

February 2015

Like many players I'm good at solving bridge puzzles presented in books or in the local newspaper and I like to think this is because I'm good at this game. But the truth is it's because I have been forewarned that a problem exists and can take my time looking for the solution. At the table however there is no red light flashing when a critical decision has to be made. I thought it would be fun to publish a series of hands that I've encountered on BBO or at the club over the last year. I trust you will find them interesting and instructive. You have the advantage of knowing that somewhere along the line there is a red light flashing but see if you can fare as well or better than those involved managed – good luck!

Bidding

Vulnerable against Non vulnerable

East	N	E	S	W
♠ A82	1C	1D	1S	2D
♥ J10	pass(1)	pass	2H	pass
♦ Q109764	4H	pass	pass	pass
♣ A3				

Here is a hand you are defending as East in last year's Hillbrow teams.

South explains that they are playing negative doubles so North's pass (1) denies 3 or more Spades, but how do you play South's bid of 2H? Is it forcing, or can it be passed out? Something you might want to discuss with your regular partner. North's jump to game sounds ambitious, there just seems to be too many points in this pack. Can we punish them?

Partner leads the D8 and dummy goes down with

♠ 107
♥ KQ86
♦ A2
♣ KQ1065

We have an agreement that when we support partner's suit with 3 small cards, we lead the highest, so it looks like Declarer started with KJ doubleton. Sure enough, he goes up with the Ace in dummy and drops the J from his hand. He then proceeds to play the S10 from dummy. Plan your defence.

Initial Analysis

I hope if you were East you took your time playing to the first trick so you knew what to do when Declarer played a Spade from dummy. It certainly looks as if Declarer is trying to stampede you into revealing where the Spade honours are placed. But of course you knew that so you play low without a care in the world hoping Declarer will misguess the Spades, right?

Let's go back a step. What do we know about declarer's hand? He started with at least 5 Spades, 4 Hearts and 2 Diamonds leaving him with at most 2 Clubs missing the Jack. How do we know he is missing the Jack? Simply because if he held that card he would be trying to set up Clubs instead of Spades. If we duck the Spade it's because we hope Declarer started with Spades headed by the KJ and he will run the 10 to partner's Queen. If that is the case we will make two Spade tricks, Ace of Clubs and Ace of Hearts. How do we know partner has AH? Because if all he has in the black suits are QS and JC then he must have the Ace of Hearts for his raise. Exactly! All the more reason for ducking the Spade smoothly, right? Wrong.

To take this contract off your partner needs to hold AH else where is your 4th trick coming from? You can take one trick in Clubs and at most two tricks in Spades, a suit which you can see breaks well for Declarer. In fact the more you think about it the more likely it is he holds this card as without it where did he find a vulnerable raise to 2D with three miserable cards in your suit and a flat hand, a 3-3-3-4 distribution if indeed Declarer holds the 5-4-2-2 distribution with which we originally placed him?

At trick 2 go up with the AS then cash AC followed by a second Club. Declarer will think Christmas has come early but when he plays a trump partner will go up with his Ace and play a third Club for you to ruff.

Here is the full deal

	N	
	♠ 107	
	♥ KQ86	
	♦ A2	
	♣ KQ1065	
W		E
♠ Q92		♠ A84
♥ A4		♥ J10
♦ 853		♦ Q109764
♣ J9842		♣ A3
	S	
	♠ KJ652	
	♥ 97532	
	♦ KJ	
	♣ 7	

At the table East played low, Declarer put up the K and played a small Heart towards dummy. It was now all over for the defence, 10 tricks eventually rolling in for Declarer. A small consolation for EW was that Declarer should always have made the contract on a Diamond lead simply by winning the first trick in hand and playing a trump. The only lead to take this contract off was a Club.

Conclusion

It is a well known maxim that declarer should take a little time to review his options before playing to the first trick, but this holds just as true for the defence. By taking the time to form a picture of declarer's hand along with that of partner's and asking oneself where are our source of tricks, we can often formulate a plan of action that defeats the contract. Don't be discouraged if your plan doesn't work or turns out to be wrong, just remember that even a bad plan is better than no plan at all.