

Summertown Monday Bulletin No. 27

“DOUBLE DUMMY” (AND THE BBO HISTORY TAB)

This bulletin is going to be mainly about a double dummy problem – so if you don’t play on BBO, don’t stop reading! But for those of you who do play online, it may also help you to find out more about how to use the analysis available via the “History” tab.

First of all, in case there’s anyone who doesn’t already know, let me explain that “Double Dummy” means you are able to see, not just your own hand and dummy’s, but all four hands.

When we used to play face-to-face (sigh!), at the end of the evening you could pick up a hand record and, as well as showing all the cards for each hand, you could see what the computer thought was the best score that could be made by both sides playing in each suit and in NT. Usually it was easy to see how you could have played or defended the hand so as to reach the optimum score, but very occasionally you might look at the cards and think “How on earth could you make that many tricks?” If you’ve ever spent time puzzling through one of these hands, you’ve been doing a Double Dummy problem.

The screenshot displays a hand record for a 7NT contract. The dealer is North, and the optimum score is EW 7N. The cards for each player are as follows:

- North (Dealer): ♠ 3 2, ♥ 3 2, ♦ K 10 4 2, ♣ K 8 6 3 2
- West: ♠ K J 9 5, ♥ A K Q 9 5, ♦ 9 7, ♣ A Q
- East: ♠ A Q 10 8, ♥ 8 4, ♦ A Q 8 6 5, ♣ 10 5
- South: ♠ 7 6 4, ♥ J 10 7 6, ♦ J 3, ♣ J 9 7 4

The trick count table shows 19 tricks for West and 3 for South. The card layout diagram shows the distribution of cards in each suit:

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	-	-	-	-	-
S	-	-	-	-	-
E	2	5	7	7	7
W	2	5	7	7	7

Here’s a hand that Krys and I played on BBO in a recent Thursday evening County pairs session (these are open, by the way, to anyone who’s a member of the County, which we all are – and if you don’t think you’re good enough, that’s not an excuse, as there’s now a separate “Nine high” section for less highly rated players).

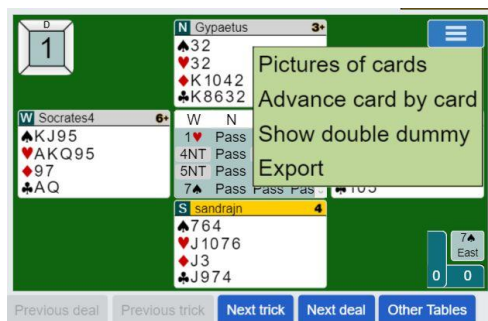
The computer says you can make 7NT with these cards, but most of us would probably stop at 6♠, and be grateful when one of the two minor-suit finesses works. However, let’s suppose that you’ve had a somewhat optimistic auction and got yourself – as our opponents Robert Procter and John Deech did – into 7♠, played by East.

Assuming South has led a trump, how can you make all 13 tricks? At the table, without seeing all four hands, it’s not at all obvious what would work, and the contract went down. Indeed, with the benefit of X-ray vision, you can see that the club finesse is wrong, and nor do the hearts conveniently break 3-3. Doesn’t look good, does it?

The diamond finesse is right, though, and that gives us a clue. You can do it by setting up the diamonds, as long as you play carefully. As Robert explained, in his post-match commentary: *Win the opening lead in dummy and immediately take the diamond finesse. Cash the diamond Ace, ruff a diamond, return to hand with a trump and ruff another diamond. Now play two top hearts, ruff the third round in hand, draw the last trump and enjoy the established long diamond. Finally, cross back to dummy with the club Ace and take the third top heart, discarding your losing club.* Simple when you know how!

But could the contract be made any other way – for example, could you afford to draw trumps first, then test the hearts? As a matter of fact, you could. How do we know? Ah! This is where the BBO “History” tab comes into its own.

When you're logged in to BBO, somewhere on your screen – on a desktop it's down the right-hand side – there will be four tabs, labelled "Messages", "People", "History" and "Account". If you're not actually playing in an event, clicking on the "History" tab will bring up a list of all the events you've played in recently. Pick one, and you can see all the hands you played, with your percentage score for each one. (If you're actually playing at the time, History will show you all the hands you've played so far, and will also give you an extra tab to show the results achieved so far at other tables.)



Now look at an individual hand and you'll see that somewhere within that box – probably top right, or top left – there's a little blue rectangle with three white lines inside it (the BBO menu box). Click on that, and you'll get four options, including "Advance card by card" and "Show double dummy". First of all, let's choose "Show double dummy".



Each card held by the hand on lead will now show whether, with that lead, and on best play by both sides, the contract can either just make (shown by =, as here), or make overtricks (a number in a green circle), or undertricks (a number in a red circle). This can be very reassuring if you've just gone off, as it can tell you that your contract shouldn't ever make. But of course, it might also tell you that you could have made it if you'd played differently!

And this is where the option "Advance card by card" comes in. Click on that one, and then on "Next card" in the blue boxes at the bottom, and you'll see the hand step through card by card, exactly as it was played at your table. Plus – and this is the really good bit! – the same little circles appear both on each card played and, at the end of each trick, on each card in the hand on lead, showing what the outcome would be if a different card had been played at any stage.



Now we'll look again at how this 7♠ contract might have been made in a different way.

At the point shown here, all the trumps have been drawn and the top three hearts have been played, throwing a club from hand. The lead is in dummy. If you look carefully at the cards left in that hand, you'll see that the double dummy analysis is telling you that although the hearts haven't broken 3-3, and taking the diamond finesse now will give you only 12 tricks, there is

still a way to make the contract: by leading another heart. You have to ruff it, of course. Next you return to dummy with a club, play the last heart which is now good, and then – key play, as Andrew Robson would say! – you put your last trump on the table. Have you been following North's cards? North will now be down to Kx of clubs, and K10x of diamonds, and has no spare card left – it's a genuine squeeze. If North releases a club, declarer can cash ♣AQ and then take the winning diamond finesse for the last two tricks. If North instead throws a diamond, declarer takes the diamond finesse, plays the ♦A dropping the J, and can throw ♣Q on the ♦8. Neat, huh?

And now for the final question: on this same hand, how can you make 13 tricks in NT, with no ruffs available? See if you can work it out yourself before you go on to the next page.

The answer is:

Playing in NT, you need to make all 5 heart tricks by finessing against the J10. If you do this, and also play off your four spade tricks, North is going to have to find five discards and will be squeezed in the minor suits, in the same way as already described.

No one says these plays are easy to find at the table – they aren't! But the mental exercise of working out the line of play needed can be very satisfying 😊

Lastly, if you're playing on BBO, and you're not yet using the History tab, I do urge you to give it a try. Going over hands that you've recently played is one of the best ways to improve, and BBO certainly provides some very handy tools to help you do this.

And one final thought to leave you with (specially those of you with impenetrable BBO aliases!)



Sandra Nicholson, Sept. 2020