

February 2017

Last month I put forward the idea that often we should take a more active role in the defence than we are want to. This is not the same thing as saying we should always be trying to take over the driving seat on every hand as often a passive defence can be more fruitful.

Here is a simple example of what I mean

KJx

A10x

As declarer, faced with the above combination of cards in a suit and no clues as to the whereabouts of the queen, how many tricks do you expect to make? Clearly you will make 3 tricks if you guess correctly and 2 if you don't. However if the defence get busy and lead this suit for you then you will always make 3 tricks.

Apart from the obvious observations that we do well in defence to get off to good leads, establish our tricks in side suits before declarer does the same, set up tricks in long suits in no trumps etc. etc., what I am advocating is that we become more aware of when a hand begs for an active role from the defence as opposed to those hands where you can sit back and await the outcome. How do we recognize these hands? The first step is to ask ourselves where are our tricks coming from? And perhaps this should be followed by where are declarer's tricks coming from? Both these questions require us to reconstruct the missing hands as best we can.

So we are back on BBO and we hold the following hand

Bidding

Dealer North
All vulnerable

West	W	N	E	S
♠ A1086		1S	dbl	2S
♥ J102	3D(1)	3S	pass	pass
♦ K985	dbl (2)	all pass		
♣ Q8				

- (1) Everyone seems to have something to say on this hand and I'm happy to bid the part score
- (2) I thought their chances of making 8 tricks was questionable, now the joke has gone far enough

West

♠ A1086
♥ J102
♦ K985
♣ Q8

Dummy

♠ Q53
♥ 86
♦ A642
♣ 9743

East leads the ♣A and on seeing your 8 continues with the king crashing your queen. He continues with a low club which you ruff, declarer following with the jack.

Plan your play.

Initial Analysis

Partner has got off to an unfortunate lead smothering one of our natural tricks and forcing us to use up one of our trumps in a suit where we hoped we might make 2 tricks. But we have made 3 tricks so far and the ♠A is a fourth, we only need one more trick to defeat this contract. Where are our tricks coming from? If declarer has two diamonds in his hand then we are assured of a diamond trick, if partner holds the ace or king of hearts we will certainly make a trick in this suit, and if he holds the singleton ♠J we could still be good for a second trick in the trump suit. Well that was easy, it's tempting now to sit back and relax, exit with the ♥J and wait for our tricks to roll in.

Final Analysis

But wait a minute, what if declarer has a singleton diamond? And what if he holds the ♠J? That still only gives him 5 points and he opened the bidding. The chances of him holding ♥AK are high, especially as he continued to bid to the 3 level. If this likely scenario proves to be the case then he will cross ruff the hand making his contract. Time to reconstruct the hand. If partner has the classical double shape, that is 1-4-4-4, then declarer is holding a 5-4-1-3 hand. He will win the heart with the ace, play a diamond to the ace, small diamond ruffed, king of hearts followed by a heart ruff, another diamond ruffed, then a fourth heart towards dummy ruffed with the ♠Q. Whatever we do now declarer is assured of 9 tricks. To foil this plan we need to play the ♠A followed by another spade so that partner will eventually come to a heart trick.

