

Board of the Week 87

By Dick Chapman

Have you ever noticed that the big dogs seem to get card combinations right better than us mortal players? Part of this is experience, of course. Part of it mental acuity. Much has to do with the use of time. We all have the same 7 minutes to play a board, but the pros seem to use their 7 minutes to better advantage than I do.

As East, you deal this set of cards:

♠KQ87	♠J4
♥A843	♥K10652
♦63	♦KQ
♣KQ3	♣A875

The auction is simple enough: 1H-2NT*-4H. You get a diamond lead and win the second diamond. It looks easy, doesn't it? You will lose a spade, so it's making 4 or 5 depending on whether the hearts are breaking 2-2 or not.

So you plunge into the heart suit at trick 3.

Wait a minute! Before you plunge into the heart suit, I recommend you do some thinking. In every case, think about the *gestalt* of the entire hand. What's going on? What are the opponents up to, if anything? What could go wrong? All of this you do at trick 1, so as to keep the opponents from know what it is that may (or may not) be bothering you. Don't wait until Trick 4 or 5 to do your thinking!

So, what could go wrong? Hearts could be 4-0, that's what. This is a small but measurably possibility. About 10% of the time the suit will indeed break 4-0.

So that's the first step: isolate the problem. Realize that if the suit breaks 2-2, you make an overtrick. If it breaks 3-1, you make 10 tricks and move to the next board. Spend the next few moments considering a 4-0 break. It may be automatic to you, but work it out anyway, if for no other reason than practice as you read this article.

The first step is to see what is missing: QJ97. The second step is to determine whether you can recover in those 10% of cases where the suit is 4-0. First, put all four cards in the South hand. Knowing you have two pointy losers, can you hold your heart losers to 1 if the suit looks like this?

♥A843	♥	♥K10652
	♥QJ97	

No, you cannot. Even with x-ray vision, you are going to lose 2 heart tricks, as your 10 is going to be a loser. "Sorry partner, I can't make it." "No problem, partner, it was 5% that all four would be in the South hand. Next board."

Now consider whether you can hold the heart losers to 1 if all the cards are in North:

	♥QJ97	
♥A843		♥K10652
	♥	

Yes, you can hold the losers to 1 in this case. How?

Lead low toward the ace. If everyone follows, it's 10 or 11 tricks, as stated earlier. If North is out, you aren't making this contract. If South is out, you are still in the game. Win the ace and lead a heart back. North will split honors (or not) and you win. Then back to dummy and lead a third heart up. That beautiful 10 in your hand will gobble up one of the remaining 2 cards in North. North will win exactly one heart trick and the contract comes in.

As I said, the above analysis may have been automatic to you. You hold A843 in one hand and K10652 in the other...it makes some sort of sense to go up to the ace and back toward your K10. But even if it's not automatic, you can work it out. IF you didn't waste 3 minutes discussing the prior board and IF the pair you are following didn't take 18 minutes on the previous round and you are in sort of a rush.

This is the point where I remind readers to not be thieves. Time is the stolen goods, so to speak. When you take minutes that belongs to other players, they don't have those minutes to play good bridge...they tend to rush and otherwise feel pressure to catch up. It's just not fair. So, be a good bridge citizen: take your time, every second of it, but don't take minutes that belong to someone else. Ok, end of sermon.

Back to the main point. Visualize the holdings and ask what could go wrong. Then work out what you can do about it. Understand, of course, that sometimes at matchpoints you take reasonably small risks in order to make overtricks. But in this week's board, there is no risk...you must only take into account the possible layout and then play the suit to take advantage of an unfavorable break.

Again: Stop at trick 1. Make your plan. Ask what could go wrong. Ask whether there is a countermeasure. I again encourage readers to do this on every board, even it's a very simple line of play. You do this to hide the problems when they do come up. If you stop and think only when there is a problem, the opponents will wake up and start thinking themselves. But if you stop on every board, some of your opponents will remain peacefully asleep. Good for you...let them rest while you play good bridge.

See you at the club. When you are there, smile and bring some cheer into the building. Let's keep LRDBC the happy place it has been for many, many years.