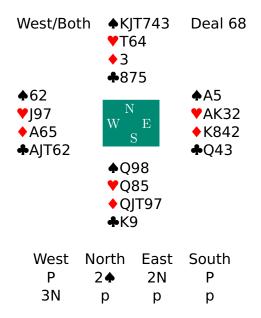
The trail of a one-IMP difference

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This deal riveted my attention when I was going through the score-sheet of one of the Swiss league rounds in the Mohanlal Bharatia Memorial team event of 2021 On the score-sheet, it only showed a 1-IMP difference, but the cards seemed to have so many stories to tell. Let us begin with the most common contract, namely, 3N by East. On 48 out of 56 Tables, East played in 3Nt. On most of these tables, North passed. Holding just 4 HCP, vulnerable, in the second seat, most players opted against a weak 2♠ bid. South led the ◆Q. Most Easts made 11 tricks.

On some tables, North opened the bidding with a weak 2♠ or a multi 2♠ that showed a weak 2M hand. On two tables, East overcalled 2Nt and West raised to three. South led the ♠8. If you were the De-

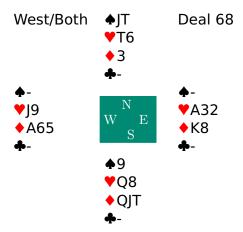
clarer, how would you like to go about the 3Nt project?

I guess you would duck the first Spade when North plays the ♠k. Playing against BBO robots, this simple duck on first trick was often enough to get you a good score because the robot, in the programmer's infinite wisdom, opted to shift. That kind of error is unlikely from a human player participating in the Bharatia event, but there is no harm in ducking. We will see later why it is important to duck, but let us move on with the play for trick two. Say North continues a Spade and you win with the ♠Ace South dropping the ♠Queen.

You need the Club King onside, so you will play a Club next, however, be careful with the choice of your card. If you play the *Queen, and if South comes up with a stiff *King, you would have thrown a cold contract for North's 9875 will give him a Club control.

The correct play is a small Club at trick two. South plays small, you win with he ♣ Jack, get back to the Closed hand with the ♥King and play the ♣Q picking up South's King and cash Clubs. On the last two Clubs, you discard two Diamonds.

This is the situation with South yet to discard.



South cannot discard a Diamond or a Heart. A non-material squeeze has operated on South. South has to let go his lone Spade. You can then cash ◆AK and endplay South with the third Diamond to force him to lead aways from the ♥Queen.

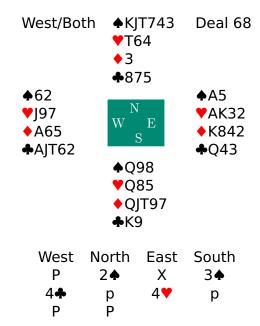
That would get you 11 tricks and place you on par with the Declarers who got the lead of ◆Queen. If you had not ducked the ♠ King on trick one, South would have had an allowance for one extra card and he would have retained a Spade. NS would have got three tricks in that case.

Let us now examine the bidding. A 2Nt overcall on a weak 2 popening with the East hand is the path of least resistance. You have 16 HCP, a Balanced hand, and one Spade control. The books wouldn't pull you up for that overcall. If you are playing with a new parter; if you haven't had sufficient time to discuss your methods even while playing with a regular partner, the 2Nt overcall will save you some anxiety.

What if you are a practiced partnership? You will worry about a Spade lead from South. You would like to explore a Moyesian 4-3 fit in Hearts if your methods permit it. The 2Nt overcall almost says bye-bye to such a possibility. A double of 2♠ will allow you to explore that as well as a 5-3 Club fit or a 5-4 Diamond fit. Finally, a double will also allow you to rightside a Nt contract.

if West holds extstyle Qx or Qxx or J9x, a 3Nt by West will play much better than a 3Nt by East.

Arvind Srinivasan and R. Venkatesh from team Rampage bid the hand thus.



No wonder their team has won all the KO rounds so far and are waiting for their opponents to slug it out for two extra days. Anatoly Karpov had that kind of advantage in World chess championships last century when the reigning champion waited for the challenger to be found from a gruelling multi-round event. You have to earn it through good play!

Vinay Sharma-Srinivas Joshi and Tanmoy Mazumdar-Sagar Bhuiya also reached 4♥ contract.