

## Don't Panic!

I thought board 15 from today's match against Staffs and Shrops was instructive:

	♠ AQ10985	
	♥ —	
	♦ AQ102	
	♣ K84	
♠ 72		♠ J63
♥ AQJ1076		♥ K943
♦ 7		♦ KJ8
♣ AQ97		♣ J63
	♠ K4	
	♥ 852	
	♦ 96543	
	♣ 1052	

At most tables, EW played in hearts – sometimes at the 4-level, sometimes at the 5-level after NS bid 4S. But 3 tables played 4S from the North hand. How should the play go on a heart lead?

All 3 N players ruffed and played on spades, but they approached the suit slightly differently. One crossed to SK and immediately finessed DQ, losing to the K, and another heart came back. After ruffing and drawing trumps, declarer played DA followed by D10. Another declarer played SA followed by a spade to K, and then finessed DQ, transposing to the same position when a heart was returned. The third declarer drew all 3 rounds of trumps, and then found they were in the wrong hand to play diamonds effectively. Never mind, it didn't make much difference with the diamond honours offside, and declarer played A and another diamond. But he compounded his error by played D2 on the second round, failing to unblock the suit, and now dummy's 5<sup>th</sup> diamond was never a threat and the defence was simple.

What about the two tables where declarer not only tried a diamond finesse, but then played DA (in case the suit broke 2-2) and continued with D10 on the third round? Now dummy's 5<sup>th</sup> diamond was very much in the picture, and the spotlight was on East. Both defenders could see a discard coming on the diamonds, and looked no further than a club switch. But declarer could win the second club with the K and still discard his other club loser on the last diamond.

What should East have done? The first important thing is not to panic! The second important thing is to do a bit of counting. What do you know about declarer's shape? He started with 6 spades, no hearts and 4 diamonds. All these suits are confirmed by one or other of the closed hands showing out. So East knows for sure that declarer has 3 clubs. If he discards one on the 5<sup>th</sup> diamond, he will still have two left, and if he has two cashable club losers at the point East is in with the 3<sup>rd</sup> diamond he will still have two club losers after discarding one. So there is absolutely no need to play a club now. Can it cost? Absolutely! Visualise what declarer has left. He has drawn 3 rounds of trumps and has ruffed two hearts, so he only has one trump left. If East calmly continues with a third heart, declarer will have to ruff with his last trump. Now declarer can take a discard on the 5<sup>th</sup> diamond, but when he plays a club West will be able to rise with CA and cash a heart winner, and declarer never makes his CK.

As so often, counting declarer's shape and tricks can save you from taking an unnecessary risk. It might be right to switch to a club after East wins their first diamond trick. Picture the CA and CK the other way round, for instance – now you need to set up two club tricks before declarer can set up the diamonds. But it can never be necessary for East to switch to a club after winning their second diamond trick....