Board of the Week 65

By Dick Chapman

In the many editions of “Board of the Week” I have never presented a Double Dummy problem. But today you get one.

Double Dummy problems are thought experiments that don’t represent what might actually take place at the table. Frequently they involve ruffing or discarding your own ace or making some other strange play that produces the desired result. Remember that you are playing against theoretical “best defense” so that the hypothetical defenders always lead, play, and discard to their best advantage.

But you do get to see all 52 cards. Ready?

You are in 6 diamonds on a heart lead. Here are the cards:

	♠K963 ♥K742 ♦J97 ♣J8	
♠J875 ♥108 ♦K6 ♣K10743		♠Q42 ♥QJ95 ♦3 ♣Q9652
	♠A10 ♥A63 ♦AQ108542 ♣A	

I don’t have any music for you this time, so just give this some considered thought. It won’t be easy, but you already have a hint (that you are going to make a play that is abnormal).

You have an inevitable diamond loser and a heart loser. Can the heart loser disappear? See next page for the solution. But I hope you will give it a try first.

Oh, ok, I’ll give you a hint before you start. The best solution doesn’t involve a squeeze. Now you take it from there.

When I was presented with the problem I thought it involved losing a diamond and running all the diamonds for a squeeze, but I just couldn't make it work out. Both defenders seem to have the proper cards to avoid being squeezed. I'm not saying there isn't a squeeze, only that I couldn't figure out how to make one work. Here are the cards again:

	♠K963 ♥K742 ♦J97 ♣J8	
♠J875 ♥108 ♦K6 ♣K10743		♠Q42 ♥QJ95 ♦3 ♣Q9652
	♠A10 ♥A63 ♦AQ108542 ♣A	

The solution was presented by David Cockcroft. If you have given up, here is the unique way to make:

Win the heart, then ace of clubs and the other heart. Now ruff the last club. You are out of clubs and West is out of hearts. Now the ace of diamonds and throw West on lead with the diamond king! Make West win the second diamond, not the first.

There was no working finesse and no squeeze. But now West is on lead with no trump and no hearts. Thus West must lead a club or a spade. The classic strip and end play works because West started with exactly two diamonds and two hearts.

Case A: West leads a club. This is easy: ruff in dummy, discard the losing heart from hand, and claim.

Case B: West leads a spade. This is not as easy, but you may have noticed by now that spades is a "frozen suit." By that I mean "whichever side leads the suit gives up a trick, loses a tempo, or otherwise suffers."

First, you can't lead spades to any advantage. Yes, you can ruff two spade losers in hand, but that doesn't take care of the heart loser you had from the very beginning. Second, when West leads a spade, you have a cool plan for three spade winners (the pesky heart loser will disappear on the third one):

Walk the lead around to your hand, where you hold A10. There are two sub-cases:

B (1) If East hops up with the queen, you win your ace and lead the 10 up to dummy's K9, which is two winners when the jack is in West. Your heart loser disappears on the second of these two winners. If West ducks the 10, you can't overtake. Go to that beautiful diamond jack to get to the spade king, the third spade winner and the parking place for that heart loser.

B (2) If East ducks the spade, you win the 10 in hand, then cash the ace. Now go to the diamond jack and lead the king, on which you discard the heart loser.

It isn't enough to thank David for the solution. We must also thank him for discovering the problem in the first place. I tend to look at hand records too casually, thus blowing by interesting thought experiments like this one. If you want some good exercise of the mind, look over a hand record and see if you can spot cool boards like this one.

Remember, it's not real bridge. Real players don't see exactly two hearts in West, the split spade honors in the two hands, and a losing diamond position whereby it is West who will be on lead after the second diamond. I suspect real players would take the diamond finesse and, when it loses, rely on a squeeze that either works or doesn't.

I hope you enjoyed this deviation from my normal discussion of bridge techniques. See you at the table.