

13/09/2021 Hand of the Week 75: Ducking play

1NT shows 16-18- you need to discuss with partner how you follow on after this- 2C could be taken as Stayman showing hearts, or you may wish to play transfers, which would have worked well on this hand. As it happened with a fairly weak heart suit East signed out in 2NT. Predictably a spade lead follows.

| | | |
|-------------|--------------|-------------------|
| D 17 | N Erika Pick | W N E S |
| | | P P 1♠ |
| | | 1NT P P 2♣ |
| | | P 2♠ P P |
| | | X P 2NT P |
| | | P P |
| W Davidj010 | ♠7 | E hxlizb |
| ♠ Q932 | | ♠ A5 |
| ♥ AQ6 | | ♥ J10942 |
| ♦ AK2 | | ♦ 1064 |
| ♣ A75 | | ♣ Q64 |
| | S med029 | |
| | | 2NT W NS: 0 EW: 0 |

At first sight there appears to be 8 tricks here- 1 spade, 4 hearts, 2 diamonds and 1 club.

How do you play the hand?

The key here is trying to manage entries to dummy- the lead removes the A♠ and if East plays a J♥ towards the AQ♥, if it loses then you have no way back to table.

Recognising this, you should play *low* towards the AQ♥- if North wins K♥ then you still have a low heart to return.

North's counter-defence to this is to hold off playing the K♥ until as late as possible- let the Q♥ win and then the suit is blocked again. Similarly, if declarer tries the A♥ first, then Q♥, hold off until the third round of the suit.

The full hand:

| | | | | | | |
|-------------|--|--------------|----------|----|-------------|----|
| D | | N Erika Pick | W | N | E | S |
| 17 | | ♠ 76 | | P | P | 1♠ |
| | | ♥ K85 | 1NT | P | P | 2♣ |
| | | ♦ J9753 | P | 2♠ | P | P |
| | | ♣ 832 | X | P | 2NT | P |
| | | | P | P | | |
| W Davidj010 | | | E hxlizb | | | |
| ♠ Q932 | | | ♠ A5 | | | |
| ♥ AQ6 | | | ♥ J10942 | | | |
| ♦ AK2 | | | ♦ 1064 | | | |
| ♣ A75 | | | ♣ Q64 | | | |
| | | S med029 | | | | |
| | | ♠ KJ1084 | | | | |
| | | ♥ 73 | | | | |
| | | ♦ Q8 | | | | |
| | | ♣ KJ109 | | | | |
| | | | 2NT W | | NS: 0 EW: 0 | |

Once North is in with the K♥ there is no way back for declarer- the defence can continue spades or safely switch to either minor, in fact a switch is better as then declarer is stuck in hand and has to play away from their spades later on.

It is counter-intuitive but the best play for declarer is actually to play spades at trick 2, this establishes the Q♠. Declarer can then play two rounds of hearts- again North is obliged to give declarer let AQ♥ win to avoid setting the suit up. Declarer then plays AK♦ and exits with a spade, South takes their three tricks but is end-played in clubs giving declarer 2 spades, 2 hearts, 2 diamonds and 2 clubs for the contract.