

Hi everyone – It's Roger Heath-Brown here.

♠ AJ8
♥ A75
♦ AQ85
♣ 874
♠ K2
♥ J102
♦ 10742
♣ A1095

I thought I would take a closer look at board 2 from last night. Here are the North/South hands. The contract was either 2♦, or various numbers of No Trumps. In either case declarer will have to decide how to tackle the diamond suit, and that is what I want to focus on today.

♦ AQ85
♦ 10742

It is easiest to consider the suit in isolation, assuming that we have adequate entries. Let us suppose we are aiming to get three tricks from the suit. Here are three plans one might consider.

Plan A would be to lead 2♦ and to finesse the Queen (unless West produces the King, or shows out), and to try the Ace on the next round, whether or not the finesse wins. This will obviously produce three tricks if West has the King doubleton or trebleton, or the Jack singleton or doubleton, or a small trebleton. And if West has the King singleton, the situation will show up on the second round, and then North will be able to lead the 5 towards the 10 7 to take a third trick. Totting things up, we see that Plan A succeeds in winning three tricks against 16 of the possible 32 layouts of the opposition cards.

Plan B starts by leading the 5♦ towards the 10, with the intention of finessing the Queen on the way back if the King has not appeared.

♦ AQ85
♦ J93
♦ K6
♦ 10742

This strategy puts a lot of pressure on the defenders. For example, when North leads the 5, would East hold their nerve and play low in this situation?

Plan B takes three tricks when West holds the King doubleton or trebleton. If East has the King singleton, winning the first round of the suit, declarer can lead twice from South towards ♦ AQ 8 to win the next three tricks. This means that Plan B succeeds in winning three tricks against 11 of the possible 32 layouts of the opposition cards. But there are 4 more layouts where the defenders might easily go wrong.

Plan C begins by cashing the Ace, and crossing to South in another suit to lead towards the Queen. This option will take three tricks in the same situations as Plan A, but what should declarer do if East drops the King or Jack under North's Ace? In this case North can lead the 5 to South's 10, conceding a trick to the remaining opposition honour. Then if West started with K963 or J963 North will be left the Q 8 as a tenace over West's 96, allowing three tricks

to be taken. All in all this means that Plan C succeeds in taking three tricks against 18 of the possible layouts of the opposition cards.

Thus, in theory at least, C is the best option. Looking at the hand records, it seems that 2 declarers tried a version of Plan A, 4 tried Plan B, and just one, Stephen Bliss, used Plan C.

Finally, something for you to try. I think there is just one layout of the opposition hands that allows one to take 4 Diamond tricks. Can you see it?

Best wishes to all,

Roger Heath-Brown