

The Exciting World of Bridge – Lesson 12

More On Declarer Play

Introduction

Tonight we are going to continue with playing lots of hands. A few will be some that I've played/defended in real life. Some will be set up to teach specific techniques. Here we go...

Hand 1 – Delaying Drawing Trump

	♠9764	
	♥QJT53	
	♦A	
	♣864	
♠AQ		♠KJ5
♥97		♥A6
♦KJT643		♦Q9752
♣AKQ		♣JT3
	♠T832	
	♥K842	
	♦8	
	♣9752	

Let's not worry about the auction on this one but let's assume that West opened one diamond and somehow or another East/West up bidding 6♦. North is on opening lead and begins with the ♥Q. Let's make our plan.

Declarer (West) sees total losers – the trump ace and a heart. With the opening lead being a heart, our heart loser is now a fast loser. This means that we need to find a way to get rid of our heart loser and we need to do it BEFORE we pull trump. This one is really fairly simple but the first few tricks must be played in a very specific way. After winning the ♥A at trick one (ducking it would be bad since the ace of trumps is always going to be a loser), we must play the ♠5 at trick two and win it with the ♠A. After that we play the ♠Q and OVERTAKE it with the ♠K. Finally we play the ♠J and throw away our heart loser on that. Is there a risk in someone ruffing one of these spade tricks? There is but since this is our only real chance, we must take it. Note that once we've pitched our heart loser, now we should immediately draw trump rather than play on clubs. We were forced to take a risk with the spade suit, there's no chance in giving the defense any more chance to beat us.

Hand 2 – The Hold-up Play

	♠853	
	♥74	
	♦K962	
	♣Q752	
♠74		♠AT96
♥KQJT8		♥652
♦Q74		♦JT53
♣643		♣T9
	♠KQJ2	
	♥A93	
	♦A8	
	♣AKJ8	

North is our Dealer and passes, as does East. With a balanced hand and 22 points, South should open 2♣. West passes and North bids 2♦, waiting. After South rebids 2NT, North raises to 3NT. On opening lead, West starts with the ♥K – the top of a sequence.

We know it's now time to count our winners. We have one heart, two diamonds and four clubs for a total of seven. It's obvious that we can develop at least two more winners in spades once we knock out the ace. The only problem is that the heart lead has attacked our weak spot – the heart suit. If your thought is to duck the opening lead you are correct, the question is what to do when West continues with another high heart. There's an easy "rule" (a guideline actually) to follow when faced with this situation. It's called the Rule of 7. When you have a suit that's going to run for the defenders after you take your ace, simply subtract the total number of cards you have in that suit from 7 and that's how many times you should duck. So here, since you have 3 hearts and Dummy has 2, you should duck twice, winning your ace on the third round of hearts. Once you've done this, you just need to "wish" for East to have the ace of spades and you will make your contract. If you instead win your ♥A on the first or second round of hearts, East will still have a heart to play when they win their ♠A and you will go down.

Hand 3 – Avoiding the Dangerous Opponent

	♠K84	
	♥9	
	♦JT975	
	♣QJT2	
♠AQ5		♠72
♥K72		♥AQT864
♦AKQ6		♦84
♣984		♣K73
	♠JT963	
	♥J53	
	♦32	
	♣A65	

East is Dealer and opens with a preemptive 2♥. North and South pass throughout and West raises to 4♥ which ends up buying the contract. South leads the ♠J – time to make our plan.

It appears that we probably don't have any trump losers and we definitely don't have any diamond losers to worry about. This just leaves our one possible spade loser and three possible clubs losers. What's important to recognize on this hand is that North is our dangerous opponent. If we let North win a trick and they play on clubs, we could be in trouble. We can always get rid of a loser on Dummy's diamonds so the safe play is to "refuse" the spade finesse and with the ♠A at trick one. After we've pulled trump, we can pitch a loser on a diamond and then lead a club towards the king to try for an overtrick.

Hand 4 – Careful Trump Play

	♠KT42	
	♥J9	
	♦Q93	
	♣AKT8	
♠95		♠763
♥KQT82		♥A5
♦87		♦T642
♣Q942		♣J763
	♠AQJ8	
	♥7643	
	♦AKJ5	
	♣5	

North is Dealer and with a balanced hand but too weak to open 1NT they decide to open 1♣. After East passes, South bids 1♦ - bidding their 4 card suits up the line. West decides to sneak in a 1♥ overcall and North bids 1♠. East passes again and South decides that they have 18 Dummy points opposite their partner's opening hand so they must be close to slam. They decide to bid 5♠ as an invite to slam. North cordially declines and 5♠ ends up being the final contract. East decides to lead the ♥A and continues hearts at trick 2. West then plays a third high heart at trick 3. Plan the play.

North has already lost two tricks so they can't afford to lose any more. We obviously need to ruff this trick. Since this will shorten Declarer's trumps, it's best to make Dummy the Captain hand on this one. Dummy has no losers except in hearts. We've already lost two heart tricks and we can ruff a third one now. A high club can take care of the fourth hearts loser so that means we don't have any more losers to worry about. The trick here is we must ruff HIGH on this third trick. West's overcall should pretty much guarantee a five card suit so we know that East is also out of hearts. Plus, we've got all of the high trump cards so there's no reason not to ruff high. Ruff with the ♠K (just to show off), play the ♠T following with the ♠8 from Dummy and then two more rounds of spades to finish pulling trump. We can now win our four diamond tricks and two club tricks to make a total of eleven tricks.

Hand 5 – Maintaining Control

	♠QT3	
	♥T864	
	♦KQ87	
	♣85	
♠A9762		♠K85
♥AKQ		♥J932
♦4		♦JT3
♣KQ63		♣JT7
	♠J4	
	♥75	
	♦A9652	
	♣A942	

South passes and West opens 1♠. North passes and while not exactly proud of their hand, East raises partner to 2♠. South passes again and West, with a maximum hand, bids 4♠ which ends the auction. North makes the opening lead of the ♦K – make your plan.

We have no heart losers but we have a sure club loser and a sure diamond loser. How about the trump suit? As long as spades split 3-2 we will only have one spade loser. If they split 4-1 (or worse) then we are in trouble so let's make a wish that they split 3-2. So we only have three total losers, assuming our wish comes true so is there anything else to think about? There certainly is! When we are forced to ruff the second round of diamonds, we are down to four trumps in our hand. If we pull trump we will be down to one single trump card left. When we lose the last trump, as we planned to, the Defense will continue diamonds to force out our last trump. Now, when we have to knock out the ♣A, we're going to lose any diamond tricks that the Defense has. What we need to do instead is just pull two rounds of trump. Now the only trump left is a high one – it's always going to win a trick. Now we switch to clubs and maintain control of the trump suit.

Hand 6 – Matchpoint Tops

	♠Q95	
	♥AT8	
	♦Q764	
	♣A76	
♠43		♠AJT86
♥Q93		♥742
♦53		♦J982
♣KQT943		♣8
	♠K72	
	♥KJ65	
	♦AKT	
	♣J52	

This is a hand I declared a few weeks ago. I was South and opened 1NT. At the table, West did not overcall 2♣ but even if they had, my partner would still have bid 3NT as they did here. West had the obvious lead of the ♣K. It was time to make my plan.

I had one sure club winner, three diamonds and two hearts. I knew that I could get a third heart winner for sure once the ♥Q was knocked out and possibly a fourth if the finesse worked. I could also establish a spade winner. The first thing I did was duck the club lead. Since I knew West had to have the ♣Q what this does is freeze out that suit – West can no longer lead it safely. On this occasion West actually continued with a low club so I won it with my ♣J. This wasn't exactly perfect defense but that happens a lot – defending is HARD! Now I had two sure club tricks and things were looking good. My plan was to now play a small heart to the ace and finesse East for the queen on the next trick. However, something interesting happened – when I played my low heart, West clearly hesitated before playing low. My plan changed! I played the ♥T instead which won the trick. I now played the rest of my hearts and managed to win all four heart tricks and watched East throw away a diamond on the fourth round. I now decided to hope that the remaining diamonds were 3-2 so I'd get a fourth diamond trick. They were! Now I knocked out the ♠A and managed to make 11 tricks. Tied for top place!

Hand 7 – An Interesting One

	♠Q4	
	♥T5	
	♦QT964	
	♣QT95	
♠AKT6532		♠J
♥AQ3		♥KJ9842
♦A		♦KJ753
♣76		♣A
	♠987	
	♥76	
	♦82	
	♣KJ8432	

West opens 1♠ and after North passes, East responds 2♥. This PROMISES at least a 5 card heart suit so West should forget about their long spade suit and raise hearts. East ends up being Declarer in 6♥.

South decides to lead the ♦8 – plan the play. East has no losers in their hand except for diamonds. The ace in Dummy takes care of one of the four small ones so that just leaves three losers. We can get rid of one on a high spade so all we need to do is ruff two of them in Dummy.

This hand is a great example of how it's easy to get confused about which hand to make the "captain" hand. Dummy has excellent spades and it may well be correct to try to establish them as winners but if we do that we have to make Dummy the captain hand. It's far easier to make the hand with the long trumps the captain hand and put our focus on getting rid of our diamond losers.