

September 2016

I've been invited back by Susy on BBO, so perhaps my earlier performances haven't been that bad. This time I am paired with a Polish expert. How do I know he is Polish? Well, there is an amazing lack of vowels in his name and an awful lot of y's and z's. I have often wondered what games of Scrabble must look like in Poland. But the big clue is that his profile says he is from Poland. And this guy is good, very good. We have passed the half way stage and have managed to build up a reasonable lead and I am feeling confident when I pick up this hand as West

Bidding

Dealer West

No one vulnerable

West	W	N	E	S
♠ 7	1D	dbl	3D(1)	4D(2)
♥ Q854	5D	5S	all pass	
♦ AKQ973				
♣ 98				

- (1) Weak.
- (2) Majors

I always find these hands awkward. My partner is almost certainly short in hearts so if 5S makes then 6D might prove to be an excellent sacrifice. But on a bad day I sacrifice only to find that 5S is off, or they push on to 6S and horror of horrors, that makes. I feel I've done enough. Partner leads the ♦2 (fourth highest).

Plan your defence.

South

♠ Q10842
♥ A9762
♦ J
♣ 106

Initial Analysis

I win the first trick with the ♦Q and settle down to consider the defence. From the bidding it is very possible that my partner has a void in hearts in which case a heart ruff now and a club trick later will take this contract off. But is he void? If I return a heart and he follows it could ruin the friendship. Here are the reasons I think he is not void:

- a) He has failed to double the final contract, an action suggesting there is a defence.
- b) He has led an honest diamond, his fourth highest. Again, an unusual lead in our suit could be used to alert partner that there is a possibility of a ruff.
- c) Declarer has chosen spades as his final contract. With an equal number of cards in both majors he would be inclined to play in the weaker of these two suits, in this case hearts.

So I think North has started with a strong hand and a 4-3-2-4 distribution with spades headed by the AK, hearts headed by the KJ10 and clubs headed by two of the top four honours with the weakest holding being the KJ. I'm going to have to hope that we can make two club tricks or one club trick and a heart trick if declarer fails to guess who has the ♥Q. Perhaps partner has the singleton ♥K, but this seems unlikely. I see no reason for not switching to a club, as this might avoid a throw in later in the play if my partner started with the KQ. On my ♣9 declarer plays the queen, my partner wins with the king and returns a spade. Shortly after this declarer wraps up 11 tricks and we move on to the next board. My placing of the cards for once has proved fairly accurate so I feel quite chuffed with myself and expect this will be a flat board. So imagine my surprise then when I discover that our other pair has gone down in the same contract – what was different in their room? It doesn't take me long to answer that question, in the other room Benito Garozzo was sitting West. Garozzo recognized a possibility that I had overlooked at the table – his partner may be holding the singleton ♥J. If this were the case declarer would need 3 entries in dummy to set up the long heart trick so it was necessary to knock out one of these entries prematurely. He simply played a second diamond forcing declarer to ruff in dummy and now there was no way of making the contract.

Here is the full deal

	North	
	♠ AK93	
	♥ K103	
	♦ 65	
	♣ AQ53	
West		East
♠ 7		♠ J65
♥ Q854		♥ J
♦ AKQ983		♦ 10742
♣ 98		♣ KJ742
	South	
	♠ Q10842	
	♥ A9762	
	♦ J	
	♣ 106	

On the play of a second diamond at trick 2, double dummy the declarer can ruff, play 3 rounds of trumps followed by the ♥A, small heart to the 10, cash the ♥K then lead a small club towards dummy. But East simply rises with the jack and returns a diamond giving a ruff and discard, and wherever declarer chooses to ruff this trick he is still unable to get home.

Conclusion

One can only sit back and admire the skill of players of the stature of Garozzo who seem to see through the back of cards and defend accordingly. I have written about this particular defence in at least two previous articles, but on this occasion I missed it completely. But that's not what annoys me, what galls me is my thoughtless play at trick 1. I knew that declarer started with exactly two diamonds and it was safe for partner to return a diamond at trick three. I could have shared this information with him simply by winning the first trick with the king, not the queen. Partner would naturally think the queen was with declarer but at the same time know that another diamond lead would do us no harm. If he had returned a diamond we would have unwittingly stumbled on the correct defence and declarer would have gone off in this contract.

We went on to win the match by the narrowest of margins, 51 imps to 50 imps so we managed to beat Jimmy Cayne's team. This was one of those magical moments in my bridge career and might be emblazoned on my headstone thus

We the Able	51
They the Cayne	50

But on second thoughts perhaps I will just stick with one of my all-time favourites

Back in 10 minutes