

# MOUNTNESSING BRIDGE CLUB

Meets every Thursday at 7.25 for 7.30  
at Mountnessing Village Hall, Roman Road, Mountnessing, Essex, England, CM15 0UG

## “2020” Comments on “RED FACES FOR THE DEFENCE”

Submission by Nick Hunt: [Click here](#)

Commentary by Alaric Cundy

Firstly, it is worth reminding readers that anybody can download the *Bridge Solver* analytical tool for free, and use it to analyse different Declarer plays and / or defences, on any hand of their choosing – such as this one! To access ‘Bridge Solver Online’ go to this link: <https://mirgo2.co.uk/bridgesolver/upload.htm>.

There are, perhaps, two different things to explore on this hand:

1. How could the Defenders have avoided their red faces?
2. How could North / South have avoided the issue in the first place?

### Avoiding red faces

It comes as no surprise that *Bridge Solver* confirms that the maximum number of tricks that NS can make in a no-trump contract is 7.

West should be thinking carefully about the defence *before selecting the opening lead* and reasoning that, assuming that the opponents’ bidding has been sensible, then clearly partner has at most 2 HCPs. This event is match-pointed pairs, and what West really needs to do is to find a lead that is not going to concede a cheap trick. West can count in his hand: one certain trick in clubs, one, possibly two, tricks in spades, depending where the Ace lies, and a possibility of a diamond, again, essentially dependent on the location of the Ace. The bidding points to a Club lead, as indeed West selected at the table. There is no question that the opening lead should be a small club rather than, say, the Ace, as West needs to keep a measure of control of the hand.

Trick 1 is very revealing. Dummy’s Queen wins the trick, partner encourages as strongly as he could, and Declarer follows small. What is going on? West must now all-but know that Declarer holds the King of Clubs. 3NT would have been an insane bid without it, and there is not ‘room’ for as much as a King in partner’s hand.

Advance to trick 3, and West is back on lead. In my view, there is no way that a small club can be right! At Teams of Four, the choice is clear-cut: the indication is that partner has a long club suit, most probably headed by the Jack; Ace followed by an other Club, and hope, looks to be almost routine. At Pairs, there is a risk that Declarer started with Kxx of Clubs, and so leading A, x of clubs at tricks 3 / 4 now concedes a precious over-trick.

It is time to count Declarer’s tricks! From the bidding, Declarer is marked with four hearts; West can see 3 in his own hand, 3 in Dummy, so, again, assuming South’s bidding was sane, there are 4 heart tricks, 4 diamonds, the Club already in the bag, plus the Ace of spades – ten in total. I think there is a case for leading a top spade, just to make sure that Declarer doesn’t do any better than ten tricks.

It’s time to pass comment about the East / West carding methods. Personally, on balance I much prefer reverse attitude signals on partner’s lead – as East / West were playing in this example. There is a rival school of thought that suggests that *count* signals are better. On this particular hand, I have to concede that count signals would have given better chance of success for the Defenders, though the situation is still a bit ambiguous for West: did East start with 4 or 6

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clubs? If the partnership has some means of fine-tuning their count signals to distinguish high / low as showing 2, 4, or 6, then they ought to get it right.

My conclusion is that things are not that easy or clear-cut for West at Pairs Bridge – but conceding 11 tricks *really should not happen!!!*

### How could North / South avoid the issue?

Firstly, it should be said that 3NT is not *too terrible* a contract on the North / South cards. Had the diamond finesse worked, nine tricks would be certain. Also, perhaps South was a psychologist, and reasoned that, courtesy of the confident jump to 3NT, West might have been left with the impression that South had a good holding in Clubs and was hoping for the 'obvious' club lead. Clearly, on a non-club lead Declarer will make at least nine tricks. But on the other hand, it could well be argued that freely choosing to play in a contract that should go two off is not sound Bridge!

An obvious alternative slot to think about is 5D. However, that contract is not only dependent on the diamond finesse, it also requires the spade honours to be split, or both with West, so it is actually slightly inferior to the "doomed" 3NT. Having said that, it does make ten tricks, so would have scored better than 3NT-2.

What about the NS bidding? Nobody will take issue with the first three North / South bids, but the sudden leap to 3NT can be challenged. Why the rush? I think that South's second bid ought to be 2C – force suit forcing. Now North has the opportunity to indicate the 5-4-3-1 shape of the hand by bidding 2H, confirming secondary support. Having found out that there is a singleton Club in the North hand, surely South will steer clear of the doomed (?) 3NT contract? In fact despite the 4-3 fit, 4H is a very good resting place – though as *Bridge Solver* confirms, it does require Declarer to play the contract carefully.

After the sequence suggested, West should find a trump lead at trick 1. There is a risk of conceding a spade ruff if Declarer's timing is at fault, in addition to the three natural losers of a Spade, a Diamond, and a Club.

My favoured line of play would be to take three rounds of trumps, finishing in Dummy. Look skywards and smile when they divide 3-3. Then run the Queen of Diamonds, which of course loses. It doesn't matter what West now plays – Declarer can collect four tricks in each red suit plus one in each black suit for ten in total. Note, however, that should West play a *small* black card, Declarer will make an overtrick.

With the 3-3 trump break, Bridge Solver confirms that there is no defence to 4H, not even a potentially awkward Ace of clubs, club continuation, as Declarer still has a trump when the potentially contract-beating third Club is later led by the Defenders. [Try it on *Bridge Solver*.]

It is interesting to note that the alternative 4-3 major suit fit can be held to nine tricks so long as the Defence attack Clubs; if the hand is played by North, a Club lead is automatic. The problem is caused by the 4-2 spade break, though West needs to be alert to seize the opportunity. Trick 1 goes J, 6, A, Q; the key play now is that West has to return a Club – the 'free' discard is of no use to Declarer. Play it out using *Bridge Solver* and you will verify that Declarer has to lose four tricks in total (or even more if he is careless).