

August 2017

You slip out of the beach house and take a stroll along the sea's edge. Dawn is breaking and there is a smell of salt in the air. Last night's high tide has left its usual debris on the shore, strands of seaweed, driftwood, dead coral, and then right at your feet you see it – a beautiful seashell. Bridge can be like that.

We have to make up a match so one Wednesday night we meet up with our opponents at a local club. The director has organized a set of pre-dealt boards identical to those his regulars will be playing. There is nothing remarkable to report on the first few hands just the usual assortment of games and part scores, then this board washes up on the shore

Board 12

Dealer West

Vul N-S

Bidding

South	S	W	N	E
♠ AKJ2		pass	1C	pass
♥ 10852	1H	pass	2H	pass
♦ A10	2NT(1)	pass	3H(2)	pass
♣ J42	4H	all pass		

- (1) As opener will often raise a major suit bid by responder with only 3 card support we employ a conventional bid of 2S as an enquiry. 2NT is a simple extension to this promising 4 spades.
- (2) Minimum hand but yes I have 4 hearts

West leads the ♦3 and dummy goes down.

North

♠ 95
♥ AQ64
♦ 9764
♣ AQ3

South

♠ AKJ2
♥ 10852
♦ A10
♣ J42

East goes up with the king, plan your play.

Initial Analysis

We have 5 sure tricks in the side suits, 6 if East holds the ♠Q and we finesse. Can we make 5 tricks in the heart suit? If West holds the ♥K we will make the ace and queen and surely 3 more tricks in the trump suit by cross ruffing as long as the opposition are not allowed in to draw a third round of trumps. What if East holds the ♥K? We can still make 5 heart tricks if we cash the ace and make the remaining 4 on a crossruff. However, if East also holds the ♣K we will go off as we will have to concede a club and a heart at the end. If East has both kings then we must hope to drop the ♥J on the second round of trumps, draw the remaining trump and hope East started with the ♠Q as we now need 6 side suit winners. It occurs to me that except in this extreme case it can never be right to finesse East for the queen for if he has that card the crossruff will always prove to be the superior play and could still lead to an overtrick when both kings are well placed. The lead suggests that West has length in diamonds and it is not unreasonable to hope East has length in spades. So perhaps this hand is simply a question of getting the timing right, making sure that the opponents can't get in at a later stage of play to cash a third round of hearts. We begin then by ducking the first round of diamonds. East continues with the J and West drops the 2 under your ace.

Should we start by taking the club finesse first or the hearts? It's important that we take the club finesse before cashing out the second round of trumps in case East started with 3 hearts, but to avoid the embarrassing situation where East can set up a club ruff for West where West started with 2 clubs and 3 hearts, we will take the heart finesse first.

I think we have analysed this hand to death so let's play it out. We lead a small heart towards dummy..... and the roof caves in – West discards the ♣5. What now?

Plan your play.

We have lost a diamond trick and will certainly lose at least two heart tricks, can we still make this contract? Yes, there is still a slim chance. If we can strip East of all his cards outside of trumps and finish in dummy at trick 9 East will be end played. East is known to have started with 5 hearts and 2 diamonds, for this plan to work he must hold at least 2 clubs and 3 spades and we must guess correctly whether his last card is a club or a spade. In addition he must hold the ♠Q and his partner the ♣K. Watching the opponents cards will be key to the success of this hand – East may realize early on what is happening and false card, so I'll be counting on his partner for more honest carding.

We start with a small spade from table inserting the jack which holds, both opponents following low. Then a club to the queen West playing the 6 and East dropping the 10. On the ♣A East drops the 7 and West the 8. Everything points to East starting with four spades, but let's continue. We cash the ace and king of spades West dropping the 8 and 10, East playing the 4 and.....7. To create any doubt in my mind he should have dropped the queen here but his partner's play of clubs and spades has already convinced me the last spade is with East. I ruff my last spade in dummy to create this position

	North	
	♠ - ♥ Q64 ♦ 9 ♣ -	
West		East
♠ ♠ Immaterial ♦ ♣		♠ - ♥ KJ97 ♦ - ♣ -
	South	
	♠ - ♥ 1085 ♦ - ♣ J	

When I lead the last diamond from dummy East is stuck. If he ruffs low I simply overruff then ruff the ♣J with the ♥Q in dummy ensuring another trick in hearts. If he ruffs with the ♥J, whatever he plays next ensures me of 2 more tricks

Conclusion

Here is the full deal

	North	
	♠ 95 ♥ AQ64 ♦ 9764 ♥ AQ3	
West		East
♠ 1083 ♥ - ♦ Q8542 ♣ K9865		♠ Q764 ♥ KJ973 ♦ KJ ♣ 107
	South	
	♠ AKJ2 ♥ 10852 ♦ A10 ♣ J42	

Perhaps the best advice I can give you is this – watching the cards defenders play for clues about the distribution is a very useful habit to adopt and becomes much easier with practice. Most players are very honest when it comes to following suits and discarding because most of the time this knowledge will benefit their partners. But often as declarer you may be able to use this information to your advantage.