"2020" Comments on "A FINE SLAM - A FINE PLAY...."
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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.

The first thing to note is that Bridge Solver confirms that either 6D or 6H fails if played from the *North* hand, because now East has the opportunity to lead a heart. Curiously, against a No Trump contract, East must lead a *top* heart, but against a Diamond contract, North can be held to 10 tricks if a *small heart* is led. Against either contract, a heart lead from East takes out the heart entry to the North hand too early, and against diamonds, additionally gives West a first-round ruff, of course.

Anyway, back to 6NT by South. As Frank admits, it is a slightly fortunate contract, as if diamonds break 4-2, the hand falls apart, unless the doubleton is precisely J, 10.

First of all, we ought to look at West's choice of opening lead. From the bidding, from West's point of view, initial thoughts might be that partner has six spades ….. but wait a minute, with the heart void, surely, if partner has spades, then would not NS be playing the hand in hearts, as they must have at least 9 cards between them, and probably 10 or more? The lead of a top club carries risks; North *could hold* Jxx, in which case, that Jack might just provide Declarer's 12th trick.

There might be something to be said for leading the Jack of Spades. Bridge Solver confirmss that on that lead the contract becomes considerably *easier* to play. Assuming that trick one goes J, Q, K, A, all Declarer now has to do is test the Diamonds, then knock out the 10 of spades, and there is a trick to spare without any squeezes or other fancy plays. As the cards lie, the lead of a top club gives South more to think about.

So how do we plan to play it? As is the case on any hand, South must count the tricks available before even playing a card from Dummy. In terms of top tricks, there are only 7, and to get anywhere near to making the contract, we have to assume that the diamonds will provide 7 tricks, taking the total up to 11. A long running suit, plus one trick too few, usually suggests that a squeeze play may be available. The first important thing to do is to recognise where your threatened 12th trick might come from, and the candidates are, in your own hand, the Jack of Clubs, and in Dummy the Queen of Spades and the Ten of Hearts.

As Frank points out, it is also important to place the outstanding top cards – the key ones being the King of Clubs, King of Spades, and the Queen and Jack of Hearts. Most East / West pairs in the room will more than likely have been playing some form of Benji system, and hence most East hands will have clarified things a bit by opening two of their major suit. Frank faced ambiguity in terms of East's distribution: collectively, EW have six spades and six hearts: (at least) one of those suits breaks 6-0, but it isn't obvious which one.

Another golden rule is always to listen to and absorb any opposition bidding. The weak 2 opening from East actually *helps*. Frank reasoned things well to deduce that given that the opening lead suggests that West must hold the King of Clubs, so unless East's bid was a

psyche or under-value opening, then East must have the King of Spades plus at least one of the top hearts. We have now thought enough to play to the first trick!

It might be helpful to follow the play using Bridge Solver. Declarer must win trick one – otherwise West now switches to the Jack of Spades and the squeeze / throw-in is broken. Next come the top three diamonds – and a huge sense of relief. Another important detail – note that West had held the Jack of Diamonds, so therefore West's top heart holding, if the overall strength is 6+, must include the Queen. Continue with the remaining 4 diamonds, and watch and count the opponent's discards very carefully.

Seeing the potential importance of his spade holding, West might well part with 4 small clubs. Dummy needs to keep Q9 of Spades, and AKT of hearts. East doesn't have much choice: he can't afford to bare his King of spades (but see below!!!), nor can he leave his Queen of Hearts unguarded, so he has to discard 3 hearts and a spade. Again, note the fine detail. East has thrown 3 hearts, and additionally is known to be holding the Queen. East has already played 3 diamonds and a club; if he started with only the 4 hearts he is now pinpointed with, then there was only room for 5 spades, and hence the 2D opening was indeed a psyche! Assuming not, East must have started with 6 hearts. Unless East has shown the most amazing and brazen defence, his last 5 cards must be Kx of spades and QJ9 of hearts. So A, K, other heart is a marked winning play by Declarer.

Of course, had East been able to come down to *singleton* King of spades, QJ9 of hearts, and a small club, he may well have been the player who wanted to highlight this hand!!!!!!! Seriously, this point also illustrates a lesson for the Defenders: if you can see that you are going to have to find several discards, throw the chosen cards in a completely random order so as to not give Declarer any avoidable help. For example, West's four clubs could be played, say, 5, 6, !0, 3, rather than lazily 'up the line'. Throwing them 'up the line' will scream out to an observant Declarer that you started with KQT9 and three more, confirming that East had started with a singleton…..

But, huge congratulations to Frank, who, without the benefit of *Bridge Solver* available at the table, reasoned the hand through to perfection!