

September 2017

This hand was sent to me by a good friend of mine, Sid Ismail. Not only is Sid an excellent tournament director he's also a pretty sharp bridge player. This hand is another example of a theme I talked about in last month's article – trust your opponents!

First of all, here is a bidding problem for you. Playing on BBO at a table of experts, all of whom are strangers to you, you pick up the following hand

Dealer South

Vul E-W

Bidding

South	S	W	N	E
♠ AK85	1H	2D	2H	3D
♥ AQJ732	?			
♦ A94				
♣ -				

There are no doubt many clever bids one can make now, but the bidding suggests there is a strong chance your partner has no more than one diamond, so following the rather old fashioned approach of bidding what he thought he could make, Sid tried 6H now. This was promptly doubled on his left and this became the final contract.

West led the ♦K and dummy went down with the following hand

North

♠ 96
♥ 10964
♦ 3
♣ K87543

South

♠ AK85
♥ AQJ732
♦ A94
♣ -

Plan your play

Initial Analysis

We have three side suit winners, which means that we must make nine tricks in hearts. Is it possible to go down in this contract? Well yes it is on an unlucky day, so here the challenge is to make sure we don't go down simply by misplaying the hand. We have four losers in our hand, we're going to try and ruff all four of them in dummy before the opposition get in with an over ruff and play trumps. Where are the missing key cards? Surely West holds the ♣A for his double and possibly the ♥K too. Without the ♣A and possibly the ♣Q his double becomes highly speculative, though often players do let emotions get the better of them when they think opponents are taking them for a ride. Is it possible that East holds less than three spades? Highly unlikely as with five spades West would surely have bid 1S in preference to 2D or even hauled out a 2H Michaels overcall with distribution in these two suits. Could East have started with only two diamonds? Not if we are to believe his raise of partner's suit. So we think East has started with at least three cards in both spades and diamonds, so let's make sure we ruff these suits in the correct order, ruffing the diamonds out before the spades. That leaves only the club suit to worry about. Could West over ruff us as we scramble back to our hand by ruffing clubs? Yes, that's a possibility, but all we can do about that is to ensure that we minimize the number of times this happens by using our existing side suit entries wisely. The opponents are going to confirm their holdings in these suits for us, so let's keep our eyes open. Off we go!

We win the first trick in hand and play a second round of diamonds, ruffing low in dummy East following with the 2 and 7. On a low spade to our ace east follows with the 2, West with the 7. A third diamond covered by the 10 and ruffed low in dummy sees East produce the 8. On a low spade to the king East playing the 4 and West the 3. Another spade from hand and ruffed in dummy produces the 10 from West and Q from East.

Time to pause and rethink. What did the opposition hold in these suits? I don't know about you but I would place heavy money on East starting with 3 cards in each of these suits with West holding the balance. How do I know? Because they have been busy telling each other this....

So West has only 3 cards unaccounted for. If they are all trumps then we are going down but if he has at least one club we are home and dry. We lead a small club from dummy and when East inserts the 9 we ruff small and hold our breath. West follows small. When we play the last spade towards dummy West follows suit, dummy ruffs and East over ruffs (he might have done better to duck this). East returns a club and Sid ruffs high claiming the rest of the tricks.

Here is the full hand

North

♠ 96
♥ 10964
♦ 3
♥ K87543

West

♠ J1073
♠ -
♦ KQJ1065
♣ AQ6

East

♠ Q42
♥ K85
♦ 872
♣ J1092

South

♠ AK85
♥ AQJ732
♦ A94
♥ -

Conclusion

Sid listened to the opponents when considering what his partner held in the diamond suit, and watched their signals when playing the hand so they unwittingly played a major part in their own downfall.

Well played Sid!