3 - Opening unbalanced hands and leading towards high cards - Teacher's notes

Objectives

Bidding - opener
Showing opener's unbalanced hand in two bids - includes determining the hand-type.

Bidding - responder
Change suit at a low level if possible - change of suit is forcing - includes relative suit rankings.

Play - leading towards high cards.

Implementation
Put out the first deal.
Encourage each player to determine their hand-shape - e.g. 5-4-2-2 (suit order not important at this point).
Is it balanced or unbalanced?
Then add up their points (HCP - standard 4,3,2,1).

Hand-type
In the initial assessment of a hand the first step should be to determine the hand-type by counting the shape - e.g. 5-4-2-2 (the order of the suits is not important at this point).
Hands with a six-card suit or 5-4 shape are unbalanced or semi-balanced.
So are 4-4-4-1 hands but they are ignored for the moment.
Any other hand - 4-3-3-3, 4-4-3-2, 5-3-3-2 is balanced.
The present topic applies only to unbalanced or semi-balanced hands.

Strength
The recommended rule for the strength when opening unbalanced hands is **'rule of 20':-**

add up the points and the lengths of the 2 longest suits. If the total comes to twenty or more then make an opening bid if no one else has bid before you - with less than this you pass.
In practice this comes down to 'Open 1 of a suit with 5-4 or 6-3 shape and 11 points, or 5-5 or 6-4 shape and 10 points.

Which suit
The opening bidder should always know what his rebid is going to be if partner makes a simple change of suit response. The sight of opener going into a trance on his second bid just shouldn't happen. His mission was always to describe his hand in two bids.
With 5-4 shape open one of the five-card suit planning to rebid in the four-card suit;
with 5-5 shape open the higher-ranking suit planning to rebid in the second;
with a six-card suit and no secondary four-card suit open one of the suit planning to rebid in the same suit.
(Note that reverse bidding is not considered at this point.)

Responder
Responder should always change suit at the one-level on a four-card or longer suit with five or more points (six if you prefer) - note that responder's hand might be much stronger - his bid is forcing so he can show the strength later. Responder's alternative bids are the main theme of the next topic.

On hand 2 - introduce the idea of leading towards high cards. On this hand declarer needs to lead towards clubs in hand twice for a repeated finesse, but it is better not to emphasise the finesse when first introducing the topic. Just introduce xx with South and Kx with North. If North leads the suit he will make no tricks - if East leads the suit he will make 1 trick, if S or W lead the suit he might make either 0 or 1 trick depending on where the A is.

Continue to plan the play and score trick points.