

Board of the Week 22

By Dick Chapman

I'll give the hand and the auction, you play it:

		♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	
♠3 ♥J762 ♦AKQ9532 ♣A	V: NS D: N	♠J94 ♥A1053 ♦J7 ♣J974	
		♠A ♥ ♦10 ♣	
North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	1♠	Double
Pass	2♥	2♠	4♥ (!)
All pass			

What do you think of 4 hearts by West? I say it was blindly rash. Three hearts would have told the story quite properly, and even that is a stretch. Now guess who was sitting West. I won't tell, but I'll disclose that his initials are RWC. You are East and have to play this mess. As Gerald K. once said to me, "Play the contract you are in, not the one you wish you were in." He could have added, "...or the one you should be in."

South leads the ace of spades and switches to a diamond. Take it from here. As in most cases where you are in a contract no one else will be in, it's going to be a top or a bottom. Don't worry about being down 2 or making overtricks! Just play it to make.

By the way, that's also the strategy for any doubled contract and most cases when playing for imps. Overtricks are important but not nearly as important as making the contract.

Give it some thought before reading further.

Ready? Ok, here we go. First, count your losers. Two hearts and a spade if you are very lucky. If you aren't lucky, you are getting that bottom score I mentioned, so play to have some luck.

Make hearts 3-2 in the NS hand and make diamonds 2-2. I told you to be lucky! Win the diamond and immediately play ace and a low heart. An opponent wins and both follow (luck #1). Let's say they lead a diamond. Win that in dummy and both follow (luck #2). Now what is the play?

There is only one trump outstanding, and you still have two trumps in dummy plus the club ace. Play on diamonds, discarding as you need. An opponent will ruff with the master trump and lead a spade or a club.

Win this in dummy and finish out the contract by cashing all the diamonds.

If an opponent forces dummy with a spade ruff, you play it the same way. Just play on diamonds. They ruff in and force again. Win that with dummy's last trump and continue diamonds.

If an opponent clears the club stopper, you play it the same way. Play on diamonds, they will ruff with the master trump, and you can get to dummy with a spade or a club ruff. The opponents can't force you and extract the club ace at the same time, so you are always going to be able to get to the rest of dummy's diamonds.

The full board:

		♠872 ♥94 ♦64 ♣K86532	
♠3 ♥J762 ♦AKQ9532 ♣A	V: NS D: N	♠J94 ♥A1053 ♦J7 ♣J974	
		♠AKQ1065 ♥KQ8 ♦108 ♣Q10	

The first secret is to count losers and also count entries to dummy: 2 diamonds, 1 club, and 1 or 2 ruffs. The second secret is to have more luck than we bridge players deserve. The third secret is to have a partner who bids more carefully. At the club, making 3 would be 9 matchpoints on a top of 11. Making 4 would be 10.5, so my stretch wasn't necessary: even making 3 is a great board. Down 1 would be 0.5 matchpoints. Most pairs were in 4 diamonds making for an average 5.5 matchpoints.

My lesson: save the heroics for another board. Three hearts would have been good enough.