

February 2016

Sitting South I am playing with one of my favourite partners on BBO. The opposition consists of two experts from Greece, so I think it is safe to assume that their bidding and play are orthodox.

I pick up this hand and the bidding proceeds as follows

		Bidding			
Dealer N					
All vul					
South	W	N	E	S	
♠ 752		1D	pass	1H	
♥ QJ973	3C	dbl(1)	pass	4D(2)	
♦ KJ106	pass	4H	all pass		
♣ A					

- (1) Competitive promising extra values
- (2) Hope this is forcing

West leads the ♣ K on which his partner plays the 6 and dummy goes down with

North

♠ AQ104
♥ A62
♦ A843
♣ 102

South

♠ 752
♥ QJ973
♦ KJ106
♣ A

I like my partner's bidding style. Many players would have passed over 3C with his hand but knowing East has passed and West has come in with a preemptive bid he has placed me with points and simplified our route to game. Just as an aside, many of the French players when evaluating their hands count aces as 4 ½ points and jacks as ½ point,

another good reason for making a competitive double with North's hand. But back to the play. You perform win the first trick with the ♣A and try the ♥Q which wins the trick, everyone following low. Now you try the ♠2, West follows with the 9, 10 from dummy, and East wins this trick with the king. East returns the ♣7 which you ruff.

Initial Analysis

There's good news and bad news. The good news is that I will only lose one spade trick. The bad news is I might be losing two heart tricks; if the trumps break 3-2 then this contract is cold but I have a bad feeling that the trumps are divided 4-1. How have I come to that conclusion? Well, West started with seven clubs in his hand; his partner has given him count by playing his clubs upwards suggesting he started with three. It also seems likely that he has started with a doubleton spade. If the hearts break 3-2 and West holds Kx there is only about 1% of the bridge population that know it is usually correct not to cover the queen. Perhaps I'm lucky enough to be playing against that 1% right now but I can't count on it. If West started with three hearts to the king then either he is void in diamonds or holds a singleton and has failed to lead it. This is possible, but not likely. On the other hand if East started with three hearts to the king, again most players would win the heart trick immediately and return a club. However if East started with four hearts to the K10 he may very well duck hoping declarer will play a second round of hearts and subsequently lose control of the hand. If I now play the ♥A and a small heart to my queen and East did indeed start with four trumps he will simply rise with the king and play a third club taking me off. Should instead I lead a small heart from dummy, with four hearts East will win and return a heart. Again I will be relying on a successful guess in diamonds to bring this contract home.

Should I take a diamond finesse now, and if so through which hand? I hate two way finesses (see July 2015 article). If that loses and a diamond comes back, am I any better off? Now if the trumps are 4-1 I will definitely go off, in fact if I start messing around in the side suits I might end up going down even if the trumps break. I see no better continuation at this point than the ♥A and sure enough West discards a club on this trick. It looks like I am going to lose two heart tricks.

Plan your play. Well, fair's fair – I've already played the first 5 tricks for you so we are already a good way through this hand.

Final Analysis

The evidence so far suggests that West started with 2-1-3-7 distribution. If this is the case then the odds favour a finesse through West's hand for the queen of diamonds. There's a small possibility that West started with three spades and the 9 was a false card in which case I should finesse East for the queen. I don't think I can cater for West starting with four spades unless he holds the singleton queen of diamonds. It finally dawns on me and you too I hope, that I don't have to guess the diamond situation at all. If I strip West of spades I can organize a very pretty end play against him. I start by cashing the ♠A followed by the ♠Q just in case West has been false carding in that suit. Sure enough West follows with the jack then discards another club. We are now down to the following six card ending.

	N	
	♠ 4	
	♥ 6	
	♦ A843	
	♣ -	
W		E
♠ -		♠ 8
♥ -		♥ K10
♦ XXX		♦ XX
♣ QJx		♣ x
	S	
	♠ -	
	♥ J9	
	♦ KJ106	
	♣ -	

Having established an exact count of the other three suits we know now that West started with three diamonds. We can cash the ♦A followed by the ♦K, if the queen is doubleton in East's hand we are home and dry else we will exit with a third diamond to West's queen. West must exit with a club which we ruff in dummy and whatever East plays we will concede only one more trick.

What, you may ask, would have happened if the spades broke 3-3? We would have arrived at the same position as above but East would now be void in spades and hold a third diamond. West would hold two diamonds and four clubs. Now we can play a master spade from dummy and East is stuck. If he ruffs low we over ruff then play ♦A and a diamond to the jack. If this loses to the queen West must exit with a club giving us a ruff and discard and the contract. If instead East throws a diamond we can cash the ace and king knowing that the queen will drop. And if he throws a club we have the luxury of deciding whether we throw him in with a heart so he can play the diamonds for us, or a diamond so he can play the hearts for us.

Conclusion

Bridge really is a beautiful game.

Full Deal

N

♠ AQ104
♥ A62
♦ A843
♣ 102

W

♠ J9
♥ 5
♦ Q72
♣ KQJ9543

E

♠ K863
♥ K1084
♦ 95
♣ 876

S

♠ 752
♥ QJ973
♦ KJ106
♣ A