

July 2016

I am back on BBO playing with an Italian expert this time when I pick up this hand

Bidding

Dealer North. None vul.

East	W	N	E	S
♠ AK976		pass	1S	pass
♥ Q10842	2C	pass	2H	pass
♦ Q4	2NT(1)	pass	3H(2)	pass
♣ 3	4H(3)	all pass		

(1) sign off

(2) sign off

(3) another sign off

Sigh, these odd sequences crop up more often than I care to mention.

South leads the ♦7 and dummy goes down with a surprisingly good hand

West

♠ 102
♥ AJ6
♦ A965
♣ A852

East

♠ AK976
♥ Q10842
♦ Q4
♣ 3

I play small from dummy, North plays the ♦2 and I win with the queen. The opposition are making 3rd and 5th leads against trump contracts along with standard carding so it's very likely South started with 4 diamonds but we will confirm this when next we play this suit. Plan your play.

Initial Analysis

I think I will make lots of tricks in this contract. If South started with the doubleton ♥K and the spades are 3-3 I will make all 13 tricks simply by playing a heart to the jack, then

cashing the ace and playing 3 round of spades ruffing the third round in dummy. Perhaps this is the best line of play? But do you remember the advice I gave you last month? On BBO we're always playing the equivalent of teams so overtricks are far less important than making the contract. We have already worked out the best scenario, but will this line of play cater for the worst scenario? So what could go wrong? This is a surprisingly difficult question to answer, so let's pause here whilst you ponder.

Well, clearly the first thing that could go wrong is that the hearts break 5-0. If South shows out when you lead small to dummy then you will go up with your ace, cash two top spades then ruff the third spade with the ♥J. Whatever North plays on this trick you are now safe for 10 tricks having made 5 tricks in the side suits and coming to 5 tricks in hearts on a cross ruff. What happens if you put in your ♥J at trick 2 and North shows out? Again you can cash your two top spades and play a third, overruffing South should he try and ruff this trick. Again you will have no trouble coming to 10 tricks. But what if the hearts break 4-1 and North wins the second trick with the ♥K and returns a club say? You win this in dummy and cash the ♥A. If all follow then you can play three rounds of spades ruffing the third round in dummy. If the spades break 3-3 you will still make 12 tricks; or if they break 4-2 and South holds the third heart, or even if North holds the third heart and also the long spades you will come to 11 tricks; else you will just have to settle for 10 tricks. But when you cash your ♥A and one of the defenders fails to follow, be careful, you can't simply draw the outstanding trumps now for if the spades don't break you can still establish a spade winner in your hand but will be short of entries to enjoy it. Now you must cash your two top spades and play a third round intending to ruff in dummy. Whatever the opposition do this line will ensure 10 tricks.

Final Analysis

I warned you this was a difficult hand. All this time we have been worried about how the trumps are going to behave while what we should have been thinking about was how the spades were going to behave. Can we cater for bad breaks in both suits? If the spades break 6-0 we are almost certainly going down. But if they break 5-1? Yes, I think we can if North holds the singleton.. Let's cash the ♠A at trick 2 then play a heart to the jack. Let's say this loses to the king and a club comes back. We win in dummy, cash the ♦A (we don't want to see that ruffed at a later stage in the hand) then play a small spade from table. If North ruffs this and returns a club we will ruff in hand, ruff a small spade with the ♥A, draw trumps and claim 10 tricks. If he returns a trump we will be careful to insert the ♥8, if this is covered then the last heart in dummy is good and we will make 11 tricks, if it holds again we will ruff a small spade with the ♥A and claim 10 tricks. If North fails to ruff then we will hop up with the king and ruff a spade high in dummy again claiming 10 tricks on a cross ruff. If however North follows to the second spade then we are back where we started hoping the spades are no worse than 4-2. We play the king and if this is not ruffed continue with a spade ruffed in dummy with the ace. If on the other hand the ♥J holds the trick, then we cash the ♦A followed by the ♥A and play a small spade towards the king. Our first line of play catered for bad breaks in the trump suit but relied on a spades breaking no worse than 4-2, in the second scenario we catered for bad breaks in the trump suit but also for the possibility of North holding a singleton spade. It mattered on this hand.

Here is the full deal

	West		North
	♠ 102		♠ 5
	♥ AJ6		♥ K975
	♦ A965		♦ J82
	♣ A852		♣ KQ1074
South		East	
♠ QJ843		♠ AK976	
♥ 3		♥ Q10842	
♦ K1073		♦ Q4	
♣ J96		♣ 3	

Conclusion

Safety plays crop up more often than we think and often we miss them because it is much easier to envisage a layout where we can make lots of tricks than one where the cards are lying badly for us but with careful play we can still find a safe route for bringing home our contract.

Next time you are in a contract that looks stone cold ask yourself what might go wrong and can you find a way around it? .You might not always get it right but I guarantee you will improve your scores.