

♠♥ So, can declarer's 2♠ contract be held to seven tricks? ♦♣

Last Thursday (13th October, 2016) Board 13 offered potential for the defense to shine.

Dir: North
Vul: All

♠ 6 4
♥ K 8
♦ A Q 9 8 5
♣ 9 7 6 5

Optimum
EW 120

♠ K 7 5
♥ J 9 4
♦ J 3 2
♣ K J 4 3

NORTH
WEST 13 EAST
SOUTH

♠ Q 10 9
♥ A 7 6 2
♦ K 10 4
♣ Q 10 2

♠ A J 8 3 2
♥ Q 10 5 3
♦ 7 6
♣ A 8

9 9 11 11

♠ - 1 - 1 -
♥ - 1 - 1 -
♦ 1 - - - 2
♣ 1 - - - 2

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The hand was played at 9 tables. On two occasions the contract was 1NT, both North's making 7 tricks.

At the other seven tables the contract was 2♠ by South. One declarer was credited with 9 tricks, at five tables 8 tricks were made and at one table declarer scored 7 tricks.

The hand records suggest that only 7 tricks should be made by declarer. And yet the scorecard shows that only one declarer failed to make 8 or more tricks in the spade contract.

First, a word about the bidding. South should open 1♠. Holding 5 spade, 4 hearts and two doubletons this hand conforms to the **Rule of 20** for an opening bid at the one level. The **Rule of 20** requires you to add your high-card points to the number of cards in your two longest suits and if the total equals 20 or more then you have the values for an opening bid at the one level. The South hand matches that criteria and South opens the bidding accordingly with 1♠.

After West passes North has a choice of bids, either 1NT or 2♦. Whatever North bids South should rebid 2♥. Note that this rebid does NOT promise extra strength as opposed to re-bidding 2♠ and has the added benefit of better describing the hand and

giving North a choice which would otherwise be denied if the re-bid is 2♠. Note also that a re-bid of 2♥ conveys your shape, i.e. 5 spades and AT LEAST 4 hearts. North should convert to 2♠ preferring to play in the 5-2 fit rather than what might be only a 4-2 heart fit.

Now to the defense and declarer play.

There is only one lead that guarantees to beat the contract... a small trump. I suspect that no West found that lead although I have not had an opportunity to check with all of those who made the opening lead!

So, why does the trump lead beat the contract? In essence this is an issue of 'tempo'. If the defense can get to play one or two round of trumps before releasing the ♥A then declarer SHOULD lose two heart tricks, two trumps, a diamond and a club, i.e. 6 tricks to the defense. If not, then declarer will be able to ruff a losing heart in the North hand whilst also perforce establishing the ♥10 as another trick. Thus declarer should be able to make 3 trumps in hand, 1 top heart TOGETHER with a ruff in dummy AS WELL AS the H♥10, 1 diamond and 1 club...a total 8 tricks.

However the trump lead, and continuation if necessary, gives the defense the 'tempo' and declarer cannot ruff a losing heart in dummy. Even if declarer makes 2 heart tricks (heart to the dummy's ♥K and then ♥Q and another heart will establish the ♥10) declarer is still a trick short for his contract.

Board No 13 Both Vul Dealer North								
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NS	EW	Bid	By	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
1	17	2♠	S	8	110		10	6
2	19	1NT	N	7	90		3	13
3	11	2♠	S	8	110		10	6
4	13	1NT	N	7	90		3	13
5	15	2♠	S	8	110		10	6
7	18	2♠	S	8	110		10	6
8	20	2♠	S	8	110		10	6
9	12	2♠	S	9	140		16	
10	14	2♠	S	7		100		16

So, that's it then...declarer makes eight tricks on a non-trump lead? Well, not quite! It depends on what the actual lead is and how declarer and the defense proceed.

At one table the bidding proceeded as follows:

North	East	South	West
P	P	1S	P
1NT	P	2H	P
2S	P	P	P

West found the lead of the $\spadesuit 2$. Declarer could have risen with dummy's $\spadesuit A$ and proceed to play on hearts thereby scoring one top heart, one heart ruff in dummy and perforce, the $\heartsuit 10$. However, and perhaps not unreasonably, declarer finessed the $\spadesuit Q$ at trick one and East won with the $\spadesuit K$.

Now the spotlight focuses on East! How should East know to switch to a trump? After all, dummy's diamond suit looks threatening. Maybe we need to cash our club tricks before declarer can discard his losing clubs on dummy's long diamonds?

Now's the time to slow down before playing to the next trick.

What did partner lead? Can you remember...it was the first card to hit the table, the opening lead. Okay, now you remember. It was the $\spadesuit 2$. What kind of lead is that? Playing standard leads it is either from a four card or three card suit...or maybe a singleton. If it was from a singleton then why didn't declarer let the lead come around to his hand where he presumably has $\spadesuit J763$ so that he can win with the $\spadesuit J$ and lead a heart towards dummy? And this line will also preserve the $\spadesuit AQ$ over West's $\spadesuit K$ if West had originally lead from $\spadesuit K10(4)2$! Also, if declarer has four diamonds then he might have re-bid $2\spadesuit$ instead of $2\heartsuit$!

I think it is clear that partner has led from a 3 or four card suit and therefore declarer has either a singleton or doubleton diamond. And with East holding the $\heartsuit A$ over dummy's $\heartsuit K$ which is dummy's only possible entry it means that the diamond suit is effectively dead! So, no discards for declarer on dummy's diamonds, in which case dummy's (and declarer's) losing clubs cannot vanish.

But what can vanish are East-West's winning hearts if the defenders permit declarer to ruff them in dummy!

So, even though partner (not unreasonably) did not find the killing opening lead, you, as East, can remedy the situation by switching to the $\spadesuit 10$ and now East-West will have regained the tempo and declarer should be held to 7 tricks.

Note that declarer will also have a losing option re the play of the heart suit. A heart to dummy's $\heartsuit K$ and East's $\heartsuit A$ will leave declarer with the option of playing a diamond to dummy's $\spadesuit A$ later in the play and then leading a heart towards his $\heartsuit Q105$ with the option of finessing the $\heartsuit 10$ into West's $\heartsuit J9$. And East's $\heartsuit 7$ will win the fourth round of the suit thereby restricting declarer to a single heart trick! That should produce a result of $2\spadesuit -2$ and 200 to East-West.

Finally, it should be noted that declarer needs to be careful how he/she proceeds after ruffing the third heart in dummy. The danger lies in playing $\spadesuit A$ and a second spade whereupon East could win and play a fourth heart for West to ruff with $\spadesuit K$. And East will also score with his/her last trump. The way to avoid this scenario is to lead a trump from dummy after ruffing the third heart and cover East's trump. West will win but cannot put partner on lead for the heart ruff.

So, look at your result on the board and replay the hand. Did declarer make the 8 tricks or was the defense less than stellar?

Defense is the most difficult part of the game. It does not come easy and can be very taxing on the brain cells! But good defense is one of the most rewarding aspects of the game and gives a huge sense of satisfaction to those who aspire to it especially when they produce a successful outcome!

Paul J Scannell,
October 14th, 2016