

Teaser No. 80

North

♠ 9
♥ A Q 10
♦ K J 9 8 5 2
♣ 9 8 2

West

♠ 8 3
♥ 9 6 4 3
♦ A Q 3
♣ K J 5 4

N/S Game, Dealer: North

Contract: 3NT by South

Lead: 8♠

North opened 1♦, East overcalled with a pre-emptive 3♠ and South bid 3NT.

Declarer allows East to win the first two tricks with the jack and king of spades, but wins the third round with the ace.

You are sitting West. Plan the defence – it's a teams match.

Solution Teaser No. 80

Discard the ace of diamonds at trick three. If you obtain the lead with a club, continue with the three of diamonds.

This is a famous hand from the early days of bridge, defended as West by Maurice Harrison-Gray, one of the best players of the Old School. Gray lived in Hampstead, but nowadays Old School players are based around Cuckfield in West Sussex!

Throwing away an ace is a bit like sacrificing your queen in a game of chess: you need to be pretty sure it is going to work. Unlike chess you have a partner, making it worse if the plan goes pear-shaped! As West you can see that the diamond honours are very well placed for declarer, but that club finesse is losing.

Declarer will need to establish winners without letting East in to cash lots of spades. They could have any number of hand types as they bid 3NT under extreme pressure, but will probably need to score some number of diamonds in order to come to nine tricks. They are also likely to hold the king of hearts and some length in clubs. The contract is clearly doomed if East holds the ace of diamonds so their natural play in the suit will be low to the king (guarding against both a singleton or doubleton queen offside) and then, as the cards lie, to concede two diamond tricks to you. They will score four diamond tricks, three hearts, and the black suit aces: game made! However, if you discard your ace of diamonds at trick three declarer is likely to abandon diamonds and play on clubs.

There was a similar position in problem No. 73, where West had an opportunity to discard the king of clubs. This prevented declarer playing on that suit:

AJ1065

K3

Q2

9874

East had lots of spades to cash so had to be kept off lead. Once the king of clubs was out of the way, declarer could only score one trick in the suit instead of four.

The actual layout of the diamond suit on the current deal was:

KJ9852

AQ3 7

1064

Thus, declarer could have scored six diamond tricks without loss! The discard of the ace, however, made it look as if Gray was trying to create a sure entry for his partner's queen:

KJ9852

A3 Q7

1064

In fact, it seemed to be the only logical explanation. Consequently, declarer, holding AQ1073 in clubs, decided to finesse clubs twice into the 'safe' hand. When the first finesse lost West played the three of diamonds. Declarer played the king from dummy and East showed out. Declarer realised at this point that he had been conned and played another club from dummy, East showing out again! The defence scored two spade tricks, two club tricks and the queen of diamonds.

South held: ♠A105, ♥KJ, ♦1064, ♣AQ1073