

September 2015

In this article I want to talk about optical illusions in bridge. But first here is a bridge quiz.

South	North
♠ AQ	♠ 853
♥ Q107642	♥ AJ985
♦ J	♦ 653
♣ AQ65	♣ J10

You're playing a team match and as South you arrive in the contract of 4H with the opposition passing throughout. The defence starts off with two rounds of diamonds so you ruff the second diamond trick in hand and play the ♥Q, West discarding a small diamond. Plan your play.

Analysis

All right, this hand is so simple it hardly qualifies as a quiz. You will go up with the ♥A and take the club finesse. If this loses then whatever West returns you can knock out the ♥K and dump two losing spades from dummy on your master clubs. If it wins you can take the spade finesse later for a possible overtrick.

So let's move on to this month's quiz. This hand is taken from a match on BBO between Orchards and JBC. Once again it is our friend Bruce Wang in the driving seat as South.

South	North
♠ AQ2	♠ 853
♥ Q10764	♥ AJ985
♦ J	♦ 653
♣ AK65	♣ J10

So you're playing a team match and as South you arrive in the contract of 4H with the opposition passing throughout. The defence starts off with two rounds of diamonds so you ruff the second diamond trick in hand and play the ♥Q, West following low. Plan your play.

Initial Analysis

We can let this run and if it loses to the ♥K we can fall back on a spade finesse to make this contract. If both kings are well placed we will end up making 11 tricks and if they are both wrong we could still try the Club finesse to get rid of a losing Spade in dummy. What are the chances of all these finesses failing? Well, it's only 1 chance in 8 so this line is looking pretty solid, right?

Final Analysis

But wait a minute, this hand look familiar. In fact North's hand is exactly the same as North's hand in the first quiz above, and now that we look at South's hand it is almost identical to South's hand in the original quiz except that the ♥2 has been replaced by the ♠2 and the ♣Q replaced by the ♣K. Correct, and the point is that you must play this hand the same way you played the first hand. Win the second trick and play a heart to the ace followed by a club finesse. If this loses then whatever West returns you can knock out the ♥K and dump two losing spades from dummy on your master clubs. If it wins you can take the spade finesse later for a possible overtrick.

Here is the full hand

	N	
	♠ 853	
	♥ AJ985	
	♦ 653	
	♣ J10	
W		E
♠ K1074		♠ J96
♥ 3		♥ K2
♦ 9874		♦ AKQ102
♣ Q743		♣ 982
	S	
	♠ AQ2	
	♥ Q10764	
	♦ J	
	♣ AK65	

Conclusion

The difference between these two hands is that in the first there was nothing to distract us from finding the winning line of play, whilst in the second there were plenty of distractions. We all know that the correct percentage play of the Hearts is to finesse, and when can it be right to run the risk of losing a Club trick when we started off with no losers in the suit? But they were simply optical illusions, combinations of cards enticing us to take our eye off the ball instead of seeing the simple route to making this contract. Bruce found the correct play at our table, in the other room declarer went off although the play to the first two tricks was the same. I mention that the play to the first two tricks was the same as I was tempted to give you East's hand and make this a defensive problem instead, and maybe when this hand is long forgotten I will. When East wins the first trick he must switch to a spade. The question is which spade? To be continued.....