

Hi everyone – It’s Roger Heath-Brown here.

My wife and I live in Garsington, and Lockdown has been relatively kind to us there. We have plenty of countryside walks to choose from, right from our front door, and plenty of friends that we can talk to from a safe distance. No-one we know has tested positive for the Coronavirus.

Much of our time has been spent working in our two gardens. Why two? In early March we bought another house in Garsington, planning to have it renovated before selling the current house and moving in towards the end of the summer. Of course there has been no progress with selling the old house, but we have had fair sized gardens in both houses to work on. Lockdown has been no holiday!

I’ve been playing a certain amount of bridge through Bridge Base Online. I’ve had a couple of sessions a week of “Kitchen Bridge” style social bridge (what BBO calls “Casual - Relaxed Bridge Club”), while sharing a joint WhatsApp call. Not all my partners are fully up to speed on their bidding, which makes it a challenge, but it’s good to have some social interaction.

I’ve also been playing “Solitaire” bridge on BBO, with three robot players. They play fast, and one can get through a lot of hands in a short space of time, but equally they allow you to think for as long as you want when necessary.

♠ AKJ8	♠ Q5432
♥ AJ6	♥ 10743
♦ AJ95	♦ Q6
♣ A6	♣ J5

Here’s a deal I rather messed up. Can you do better?

I was West, and the bidding is easy: 2N – 3C (Stayman) – 3S - 4S, and North leads the ♠ 10. It is total points scoring, so I don’t care much about overtricks. Before reading on, plan how you would play this.

If the trumps are no worse than 3-1 things are easy. For example, I can draw trumps in 3 rounds and flush out ♦ K. I can then dump East’s other diamond and losing club on ♦ A & ♦ J. West’s remaining diamond and club can then be ruffed in dummy, losing only two hearts and ♦ K.

But South shows out of trumps at trick 1. So I tried the same line as above, but without drawing any more trumps. That is to say, I won the opening lead in my hand, played a small diamond to the queen, losing to the king, and won the diamond return, reaching

♠ AK8	♠ Q543
♥ AJ6	♥ 10743
♦ J9	♦ -
♣ A6	♣ J5

My plan was to cash  $\heartsuit J$  and  $\clubsuit A$ , throwing dummy's clubs; ruff a club, cross back with a trump, ruff a diamond, cash  $\spadesuit Q$ , cross back to hand with  $\heartsuit A$ , and concede the last two hearts.

But when I play  $\heartsuit J$  North ruffs, and I over-ruff with the queen.

$\spadesuit$ AK8	$\spadesuit$ 543
$\heartsuit$ AJ6	$\heartsuit$ 10743
$\diamondsuit$ 9	$\diamondsuit$ -
$\clubsuit$ A6	$\clubsuit$ J5

Requiring 7 more tricks, I'm going to need 2 from the heart suit. I'm sure I went wrong at this point. If I lead a heart towards the  $\heartsuit AJ$ , and cash the ace on the next round of hearts, I will make two tricks if South has a singleton or doubleton honour, or both honours, or 4 small – roughly 42% of the time. But instead I draw the last two trumps and lead a small heart to the ten, losing to the king. A club comes back, which I win.

$\spadesuit$ 8	$\spadesuit$ 5
$\heartsuit$ AJ	$\heartsuit$ 743
$\diamondsuit$ 9	$\diamondsuit$ -
$\clubsuit$ 6	$\clubsuit$ J

Things don't look good - I'm now hoping that the  $\heartsuit Q$  will fall under my ace; or maybe I should cross to dummy with a diamond ruff and finesse in hearts? Putting off the evil as long as possible, and giving the opponents a chance to go wrong, I exit with a club – and to my surprise and delight, North wins and returns a heart into my tenace. Ten tricks bid & made!

With 5 cards left, North held  $\spadesuit$ : -,  $\heartsuit$ : Q98,  $\diamondsuit$ : -,  $\clubsuit$ : KQ. Having been put in with the  $\clubsuit K$ , the robot should have exited with  $\clubsuit Q$ , rather than leading away from the  $\heartsuit Q$ . But maybe it was afraid of giving a ruff-and-discard?

The full hand was

	$\spadesuit$ 10976	
	$\heartsuit$ Q985	
	$\diamondsuit$ 42	
	$\clubsuit$ KQ9	
$\spadesuit$ AKJ8		$\spadesuit$ Q5432
$\heartsuit$ AJ6		$\heartsuit$ 10743
$\diamondsuit$ AJ95		$\diamondsuit$ Q6
$\clubsuit$ A6		$\clubsuit$ J5
	$\spadesuit$ -	
	$\heartsuit$ K2	
	$\diamondsuit$ K10873	
	$\clubsuit$ 1087432	

The alternative play in hearts, leading low towards AJ would indeed have netted the two tricks I wanted – without needing the robots to misplay!

I'd be interested to hear if anyone has alternative lines of play to suggest. This one has been bugging me for some time now.

Best wishes to all,

Roger Heath-Brown