

## December 2016

I know little about sailing and a just a bit more about playing bridge. But I have often thought that the two activities have much in common. At the table you are constantly checking the weather conditions whilst keeping a lookout for the hidden rocks on which you may run aground, and as these become apparent you change tack. The following hand is a case in point. As usual I am aimlessly floating around BBO when I am invited to join a table. Much to my surprise when I arrive there I find that the bidding is over and I am declarer.

### Bidding

Dealer West  
NS vul.

South	W	N	E	S
♠ AQJ6	2S(1)	3H	pass	3NT
♥ Q8	all pass			
♦ 54				
♣ K10863				

(1) Weak

West leads the ♠5 and dummy goes down

### North

♠ 2  
♥ KJ974  
♦ AQJ109  
♣ QJ

### South

♠ AQJ6  
♥ Q8  
♦ 54  
♣ K10863

East inserts the ♠10 and you win the first trick with the queen. Plan your play.

### Initial Analysis

If the cards are sitting nicely we can make 5 tricks in diamonds, 4 in hearts, 4 in clubs and at least 2 in spades. We can make so many tricks here we hardly know where to start.

But while we are making our tricks, what is the defence doing? Well, they have one sure trick in hearts and one in clubs, and will surely set up a spade trick for themselves, and if the ♦K is offside (or perhaps even if it isn't) they have a trick there too. If they can set up an extra trick in a suit before we have made our 9 tricks then we are going down, and they can do this by either locking us in dummy and forcing us to guess the heart position or else locking us out completely from the dummy and forcing us to play black cards from our hand.

Before we begin let's go over what we think we know. West surely started with six spades headed by the king. There are three other key cards out there somewhere, the ♦K, the ♥A and the ♣A. We expect West to hold one of these for his opening bid, and would be surprised if he held none or two. But anything is possible in this game. If West holds no more than three diamonds headed by the ♦K we could set up five diamond tricks by finessing through dummy and thus make our contract easily. So this is where we will begin. At trick 2 we lead a small diamond towards dummy and insert the nine. To no one's surprise this wins the trick. Perhaps it's already time to change tack?

Plan your play.

I like the idea that West holds the ♦K, but does he? If I can set up 4 club tricks it doesn't really matter who holds this card, or if I can force the defence to open up hearts for me the contract is also assured. If I can play a couple of rounds of clubs there might be a throw in in the offing. I switch to the ♣Q; East wins this trick immediately and plays the ♠7.

Plan your play

Here is the first submerged rock. We can choose to steer around it in the hope of finding a safer passage, or else steer over it and hope it is too deep to rip a hole in the boat. Do we duck this spade giving up a trick, or go up with the ace in the knowledge that neither opponent can successfully attack this suit?

I hope you chose to duck this card, if you went up with the ace then you have hit a rock and will eventually sink. East switches back to a club and you are immediately presented with the next submerged rock.

Plan your play

You have options here. You can let this run around to the jack in which case you must decide how best to continue. You can win this with the king and cash the ten hoping for a 3-3 break or the nine doubleton to fall. Or you can win with the king and try another diamond finesse. You can go for broke and hope the clubs behave, but if they don't you will probably go down. The first option is superior to the last option because even if West started with three diamonds to the king, when you cash the ♦A followed by another diamond West will be endplayed. So we win the club in dummy, cash the ♦A and play a third diamond. East wins this trick with the king, both declarer and West discarding spades. East exits with a fourth diamond on which you throw a club and West another

spade. As we feared we are finally locked in dummy. We cash the last diamond, East discards a club as does declarer, West discards another spade. Here is the final position

**North**

♠  
♥ KJ97  
♦  
♣

**South**

♠ A  
♥ Q8  
♦  
♣ K

The sea has grown choppy and a storm is brewing. If East started with the ♥A a small heart to the queen secures the contract, but West surely holds that card. If West wins the trick then I could hope that the hearts behave. Or is a better line of play finessing East, who is likely to hold long hearts, for the ten? If I get this wrong my partner will not be happy. Which tack should I take? Perhaps before deciding on the final tack we should review what we know. West started with six spades to the king and exactly two diamonds. He also started with at least two clubs and possibly three (East has discarded one). That means he has started with two or three hearts. And suddenly the sun is shining and there's a rainbow in the sky and we see there is a safe route back to shore. Have you spotted it? We simply lead the ♥K from dummy. If either defender wins this trick we are home and dry. When we lead a second heart off table one of the defenders must win this else we make an overtrick. If East wins he must concede the last two tricks. If West wins and started with only two hearts he is also end played. But what if he can exit with a small heart you ask? Then we know the hearts are breaking 3-3 and we confidently play the jack in dummy felling East's ten.

Perhaps I will take up sailing after all.

Here is the full deal

	<b>North</b>	
	♠ 2	
	♥ KJ974	
	♦ AQJ109	
	♣ QJ	
<b>West</b>		<b>East</b>
♠ K98543		♠ 10 7
♥ A5		♥ 10632
♦ 73		♦ K862
♣ 952		♣ A74
	<b>South</b>	
	♠ AQJ6	
	♥ Q8	
	♦ 54	
	♣ K10863	

### **Conclusion**

Good news, my publisher has told me that readership has increased by 50% this year! So I will take this opportunity to wish all three of you happy holidays over the festive season and trust that your 2017 will be filled with even better bridge.