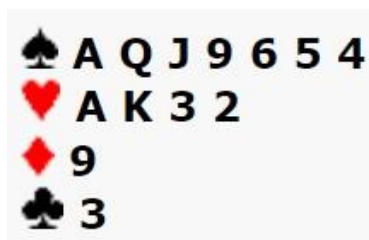


10/01/2023 Hand of the Week 95: Mixed pairs

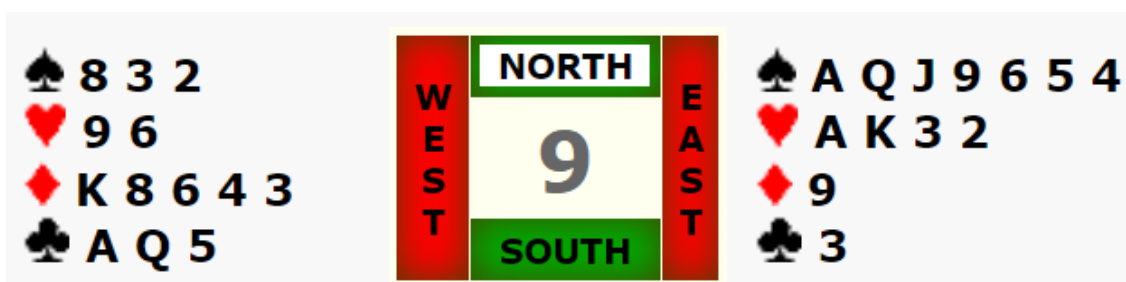
This week a hand from the mixed pairs event on 19<sup>th</sup> December last year. A slam proved to be the decisive hand.



How would you bid this hand? Only 14 points but a very friendly distribution. If you held the K♠ as well you could open a strong 2, but missing it 1♠ is the correct bid, south overcalls 2♣ and partner bids 2♦. North comes in with 3♣- what next? If partner held a 4 card heart suit they should have bid a negative, or 'Sputnik' double after the overcall. There is no need to show the heart suit, and you can go straight to 4♠. Partner will most likely pass.

In fact on the night South passes allowing partner to respond 1NT. Now you can show the heart suit and after East bid 3♥, West responded 4♠- showing a maximum hand with 3 card support.

What if the 9 points includes some minor suit Aces? There seemed to be no harm in asking and after finding only one Ace, East bid a very bold 6♠. South leads and you see this dummy:



The hand is dead in the water if South holds the K♠, so before you start to plan the play I will tell you that Spades split with North holding K7 and South holding singleton 10.

You will lose a diamond and have 2 heart losers that you need to get rid of. Missing 7 cards there is a good chance hearts split 4-3 (62%), so you could ruff one before drawing trumps if you wish to. A safer option is to go to table and draw 2 rounds of trumps first.

There are 2 options for removing your other heart loser:

Play low towards the diamonds, if South holds the A♦, they should go up with it. When you reach table you can then throw a heart on the K♦. If South does duck your diamond loser had gone.

Take the club finesse- if this holds you can then throw the heart on a club

So, how to play the hand? Timing is important here and you need give yourself the best chance by taking the play in the correct order- but which is that?

As you are planning to lose a diamond anyway, you should play diamonds first, and if that fails fall back on the club finesse. Ideally you should do this before playing the hearts and spades- if you ruff a heart and then play two rounds of spades, when you lose the A♦ you will still have a heart loser in hand and no trumps left on table.

You will notice I have not told you the lead! On the night South leads a club- does that change your plan?

You have been forced to consider the club finesse earlier than you would like, and it seems unlikely that South would underlead the K♣ against a slam, so your only hope now is to play the A♣ at trick one and hope the diamond finesse succeeds...

The full hand:

Dlr: North  
Vul: E/W

♠ K 7  
♥ 10 7 5  
♦ A Q 10 2  
♣ J 6 4 2

Optimum  
EW 6S  
-980

♠ 8 3 2  
♥ 9 6  
♦ K 8 6 4 3  
♣ A Q 5

WEST

NORTH

9

SOUTH

EAST

♠ A Q J 9 6 5 4  
♥ A K 3 2  
♦ 9  
♣ 3

	10	
9		14
	7	

♠ 10  
♥ Q J 8 4  
♦ J 7 5  
♣ K 10 9 8 7

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	7	5	4	1	2
S	7	5	4	1	2
E	6	8	9	12	10
W	6	8	9	12	11

South seems to have found the only lead that takes the contract down- genius or madness? You decide!