

HAND OF THE WEEK

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Little things mean a lot in bridge. As you play the game more and more, you gain a deeper appreciation of the subtleties of little things. Here's a deal from the 2nd of 4 sessions of the NAOP final this year. I am just going to show you my hand, give you the auction, and let you defend with me. Well, actually, you are defending with Bernie Greenspan, looking over my shoulder. Your RHO is the dealer, you are vul and they are not, and it's matchpoints.

You hold ♠107 ♥J864 ♦KQ652 ♣AK. This is a clear 1♦ opening in almost any system. In ours, it promises at least 4 diamonds and is seldom made with a balanced hand unless you have 5 diamonds. LHO doubles, Bernie bids 1♠, and RHO bids 2♥. This auction has not gone well for you, your hand looks a bit lost in all the bidding so far. LHO and Bernie are likely to have 4 spades each, and so there's no future in that. LHO has at least 3 hearts for his double, and RHO has announced 4 of them as well, so there's no fit there either. With no obvious source of tricks, we have no reason to believe that we have the 22 points or so we'd like to have to bid 2NT here. So we just pass.

LHO passes as well, but Bernie comes to life with 3♦. This is strictly competitive here, and RHO bids 3♥, so bidding on is out of the question. But if we add all the new information about the deal into our heads, we realize that Bernie is likely to have a singleton heart. If so, all I would have needed to make 3♦ is ♠xxxx ♥x ♦A743 ♣xxxx and a 2-2 diamond break. So we had a plus score coming. Well, I have a nice defensive hand; I have two almost certain club tricks, a strong diamond suit to use to attack declarer's trump holding, and a partner that bid twice. I'm doubling this. You should, too. My double ends the auction.

I'm a very strong believer in leading trumps against doubled contracts unless I see a route to an immediate ruff. Here, I don't see that at all, so I put the ♥4 down, and dummy tables ♠A832 ♥KQ109 ♦108 ♣J52. Things are looking good for my decision to double. Bernie's shape is likely 4=1=4=4 (spades, hearts, diamonds, and clubs in that order) and he probably has more than a bare 6 points. This is not only because he bid twice, but also because I have 13, dummy has 10, and if Bernie has only 6 RHO has 11 and would likely have jumped to 3♥ at his first turn. All of this should go through your head while everyone else is thinking about the deal from their perspective. Bernie is likely wondering whether I am 1=4=5=3 or 2=4=5=2, although he should also get the right answer since I would have surely led a singleton in his bid suit. And with 2=4=4=3 and less than 15 points we would normally open 1♣.

Declarer sticks in the ♥10, Bernie plays the ♥5, and declarer the ♥2. Now declarer insults me by leading the ♥K. Does he think I'm some kind of madman? (Don't any of you who know the ugly truth tell him!) Bernie discards the ♦3, an encouraging card in our carding methods. So I place him with the ♦A. Declarer follows with the ♥3 and I with the ♥6. Now declarer thinks for a while (confirming my notion that he was hoping I was the kind of madman who would double on ♥Jxx) and leads the ♣2. Bernie follows with the ♣3 (showing an even number of clubs) and declarer puts up the ♣Q.

Now I get to do something that doesn't happen very often. I win the ♣A and then play the ♣K, which gathers the ♣5, ♣6, and ♣4 around the table. Normally, with honor sequences we lead the highest and follow suit with the lower of two. With 3 or more in a row we also follow from the top down, but that's a relatively new (albeit sensible) idea. But the important thing is that, when we are trying to win a trick,

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we do not just “play a card.” Here, I have told Bernie that I have no more clubs by playing my clubs in a funny order.

Now I violate another rule that I just stated. I continue with the ♦Q, not the ♦K. Why did I do that? Because I want to make sure that Bernie wins this trick and gives me my ruff. I know he has the ♦A from his signal on the 2nd round of trumps. Do you see why it was a mistake for declarer to play that trump now? If he doesn't, I have to use another source of information. In fact, I did have another piece of information – Bernie followed to the first club with his lowest to tell me he had an even number, and then followed to the 2nd club again with his lowest remaining club, telling me that he received my message in clubs and that he wanted me to play the lower side suit. Bernie overtakes my ♦Q with the ♦A and gives me a ruff.

I am double-dummy on shapes now. Bernie was dealt an even number of clubs, obviously 4 since there are only two remaining that haven't been played on one of the 3 rounds of clubs. Bernie had only one heart, bid spades, and competed to the 3-level in diamonds. He has at least 4 spades, and would likely have competed in spades with 5, so he also has 4 diamonds. So I cash the ♦K (the setting trick) and exit with my last trump. Declarer has a spade to lose, since Bernie's spades are QJ64 and declarer's are K95.

So that's down 2, and a tie for a top in an 18 table section. All because we pay attention to details on every deal, so when we do something odd it sends a message.