

May 2016

I am sitting North playing with one of my regular partners on BBO when this hand crops up.

Bidding

Dealer East
N-S vul

South	W	N	E	S
♠ AK94			2S	3NT
♥ A9	all pass			
♦ AK4				
♣ Q865				

How you wish for the good old days when a double meant business and you could punish East for his temerity, but never mind. Dummy goes down with the following hand and West leads the ♠J

North

♠ 5
♥ KQ432
♦ 8762
♣ J94

South

♠ AK94
♥ A9
♦ AK4
♣ Q865

Plan your play.

Initial Analysis

Clearly if hearts break you have 9 tricks on top. But you can give yourself an extra chance by trying to establish 2 club tricks. How best to play this suit? If the clubs break 3-3 then the best line given the lack of entries in dummy is to play West for the 10. This also works if West started with 4 clubs headed by AK10. Other options are to play specifically for the 10 doubleton in East's hand where a small club to the jack is the

winning line. But you might prefer to play East for ♣A7 or ♣K7 where leading the ♣8 and playing low from dummy brings home the bacon. I like this option but am not unduly concerned when my partner wins the first trick with the ♠A and leads a small club towards dummy. West jumps up with the ace and continues with the ♠10. There seems little advantage in ducking this and my partner agrees as he wins with the king throwing a diamond from dummy. He continues with a small club from hand on which West plays low, but instead of playing the ♣9 as I expected he goes up with the jack, East discarding a spade.

Here is an observation I would like to share with you. On BBO I play hands much better when I'm dummy than when I am declarer. There must be a reason for this. Perhaps as dummy I am more willing to take risks in the play secure in the knowledge that if I go down it's really declarer going down and this is far less painful than me going down as declarer if you see what I mean. Even when sitting at a real bridge table with real partners and opponents I often find I can play the hand better as dummy than my partner, especially after the last card has been played and all hands revealed. On reflection I think many of us can say the same.

Mental telepathy has had no effect on my partner on this hand and it now seems he has thrown a stone cold contract on the floor.

Plan your play.

Final Analysis

By pure hazard my partner has created a fascinating end play situation. Can you see it? He is assured of 8 tricks and if hearts break he will now make 10 tricks. But if hearts break 4-2? We know a lot about East's (and West's) hand. East started with 6 Spades and a singleton club which leaves him with 6 red cards in his hand. If he started with 4 hearts then he has only 2 diamonds, and if he started with 4 diamonds then he has only 2 hearts. Cash the ace and king of diamonds followed by the ace and king of hearts coming to this position with the lead in the dummy.

North

♠ -
♥ Q43
♦ 8
♣ 9

South

♠ 94
♥ -
♦ 4
♣ Q8

On the play of the ♥Q throw a diamond from hand. Either the heart suit breaks in which case you will make an overtrick, or West will show out or East will show out. You are now spoilt for choice.

If East shows out you can either

- a) exit dummy with a diamond throwing clubs from your hand endplaying East in spades, or
- b) exit dummy with a heart throwing spades from your hand and endplaying West in clubs.

If East follows to a third heart and West shows out you can either

- a) exit dummy with a heart throwing clubs from your hand endplaying East in spades, or
- b) exit dummy with a diamond throwing spades from your hand and endplaying West in clubs

The strategy here is to strip the opponents of a safe exit before embarking on the end play, so cashing the ace and king of diamonds before playing hearts is key. My partner failed to realize this and played his top hearts first. Had hearts broken or East started with 4 he could still make the contract by arranging to throw West in with a diamond, but that was not to be.

Here is the full deal

North

♠ 5
♥ KQ432
♦ 8762
♣ J94

West

♠ J10
♥ J765
♦ Q9
♣ AK1032

East

♠ Q87632
♥ 108
♦ J1053
♣ 7

South

♠ AK94
♥ A9
♦ AK4
♣ Q865

Conclusion

I think you will agree this is a very pretty hand. East's opening bid was very cheeky indeed but in making it as so often happens in this game he gave away vital information as to how best to play the hand. What happened in the play? Declarer no doubt lost heart when he chose to play the ♣J instead of the ♣9 in dummy. At times like these it's good to remember that Latin piece of advise "Illegitimi non carborundum" which loosely translates to " 'n Boer maak 'n plan". Had he stopped for thought at this point instead of rushing back to plan A he would have realized the hand was still almost cold. Having a count of the black cards was a good point in play for rethinking the hand and changing tactics. The lesson from today's hand is *never despair*. Often in this game you get a second bite of the cherry if you only put your mind to it. In the meantime I am working on my powers of mental telepathy. Already I can read my own thoughts. Well, you have to start somewhere.