

Teaser No. 17

♠ A Q 6 4

♥ A J 10 9

♦ 8 7 4

♣ Q 2

GAME all, Dealer: South

Contract: 4♠ by South

Lead: Q♦

E/W Silent

♠ K J 10 8 2

♥ 4 3

♦ A K 5

♣ K 9 8

Trumps break 2-2

Plan the play – its duplicate pairs.

Solution Teaser No. 17

It is likely that the entire field will be in the same contract, and the lead (probably top of a sequence) looks normal. As everyone is in the same boat the bonus for making game loses all significance, it is just a matter of how many tricks you score with spades as trumps. There are ten easy tricks by way of five trumps in hand, one heart, two diamonds, a club and a club ruff. You should look for any line that offers a chance of an extra trick, but if that line jeopardises the ten tricks you are sure of it needs to work more often than not. After drawing trumps, there is a small chance in clubs as you could play West for ace bare or ace doubleton. If successful, that would set up a second club trick and provide a parking place for one of dummy's diamonds. The heart suit, however, offers a far more likely source so you start by leading a low heart towards the nine. This yields instant success if West holds both missing honours, but as expected East wins the trick and returns a diamond.

At this point you could play a heart to the ace and lead the jack from table. If East covers you ruff and your overtrick is established. If East plays low you can either ruff (hoping West started with HXX), or you can throw your diamond loser (hoping East has the missing honour) The latter play, a ruffing finesse, is a bit

better but both options would seem to be a reasonable compromise as they give a chance of an overtrick without putting the contract in danger. Alternatively, you could take a second heart finesse, leading low from hand and playing the ten from dummy. This is playing for split honours and is twice as likely to succeed as the ruffing finesse. It also results in an overtrick if it wins. If it loses, however, the defence may cash a diamond trick and you go down in a cold contract.

Should you risk the contract for an overtrick?

Emphatically, YES!! Unlike Teaser 16's deal, this is almost sure to be a universal contract and you are faced with a decision that all the other declarers will also face. In these circumstances, what actually happens at the other tables has no bearing on the cost of getting this decision wrong (although it will, of course, have an impact your score). At pairs, this is an important concept. If you go wrong it will cost you one matchpoint against every other pair regardless of what they do: If they also go wrong you get an average instead of a top, and if they guess right you get a bottom instead of an average. As the cost of wrong decisions is always the same you should simply make the play that is most likely to be right.

If, in your judgment, every other declarer will play safely for the contract should you go with the field? Well, it would be rather insulting to the other declarers to form this opinion but let us suppose your premise is true. If you are happy with an average, go ahead and play with the field! (Perhaps it's the last board of the session and you think you're are doing well.) Otherwise, it is not a winning tactic. Be brave and play with the odds, taking a second finesse will beat your cautious rivals two times out of three: you may score a 'bottom' on Mondays, but will get a 'top' on Tuesdays and Wednesdays.