



Bath Replays

40 Duck and get a duck

Board 2, Tuesday 4 May, 2009

This hand occurred on the Butler Pairs on the 4th of May. The auction was straightforward. I was sitting East and opened 1NT, which my partner raised to 3NT.

South naturally led the $\heartsuit 5$. I played hastily to the first trick and then, as the saying goes, repented at leisure. I ducked and realized that it was one of two classic textbook situations where one should not duck the first trick at no trumps. North won with the $\heartsuit Q$ and immediately switched to the $\spadesuit K$. I had no way of recovering and made only seven tricks.

The well known maxim is not to duck when there is a bigger threat lurking. Indeed the diamond suit is only a threat if South has 5 cards in the suit (and an entry - which she does in Clubs) in which case North would have a singleton and then there would be no point ducking anyway. My only consolation was that two others must have made the same play and got a joint bottom. It would be interesting to know how many Easts did go up with the $\heartsuit A$ at trick one.

A possible variation illustrates another situation where ducking the opening lead is wrong. Suppose the diamond suit is distributed slightly differently, where West has $\heartsuit A10$ while East has $\heartsuit 9764$. If South leads the $\heartsuit 5$ one can reasonably deduce that North has at least one honour, since from a suit headed by KQJ it is safe to assume that the King would be led. Say North has $\heartsuit Q2$, as in the actual hand and South has $\heartsuit KJ853$. If we play the $\heartsuit A$ at trick one then the suit will be blocked if North does not drop the Queen. (South cannot afford to overtake the Queen since the $\heartsuit 9$ would then become a stopper). If North does unblock, then the $\heartsuit 9$ is still a stopper. Of course if the suit breaks 4-3 there is no point ducking anyway.

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\spadesuit KQ8764		
\heartsuit 10974		
\diamondsuit Q2		
\clubsuit 5		
\spadesuit 95		\spadesuit AJ
\heartsuit KQ2		\heartsuit A85
\diamondsuit A103		\diamondsuit 8764
\clubsuit A8642		\clubsuit QJ73
\spadesuit 1032		
\heartsuit J63		
\diamondsuit KJ95		
\clubsuit K109		