

January 2017

When we are declarer and dummy goes down, the first thing all of us do is ask ourselves where are our tricks coming from? Should we draw trumps, play for a drop in a side suit, or hope a suit is breaking kindly? Which way should we take a two-way finesse, is a throw in possible? It's a little bit like getting behind the steering wheel of a car and switching on the engine, we know where we want to go and we plan our route accordingly. Others might find better or faster routes than us, but the point I am making is this – when we are declarer we feel energized and in control.

But for many of us, when we are defending this energy disappears and we behave like passengers in the car, we know where the driver is heading and we hope he will take a wrong turn along the way, but basically we're just there for the ride. So for a change I'm going to give you a tip right up front – when you are defending and dummy goes down, ask yourself – where are our tricks coming from? Perhaps had West asked himself this question on the following hand the outcome would have been different?

		Bidding			
Dealer South					
No one vulnerable					
West		W	N	E	S
♠ A107					1D
♥ AK76542		4H	4S	all pass	
♦ -					
♣ 654					

South

♠ Q62
♥ 103
♦ K987
♣ AKQ3

East leads the ♥8, dummy plays low, you go up with the ♥K and declarer drops the queen
Plan your play.

Initial Analysis

If we are to believe all that we see, partner has led from three hearts headed by the jack and we are only going to make two tricks defensively except in the unlikely event partner turns up with the ♠ K or the ♦A. Given that North has bid 4♠ missing the ace, queen and

10 in that suit he is surely holding 6 or possibly 7 spades to the KJ. Could he be missing the ♦A? This too, although possible, seems unlikely. And here's another thought; if this truly is declarer's holding then partner has at most one spade along with his three hearts. Would he not have pushed on to 5♥ with this holding? And even if he is very timid at the best of times, give him the ♦A as well and bidding 5 becomes a no brainer. No, there's no way we can stop declarer in this scenario so now it's time to look at the other possibility; the ♥8 is a singleton. Now our trick count increases by one and that partner holds the ♦A, although still unlikely could still be considered consistent with his pass. But will he ever get to make a trick with it? When we play the ♥A followed by a third heart, partner may be able to ruff this but declarer will over-ruff, draw trumps and if he is blessed with the ♣J or started with three clubs, then he will make 1 heart ruff, 5 spade tricks and 4 club tricks and his diamond losers will disappear. If only partner had led a diamond....

Final Analysis

This is where you stop sleeping in the backseat but instead grab the wheel and start driving the car! Of course your partner can lead a diamond for you to ruff if you play a small heart at trick 2 and force him to ruff. But we still have a final hurdle to clear. How will he know which suit you are ruffing? You tell him, and by that I don't mean you lean over the table and say "lead a diamond, pard", you tell him by using a suit preference signal. These signals are very simple and work like this – the smallest card in the suit asks partner to return the lower suit and the highest card you can afford asks partner to return the higher suit. Here you want a diamond returned so at trick 2 you play the ♥7. Your partner might also have been asleep in the backseat and is now wondering whether the ♥7 is the highest card you can afford, but he should be able to work out that it isn't the smallest card in your suit.

Here is the full hand

North

♠ KJ9853
♥ QJ9
♦ AQ3
♣ 10

West

♠ A107
♥ AK76542
♦ -
♣ 654

East

♠ 4
♥ 8
♦ J106542
♣ J9872

South

♠ Q62
♥ 103
♦ K987
♣ AKQ3

Conclusion

At the table West cashed the ♥A at trick 2 and that was the end of the defence. And it wasn't as if the best defence was so difficult to find, it was just so much easier to find the wrong defence.

So here's my tip going into the New Year.

When it comes to defensive play, stop being a passenger and start thinking about becoming a backseat driver by the simple expedient of asking yourself – where are our tricks coming from?