

Board of the Week 33

By Dick Chapman

I botched the play on this board but got a favorable defense so came out ok. Of course, I shouldn't have blown it in the first place.

		♠104 ♥Q107 ♦A102 ♣AJ982		
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣		V: NS D: S	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	
		♠AK65 ♥852 ♦Q84 ♣1074		
South	West	North	East	
Pass	Pass	1♣	1♠	
1NT	All pass			

You get the 9 of spades and hold up once. Then the 3, 10, ace. You have a sporting chance if the hearts are blocked or something else good happens in that suit. But you have to play the clubs for four winners.

I did what any new player would do. Think to myself, "oh good, I can take two finesses and just need one of them to be right." True that...if the top club honors are divided (and the opponents don't find the killer heart lead), you have a shot. You took the ace of spades, not the king, because you want another spade when the first finesse fails. The opening lead should tell everything about the suit, but one never knows.

So I led the 10 of clubs, played low from dummy, and the king won. Sure enough, here comes the third spade, just as I hoped.

STOP. I have already blown it. Do you see why?

Music time. Study the layout and tell me where I fouled up. Only after you know why, or at least have given some serious thought, should you read further.

Dum de dum, dum....tra la.

Ok, ready? I'll tell you what happened in case you don't see my error yet. I led the second club and put in dummy's 8. And East discards a diamond. Oh nooo! I am in dummy and there is a club stack on my left.

Now do you see my error? Geeze, I just taught a summer symposium on this subject and still blew it. Here's my error: When I led the 10 of clubs, I should unblock the 9 from dummy. Then later, when I take the second finesse, I can use the 7 and stay in my hand by playing the 2. See the full hand in the next column:

	♠104 ♥Q107 ♦A102 ♣AJ982	
♠93 ♥KJ93 ♦K53 ♣Q653	V: NS D: S	♠QJ872 ♥A64 ♦J976 ♣K
	♠AK65 ♥852 ♦Q84 ♣1074	

If I could had x-ray vision I would see that hearts are not a serious threat. Of course, if I had x-ray vision I would drop the club king singleton. My play of the spade ace at trick 2 was a fishing lure for a third spade so that I wouldn't have to unscramble the heart situation. Had I played the board correctly, I would bring in 2 spades, 4 clubs, and 1 diamond, making easily. Notice also that diamonds is a frozen suit: whichever side leads a diamond will give up a trick.

Experts make the right club play routinely. They don't just say "I need one of two finesses so this is 75%." They go past that simplified approach...way past. Along the way, they say "how is that second finesse going to work?" and then "oh, I see it, the 7 will be the card I need to stay in hand." Then and only then do they make the book play by unblocking the 9 and keeping the precious 2 in dummy.

We all have probably played this sequence incorrectly, but when the suit breaks 3-2, we don't even notice our error. This time I got caught speeding, as it were, because when the suit broke 4-1 I wasn't able to take a third finesse.

Speaking of speeding: on several occasions I have mentioned that bridge is a timed game. If you spend a lot of time on other boards, or if you are late starting a round for some reason, you are going to get in a hurry and won't have time to make the right play here. I can't claim that excuse: I had plenty of time to think about the right play. But my thinking stopped at "take two club finesses." I never even got to "what if I need three finesses?"

The morals are (a) don't fool around on routine plays so that you will have time to think about more complex ones and (b) when you do have time, as I did here, use it to think out the entire hand before you play a card.

Thanks for reading these columns. I hope you are enjoying a little bridge fun and education, even at my expense. Remember to do as I say, not as I do. Because I do bad. Badly, for you grammarians.

See you at the table.