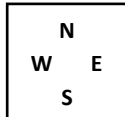


Planning Permission Granted

Two aspects of play are said to influence the outcome of a contract more than any other: the opening lead, about which declarer can do little; and play at trick one, over which declarer has complete control. We are strongly encouraged when we first learn the game of bridge to regroup after the opening lead has been made and take a sensible amount of time to study dummy and plan the play before requesting a card. Not every declarer makes the best use of this opportunity to plan. The planning process need not be complex but having a workable plan is better than no realistic plan. (It could be said that, at Club bridge level, the plan of hoping the defenders misdefend is a realist plan – but this is not one I would advocate relying on!)

♠ A83
♥ A7
♦ QJ1065
♣ J74



♠ K6
♥ KQJ9
♦ 943
♣ KQ82

A little more thought may have brought its rewards on today's hand from a local club night*. The auction was straightforward; South opened 1NT and North raised to 3NT. A simple sequence to a sensible contract which, with some forethought, should have proved successful. The traveller at the end of the evening, however, showed that less than half of the declarers had made 9 tricks. Most Wests led the 2♠, so how should the planning process go?

Before reading on take time at this point to study the hand and make your plans.

Let us now eavesdrop on the thinking process of one of the successful declarers and see how your plan compared.

"Assuming the lead is fourth-highest it appears to be from a 4-card suit so the spades are splitting 4-4 between the defenders."

"I have 6 top tricks so need 3 more. Which suits are these coming from? Possibly diamonds or clubs. The diamond suit offers me the best mathematical chance of establishing 3 more tricks but I can see a problem here - by the time I get my extra diamond tricks, assuming the defenders continue spades, I will have lost 5 tricks – 2 spades; A, K of diamonds and the A clubs – one down."

"What about the club suit? A possible 3:3 split will give me 3 tricks and that will be enough for my contract and I can achieve this by only losing the lead once to A♣, so the defenders won't get their spade tricks before I have my 9".

"A 3:3 split is not great odds but better than no chance; let's attack the club suit. So what's the best way to play this suit? Does it matter? Well if suit doesn't split 3:3 but the A♣ is in the East hand, leading towards my King-Queen may be an advantage (and I have known some defenders leap up with an Ace for no good reason) – and if the A♣ is in West's hand I have lost nothing."

"Ok, that's what I will do. So I will need 2 entries to dummy to lead clubs twice towards my hand - the A♥ is one and the A♠ another." "Thank you partner. The Ace of spades please. The 4♣ please...."

Declarer's plan involved seeing the potential problem of attacking diamonds and the need to play on clubs. His plan also involved how to play the club suit to best advantage. This in turn then involved making sure that dummy's entries were put to best use. And all this thinking was done at trick one before a card was played.

The full deal:

♠ A83 ♥ A7 ♦ QJ1065 ♣ J74	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; margin: auto;"> <tr> <td></td> <td>N</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>W</td> <td></td> <td>E</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>S</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ J974 ♥ 10542 ♦ A82 ♣ A5
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♠ Q1052 ♥ 863 ♦ K7 ♣ 10983											
♠ K6 ♥ KQJ9 ♦ 943 ♣ KQ82											

As we can see from the full deal, playing diamonds would have (or should have) resulted in defeat. Declarer's plan B of a 3:3 club break although offering only about a 36% chance of success, was better than playing for the defence to go wrong, but wouldn't have worked either on this occasion - but that extra chance of playing for the A♣ to be well placed (or in fact the 10 and 9 of clubs to be doubleton) by leading towards the South hand, did succeed and 9 tricks were made. Leading towards honour cards rather than just plonking them on the table is a sound principle for many other situations not just establishing suits in no-trumps. It is in essence a form of finesse.

Defenders should not get fidgety when declarer takes time to study dummy before making a play; they too should be making use of this time to formulate their own plans based on the sight of dummy. It is considered that when underway the play of the cards should generally proceed at an even tempo but when dummy is placed on the table 'planning permission is granted,' and this is the time for both sides to pause, think and plan their play.

**Those of you who feel they may have seen this hand before, you are possibly right. You may have played it originally of course but I did also use it in the Summer Seminars as a general illustration on planning the play in no-trumps. I guess all of you who attended would have had no problem getting this one right!*

