

HAND OF THE WEEK

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Here's an interesting declarer play problem.

Your hand is ♠5 ♥A7632 ♦AKJ7 ♣Q94. RHO deals, only the opponents are vulnerable. He opens 1♠. And you're faced with a dilemma. With a couple of aces, one backed up by the KJ, another Queen, and a singleton in RHO's suit you have to bid something. Hearts is your longest suit, and with this much in the way of high cards, you can set aside the need for a six-card suit to overcall at the 2-level. But what if your LHO has a bunch of hearts?

There's nothing you can do if that's the case. But you will win 4-7 IMPs many times for every -800 you suffer by overcalling with such a terrible suit. So you bid 2♥, Partner invites game by bidding 2♠ and you bid 4♥, reassured a bit about the puniness of your suit.

LHO leads the ♠9 and you see:

Dummy: ♠Q1032 ♥K54 ♦95 ♣AK72

Your hand: ♠5 ♥A7632 ♦AKJ7 ♣Q94

Partner surely had his bid here. How many losers do you see? I see one spade and one heart, how about you? What tricks are you planning to take? ♥AK ♦AK ♣AKQ is 7. And if trumps are 3-2, you will make two of your small hearts. 9 winners, two losers. That means there are two tricks up for grabs. How can you find another trick or two?

The first place to look is in the trump suit. Can you trump anything? Yes! You can trump three spades in hand, using the ♥K and ♣AK as entries. But there's a flaw in that plan. Do you see it? Of course. LHO has led a high spade spot. That usually means he has at most two spades, although some players will lead a 9 from 9xx. That's OK, though – trumping one spade will get you to 10 tricks, right? Wrong!! Your plan was to make two of your little hearts after drawing two rounds of trumps. So you would just be changing when you made tricks with those trumps, not adding to your total.

Can you trump something in dummy? Yes! You can cash the ♦AK and ruff a diamond. Does that help? Yes! You weren't counting on making any small hearts in dummy. And now you're making one. That gets you to 10 tricks.

There's still a trick out there that's not accounted for. Is there anything you can do to grab that one, too? Yes! You could take a diamond finesse. If that wins, you could trump the 3rd round of diamonds and save the ♦K for later. You could also play for clubs to be 3-3, which would make dummy's 4th club into a trick. Sometimes you can try one, then the other. Can you do that here?

Well, yes and no. If trumps are 3-2, you could play 3 rounds of clubs ending in dummy. If you try this, it's best to play A-Q-K in case LHO has a doubleton club and the long trump – that way he can't trump a winner. You wouldn't really mind having someone trump a club winner, since that would mean you were making THREE small trumps in hand. You would lose a club winner but replace it with a heart winner, and you would be free to trump a diamond in dummy. So you would take two high hearts, two high diamonds, two high clubs, three little trumps in hand and a little trump in dummy. Ten tricks. And if the club doesn't set up, you could take the diamond finesse to try for an 11th trick.

There's still one thing left to consider. What if trumps aren't 3-2? Now you might take only 1 little trump in hand, so you will need two extra tricks from the minor suits. Can you do that? Of course, you

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were trying to make 11 tricks when trumps were 3-2, so losing out on one of your trump winners would still leave you with 10. But there would be another problem. If you take two high trumps and the hand with 4 trumps can trump in soon enough, they could draw dummy's last trump. Now you could go down.

So how many high trumps should you play before trying the minors? At matchpoints, you just go for the home run. Take two high trumps and if they don't break, take the diamond finesse and try to ruff a diamond.

Why not go for clubs first? I already told you that – if someone has 4 hearts and a doubleton club, they can ruff the 3rd club and draw dummy's last trump. Now you may need to depend on the diamond finesse.

At IMPs, though, where the loss for going down in a game made at the other table is double digits, you should just take one high heart first (the Ace, preserving a late entry to dummy for a diamond finesse if needed) and go after the minors.

OK, now that you have your plan ready, you may call for a card from dummy. You play the ♠10 from dummy and RHO wins with the Jack. RHO plays another spade and you ruff. Now you cash the ♥A, collecting the 8 from LHO and the Q from RHO. Does this mean that trumps are 4-1?

Not necessarily. At least not against good players, who might even choose to play the Q from QJ109. But at IMPs you should be cautious in the play when you can afford to be. So next you cash the ♦A (sometimes the Q is singleton) and then play A-Q-K of clubs. On the 4th club, RHO discards a spade. Does that mean that trumps are 4-1? Almost certainly. If RHO could ruff this, he would because he may know that his partner is out of spades, either because he has 6 or because they do not lead high from 9xx.

Now what? Why, you finesse in diamonds. This is why you have saved the ♥K in dummy – if the diamonds finesse loses, LHO can't draw trumps. But all is well, the diamond finesse wins, your ♦K also stands up, and you lead your losing diamond planning to ruff it in dummy.

So with careful play, you have made 10 tricks despite the 4-1 trump break. Well done!