

April 2016

You are playing in the JBC Mixed Pairs event at the Links. Things are going well and then you pick up this hand

Bidding

Dealer West
All vul

West	W	N	E	S
♠ Q1098432	2S(1)	3D	pass	4H
♥ Q86	pass	6H(2)	all pass	
♦ 5				
♣ 76				

- (1) Playing pairs an overbid of 3S or a conservative pass might be the winning line here but instead you decide to go for a rather sneaky 2S opening.
- (2) Either North has grossly underbid his hand first time round or now has grossly overbid it.

North is clearly not concerned about a spade lead, marking him almost certainly with first round control in this suit. But if your opening bid was suspect then your choice of opening lead was even more so when you decide to play your singleton diamond. With an almost certain trump winner in your hand there is little point in looking for a quick ruff but you are hoping this lead will give nothing away. Dummy puts down the following hand

North

♠ -
♥ 105
♦ AK109843
♣ AK53

Declarer goes up with the ♦A in dummy on which partner follows with the 2 suggesting an odd number of cards in the suit, declarer playing the Jack from her hand. Plan your defence.

Initial Analysis

Hey, wait a minute! What do you mean, plan your defence, you haven't even told us what declarer played from dummy at trick 2? OK, you win. Declarer runs the ♥10 which you win with your Queen. Now plan your defence.

Further Analysis

Before we start analyzing this hand, let me ask you a question. If declarer makes this contract, how many points do you think you will score? Had you opened 3S as some players might have, it is very possible that North would have leapt to 5D and that may have ended the auction. If you had passed, the opposition may have failed to bid past game or if they reached a slam it would be in diamonds. Even at tables where the bidding started the same as at our table, North might not have chosen to raise to 6H.

No, let's face it, you're heading for a bottom or, if you are really lucky, a joint bottom - but I wouldn't bet on it. Back to this hand. Unless declarer is just teasing us with the play of the ♦J she also holds the Q. We also know from her jump bid that she started with six semi solid Hearts almost certainly headed by the AKJ. Why not seven? Because with seven hearts to the AK she would have cashed them hoping to drop the Queen. That means she has now 6 tricks remaining in diamonds, at least 2 tricks in clubs and 5 heart tricks to take not to mention what she might make in spades.

Our only real chance is that partner holds the ♠A and by switching to a spade and forcing her to ruff in dummy she might not be able to safely exit. We know she can't play diamonds so if she started with three small clubs she's going down. But will she? Let's analyse this a bit further. We know she started with exactly two diamonds and six hearts. If she started with at least three clubs then partner started with at least four spades and has failed to bid. This leads us to conclude that most probably she holds at most two clubs and your plan won't work. Declarer can cash her two top clubs then ruff a small club high in her hand and claim the rest of the tricks. Too bad.

Final Analysis

You came up with a good plan, unfortunately you came up with it one trick too late. You need to duck the first heart and duck it very, very smoothly. Declarer knows that she has a spade loser and can't get rid of her spades on the diamonds before drawing all the trumps. She may well protect herself against a 4-1 break by finessing again. Even if she holds the ♠A she will make the same play. You should have led a spade at trick 1 then this contract had no chance,

Here is the full deal

	N	
	♠ -	
	♥ 105	
	♦ AK109843	
	♣ AK53	
W		E
♠ Q1098432		♠ AJ5
♥ Q86		♥ 73
♦ 5		♦ 762
♣ 76		♣ J9842
	S	
	♠ K76	
	♥ AKJ942	
	♦ QJ	
	♣ Q10	

Conclusion

We all know the maxim that before playing to the first trick as declarer we should study the hand. This rule is even more true if you are defending. In fact you should already be forming a picture of declarer's hand before you make your lead even if it is only his general shape and point count. Here is an example of a hand where you needed to flesh out and finalize your defence before declarer gets to play her second trick. You know what she's going to do so take your time, leave your card face up, study the dummy and come up with a plan. Do your thinking now and perhaps you will see the hand in a whole new light. She is going to play a trump. If she cashes the Ace and King your defence is easy, ruff as early as you can and lead a spade. If she runs the ♥10 and you duck, she will almost certainly finesse again.