

HAND OF THE WEEK

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Here's a very neat play hand from the first day of the online NABC 0-5000 KO. Again, I have to let you behind the curtain of our bidding system (my whole 5-man team is playing this system in the event). You deal, with all vul, and see a promising collection. ♠AKJ5 ♥9652 ♦ ♣KJ1074.

You open 1♣, which promises two or more clubs. Partner responds 1♥, artificially showing 4 or more spades. RHO comes in with 2♥, and you visualize a good fit in spades, so you bid 3♠. LHO and partner both pass, and RHO now bids 4♥. What should you do now?

I think double is a strong candidate here. If RHO really has a hand where he has a play for 4♥, he might have bid more the first time around. He's likely short in spades to bid to the 4-level by himself. And if he has a side diamond suit, he likely would have bid 4♦ instead of 4♥. But you're not as bloodthirsty as I am, so you pass. But partner decides, in passout seat, to bid 4♠. Why would he do that? He must have a lot of potential offense without much in the way of high cards. Nobody has anything more to say, and LHO leads the ♥A. You see:

Dummy: ♠Q942 ♥10 ♦KJ10987 ♣52

Your hand: ♠AKJ5 ♥9652 ♦ ♣KJ1074

That's about what you expected. After winning the first trick, LHO continues with the ♥J. What were you thinking? You would have murdered 4♥. RHO must have a lot of clubs. As I said above, if he has a lot of diamonds, he could have bid them, since has a mediocre 6-card heart suit. But that's water under the bridge, your job is to take 10 tricks with spades trumps. It looks hopeless, but playing safe for a small set in an undoubled contract is seldom an option.

You ruff the heart in dummy and lead a club. RHO is right there with the ♣A and LHO follows with the card he would play from an even number. He may well have a singleton, but you hope that's not the case. RHO now shifts to the ♦Q. Wow! What should you do here?

If you see the right play here now, you have a lot of hope as a bridge player. The right play is to just pitch a heart, forcing the defense to help you establish dummy's diamonds. If you do that, LHO must duck and you will win the ♦K. But the play is easy from here; you play a club to the 10, ruff a club as LHO pitches a diamond, draw trumps, and claim with 4 trumps, 2 ruffs in dummy, the ♦K, and three clubs.

But you fall from grace and ruff the ♦Q. Now you play the ♣K and ruff a club as LHO pitches a diamond. You lead the ♦K, RHO pitches his ♣Q (a definite error), and you (correctly) pitch a heart, forcing LHO to win the ♦A. LHO now plays a spade and you win in hand with the ace. The position now is:

Dummy: ♠Q ♥ ♦J1098 ♣

Your hand: ♠KJ ♥9 ♦ ♣104

You need the rest of the tricks. Do you see any hope?

Yes, the contract is cold. You know that RHO started with ♠xx ♥KQ8743 ♦Q ♣AQ96. That leaves LHO, right now with ♠xx ♥ ♦xxx ♣. You simply lead the ♠J to dummy's Q, extracting RHO's last trump. Now

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you run the diamonds, and at trick 13 you are forced to ruff with the ♠K, finally drawing the last trump at the last possible moment.

At the other table, your teammate did not find the maniacal 4♥ call and the opponents simply played and made 3♠. If you had simply made the bloodthirsty double and led three rounds of spades, declarer would have been held to 8 tricks, a much safer way to win a big IMP swing. But you would have robbed yourself of the chance to declare a hand you could cherish for years, and a couple of extra IMPs.