

Board of the Week 73

By Dick Chapman

This fun hand was played in a casual BBO game:

	♠10 ♥102 ♦AK52 ♣AQJ642		
♠ ♥ ♦ ♣			♠ ♥ ♦ ♣
	♠986 ♥AK95 ♦Q74 ♣K95		
East	South	West	North
Pass	1♣	1♠	2♠
Pass	3♣	Pass	4♣
Pass	4♠ ^(a)	Pass	6♣
All pass			

^(a) 2 key cards, no ♣Q.

North was a bit aggressive, but this is imps scoring so you try to bid your close slams. West kicks off with the club 7, 2, 3, 9. Plan the play from here. This is routine for experts, but we normal players will have to think a bit. Well, to be fair, the experts think too...they just do it better than I do.

It doesn't look good, does it? Your first thought is the clubs are 2-2 and you can ruff a fourth diamond in hand, making easily (2 hearts, 3 diamonds, 6 clubs, 1 ruff). So you lead a second club and, of course, the suit is dividing 3-1. West had a stiff club. What next?

The next thought is to leave the last trump outstanding and play four diamonds. If the player with the long trump also has four diamonds, you can ruff in hand and get back to dummy with 2 hearts and a ruff then finally draw the last trump and claim 12 tricks. BUT this is against the odds: the defender with long trumps is more likely to have shortness in the other suit.

A third possibility is to draw the last trump and make diamonds 3-3. Alas, this is going to work only about 36% of the time.

They say that if there is only one way to make a contract, you put the cards where they have to be in order to make. So should you mentally put the diamonds 3-3 and plunge ahead with that suit?

You should not. "They say" had that conditional phrase, "if there is only one way to make a contract." There is still another way, not yet discussed. Study the hand a bit and come up with a better way to play the board.

While you think, I'll enjoy the fourth movement of the Mahler 4th. I heard this in Chicago with the great Kiri Te Kanawa, but here we hear her successor and equally radiant Renée Fleming:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zq-LHtwxNyY>

Wir geniessen die himmlische Freuden, d'rums thun wir das Irdische meiden. Kein weltlich' Getümmel hört man nicht im Himmel! Lebt Alles in sanftester Ruh! Wir führen ein englisches Leben! Sind dennoch ganz lustig daneben! Wir tanzen und springen, wir hüpfen und singen!	"We enjoy the heavenly delights, therefore do we shun the earthly. No worldly tumult is heard in heaven! All live in balmiest peace! We lead an angelic life! But we are quite merry at the same time! We dance and skip, we frisk and sing!
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The sentiments are a bit dated, but you can't fault Mahler for that. He wrote for his time, and his music lives for all time.

Have an answer?

Try this: run all 6 clubs and watch the discards. One player or another might accidentally discard a diamond. Or, quite likely, you have a squeeze here and a player will be forced to unguard hearts in order to keep four diamonds. In other words, play out the hand before you commit to making the diamonds divide 3-3. Here was the full hand:

	♠10 ♥102 ♦AK52 ♣AQJ642	
♠AQ752 ♥QJ7 ♦J1083 ♣7		♠KJ43 ♥8643 ♦96 ♣1083
	♠986 ♥AK95 ♦Q74 ♣K95	

It gets complicated, but even with perfect defense you are going to prevail. You can play it

out to see, but suffice it for now that West is likely to discard a diamond. When that happens, you score 0 spades, 2 hearts, four diamonds, and 6 clubs. If West keeps parity in diamonds and discards a heart, you will score 0 spades, three hearts, 3 diamonds, and 6 clubs. If West is clever enough to discard 5 spades, you are in a tough game and better not be playing for big money. However, you can still do it: play 4 diamonds. West wins the fourth one and must start the hearts from QJ7, leading into your 10-2 opposite AK95...and once again you score 3 hearts to go with 3 diamonds and 6 clubs.

The object is to force the opponents into a play that works for you. Don't commit to the 3-3 diamond play until you must. If you need the diamonds to be 3-3, they will still be that way later. Play the clubs and hearts first!

By the way: if defenders cash a spade and lead a second one, you ruff and commence the same line of play. But now West has only 3 spades, so the squeeze is just as effective. West can't lead spades and then discard those same spades later, so West must come up with other discards and you still come home with some combination of 12 tricks in the other three suits.

See you at the table. Squeeze someone other than me, please.