

Dealer
WEST 17 EAST
SOUTH

Bath Replays

21 Lucky miss

Board 17. Thursday 15 Oct, 2007.

This started with a bit of a bidding dilemma. North passed, partner opened 1♥, and South overcalled with 2♦. Sitting West, I dithered, hesitated and finally bid 2♥. North passed, as did my partner and South now offered 2♠, which was passed out - my partner possibly feeling ethically constrained by my hesitation. So the auction went:

North	East	South	West
Pass	1♥	2♦	2♥
Pass	Pass	2♠	All pass

Dismissing a nagging feeling that I should have tried 3♥, either at my first or second opportunity, I led my ♥A, dummy went down, and the 5, 3 and 4 completed the trick. A heart continuation seemed a poor idea, so with a view to reducing dummy's diamond ruffs, I switched to the trump 10, which was covered by the Jack, King and Ace, giving me an eventual trick with the ♠9. South ended up just making his contract for 110.

The following morning, an email from my partner suggested that I might have made a rather better lead at the 2nd trick. Maybe you've already spotted what he meant? If not, take a moment to think about it before reading on.

OK. By bidding diamonds first, South has shown more diamonds than spades. Assume he's 5-4. That gives my partner 3 spades and 4 diamonds. If partner also has 5 hearts (which looks likely, as he has discouraged a heart continuation - fearing a ruff in declarer's hand?) then he has a singleton club ... Let's double-check that. If partner only has 4 hearts, then then he started with a 3-4-4-2 shape - meaning that he must have 15+ points (having not opened INT). Which means, as I'm looking at 14 points in my hand and dummy, that South reversed on an 10-11 count. Unlikely. It looks as if partner started with 3-5-4-1.

So at trick 2, the suggestion is that I should switch to Ace and another club, giving him a club ruff. But does that give us a better result? Well, no, as the complete deal reveals.

I lead my ♣A, dropping partner's Queen, then another club for the ruff. Let's suppose that partner now leads a trump, aimed at reducing dummy's ruffing potential. Declarer has seen 9 points in my hand (two aces plus he knows I have the ♣J), so he can be quite sure that I don't have the ♠K (I'm not leaving them in 2♠ with 12 points after my partner has opened the bidding), and he therefore lets the trick run round to his Jack. From where he can clear trumps, and ... But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Back to trick 3.

Look at the clubs from declarer's point of view: once East ruffs, my remaining ♣J8 is staring him full in the face. All he need do is drop his ♣10 on the second club trick, and wait for East to lead a trump. So *if* he's had the foresight to unblock the clubs on trick 3, he can now clear trumps ending in hand, lead his remaining small club to catch my Jack, and take three club tricks. He can then take the diamond finesse on the way back to his hand - East must have the Queen for his opening bid, and even if he hasn't declarer's safe, as he still has a trump - and ends up with 10 tricks.

If partner comes back with a heart instead of a trump, it isn't quite as good: declarer gets just 9 tricks. But that still beats 8. Not that it matters - it was a rotten result for us, as we should be going one off in 3♥. All the same, I was lucky to miss what might have turned out to be an unprofitable insight.

Chris Jones (with thanks to Paul Keightley)
November 2007

♠ 1096
♥ AJ2
♦ 872
♣ AJ87

Dealer
WEST 17 EAST
SOUTH

♠ J84
♥ 10765
♦ 10
♣ K9654

♠ 1096
♥ AJ2
♦ 872
♣ AJ87

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WEST 17 EAST
SOUTH

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♦ 10
♣ K9654

♠ 1096
♥ AJ2
♦ 872
♣ AJ87

Dealer
WEST 17 EAST
SOUTH

♠ K75
♥ KQ983
♦ Q965
♣ Q

♠ AQ32
♥ 4
♦ AKJ43
♣ 1032