

Teaser No. 24

♠ K 9 5 4 2

♥ 7 5 4

♦ Q 10 7 5

♣ 6

N/S GAME, Dealer: South

Contract: 4 ♥ by South

Lead: K♣

E/W Silent

♠ A 6

♥ A K Q J 9

♦ J 9 6 2

♣ A 8

Plan the play – it's a teams' match.

Solution Teaser No. 24

Playing teams' bridge you should underwrite the contract by playing on diamonds before drawing trumps. You can ruff the losing club in dummy straight away or you can delay doing so, it doesn't matter. But you must NOT ruff the club and then play two or more top trumps. If the suit breaks 4-1 or worse, control is lost. A diamond trick is needed for the contract but each time the defence get in with their top diamonds they will play clubs. You will run out of trumps! On most distributions defeat will follow regardless of whether you carry on drawing trumps or abandon the suit after two rounds have revealed the bad break.

Playing on diamonds first may well allow the defence to score a diamond ruff, but they cannot force you to ruff in the long trump hand: clubs leads can be ruffed in dummy instead. If they do collect a ruff you still make ten tricks, even if trumps break 5-0.

The key is to have trumps in dummy when you first play on diamonds.

Playing duplicate pairs, should one play the same way? There is an easy overtrick available if trumps break normally. With a 3-2 break occurring 68% of the time it looks attractive to ruff a club and draw trumps. However, there are

three factors in favour of the safety play. The first two are minor considerations as the majority of pairs should have bid to 4H. The third is much more significant.

A) Some pairs may play in a part score if North passes partner's 1H opening. Bidding 1S (or 2H playing five card majors) is sensible, but with only five points a conservative bidder may not do so. You swing a full two matchpoints against any such pair if you go down instead of making.

B) With a 5-3 major suit fit and all suits stopped a few pairs usually end up in 3NT. This is doomed to go one down so you swing one matchpoint against each of these pairs if you also go one down in 4H.

C) By playing a round of diamonds before drawing trumps you might not run into a ruff and therefore make eleven tricks anyway. The suit may be blocked, with one defender holding AK bare or a singleton honour. Or they may just fail to unravel the ruff. For instance, imagine that West holds AX and that you lead low diamond at trick two. Would they know to rise with the ace and play another diamond?

So which line of play is better at pairs? Whilst there is a good case for ensuring the contract, there are too many imponderables to give a definitive answer.