

Bath Replays

1 Stay flexible

Board 7 Thursday 7 December 2006

This was an interesting hand, featuring a game contract that no declarer (myself included) managed to bring home. There are chances, however, and the hand illustrates some good techniques for both defence and declarer.

The normal contract of 3 NT by South should be reached most times via a Stayman enquiry after a weak one no trump opening. With a combined 26 points you would expect the contract to make.

However, West leads the 4th highest heart (apparently of 5) and prospects don't look too encouraging. As a well trained declarer, you take stock and plan before playing to the first trick:

- **Strength:** Initial trick tally 1 heart, 3 clubs, 2 diamonds.
- **Weakness:** Only one heart stop. Immediate losers appear to be 4 hearts and the Ace of spades.
- **Opportunities**
 - Spades:* 1 or 2 tricks depending on the location of the Ace;
 - Clubs:* a 40% chance of the suit breaking giving a 4th trick;
 - Diamonds:* a 50% chance of finessing the Queen and then a subsequent 40% (20% combined) of the suit breaking.
- **Threats:** The danger hand is West with established hearts.

♠ T873	
♥ KJ	
♦ A732	
♣ KQ7	
♠ 9	♠ AJ642
♥ Q8643	♥ A95
♦ Q65	♦ T94
♣ JT63	♣ 85
	♠ KQ5
	♥ T72
	♦ KJ8
	♣ A942

Dealer: South
All vulnerable

The first task is to stop West enjoying hearts easily. The King to East's Ace and a heart return to West's Queen allows the suit to be cleared but isolates West's last 2 hearts. Note that the defence will succeed either if East holds up the heart Ace on trick one or if West holds up the Queen on the second. If declarer plays the Jack to the first trick then the hold up by East is automatic!

So assuming declarer survives this initial foray, with the defence gathering 2 tricks, the best chance is to assume that the spade Ace is in the safe East hand.

Cross to dummy with a club and lead to KQ of spades. When this succeeds, return to dummy with a 2nd club and repeat. East still holds up as he doesn't have a good exit card (a diamond helps declarer to remove the Queen).

Now West starts to squirm, being out of spades, and discards a master heart! Why? West must have the 4th club and the diamond Queen (just as well we didn't try for the 20% minor miracle!). Declarer should always remain flexible (this was my downfall), and conclude that *West is no longer the danger hand!* He now only possesses one heart trick and one club trick. So cash the Ace of clubs and throw West in with the last club. West can cash his remaining heart (the 4th defensive trick) but now has to lead away from the Queen of diamonds.

So declarer gets home via 1 heart, 3 clubs, 2 spades and 3 diamonds. Except that none of us did on the night.

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8th Dec 2006