

This week I'm going to take a closer look at Board 16. Here are the East-West hands. West opened 1H at every table, and North came in, usually with 2H (Michaels, showing Spades and a minor). After that the bidding developed in various ways, but East-West always reached 4H. At some tables North-South went on to 4S or 5C (sometimes doubled), costing anything from 50 to 300. So, should 4H make?

♠ A10	♠ 9764
♥ AKJ86	♥ Q973
♦ QJ86	♦ A72
♣ K9	♣ 72

Of the four tables where the final contract was 4H, it went down 3 times, and was made just once (by Cliff Pavelin – Well done!). The ♠ K is led by North, and Declarer (West) sees one loser in Spades, one in Diamonds, and two potential losers in Clubs. The bidding suggests North holds Spades and Clubs, but it is not quite clear how strong his hand is. If South has ♣ A the contract is probably safe, but otherwise West must hope to keep South out of the lead – which will require ♦ K to be with North.

West wins the first Spade trick and takes a couple of rounds of trumps, North discarding two clubs. It looks as if North has something like 5035 distribution. We are hoping it is North who has the ♦ K, and fearing that he has ♣ A. So we envisage something like:-

	♠ QJxx	
	♥ -	
	♦ Kxx	
	♣ Axx	
♠ 10		♠ 976
♥ J86		♥ Q9
♦ QJ86		♦ A72
♣ K9		♣ 72
	♠ x	
	♥ 105	
	♦ xxx	
	♣ xxxxx	

Now there is only one card for West to lead which will save the contract. Can you see what it is?

Have a think before turning to the next page.

Only the ♠10 works. North will take the Queen, but has no good return.

	♠ Jxx	
	♥ -	
	♦ Kxx	
	♣ Axx	
♠ -		♠ 97
♥ J86		♥ Q9
♦ QJ86		♦ A72
♣ K9		♣ 72
	♠ -	
	♥ 105	
	♦ xxx	
	♣ xxxxx	

Obviously North cannot safely lead a Club.

Let's see what happens if he tries a low Spade. Dummy will play the 9, South will ruff, and Declarer will over-ruff. West can then draw the remaining trump with ♥J:-

	♠ Jx	
	♥ -	
	♦ Kxx	
	♣ Ax	
♠ -		♠ 7
♥ 8		♥ Q
♦ QJ86		♦ A72
♣ K9		♣ 72
	♠ -	
	♥ -	
	♦ xxx	
	♣ xxxxx	

It is now time for Declarer to set up the Diamonds. Suppose West starts with ♦Q, which North covers. It is tempting for Declarer to win the trick with Dummy's Ace, but that would be disastrous, since South might then be able to gain the lead on the third round of Diamonds and send a Club through Declarer's hand.

Instead, when North plays ♦K, Dummy must duck. Then two more rounds of Diamonds, starting with the Ace, will set up a Diamond winner in Declarer's hand, with a Spade ruff as entry if necessary.

Alternatively North might continue with ♠J after taking Declarer's ♠10. West ruffs, and Dummy's ♠9 has been set up. Now West can draw trumps putting pressure on the North hand. There are several possibilities. If North discards a Spade for example, Declarer can concede a trick to the ♦K, ending up with two Spade tricks, five Hearts, and three Diamonds.

This was a remarkably complicated hand, with lots of places where Declarer and Defenders could go wrong. However the experience on the night was that those North-Souths who left their opponents to play in 4H generally got a good score!

Roger Heath-Brown