

Making Impossible Contracts

In bridge, whatever the contract, it is often possible for the declarer to make it. And indeed it is often possible for the defence to defeat it.

From both points of view think about your likelihood of making or defeating a contract. If you rate your chances highly, then think about what could go wrong - perhaps that Ace doesn't cash after all, because one of your opponents is void in that suit.

If things look hopeless for your side, do not despair! Sometimes you can still save the day by taking a particular line of play. Sometimes you just have to hope that the opponents' cards lie in such a way that, despite everything, you can still succeed.

Today we will look at a couple of hands from declarer's point of view, which look impossible. And yet declarer can still prevail. How.....?

Hand 1

In this first hand, one of you has taken a rather optimistic view of their hand and you have gone looking for a slam. You find it isn't there so you stop short and the final contract is 5♠ by West:

♠ A T 6 5 4	♠ K 9 7 3
♥ A T	♥ K Q 3
♦ A K Q	♦ 4
♣ Q 4 3	♣ T 9 7 6 2

North leads the ♥9. At least they haven't put you to the test at the start with a club lead. It looks as though you can throw one of your club losers on the third round of hearts so that you will only lose two club tricks. Then if the trumps break 2-2 you are home and dry.

However, when you play Ace and King of trumps, South shows out on the second round leaving North with the master trump Queen.

These cards remain:

♠ T 6 5	♠ 9 7
♥ T	♥ K Q
♦ A K Q	♦ 4
♣ Q 4 3	♣ T 9 7 6 2

How do you make your contract now?

Superficially there is no hope. You must lose the Queen of trumps and it looks like you will have to lose two clubs. You can throw two clubs from dummy on the diamond winners and/or a club from hand on the heart winners, but you will always be left with at least two clubs in each hand.

So your only hope is that the cards lie well for you.

You need.....?

The answer is you need one opponent or the other to hold a singleton club honour. You must cash your heart winners, throwing a club from hand, and cash your diamond winners throwing two clubs from dummy. Then play a trump from both hands throwing North in with the Queen. Your hands now look like this, having lost one trick:

♠ T 6	♠ 9
♥	♥
♦	♦
♣ Q 4	♣ T 9 7

North cannot afford to lead a red suit as you will ruff in dummy and discard a club from hand. Then you will lose just one trick. North has no trumps left so is forced to lead a club. Now is either opponent has a singleton honour they are stuck, because they must win the trick, and then lead a red suit to give you a ruff and discard. On this occasion Dame Fortune smiles on you and South wins the trick with a singleton Ace of clubs. The South has to lead a red card and you discard your last club from hand while ruffing in the dummy.

The full hand:

♠ A T 6 5 4	♠ Q J 2	♠ K 9 7 3
♥ A T	♥ 9 4	♥ K Q 3
♦ A K Q	♦ J 8 7 6	♦ 4
♣ Q 4 3	♣ K J 8 5	♣ T 9 7 6 2
	♠ 8	
	♥ J 8 7 6 5 2	
	♦ T 9 5 3 2	
	♣ A	

The lesson from the hand? If the contract looks hopeless, think of a possible distribution of the opponents cards that will give you a chance and play for it.

Hand 2

First a bidding problem. You are East, second in hand, and North opens a pre-emptive 3♦.

What do you bid with this powerhouse?

♠ A K Q J 7 6 5 2
♥ A K 3
♦ A 3
♣

In 6 there are potentially two losers, both the red threes. There are various possible ways to eliminate them. Partner may be able to ruff one or the other. Partner may hold ♥Q. Partner may hold a trump entry and the ♠A. It is unlikely, but partner may hold ♦K.

However clever your bidding system, you are unlikely to be able to find out if any of these chances is likely to come to fruition. So it is probably to shut your eyes and bid the slam (keeping your fingers crossed): 6♠.

South leads the ♦2 and down goes the dummy. It is not as bad as you feared, but not as good as you hoped:

♠ 8 3	♠ A K Q J 7 6 5 2
♥ J T 7	♥ A K 3
♦ T 8 6	♦ A 3
♣ A K J T 5	♣

Contract 6♠ by East. Lead ♦2.

Dummy has the lovely top clubs, but you can't get there. How frustrating! Is there any way you can get to the dummy? The spades out against you are the T, 9, 4 and if the opponents throw the T and 9 underneath your Ace, then the ♠8 will be an entry. Surely this has no hope whatsoever! A more reasonable prospect is that the ♥Q will fall on one of the first two rounds and the ♥J will provide an entry to the dummy.

Is there anything better to try.....?

When you win the ♦Ace on the first round, and play the Ace of trumps, South follows with the 4 and North shows out, discarding a diamond. The contract is now nearly a certain make. Think about the diamond suit. North has opened a pre-empt, and probably holds 7 of them. South has led the ♦2, which tends to confirm 7 in the North hand, and (more importantly) a singleton in the South hand. So South has no more diamonds. What you must do is give him the lead in trumps and then he must give the lead to the dummy.

So you cash the ♠K and then play the ♠2, giving South a spade trick to which he is not entitled! However, South must now give the lead to the dummy with his return. If he leads a club, you cash Ace and King and discard your two red losers. If he leads a heart, you play the Ten, which will either win the trick, or, if North beats it with the Queen, create an entry with the ♥J.

The full deal:

	♠	
	♥ 6 5 2	
	♦ K Q J 9 7 5 4	
	♣ Q 3 2	
♠ 8 3		♠ A K Q J 7 6 5 2
♥ J T 7		♥ A K 3
♦ T 8 6		♦ A 3
♣ A K J T 5		♣
	♠ T 9 4	
	♥ Q 9 8 4	
	♦ 2	
	♣ 9 8 7 6 4	

It doesn't matter where the ♥Q is. South can do nothing about it. This hand showed you how to create an entry out of thin air. Another "impossible" contract made.

Remember: In bridge, when you have tried all the possible ways of making a contract, have a think about using one or two impossible ones!