

Board of the Week 52

By Dick Chapman

This week I will illustrate a principle that isn't original with me, but I did come up with it independently. It is: if you are going to put an opponent on the guess, do it (a) early in the play and (b) smoothly. There are some tactical reasons for this.

With regard to doing it early, keep in mind that your opponents, especially declarers, are busy with lots of things. They are trying to remember the auction, come up with a plan, figure out what the defenders are up to, counting winners and losers, and (if you are lucky) thinking about what to have for dinner tonight. Meanwhile, because you were doing your thinking during the auction, you can spring your plan. Also remember that some declarers will play three or four tricks before starting to make a plan, and this can work to your advantage.

But the main reason is that all the facts may not be available when you make an early play.

If you are going to fool your opponent, you must do it smoothly. Remember that you can't ethically vary your tempo either as a way to fool your opponent (bridge isn't poker) or to inform your partner (we play ethically), so you should be smooth regardless of the situation. But, as one example, if you are on defense holding an ace and know that declarer will be leading up to the KJxx in dummy on your left, you better be ready to duck smoothly (if indeed you are going to duck). It's not unethical for your opponents to try to read your tempo ("table feel"), so be ready.

Ok, now for the board. This was played online, scored for imps. You are sitting East:

	♠ ♥ ♦ ♣		
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣	V: B D: W	♠10 ♥KQ109872 ♦K75 ♣74	
	♠642 ♥5 ♦A1084 ♣AKQ108		
West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠	3♥	4NT
Pass	5♦	Pass	6♠
All pass			

Not the auction I would conduct if South. Playing Blackwood (not Roman Key Card), South knows the pair is missing one ace but doesn't have a clue about the spade king or queen. But there it is.

I led the king of heart which held. What do I do at trick 2? Decide for yourself, then read further.

It looks hopeless for our side. Partner didn't overtake so doesn't have a known trick. Any spade my partner holds is going to be finessed and I'm starting at a monstrous club holding in South. Finally, I know my diamond king is in the pocket. So without even a flicker of hesitation I led...the diamond seven. I'm pretty sure this is going to give the declarer a fit.

Put yourself in Declarer's shoes and hold the AQJ of diamonds in the combined hands. Do you play the lead as from the king (ducking to the queen is the right play) or do you win the ace, draw trump, and try to make the clubs work out for discards? Let's show the full hand now to illustrate the problem:

	♠AKQ985 ♥6 ♦QJ96 ♣92	
♠J73 ♥AJ43 ♦32 ♣J653		♠10 ♥KQ109872 ♦K75 ♣74
	♠642 ♥5 ♦A1084 ♣AKQ108	

Tough call, isn't it? That is the point of this article. I wanted to put Declarer on the guess immediately. If I had led a spade or club, Declarer would have the luxury of drawing trump and checking out the club situation while the diamond ace was in place. If the club jack doesn't fall, Declarer can ruff the fourth club and take the diamond finesse. If the jack does fall, Declarer can discard three losing diamonds from hand. This gives Declarer two shots to make. But a diamond at Trick 2 puts Declarer on guess right now...one shot.

Declarers, what would you do?

My opponent thought 20 seconds then took the play I would have taken. She won the ace of diamonds, drew trump, and ran clubs. The jack did not drop and the slam failed by one trick.

The board was played 16 times and only two were in slam. In the other slam, East led the diamond 5 (not quite as deceptive as the 7, in my view) at Trick 2 and the declarer at that table also rose with the ace, down 1. The others NS pairs were in game contracts making 11, 12, or 13 tricks. 11 imps for our side by making the Declarer take a position before all the facts were available.

Remember: if it's a ruse, do it early and do it smoothly.

See you at the table.