

Board of the Week 76

By Dick Chapman

In my classes I urge declarers to stop at Trick 1 and work out what they intend to do for the entire board before calling the first card. We do this for two reasons. First, it helps us develop a plan or plans and thus score more tricks. A second benefit is this: if you study every hand, not just the ones where there is a problem, you don't signal to opponents when you do in fact have a problem. If they are thinking about what to have for supper, you don't want to wake them up. Finally, don't discuss the auction. It's rude to defenders trying to analyze, it doesn't nothing productive for your planning, and it can easily give away information to the defenders. A polite "thank you, partner" is all you need. Not "where is the hand you had during the auction???" Or "I told you I had a spade fit, why are we in no trump?"

Today's board is a good example of not practicing what I preach.

♠QJ9 ♥KQ10972 ♦AK87 ♣	V: B D: E	♠A32 ♥86 ♦Q953 ♣AK54	
East	South	West	North
1♦	Pass	1♥	Pass
1NT*	Pass	2♦*	Pass
2NT	Pass	4♥	All pass

1NT was alerted ("partner might have four spades"). 2 diamonds was alerted ("artificial, game forcing, checking back for a heart fit or four spades in partner's hand").

As West, you get the 4 of spades as the lead. Take it from here. It looks easy, doesn't it? You expect the king of spades to be in North so you duck around to your queen. What's this? South had the spade king. You survived a second spade, lucky to not get ruffed. Now two top clubs to discard a good spade and a maybe-not-good diamond. Lead a heart up to the king, which holds. Back to the diamond queen and lead another heart up. South wins the ace and leads a third spade. You are lucky to score this in hand and draw the last trump, making 5 fairly easily.

So why is this a Board of the Week? You got a 22% on the board, that's why. Maybe you should have sweated a little bit. Where did you go wrong?

Where you (that would be "I," of course, since it was I who got that 22% score) went wrong was you didn't count your tricks.

Yes, it looks like a free finesse into your J9 tenace and thus three spade tricks. That 4 sure looks like low from the king. But it could be low from the ten. Even worse, it could be a singleton (South might have K10xxxx and not be willing to make a vulnerable preempt). Further,

what did you plan to do with the ace-king of clubs? Discard diamonds?

The correct play is the ace of spades, then ace-king of clubs to discard two spades. Now lead a heart up to the king. If the king holds, that diamond queen is still there for an entry. A second heart up and you are on your way to 12 tricks if the cards behave. You need the ace of hearts to be in South (or the jack dropping somewhere, or both) and the diamonds to be 3-2. Here's the full board:

♠QJ9 ♥KQ10972 ♦AK87 ♣	♠10874 ♥J5 ♦J106 ♣Q863	♠A32 ♥86 ♦Q953 ♣AK54
♠K65 ♥A43 ♦42 ♣J10972		

We were the only pair to get the spade 4 as the opening lead. Well done, Dan...you fooled me. But I shouldn't fall for this lead in any case, as the analysis above shows. On any lead the play is the same: ace of spades, 2 spades on the clubs, lead a heart up the king, back to the diamond queen, and lead another heart up. Easy. If, if, if you think about your tricks before jumping to conclusions.

See you at the table. Next time I will follow my own advice and think. Maybe.