

Today I've decided to take a closer look at Hand 3, where North-South hold:-

♠ 5
♥ Q83
♦ Q8753
♣ Q963
♠ A73
♥ AK2
♦ AJ4
♣ A872

A fortunate position in the two minor suits means that both 6♣ and 6♦ make, but unsurprisingly all 9 pairs ended up in 3N by South.

The play started the same way at every table. West led ♠K, ducked, and followed with ♠Q, which declarer usually also ducked. In fact West started with ♠K Q J 9 6 and East with ♠10 8 4 2. Should west continue with a third spade, or might declarer still hold ♠A 10? It isn't clear to me whether East can give partner any helpful signal, but in the event most Wests continued with ♠J, and the spotlight turns to East. Should East unblock by playing ♠10? That would look silly if declarer started with ♠A 9 7 3, but maybe West's play suggests a 5 card spade suit rather than just 4 cards. In fact only one East decided to unblock. (Well done Vivien!)

Declarer is now left with:-

♠ -
♥ Q83
♦ Q8753
♣ Q9
♠ -
♥ AK2
♦ AJ4
♣ A872

Several diamond tricks will be needed for the contract, so how should one tackle the suit? One approach is to cross to ♥Q and try the diamond finesse. If East has ♦K x this will bring in the suit without loss. However if the ♦K is trebleton declarer will have to give up a trick to the king, and will have no entry to dummy to cash the suit.

An alternative approach is to hope that the spades cannot be cashed when the defenders win ♦K. The spades might be blocked, or East might hold ♦K and have started with only three spades. In that case declarer can succeed by playing diamonds from their own hand, forcing out the King, and later using ♥Q as entry to dummy's winners.

One advantage of the first line, at match points, is that it produces an extra trick when it works. A second advantage is that, on the night, East does indeed have ♦K doubleton!

Overall then there are difficult decisions for West, East, and South, reflected in the scores. Well done to those who got it right!

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