

Bath Replays

4 An extra chance

Board 19. Thursday April 12, 2007

The way that most contributors have been owing up to blunders, we should perhaps rename this series Bath Confessions - and this is no exception. It was a Sim Pairs night, I was intent on a possible shedful of master points, and picked up the South hand below. I opened a heart, and when my partner replied with 2NT (a sound raise to game in hearts), I considered my 5-loser hand and went straight for Blackwood. Partner showed the missing 2 aces, so I asked for Kings, settling for 6♥ when she showed none.

West led the 2 of trumps, and dummy went down. It wasn't the best lead for me. A spade would have given me 12 cold tricks (6 trumps in dummy, 3 spades, the minor aces plus a club ruff in my hand), as would a club (the ♣J10 would enable me to establish a 2nd club winner on which to discard a losing diamond in my hand). On the other hand, a trump was better news than a diamond. East followed with the 4, and I won the trick in dummy.

Trumps were already cleared, and I could ruff in either direction. Either way, I had just 11 tricks. If I ruffed a club, I'd have 6 trump tricks in dummy + the ruff + ♠AK + the minor aces. Or if I did a dummy reversal and ruffed spades twice, the total would be the same. Where was the 12th trick coming from?

One possibility was that the club K and Q were both with East. If so, it would work out just as if the opening lead had been a club. If East played low, I would win an extra trick with the ♣J, and if he played high, I would win with the ♣A, force his other honour out with the ♣J, and I could then discard a losing diamond on dummy's winning ♣10. 12 tricks. But the odds were poor: just a 25% chance of the KQ being with East, plus a couple of slim chances that a club honour would drop under the A or that East would otherwise mistakenly play '2nd player high'. Say 30% overall.

The other possibility was the spade finesse, which at 50% was a much better bet. No contest. So up with the ♠A, a low spade to the J ... and it was all over when West produced the ♠Q and left me with an inescapable loser in clubs.

Well, there you go. Silly old partner, ignoring the losing trick count and raising to game with 8 losers. Inevitably we end up in a poor slam depending on a finesse, and as sure as eggs is ... But hang on a sec. Here comes that hollow feeling in the stomach as I realise that I've misplayed yet another hand.

The key is, of course, that however the hand pans out, I'm always going to lose a club trick. And because I only have two clubs in my hand, I'm never going to lose more than one. So although the chance of an extra club trick isn't high, it isn't going to cost me anything at all to try it. If it works, I won't need to risk the spade finesse. And if it doesn't work, I've only lost a trick I'm going to lose anyway, and I still have the spade finesse to fall back on. So to give myself the best chance, I have to lead a low club at trick two. And as the cards lie (see the full deal) it works. The club option isn't a poor *alternative* to the spade finesse, as I had first thought. It's *an extra chance* - but only if it is tried first.

This insight, no doubt trivial to the experienced declarer but jaw-saggingly significant to me, filtered through only in the small hours of the next morning. As I progress, I will recognise my error at the table shortly after committing it. Eventually, maybe I will catch it in time and make my contract.

Chris Jones
20 April 2007

North	
♠ A8	
♥ AJ10976	
♦ 86	
♣ 1042	
South	
♠ KJ74	
♥ KQ853	
♦ A2	
♣ AJ	

Dealer S.
EW
vulnerable

♠ A8	
♥ AJ10976	
♦ 86	
♣ 1042	
♠ Q10952	♠ 63
♥ 2	♥ 4
♦ J10753	♦ KQ94
♣ 75	♣ KQ9863
♠ KJ74	
♥ KQ853	
♦ A2	
♣ AJ	