

Listening to the Auction – Kevin Kacmarynski

1. Let's put you in the hot seat right off the bat. You sit down at the Friday/Saturday 9 AM Swiss team event at the regional with your 200-masterpoint partner. Two world-class players – Geoff Hampson (2010 Rosenblum Cup) and Marc Jacobus (2013 Senior Bowl silver medalist) – sit down at your table for round one. Fun! The auction on the first board proceeds like this:

<u>Geoff</u>	<u>You</u>	<u>Marc</u>	<u>Partner</u>	
1NT*	P	2C	P	15-17 No-trump range. 2C is good old-fashioned Stayman
2D	P	3NT	P	3NT says "I have the points to be in game, but not slam"
P	P			

Your lead. Here is your hand: AQ8x, 9, KJx, T9xxx. What is your choice? Remember, it is Swiss Teams, so you really want to try to beat the contract and giving up an overtrick (or two) is not the end of the world.

Done thinking? No? Okay – where do you start your thought process?

- 4th best from longest and strongest?
 - o Your long club suit is weak. We will think about a club lead, but not commit to it yet.
- A diamond?
 - o Do you want to lead from king-jack-third when your partner has not bid the suit? Me neither. This suit is out of consideration.
- A heart?
 - o You only have one heart. How often do you lead singletons against no-trump when partner has been silent throughout the auction?
- A spade?
 - o This is probably many people's choice because it is clearly your strongest suit, even if it is not quite as long as the clubs.

Ok, so looks like a black suit lead, right? Well, here are a couple of other things to consider:

- Are you ever going to be able to set up a club trick?
 - o Maybe, but it is going to take several repeated club leads to do it.
- Leading from a 4-card suit headed by the ace against no-trump is overrated
 - o You don't need to set up your ace
 - o How many tricks are you really going to be able to establish in a 4-card suit?
 - o Which defender is more likely to have the king of spades? Probably the person on your right (declarer) who has more points. Why potentially give up a trick to the king of spades (or even worse, the jack) by leading a spade at trick one when you have AQ behind him?

Great. So now what? Calm down and let's think about what other pieces of information you have.

- Opponents have at least 25 HCP between them. You have 10. That means that partner has at most 5 points. You will not be able to count on partner for much help. Partner probably does not have two club honors to help setup your long suit. Drat.

- How about trying to find partner's long suit? That is a reasonable strategy when you are not thrilled with your own lead choices. Too bad you do not know what partner's suit is.... Or do you?

Time to play detective. What does the bidding sequence tell us about the distribution of the hands?

- The 1NT opener has a balanced hand
- Responder asked partner if he had a 4-card major
- Opener said "no" (2D bid)
- Responder made a Stayman bid instead of a transfer, then jumped to 3NT

Got it yet?

No?

Ok – I will help you through this one. Count the suits you know the most about – in this case, hearts and spades. Let us start with spades.

- You have 4
- Dummy has at most 4 (he didn't make a transfer bid or give any other indication of having 5)
- Declarer has 2 or 3 (he denied a singleton with the 1NT opening and then he bid 2D over 2C, denying a 4-card major)
- Partner has what?
 - o Let's do the math. $4+4+3 = 11$. $13-11 = 2$.
 - o Partner has at least two spades. That is not very helpful.

Now hearts:

- You have 1
- Dummy has at most 4 (he didn't make a transfer bid or give any other indication of having 5)
- Declarer has 2 or 3 (he probably denied a singleton with the 1NT opening and then he bid 2D over 2C, denying a 4-card major)
- Partner has what?
 - o Again, do the math. $1+4+3 = 8$. $13-8 = 5$.
 - o Partner has at least five hearts; partner might even have six hearts if declarer has only two!

Lay that singleton heart on the table (face down, of course) and hope for the best!

Fun fact: singleton and doubleton major suit holdings are often good leads against no-trump if neither declarer nor dummy promised length in that suit. There is a reasonable chance that partner has a stack of them and you are able to get the defense off to a good start.

In full disclosure, the hand is unbeatable. I will not go into the details, but Geoff executes a simple squeeze against you destroying your holdings in both spades and diamonds (your choice, but either choice leads to immediate disaster) and is able to come home with nine tricks. On the plus side, he had to work for it and he compliments you with the simple statement "good lead". Even we little guys can get compliments from the pros if we take a moment to think about what the auction is telling us!

2. You hold: T7, AK96, Q85, 8754 and hear the following auction:

<u>RHO</u>	<u>You</u>	<u>LHO</u>	<u>Partner</u>	
2D*	P	2H	P	2D alerted as 11-15 HCP, any 4-4-4-1 or 5-4-4-0 hand
2S	P	P	P	

It is your lead. How do you defend the hand?

LHO (Dummy): Q963, J85432, 76, K

Partner: 854, QT, K432, AQ32

RHO (Declarer): AKJ2, 7, AJT9, JT96

Repeated trump leads destroy declarer's assets and they should only come to about seven tricks. It would be worse, but declarer's great intermediates let them set up tricks in the minors. Without a trump lead, declarer can easily crossruff their way to 8 or 9 tricks. The auction tells you both opponents have shortness somewhere – that calls for a trump lead!

3. You hold: A6, JT982, J5, K972

<u>LHO</u>	<u>Partner</u>	<u>RHO</u>	<u>You</u>
P	P	1H	P
1NT	P	2S	P
3S	P	4S	P
P	P		

It is your lead; what do you know about the situation?

- It looks like you have a heart trick in your hand
- Dummy likes spades better than hearts
- Dummy doesn't have 4 spades
- Dummy probably has 0 or 1 heart.

When the defense starts with the ace of spades and another spade, most of dummy's ruffing power is gone and the defense scores two clubs, a heart, and the ace of spades for a 1-trick set.

LHO (Dummy): Q83, 5, KQT94, T863

Partner: 952, 4, A87632, AQ5

RHO (Declarer): KJT74, AKQ764, void, J4

As it turns out, declarer has to lose either two heart tricks or give up an overruff to your partner, so the trump lead is not as critical as on other hands. However, if dummy's 8 of spades and partner's 9 of spades were switched, dummy would be able to ruff two hearts high and the lead of two trumps is needed to beat the contract.

4. You hold the following hand: AK93, AKT64, AK8, K

<u>LHO</u>	<u>Partner</u>	<u>RHO</u>	<u>You</u>	
	P	P	2C	
P	2H*	P	3H	*Alerted as showing either 1 ace or 2 kings
P	4H	P	4NT*	*Not alertable – explained after the auction as “how many queens?”
P	5S*	P	?	*Not alertable – explained after the auction as “3 queens”

It is your call – what do you know?

- Partner has less than an opening hand
- Partner must have 1 ace, because you have all the kings
- Partner has a fit with your heart suit
- Partner has 3 queens

The auction tells you that you have 11 top tricks. With the known heart fit, a grand slam is looking good. There is an extremely good chance that partner has the queen of hearts which almost assures you of 13 top tricks. Even if you decide to stop in 6H or 6NT, at least you have a lot of information available to you to make the decision.

Partner’s hand: QT8, Q872, J92, AQ7

5. You are dealt the following hand: AKQJT85, K, KQJ, T9. Nice hand!

<u>RHO</u>	<u>You</u>	<u>LHO</u>	<u>Partner</u>	
P	1S	P	2NT*	*Jacoby raise: 4-card spade support + opening strength hand
P	3H*	P	4D*	*Singleton or void in hearts
P	?			*Diamond control (A, K, void, or singleton)

Things are certainly looking up with your great hand and partner’s game-forcing 2NT bid. Which slam should you be in? What do you know about partner’s hand?

- Partner has at least 4 spades and at least opening strength (12+ points)
- Partner has a diamond control
- Partner does not have a spade control
 - o Obvious – you have all the big spades!
- Partner does not have a club control
 - o Controls are generally bid up the line and partner skipped 4C
 - o Do you still think there is a slam?
 - The auction is warning you that the opponents have two club tricks!

Here is partner’s hand: 9762, AQ8, AT, QJ53

While you might get lucky with opponents making a bad lead, they are listening to the auction too and a club lead is starting to sound a lot better right now. Best to settle in 4S and take your 11 tricks rather than be down one in a hopeless slam (even though you do have 32 HCP between the two hands).

6. You hold the following hand: AJ2, QJ92, A8, K762 at matchpoint scoring (overtricks are vital!)

LHO Partner RHO You

	P	1H	1NT	You have 15 points and hearts well stopped. 1 NT is an easy call.
P	P	P		

The opening lead is the 7 of diamonds. Dummy comes down with K964, 63, 653, JT85 – “thank you partner, that’s delightful”. What is your plan to take as many tricks as possible? I will help you out with the first few tricks.

Trick 1: 7D (LHO), 3D (Dummy), JD (RHO), 8D (You)	
Trick 2: 9D (RHO), AD (You), TD (LHO), 5D (Dummy)	There’s 1 for us!
Trick 3: 2S (You), 3S (LHO), KS (Dummy), 5S (RHO)	That’s 2!
Trick 4: JC (Dummy), QC (RHO), KC (You), 9C (LHO)	That’s 3.... and the 9 of clubs dropped!
Trick 5: 2C (You), 7H (LHO), 8C (Dummy), AC (RHO)	
Trick 6: 7S (RHO)	

It is your play. Do you take your Ace or finesse your jack? What do you know from bidding and play?

Bidding

- RHO has an opening hand with at least 5 hearts
- LHO did not make a call over 1NT, so RHO has the vast majority of the points for their side

Play

- RHO has had three chances to play a high diamond honor (K or Q) and did not do it any time
 - o Assume LHO has KQ of diamonds
 - o Is there room for any other honors in LHO’s hand?
 - Not much. RHO probably has the queen of spades, but maybe we can get more information from the play
- LHO had only 1 club. That means RHO must have 4 clubs (4 in dummy, 4 in your hand)
- RHO played diamonds at trick 1 and trick 2.
- RHO played spades at tricks 3 and 6.

You have all the information you need. Time to piece it together.

From the bidding, RHO has at least 5 hearts. From the play of clubs, RHO has exactly 4 clubs. RHO has also played 2 hearts and 2 diamonds. How many of RHO’s cards do you know?

The answer is **ALL OF THEM!** 5 hearts + 4 clubs + 2 diamonds + 2 spades = 13 cards. RHO cannot possibly have the queen of spades – it would be the 14th card in her hand! Finessing the jack of spades will prove extremely hazardous to declarer’s health. Here are the opponents’ hands:

LHO: QT83, 87, KQT742, 9
RHO: 75, AKT54, J9, AQ43

Assuming declarer goes up with the ace of spades, LHO will never get in to cash her diamond winners. RHO will gain the lead a couple of times in hearts but is down to only clubs and hearts at this point in the deal and cannot get back to LHO's hand. The play of the hearts over the remaining tricks is a bit interesting as both RHO and declarer can try to endplay each other – but that is a topic for another time. Declarer should be able to scramble home with 7 or possibly 8 tricks for a good result.

I wish I had listened to the auction and processed what I had seen before I finessed the jack of spades. It was “obvious” that RHO had the queen of spades. Oops. -300 did not score very well.