

NORTH
WEST 19 EAST
Dealer

Bath Replays

27 Room for improvement

Board 19. Tuesday 16 Sept, 2008.

Just as you're doing really well, along comes the hand that you're destined to make tonight's right royal mess of. Even worse, it's a Sim Pairs night, with billions of Master Points at stake. Never mind - these things are sent to teach us valuable lessons for the future.

My first error was in the bidding. My partner, sitting South, opened 1♠. Looking at it now, it's obvious that with 9 points, a 5-card heart suit, and just seven losers, I'm easily strong enough to respond 2♥, but I wasn't thinking straight. I saw the spade doubleton, the queens and jacks (good no-trumpy cards), the 6-9 points, and bid INT, which was passed out:

South	West	North	East
1♠	Pass	INT	All pass

The ♦Q was led, dummy went down, West played low, and I won the opening trick. How would you plan the play?

My reasoning was as follows:

We need 7 tricks, which we have easily if the heart finesse is right or the spades are 3-3. Trouble with the heart finesse is that if it loses, East-West have at least four diamond tricks, plus two club tricks for one down. I know! I'll do a 'pretend finesse': lead the ♥Q and if East doesn't cover, go up with the Ace anyway, and try the spades instead. Which is exactly what happened. The spades were 4-2, and I ended up going two off.

Wrong, wrong, wrong, as my partner wasn't slow to point out afterwards. What makes you think you need 7 tricks? *Think for a moment about the rest of the room.* They're all going to be in hearts, aren't they, probably making 9 tricks. Making 7 tricks is no better than making 6 or 5 - any of those is going to be a bottom, compared with everyone else's 110s and 140s. But supposing we make *nine* tricks in no trumps? Then we're looking at a top, and we'll have turned a wrong move (missing the heart contract) into a resounding victory. It's a no-brainer. You *must* take the heart finesse. If it loses you're no worse off, but if it wins, so have you. And as you can see, the ♥K is right, yielding one diamond trick, 5 heart tricks and 3 spades - 9 in all, and 150 points.

So what can we take from this miserable performance?

- A rotten auction doesn't necessarily get you a rotten result. With luck, you may be able to turn it to your advantage.
- When you plan your play, consider what the rest of the room is likely to score - especially if you're in an inferior contract. *That* is your real target, not the nominal target of your contract.
- If simply making an inferior contract will get you a bottom anyway, you have nothing to lose - go out on a limb and risk all for a better score. It costs nothing, and could gain a lot.

Chris Jones
September 2008

♠ 102
♥ QJ986
♦ K8
♣ QJ109

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♠ AKQ54
♥ A103
♦ 62
♣ 853

♠ 102
♥ QJ986
♦ K8
♣ QJ109

♠ 87
♥ 54
♦ 10943
♣ AK742

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♠ AKQ54
♥ A103
♦ 62
♣ 853

♠ J963
♥ K72
♦ AQJ75
♣ 6