are both short in the suit it means your hands have less ruffing potential and there are more likely to be losers in another side suit, as with this hand:

Board 3

Dealer S

Vul E-W

♠ KT2

♥ 64

♦ AJ86432

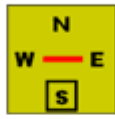
♣ Q

♠ A643

♥ AKJ72

♦ K

♣ 743



♠ QJ98

♥ Q983

♦ 7

♣ T865

♠ 75

♥ T5

♦ QT95

♣ AKJ92

Makeable contracts

	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	3	4	-	-	1
S	3	4	-	-	1
E	-	-	2	1	-
W	-	-	2	1	-

10
15 5
10

South West North East

Pass 1H 3D 3H

Pass 4H Pass Pass

5D Dbl All Pass

North's pre-empt took away our bidding space and pushed us into game. Despite the double fit, 4♥ would have failed by two tricks because our hands were too symmetrical being both short in diamonds, with three club losers. Swap the minor suits around for East or West and now 4♥ is likely to make. Our opponents were quite unlucky here; with an 11-card fit it looked right for them to bid to the 5-level, especially at favourable vulnerability, and they would have made the contract if either of them had a singleton heart or had we not taken our tricks immediately.

I partnered Geoff Martin in the Ivy Dahler Butler Pairs where we placed third in the East/West section. Geoff's performance was impressive, especially as he had only played in one congress in the last 12 months. We avoided any big losses against a series of very strong opponents. Planning the play at trick #1 is so important, as this hand demonstrates.

Board 1 ♠ 52
 Dealer N ♥ 5
 Vul None ♦ 9763
 ♣ KQJ962

♠ AK86 ♠ J94
 ♥ KQJ86 ♥ A72
 ♦ 84 ♦ JT5
 ♣ 54 ♣ AT83



♠ QT73
 ♥ T943
 ♦ AKQ2
 ♣ 7

6
 13 10
 11

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

North East South West
 3C Pass Pass 3H
 Pass 4H All Pass

I sat West throughout this event. North led a top club. This game has poor prospects. It fails immediately if North started with seven clubs, as South can trump, but there was nothing to be gained by withholding the ace, which held. I have three minor-suit losers and must avoid losing any spades. With North having pre-empted, South likely has spade length and values, so I played South for both the queen and ten in this suit, which needed both entries to dummy.

Therefore I immediately led the jack of spades, covered by the queen and king. I then played two rounds of trumps ending in dummy and led the nine of spades, covered by the ten and ace, and making my eight a winner. I was on the right track, but at this point I erred by drawing the remaining trumps, meaning that I had to lose the fourth round of spades to South. Instead, I should have played a third spade, as that way I make the contract if the suit breaks 3-3 or if, as was the case, South was 4-4 in the majors – I could have trumped the fourth spade in dummy with North out of trumps and South having to follow suit. So this was -50 and 2 IMPs out instead of +420 and 9 IMPs in.

The following hand from the second last round was our unluckiest and demonstrates what a difference one card can make:

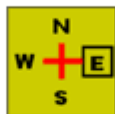
Board 10

Dealer E

Vul Both

♠ Q8
♥ AKJ8743
♦ J92
♣ 9

♠ T632
♥ QT92
♦ KQ54
♣ J



♠ AK95
♥ 6
♦ AT763
♣ 842

♠ J74
♥ 5
♦ 8
♣ AKQT7653

11
8 11
10

Makeable contracts					
	♣	♦	♥	♠	NT
N	4	-	2	-	-
S	4	-	2	-	-
E	-	3	-	2	-
W	-	3	-	2	-

East	South	West	North
1D	4C	Dbl	Pass
4S	Pass	Pass	Dbl!
			All Pass

I am a little weak to make a takeout double at the 4-level, but I have the ideal shape and 4♠ has a good chance of making, with the East/West hands fitting well. North's penalty double is very strange. He has one defensive trick opposite a partner who has pre-empted, knows that the spades are breaking, and his hand is much more offensive than defensive. South led his singleton heart. North won the jack and continued a top heart. Had South not held the jack of spades, Geoff could have won by trumping with the nine, played the AK of spades, and ran diamonds, which combined with a second heart ruff would guarantee +790, and left our opponents wishing that they had sacrificed in 5♣ for one down. As it was, South's jack of spades (combined with a 7-1 heart break!) allowed him to overruff and the opponents to cross-ruff twice each in clubs and hearts. Thus our actual score was -800, losing 13 IMPs in a travesty of justice. On the following hand, our luck evened out somewhat:

Board 9

Dealer N

Vul E-W

♠ QT5
♥ T752
♦ T3
♣ 8542

♠ 8732
♥ A83
♦ K87
♣ AJ9



♠ AK964
♥ KQ9
♦ AJ95
♣ 6

♠ J
♥ J64
♦ Q642
♣ KQT73

2
12 17
9

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

North	East	South	West
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Pass 1S 3C 3NT

Pass 4NT All Pass

3NT by me was a slight overbid, and concealed my spade support, but my hand is flat, my clubs well-placed, and 4♠ would suggest a weaker hand. Geoff's 4NT was a quantitative slam try that I was never going to accept. Had South passed, I would have made a limit raise of 3♠ and we would be close to reaching 6♠, a good slam that only needs either the diamond finesse or a spade break to make, thanks to our hands fitting well. Luckily for us, neither suit behaved and, with more than half the field attempting slam, our score of +660 was a gain of 9 IMPs instead of losing about that much had slam made. 6♠ can make in theory by running the jack of diamonds from hand, and, if South covers, finessing the ten on the way back, but that play is very double-dummy. Thanks to this hand and a sharp defence on two other hands, we won the round by 8 IMPs, despite the disaster on board #10.

This result got us into 2nd place for East/West, just one point off the lead, with one round to go. On one board in the last round, the opponents almost bid a slam. I was hoping that they *would*, because I held QT8x in their trump suit – but my trumps were badly placed, dummy was void in the suit where Geoff held an ace, and 12 tricks was easy, even 13 tricks possible, so we gained 7 IMPs from -480, with many pairs reaching slam. The board below went against us; otherwise, we might just have won:

Board 21 ♠ K7532
 Dealer N ♥ Q
 Vul N-S ♦ K9876
 ♣ 98

♠ J86 ♥ A975 ♦ AJ543 ♣ 2		♠ ♥ KT8642 ♦ Q2 ♣ K7643
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♠ AQT94
 ♥ J3
 ♦ T
 ♣ AQJT5

8	Makeable contracts ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT					
10	N	2	-	-	5	-
14	S	2	-	-	5	-
	E	-	1	4	-	-
	W	-	1	4	-	-

North	East	South	West
2S	3H	4H	5H
Pass	Pass	5S	All Pass

North's opening showed spades and a minor. Geoff did well to bid at the 3-level with an 8-count – his hand has good shape - and I was happy to bid to the 5-level with good support at favourable vulnerability. Over South's 5♠, Geoff considered bidding 6♥, which would have been effective (only two off), but I believe that passing was very much the percentage action with his hand. We only have a ten-card fit, have already pushed the opponents one level higher, and 5♠, which several pairs doubled, very nearly failed. Declarer made eleven tricks thanks to both minor-suit finesses working – the king of diamonds was important because the clubs could not quite be established, due to the bad break in that suit. -650 was a loss of 4 IMPs, crucial in the context of the round, which we lost by 3 IMPs, leaving us nearly 5 VPs short of the top two East/West pairs. Congratulations to the winners, Jessica Brake and Matthew Brown.