

♠♥ **So, did you hold declarer to nine tricks on board #21?** ♦♣

Last Thursday (20<sup>th</sup> October, 2016) Board 21 offered an opportunity for the defense to shine.

The hand was played at 12 tables. At one table East/West played in 3♣\*-2 (-300) for an outright top for the moving pair.

At the other eleven tables the contract was 3NT by North.

Two declarers were held to nine tricks whereas the other NINE declarers ended up with 10 tricks.

You will note that the hand records suggest that N/S cannot make ANY NT contract. An examination of the board will show that if South contracts NT the defenders can take the first seven tricks via six clubs and ♦A.

And if North is declarer then the same seven tricks can accrue to East/West if East finds the inspired opening lead of ♦9 and West switches to his/her singleton club.

Not surprisingly the results confirm that none of the East/West pairs were so inspired as to defeat the contract!

However, at two tables North/South emerged with only nine tricks.

The first port of call is the lead and continuation

Board No 21 N/S Vul Dealer North								
NS	EW	Bid	By	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
1	17	3NT	N	10	630		14	8
2	19	3NT	N	10	630		14	8
3	21	3♣*	E	7	300			22
4	23	3NT	N	10	630		14	8
5	25	3NT	N	10	630		14	8
7	16	3NT	N	10	630		14	8
8	18	3NT	N	9	600		3	19
9	20	3NT	N	9	600		3	19
10	22	3NT	N	10	630		14	8
11	24	3NT	N	10	630		14	8
12	26	3NT	N	10	630		14	8
13	15	3NT	N	10	630		14	8

What I suspect happened at several tables was that East cashed the ♣A and continued with the ♣K and after that declarer can safely force ten tricks via 3 spades, 4 hearts, 2 diamonds and one club....

So, how can East know not to cash the second top club thereby establishing North's ♣Q. After all, if North and West both hold doubletons then East can cash the first six tricks. Sounds very tempting!

Well, a little knowledge and partnership agreement regarding leads can help.

A convention that is used by some experienced players re the opening lead of a K against a NT contract would have been very useful on this board.

The lead of the K of a suit versus a NT contract requires partner to contribute as follows:

- 1) Unblock any honour card, i.e. the ♣Q in this case
- 2) If not holding an honour card in the suit led then give a COUNT signal

In the instance of this hand West will follow with the ♣3

The ♣3 is not clear to East at this stage as being a singleton BUT if declarer follows with the ♣2 to the first tricks then the layout of the suit is an open book and East should switch to another suit.

Oh...that sounds easy says you. How, so?

When North plays the ♣2 then East can easily work out the following:

- 1) West does not have the ♣Q ...they would have played it at trick one!
- 2) West cannot have three clubs because then North would only have one and this can be discounted for the following reasons:
  - a. North opened 1NT and should not have a singleton
  - b. If north has a singleton club then West has three clubs and would have unblocked the ♣Q from the original holding of ♣Q103

So, East now has a full picture of the layout of the club suit and knows that by cashing the ♣K it establishes North's ♣Q as a trick.

East should simply switch to another suit and declarer cannot make more than nine tricks assuming that West does not carelessly gift declarer a third trick in diamonds by not playing the ♦10 or ♦8 on the third round when declarer leads the ♦4 from dummy.

And yes, North MIGHT get away with muddying the waters by playing the ♣10 at trick one, thereby creating the impression that West holds a doubleton, i.e. ♣32. But that would be a very far sighted play which could significantly cost on various other layouts of the clubs suit where West holds ♣J and where East/West are not playing the lead of the K from AKJxx(x)

So, if you haven't already done so, perhaps you should spend some time discussing opening leads with partner.

**Paul J Scannell,  
October 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016**