

HAND OF THE WEEK

© 2021 Craig Biddle

Vol. 1 No. 30 Page 1

With the Finals of the four Grand National Teams underway, I have bundles of hands. But this is the best of the lot so far. The successful declarer was Ron Franck, whose team finished 6th in the Flight A Qualifying Swiss.

Ron picked up, in 2nd seat, ♠A ♥AJ52 ♦AKJ6 ♣QJ102

What would you open with this? I know it's fashionable to open 2NT to show 20-21 points, but I am a dyed in the wool 1♦ opener with hands like this. Ron gave me this hand as a problem, and when I told him I would open 1♦, he asked me what I would rebid after a 1♠ response. 3♣ I said. He then asked me what I would bid after 3♠ from partner. 3NT, I said.

But back to Ron's auction. He opened 2NT, and partner bid 4♥, a Texas transfer to spades. Ron dutifully bid 4♠ and nobody had anything else to say. LHO led the ♦4 and this is what Ron saw:

Dummy: ♠K10843 ♥Q108 ♦1087 ♣73

Declarer: ♠A ♥AJ52 ♦AKJ6 ♣QJ102

Count your winners. 2, and probably 3 spades. 2-4 hearts, 2-4 diamonds, and 2 clubs. Looks good, right? Now count your losers. 2 clubs for sure. 1 spade for sure, and likely 2. (To have only one spade loser you would have to find someone with ♠QJx so that you can win the ace, cross to dummy with your magic carpet, and lead the king dropping the Queen or Jack and then lead low to the other face card. Later, your 10 will take care of the 9. But there's a flaw in that plan – your magic carpet is in the shop for repairs and your only way to get to dummy will be club ruffs. And when you get there, you will need to do some finessing.

Fortunately, the opening lead has taken one of your finesses for you risk-free. Ron played the ♦7 to the Q and ace. Now Ron began building a dummy entry. He led the ♣J from hand which was ducked around to RHO's King. RHO returned the ♦2 and Ron let this run to the 10 in dummy. Then he played a club to the Q and LHO won the Ace. LHO played a third diamond and everyone followed. The position was now, with the lead in hand:

Dummy: ♠K10843 ♥Q108 ♦-- ♣--

Declarer: ♠A ♥AJ52 ♦J ♣102

Ron led the ♣10 and pitched a heart, then led the ♣2; LHO pitched a heart. Ron ruffed in dummy and led the ♥10 for a finesse. It won. Ron now led the ♥Q and that held, too. It's time to show you the 4-card ending, with the lead in dummy.

Dummy: ♠K1084 ♥-- ♦-- ♣--

LHO ♠J962 ♥-- ♦-- ♣-- RHO ♠Q75 ♥K ♦-- ♣--

Declarer: ♠A ♥AJ ♦J ♣--

Ron led a spade to his ace as both followed low. Now, secure in the knowledge that RHO had the ♥K since LHO had twice declined to win a heart trick, Ron led the ♥A. LHO can set this hand now, do you see it? LHO must ruff with the ♠J – Ron will have no winning option. If he overruffs he will have to lead away from the ♠108 with RHO holding Qx and LHO 9x. And if he doesn't overruff, RHO will have the

HAND OF THE WEEK

© 2021 Craig Biddle

Vol. 1 No. 30 Page 2

♠Qx behind the K10. But LHO erred by ruffing small, Ron overruffed with the 8, and now the ♠K was his 10th trick.

This was a well-deserved 12 IMP swing to Ron for persevering in the face of a difficult play problem in a poor contract. If you keep making people make decisions, eventually they will get one wrong, as his LHO did here. And at the other table, the opponents were playing Precision and got to 4♥ by South. Their declarer was unable to make this. How would you play 4♥? Suppose they lead a spade.

Win the ace and lead the ♣Q from hand, planning to ruff the ♣2 on the third round of the suit to take red suit finesses. You will lose two clubs and, if they defend well, one red suit trick. If, say, you ruff the ♣2 and lead the ♥Q, if they cover you will then use the ♥10 as an entry for the diamonds finesse and you will have 11 tricks.

Meanwhile, 3NT is easy – you will make 10 tricks on pretty much any defense simply by leading a red Jack out of hand as soon as you can if they lead a black suit. This will establish an entry to dummy to take the other red suit finesse and you will make 7 red tricks, the ♠K, and another trick elsewhere.