

HAND OF THE WEEK

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Here's an extremely nice deal that demonstrates the power of entry management. Nobody vul, IMPs, you reach 3NT on the following auction.

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

West leads the ♥2 (4th best) and you see:

Dummy: ♠KJ52 ♥J76 ♦Q32 ♣J97

Declarer: ♠Q7 ♥AK5 ♦AK874 ♣K85

You correctly play the ♥J from dummy, East discourages with the 4, and you play the 5. You have a lot of potential tricks – Pollyanna would be expecting to take five diamonds, three hearts, two spades, and the ♣K. But Pollyanna has never won a national championship, and the players who participated in this deal have won dozens of World Championships and hundreds of NABC titles.

So you need to plan for diamonds breaking 4-1 and minimizing the threat of the club suit. Take a minute or two and decide what you want to do at trick 2. And pay special attention to the first sentence of this article. One of the things I do very well is managing entries as declarer, but I got a little careless when given the problem and put myself in a position where I might have gone down.

At trick 2, you should follow the general principle of knocking out an ace when you can do so safely. So you lead a low spade from dummy. East should play low, and you will put up the Queen and win the trick.

Now what?

What happens if you play diamonds from the top? West will show out on the 2nd round, pitching an encouraging club. On the next diamond, West will pitch the ♠6, and on the 4th diamond, West will pitch another spade while you will pitch a spade from dummy. But East will simply cash the ♠A and play a heart. The ending as East has just led a heart will be:

Dummy: ♠K ♥76 ♦ ♣J97

Declarer: ♠-- ♥AK ♦8 ♣K85

You will have taken: ♠Q ♥J and ♦AKQ, the defense will have taken two tricks and their remaining cards will be: ♠10 ♥Q1098 ♦-- ♣AQ106432

You can take 3 red suit tricks. Should you? Yes, as long as West follows to this trick. If you keep heart winner, you just give them the opportunity to put you back in with it after they win their first club trick. So you take your two hearts (everybody follows) and then cash the ♦8. You must pitch a club from dummy unless West has pitched the ♠10. West just pitched a club, and after you pitch the club from dummy East pitches the ♠10. Now you get to lead a club from hand; West plays small, and you play the ♣J. East wins with the Q and leads a low club. So, assuming that West does not have the ♣A10 left, you

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have a guess for your contract. How should you guess? You should play West for the ♣10, since if East has the ♣10 he might lead it, believing that West has the ♣A8 behind your Kx. So you go up King.

OK, playing diamonds leaves you with an ugly end position. What else can you do?

What if you play a spade here? There's a chance that East can capture one of dummy's honors with the Ace and knock out the ♠K. Now if diamonds don't break, you could use two spades, one diamond, and two clubs.

What's left?

How about just playing a low diamond from both hands? That's not a play many of you are familiar with. What can the defense do? After 3 tricks, the position will be:

Dummy: ♠KJ5 ♥76 ♦Q3 ♣J97

Declarer: ♠7 ♥AK ♦AK87 ♣K85

Suppose West wins the diamond and East follows. If he plays a spade, you play the Jack and East wins the ace. Now if he plays a spade, you just take 2 spades, 3 hearts, and 4 diamonds. No club guess required. What if West plays a heart. You win in hand and now YOU play a spade. East wins and plays another heart. You win this, cross to the ♦Q, cash the spade winner, and come back in diamonds to take the rest of the diamonds. Once more, 2 spades, 3 hearts, and 4 diamonds. And if West plays a diamond (careful now) you will win in hand (blocking the diamond suit when East shows out) and play a spade. With two heart entries to hand and the ♦Q as an entry to the 2nd spade honor, you can't be denied your 9 tricks.

What if East wins the diamond and plays a club? You just duck, and West can either play the Queen or Ace. If he does neither, the ♣J will be your 9th trick; you will get 1 spade, 3 hearts, 4 diamonds, and the ♣J. If West does win this trick, you will be left with the ♠KJ guarding that suit and the ♣Kx opposite Jx guarding that suit. Whichever black suit they play, you will win and run your red suits. Yet another route to 9 tricks.

If you can't follow all this in your head, take out a deck of cards, lay out the N-S hands, and follow all the variations. This is truly a beautiful demonstration of how to manage your entries by setting up your 9th trick before you cash too many of the other eight.

Also note that suits like the clubs here:

♣J97

♣K85

Are called "Frozen" suits. Whichever side leads the suit first potentially loses. If you start the suit yourself, and guess badly, you could take no tricks. But if they lead the suit first, and you are moderately careful, you will always win a trick in the suit.

Allowing you to retain this position in the club suit is the main reason you don't want to try to run the diamonds early, and furthermore, is the incentive to ducking the first diamond. This deal was played by

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many household names; none found this very pretty solution to the problem. Many thanks to Franco Baseggio for calling this to the attention of the bridge community.