

Let's start with a double-dummy problem from Board 4.

	♠ K6	
	♥ AK642	
	♦ K7	
	♣ K1093	
♠ J84		♠ A
♥ J53		♥ Q10987
♦ Q52		♦ A1063
♣ Q654		♣ A82
	♠ Q1097532	
	♥ -	
	♦ J984	
	♣ J7	

At three tables this was played in Spades, by South, and 8, 9, and 10 tricks were taken. When the opening lead was a Heart it was natural for declarer to cash Dummy's honours and begin trumps by leading ♠ 6 from dummy. This would restrict the trump losers to one, but Declarer still needs some work, or some luck, to gather 10 tricks.

However if Declarer first gets the lead in the South hand it is natural to begin trumps by playing small to the King. This wins if the outstanding trumps are 2-2, or the Jack is singleton, or if West has the bare Ace. But on the night Declarer loses three Aces and ♠ J.

Playing double-dummy though, it looks as if Declarer can restrict the trump losers to one, and take two Club tricks to go with six trumps and Dummy's top Hearts. However the computer says that the Defence can always restrict Declarer to 9 tricks. Can you see how?

I'll come back to that later, but first let's look at a hand where I am still disappointed with myself for going wrong. It's Board 1, where I played in 1NT as South.

♠ KJ63
♥ K98
♦ J8
♣ A642
♠ A84
♥ 1075
♦ K1054
♣ J73

West began with ♥ 4. I ducked in Dummy, and East won with the Jack, and returned a second Heart which West won with the Ace. West then played a third Heart, won by dummy's King, East following.

I now tried the ♦ J from Dummy. West won with the Queen, and cashed the last Heart. I threw Clubs from both hands on this, while East discarded a Spade. West then continued with ♦ A and ♦ 3 (not best). On ♦ 3, I discarded another Club from dummy, and East followed with ♦ 9. Here is the position now, with South to play.

♠ KJ63
♥ -
♦ -
♣ A6
♠ A84
♥ -
♦ K
♣ J7

Next came ♦ K, on which I threw a Spade from Dummy, while East discarded a Club. When I led ♣ 7 to Dummy's Ace, East played ♣ Q.

What's going on here? How should I have continued? I've taken 4 tricks so far, and need 3 more.

We know there are only Spades and Clubs left. East appears to have either 4 spades left, or 3 spades plus ♣K. Would East really have thrown a Club from Q x when I played ♦K, in order to keep 4 Spades? Sure enough, the situation was:-

	♠ KJ6	
	♥ -	
	♦ -	
	♣ 6	
♠ 75		♠ Q109
♥ -		♥ -
♦ -		♦ -
♣ 98		♣ K
	♠ A84	
	♥ -	
	♦ -	
	♣ J	

All I had to do was exit with ♣J, and East would have been end-played to give me the last 3 tricks. But sadly, I failed to read the position and went one off.

I'm still kicking myself!

Let's go back to that double-dummy problem. I eventually gave up on it myself, and used the double-dummy facility on BBO. Did you know you can play through hands from the SBC website using BBO? Underneath the hand display, click on "play it again" and select BBO if necessary. You can then play through the hand by clicking "Play" in the pop-up window, and use the double-dummy version "GiB" if you want.

In order to restrict Declarer to 9 tricks West must start with a low Diamond. Dummy ducks, and East can only succeed by inserting the 10! This prevents Declarer from winning in Dummy. Suppose now that Declarer plays low trumps from both hands so that East has to play ♠A "on air".

	♠ K	
	♥ AK642	
	♦ K	
	♣ K1093	
♠ J8		♠ -
♥ J53		♥ Q10987
♦ Q5		♦ A63
♣ Q654		♣ A82
	♠ Q109753	
	♥ -	
	♦ 984	
	♣ J7	

Can you see now what East must do?

He cashes the two Aces and continues with a small Diamond. Dummy can ruff with ♠K, but then West will make ♠J.

Rather elegant I think!

Best wishes, and Good-Bye,  
Roger Heath-Brown