

7th May, 2008

DECLARE & DEFEND

Two hands from today's Wednesday Game, one to test your declarer skills, the other your defense.

Declare ...

♠ AJT73 ♥ 53 ♦ A4 ♣ AQ42 ♠ KQ ♥ AQ986 ♦ QJ732 ♣ J	Board 24 Hands Rotated for Convenience 1♠ Pass 2♥ Pass 3♣ Pass 3NT Pass Pass Pass
--	--

Against 3NT, West leads the Club Three, won by East's King. East returns the Five to Dummy's Ace, what next? You can count 9 top tricks, with a 10th available in Diamonds. But no self-respecting matchpoint player would be satisfied with 10 tricks here, so you must decide which red suit is the most likely bet for 4 tricks and 11 altogether. And also, what's the best play for 4 tricks in each suit?

- **Hearts:** The percentage play is to finesse the Nine on the first round, and to finesse again on the second round. This one is good for 4 tricks just 33% of the time.
- **Diamonds:** Here, it's best to lay down the Ace and lead towards the QJ, which picks up 4 tricks when the suit is 3-3 or when the King doubleton is with North. The success rate here is 44%.

Of course, consulting the Dictionary of Suit Combinations in the middle of a hand is not permitted by the ACBL, but you really don't need that estimable tome, simple common sense says that the 5-2 fit with more high cards is probably the better bet to produce 4 tricks. So you play the A♦ and lead a Diamond to your Queen and West's King. Back comes a Club which you win in

Dummy, then you cross to the K♠ and cash the J♦, West pitching a Club. "Rats!" is the first word that comes to mind, but it is about to get worse. Because of the entry situation, you are obliged to overtake the Q♠ with the Ace. But, on that second round of Spades, East shows out! Yikes, now the Spades don't run and you are back down to 9 tricks! Should you try to get back to 10 tricks with a Heart finesse? Or is there a better plan?

Of course, along the way you have been doing some counting of the opponents' distribution, what have you concluded so far?

Spades? East had 1, West had 5

Diamonds? East had 4, West had 2

Clubs? West's opening lead of the Three suggests a 4-card suit, and East's return of the Five confirms that suspicion.

So, it looks as if West started with 5=2=2=4 distribution. That being the case, he is about to get end-played! He was forced to part with his last Club, so it is a simple matter to cash the Spades, and throw him in on the 5th round of the suit. At Trick 12 he will be forced to lead into your ♥AQ. So you really don't care who has that K♥, you will score two Hearts anyway. By now, you almost have a complete picture of the hand, but here it is anyway:

	♠ AJT73 ♥ 53 ♦ A4 ♣ AQ42	
♠ 86542 ♥ K2 ♦ K6 ♣ T873		♠ 9 ♥ JT74 ♦ T985 ♣ K965
	♠ KQ ♥ AQ986 ♦ QJ732 ♣ J	

We would have to say that you showed great composure if you weathered the bad luck in Diamonds and then in Spades and still managed to organize that end-play against West for 10 tricks.

Sad to say, 11 tricks were always there! Yes, playing on the lower percentage Heart suit and finessing the Heart Nine would forced the King, and now Declarer can unravel 5 Spades, 2 Hearts, 2 Diamonds and 2 Clubs.

... Defend

South	West	North	East
			1♠
Pass	1NT	Dbl	2♦
Dbl	2♠	Dbl	Pass
Pass	Pass		

♠ Q4 ♥ 96542 ♦ 8 ♣ K7543	
Board 9 Hands Rotated for Convenience	♠ 8532 ♥ AJ ♦ JT74 ♣ QJ6

First, a look at the auction (you are South). Your Double of 2♦ showed Diamonds, and Partner's Double of 2♠ simply showed some extra values for that original takeout Double. How do you like your final Pass? Speculative, that's for sure, but there does not seem to be an attractive alternative.

What's your opening lead? You can safely deduce that Dummy will have Diamond shortness, and, that being the case, a trump lead stands out. But not a "top of nothing" lead, the 8♠ may be useful later on, so you lead the deuce. The Q♣ is played from Dummy, covered by Partner's King and Declarer's Ace. Now Declarer cashes the A♦ and takes a Diamond ruff in Dummy. Next, Declarer plays a Heart from the board to his Queen and your Ace.

If Declarer had the A♣ he would have used that entry to get to hand and draw trumps, so you can assume that Partner has that card. And you had better hope that Partner also has the K♥ and K♦ otherwise this contract is likely to make. As Declarer has trouble getting back to his hand to draw trumps, surely the best line of defense is to cash winners in the right order, ending up in North's hand. Then a 3rd Heart provides a trump promotion (be glad your opening lead was not the 8♠!).

But what is the "right order" for the defense to cash its tricks? That depends on Declarer's distribution, and fortunately you and your Partner are in the habit of giving count signals when Declarer leads a suit. So, of course, you noticed that Partner played the Three and then the Two in Diamonds, and the Eight

on the first round of Hearts. So, Declarer must be 5=2=4=2, it's the only distribution that is consistent with the bidding and with Partner's count signals.

If Declarer started with ♠ AJT9x and with ♦ AQxx how will you beat this contract two tricks? Yes, cash the A♥ first, then shift to the Q♣. Let's say that Dummy plays low and North plays the Ten. Is Partner playing the Ten to encourage Clubs? No, of course not, he knows that we know where the Ace is (or will when the Queen holds the trick). Partner is playing the Ten because he can afford to, his initial holding was AT9. So, now you lead a low Club to North's Nine.

Partner also has a count on the hand and plays the K♥ next. This is the full deal:

	♠ K7 ♥ K873 ♦ K932 ♣ AT9	
♠ Q4 ♥ 96542 ♦ 8 ♣ K7543		♠ AJT96 ♥ QT ♦ AQ65 ♣ 82
	♠ 8532 ♥ AJ ♦ JT74 ♣ QJ6	

The cards in **bold** are those yet to be played. Look what happens when North plays that K♥:

- If Declarer pitches a Diamond, then North cashes the K♦, and gets the trump promotion by reverting to Hearts.
- If Declarer ruffs low, you overruff and play another Club. Declarer can ruff and draw trumps, but now he must give up two Diamonds at the end..
- If Declarer ruffs high (his likely choice), he does no better.

In all variations Declarer is down two and a lovely +300 for N-S. The moral of the story is that it pays big dividends to give count on defense. On this deal, by Trick Four, both defenders had a perfect count on the hand.

Post Script Yes, in the deal that was played in The Wednesday Game, Declarer's Q♦ was actually in Partner's hand, we doctored the deal to make this problem more challenging! © BES, Inc All Rights Reserved