

Summertown Bridge Bulletin, 19 April 2021

Nothing terribly noteworthy appeared to be happening last night, and we were wondering what to write about, until the last two rounds came along. In each of these there was a hand featuring a bad trump break, which always makes life difficult for declarer; and each needed to be dealt with in a different way. I'm sorry to say we were the declaring side on both of them and didn't get either of them right at the table: but hindsight is a wonderful thing, so here they are!

Dir: West Vul: E/W	♠ A K ♥ J 10 5 4 ♦ A K 10 7 3 2 ♣ 7	Optimum NS 3N+2: +460																																		
♠ Q 8 5 4 ♥ 6 ♦ Q J 9 4 ♣ A J 5 3	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="width: 15px;">W</td><td style="width: 30px; text-align: center;">NORTH</td><td style="width: 15px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">E</td><td style="text-align: center; font-size: 24px; font-weight: bold;">16</td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td style="text-align: center;">SOUTH</td><td style="text-align: center;">T</td></tr> </table>	W	NORTH	E	E	16	S	S	SOUTH	T	♠ 10 9 7 3 ♥ K 8 7 2 ♦ 8 ♣ 10 9 8 4																									
W	NORTH	E																																		
E	16	S																																		
S	SOUTH	T																																		
<table style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">15</td></tr> <tr><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">10</td><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">3</td></tr> <tr><td style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px;">12</td></tr> </table>	15	10	3	12	♠ J 6 2 ♥ A Q 9 3 ♦ 6 5 ♣ K Q 6 2	<table style="width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>♣</td><td>♦</td><td>♥</td><td>♠</td><td>N</td></tr> <tr><td>N</td><td>1</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>1</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>S</td><td>1</td><td>4</td><td>5</td><td>1</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>E</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td><td>-</td></tr> </table>		♣	♦	♥	♠	N	N	1	4	5	1	5	S	1	4	5	1	5	E	-	-	-	-	-	W	-	-	-	-	-
15																																				
10	3																																			
12																																				
	♣	♦	♥	♠	N																															
N	1	4	5	1	5																															
S	1	4	5	1	5																															
E	-	-	-	-	-																															
W	-	-	-	-	-																															

On Board 16, after North opened 1♦ and S replied 1♥, North counted losing tricks and raised straight to 4♥. South tried Blackwood and passed the 5♥ response.

After the lead of ♦Q, it looks as though 11 tricks should be makeable, and indeed the analysis confirms this is the case. But without the benefit of seeing all the hands, do you aim to set up the diamonds, or should you be trying for some sort of cross-ruff?

If you're playing in 4♥, as most pairs were, then you can afford to give up a diamond trick, because even if the ♥K is wrong, you will still make the contract (of course, you have to lose the ♣A as well). Playing in 5♥, it's not so easy. You can afford to lose only two tricks, so it looks as though your line of play will depend on whether you are going to lose a trump trick – in which case, you can't afford to give up a diamond as well as losing the ♣A.

So, you take the ♦A and run the ♥J. Hooray - it wins, so let's try that again. Oops – West shows out! Now what? Should you carry on till you've drawn all the trumps and hope that you can still make 5 tricks in diamonds – or should you now change tack, knock out the ♣A and go for the cross-ruff?

When there's a bad trump break, it's often right to stop drawing and start working on your side suits, keeping your trumps for control or ruffing. Here, though, a careful look at the entries and the holdings in the black suits indicates that even with no trumps left you won't lose control, as you have a double stop in both spades and clubs; and you still have two guaranteed entries to dummy in spades.

So the winning line is to finish drawing the trumps, ending in hand, finesse against West's (probable) ♦J and give up a diamond. You will also lose the ♣A, but that's all.

If you misguidedly decide to try for a cross-ruff, though, East can ruff your second top diamond and return a trump. Ouch!

Dlr: East
 Vul: N/S

♠ 6
 ♥ K 10 7 5 4 2
 ♦ J 8 7 5
 ♣ 4 2

Optimum
 NS 3H:
 +140

♠ J 4 3
 ♥ A J 9 6
 ♦ 6 3 2
 ♣ 10 8 6

WEST NORTH EAST
 SOUTH SOUTH EAST
 18

♠ A Q 10 8 2
 ♥ 8
 ♦ Q 10 4
 ♣ A 9 7 3

4
 6 12
 18

♠ K 9 7 5
 ♥ Q 3
 ♦ A K 9
 ♣ K Q J 5

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	-	3	3	-	1
S	-	3	3	-	1
E	1	-	-	1	-
W	-	-	-	1	-

And here's board 18. Looking at the analysis, best defence can always hold N/S to only 9 tricks in a heart contract. But if your lively bidding has landed you in 4♥ doubled, it would be very nice to make 10 tricks – and when East leads one of their Aces, you have a chance of doing just that.

How? Don't you always have to lose two Aces and two trump tricks?

Not necessarily. This is an example of a technique known as a "trump coup" or "trump reduction". It's not easy and needs very careful play but when it works, it's very elegant!

Let's say East leads off their two Aces and then leads a low spade. You win in dummy, throwing a small diamond, and play the Q♥, which holds. It was West who doubled, so you now play the other trump from dummy, aiming to finesse against the J: and indeed, your 10 wins.

You have now reached this position:

Declarer

♠ –

♥ K 7 5 4

♦ J 8 7

♣ 4

The lead is in your hand and you know that West still holds two trumps – the A and the J. If you had another trump left in dummy, you could lead small towards the K. Sadly, dummy is out of trumps; but you can achieve the same result by leading winners from dummy, as long as you can reduce your own trumps down to the same number as West, **and** get the lead back to dummy.

Dummy

♠ 9 7

♥ –

♦ A K 9

♣ K Q J

Fortunately there are enough entries in dummy to execute this manoeuvre. Cross to dummy with a diamond and ruff a spade. Cross with another diamond and ruff another spade, thereby reducing your trumps to the same number as West holds. Now cross to dummy once more with a club, play another club throwing a diamond... and West is helpless. You hold K 7 of trumps over their A J and whichever card West plays to the penultimate trick, you will lose only one more. It's just like magic!