

HAND OF THE WEEK

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Vol. 1 No. 12 Page 1

Saturday night, on the last deal of our 0-5000 NAOBC knockout, our match with four English players arrived at the last deal with the score tied at 81 when this deal hit our screens. First I'm going to show you a defense problem from my perspective. I was the dealer, and saw ♠9 ♥K9873 ♦4 ♣Q108643 with only the opponents vulnerable.

I didn't know the score was exactly tied, but I expected the match to be close. While in some circumstances I might choose to open this with 2♥ or 3♣, this wasn't the time or place to unilaterally take so much risk. My teammates (Phil Goulding, Bob Zimmermann, Alan Leaver, and Jim Fox) had invested 5 days of their time to get to this point; I had no right to destroy all their efforts with a mad preempt.

The auction proceeded:

W	N	E	S
Pass	1♦	1♠	2♥
Pass	2NT	Pass	3NT
All Pass			

Jim led the ♥J, and I saw:

Dummy: ♠K32 ♥A10654 ♦A75 ♣A7

My hand: ♠9 ♥K9873 ♦4 ♣Q108643

Well, what do you make of the heart suit? And what does that tell you about partner's hand? Partner has either led a singleton Jack, or Jack from Jack deuce. And this suggests that his spade suit is not of the finest.

Where are the cards? The opponents have been fairly sound openers, so I expect LHO to have at least 12 points, that leaves at most 8 for partner and one of those is on the table, while I know two of declarer's.

What is declarer's shape? They open all 4333 and 4432 hands that don't fit their 15-17 or 20-21 notrump ranges with 1♣. In addition, they also use that opening with all 5332 hands of similar strength when the 5-card suit is a minor. So I know that declarer has at least 5 diamonds and if she has only 5, she will have a 4-card suit somewhere.

Can I beat this hand if declarer has a 6-card diamond suit? I don't think so unless partner has specifically ♦KJ9. That will give partner the ♠Q and ♣J at most for his 8 points, and declarer will play him for all the cards but my ♥K by coming to hand and leading high diamonds through partner to hold him to at most 1 diamond trick with any weaker holding.

So I need to focus on declarer's 5-card diamond suits. In this case, she will have a side 4-card suit. Hearts is obviously out, and if declarer's side suit is clubs partner has at least 6 spades and likely would have led the suit, hoping to find me with the Jack or ten. So declarer has 4 spades and 5 diamonds if we are to be able to beat this hand.

Declarer is still thinking, so I can turn to her shapes in clubs and hearts. If she has the singleton ♥Q, she will surely duck this trick in dummy. She wouldn't want to play her ♥A and Q on the same trick, leaving

HAND OF THE WEEK

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Vol. 1 No. 12 Page 2

me with K9 and length behind dummy's 10. But I don't know, right now, whether she has 1 or two hearts.

If she plays a low heart from dummy, what am I going to do? Whether she has ♥Q or ♥Qx, I can play low and ensure that she makes only two heart tricks. And if she has the singleton, playing the K will do the same. But if she has a doubleton heart, and I play the ♥K, she now will have 3 tricks in the suit.

Would ducking my King be the right play, then? I need to try to place the high cards to figure this out. Give declarer the ♠A and ♦K to go with her ♥Q. My best chance to beat this hand, then, is for her to have the other 3 Jacks for her 12 points, this gives partner the ♠Q, ♦Q, and ♣K, making all 3 of her Jacks worthless. Oh, and I'm going to need partner to have the ♠10 and ♦10 as well. I'm pretty sure he will have the ♠10; overcalling 1♠ with Q8xxx and a King and Q on the side isn't all that attractive. As for the ♦10, if declarer has it she has an easy route to four diamond tricks simply by losing a diamond finesse to partner. And that, along with two spades, two hearts, and the ♣A, comes to 9. So I have to play partner for both critical tens.

About the time I have all this worked out, declarer plays dummy's ♥A. Ah, so partner has led a singleton. That leaves declarer with, I hope, ♠AJxx ♥Q2 ♦KJ9xx ♣Jx. I encourage with the ♥9 so partner knows to not rely on me for much else. Now declarer plays the ♦A and 5, and on the second of these I pitch the ♣8 to show a high club honor, hoping that this leaves partner able to place all the high cards, too.

Declarer thinks for a bit, and then plays the ♦K from hand and follows with the ♥Q. Partner discards the ♠4, telling me that he doesn't want me to play a spade. So partner must have the ♣Kxx, as I had hoped. I win the heart and fire out a low club. Partner plays the King and declarer ducks. But partner now plays his higher club (as one must always do when setting up the long suit in the opposite hand) to dummy's Ace. Declarer accepts her fate, cashing the ♥10 and the ♠K, then leading a spade and taking her ace when I show out. We take the balance for down 2, a nice way to end the session.

Now over to Phil's table. The auction at the other table was exactly the same as at ours, and Phil also received the ♥J lead. The play problem, as he saw it, was:

Dummy: ♠K32 ♥A10654 ♦A75 ♣A7

His hand: ♠AJ76 ♥Q2 ♦KJ963 ♣J9

He saw that by playing small from dummy, he would have 8 sure tricks, 3 hearts, two each in spades and diamonds, and the ♣A. Of course he also saw the club problem, but if the ♦Q was on side he would have 9 tricks anyway. So he played small from dummy.

His RHO now decided to allow declarer 3 heart tricks for the opportunity to play a spade through declarer. So he won the ♥K and shifted to the ♠9. Phil won the Ace in hand, cashed the ♥Q, and crossed to the ♦A; he was cold now if diamonds were 3-2. But on the second diamond his RHO showed out, discarding a high club spot. If East had followed here, Phil would have just taken a diamond finesse; either it wins or he will have 4 diamond tricks because the King will catch the last diamond.

HAND OF THE WEEK

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Vol. 1 No. 12 Page 3

But Phil put in the nine to force his LHO to win the ten. LHO now shifted to a low club. Phil ducked this to the Q and won the club return as LHO held on to his ♣K. (This, of course, violated my rule about not playing the higher of your last 2 cards in partner's long suit.) Now the position, with the lead in dummy, was:

Dummy ♠K3 ♥A106 ♦7 ♣--

LHO ♠Q108 ♥-- ♦Q8 ♣K

RHO ♠-- ♥987 ♦-- ♣1084

Phil ♠AJ76 ♥-- ♦KJ6 ♣

Phil cashed the two heart winners in dummy, discarding both sixes. Which two cards should LHO keep? He chose to keep ♠Q10 ♥-- ♦Q8 ♣--. So Phil played the ♠K and another, and forced LHO to lead into the ♦KJ. Making 3, for 13 IMPs on the board and a win in the match by that same margin.