

An interesting hand?

This month's hand is taken from a Chairman's Cup teams event. It is a play problem and it illustrates the importance of being in the right place at the right time if you are to make the most of your resources as declarer. The full hand was:

	North	
	S Q82	
	H 10873	
	D AJ	
	C AK43	
West		East
S K10654		S J
H 5		H AQ96
D Q84		D 7632
C Q1075		C J986
	South	
	S A973	
	H KJ42	
	D K1095	
	C 2	

At both tables in my match, North dealt and became declarer after the bidding sequence:

1NT Pass 2C Pass
2H Pass 4H End

One North made 10 tricks and one didn't. What made the difference? Before reading further, cover up the EW hands and decide on your best line of play after the lead of SJ. It's one of those tricky hands where you have relatively few tricks on top and numerous possibilities for the extra tricks you need for your contract.

The lead of SJ could be a singleton, the top card from a doubleton or from a suit headed by J10. Both declarers decided to play low in dummy and West took the trick with SK. A low spade was returned to Q and ruffed by East who switched to a low club, and East's CQ was won by declarer's CA. At this point the lines of play diverged.

- At table 1, declarer ruffed a club before returning to DA to lead a heart towards KJ4. East ducked and HJ won but now declarer can only return to hand by a ruff. He knows that a spade will not succeed so can only lead DK and another bringing down DQ. However, having ruffed in both hands, when declarer leads a second heart and East rises with HA, a third round of hearts can be drawn locking declarer in dummy. He can cash the established D10 but there is no way to avoid a spade loser at the end.
- At table 2, a heart was led by declarer at trick 3, ducked by East and won by HJ. A diamond was returned to DA and another heart was led, East rising with the HA and playing another club. Declarer ruffed in dummy, cashed HK drawing East's last trump and played DK and another, ruffing out West's Queen with his last trump in hand. It remained only to cash CK discarding the losing spade from dummy and enter dummy via SA to cash the established D10 for 10 tricks.

The maxim for declarer is: work out a line which uses entries as flexibly as possible, allowing tricks to be taken in the right order, and which anticipates what the defence might do each time you lose the lead. Have you worked out what the first declarer should have done? He should have cashed CK, discarding the losing spade, before leading the second heart.

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