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18th June, 2008

DECLARE & DEFEND

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

Declare ...

♠ 8 ♥ Q986 ♦ A762 ♣ KT63	**Board 12** Hands Rotated for Convenience
♠ AJT5 ♥ AK7 ♦ T85 ♣ A94	*South* *North* **Pass 1NT 3♠ Dbl** **Pass 3NT Pass Pass** **Pass**

You opened 1NT, West came in with 3♠ and the question is "What does North's Double mean in this situation?" Let's assume that your partnership is playing Negative Doubles here, which is most fortunate, as without that treatment North would be without a sensible bid. After the Negative Double, you could have made a penalty Pass, but were persuaded by the vulnerability to take a shot at 3NT.

West leads the Diamond Four. There's no reason not to duck, after which East's Queen wins and the Spade Nine is returned. You play the Jack, losing to West's Queen, and the Diamond Nine is returned. Yet again you duck, and East wins the K♦ and plays another Diamond, West following with the Jack.

So far, you have lost 3 tricks, and with the Diamonds breaking 3-3 you can count 8 winners. What do you know about the enemy distribution? West must have started with 7 Spades, not just because of the bidding but also because East did not return a Spade when in with the second Diamond. West also started with 3 Diamonds, meaning that East has the majority of Hearts and Clubs and can surely be squeezed or end-played.

The way to clarify matters and tighten the noose for East is to cash that 13th Diamond (pitching a Spade), then the A♥, K♥ and the A♠ (pitching a Club). East had two pitches to find, both of which were Clubs.

Dummy

♠
♥ Q9
♦
♣ KT6

East

♠ T5
♥ 7
♦
♣ A9

By now, you know that East started out with 1=4=3=5 or 1=3=3=6, and that his remaining cards are 0=2=0=3 or 0=1=0=4. Either way, you've got him. Cash the A♣ in order to get a perfect count on the hand:

- If West follows, then you cash the K♣ and throw in East with a Club, forcing him to lead a Heart from his J5 into Dummy's Q9.
- If West shows out then Hearts were 3-3 all along and Dummy's Hearts are good.

It turns out that the throw-in was required as this is the full hand:

	♠ 8 ♥ Q986 ♦ A762 ♣ KT63	
♠ KQ76432 ♥ T3 ♦ J94 ♣ 5		♠ 9 ♥ J542 ♦ KQ3 ♣ QJ872
	♠ AJT5 ♥ AK7 ♦ T85 ♣ A94	

This was not a particularly difficult hand to get right provided that Declarer takes the trouble to do some counting, and avoids committing himself in Hearts too soon.

P.S West did well not to lead a Spade at Trick One, that would have give Declarer the chance for an overtrick.

... Defend

You hold: ♠ Q873
♥ A6
♦ QJT8
♣ 654

The bidding commences:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
1♥	1♠	2♣	??

You obviously want to support Spades in one way or another. We'd say that this hand is just about good enough for a game-invitational raise. Sure, it's only 9 HCP's, but we do love those 9-card fits and also that chunky Diamond sequence. Assuming that you agree with that assessment, how do you propose to show a game-invitational raise in this auction?

A cue-bid of the enemy suit is the usual weapon of choice, but here we actually have *two* cue-bids available. So, we can use the cheaper 2♥ cue-bid to show 3-card invitational support and the more expensive 3♣ cue-bid to show 4-card invitational support. Notwithstanding your support-showing machinery, you wind up defending 4♥ after the following auction:

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
1♥	1♠	2♣	3♣
3♥	Pass	4♥	Pass
Pass	Pass		

Partner leads the Club Ten, and this is what you see:

	♠ 942 ♥ 98 ♦ A ♣ KJ98732
♠ Q873 ♥ A6 ♦ QJT8 ♣ 654	**Board 7** Hands Rotated for Convenience

Declarer wins the A♣, and leads the K♥. Before we decide whether to win this trick or not, let's figure out Declarer's distribution:

- *Spades?* Put your money on a singleton, if Partner had 6 opposite our 4-card raise he would surely have bid 4♠. In other words, Declarer is unlikely to be void.
- *Hearts?* Let's assume 6 (but 7 is also possible).
- *Diamonds?* No clues
- *Clubs?* Obviously two as Partner's lead is a singleton.

So, Declarer is either 1=6=4=2 or 1=7=3=2 and we should assume the former if we intend to beat this contract. Where are the defense's 4 tricks coming from? We could win the A♥, give Partner a Club ruff, but then what? The defense will have a Spade coming but that will be it.

The winning defense is to say "Phooey!" to Partner's Club ruff and to focus on shutting out Dummy's Club winners. The only way to do that is to duck the first Heart, win the second Heart and return a *Diamond!* "Phooey", indeed! The steam emitting from Partner's ears will maybe subside if she realizes that you have just found the only winning defense.

	♠ AKJT5 ♥ 743 ♦ K964 ♣ T	
♠ 6 ♥ KQJT52 ♦ 7532 ♣ AQ		♠ 942 ♥ 98 ♦ A ♣ KJ98732
	♠ Q873 ♥ A6 ♦ QJT8 ♣ 654	

Ducking the first Heart and then shifting to a Diamond is the only way to beat 4♥. If Partner says in the post mortem "I had a singleton Club, we'd have scored another trick if you had given me my ruff", then the politically correct response is "I thought I'd go for the sure set". In fact, if sainthood is your objective, you might even add "Great lead, Partner, if you had cashed the A♠ at Trick One then 4♥ is cold."

South will also refrain from asking Partner why she did not bid on to 4♠ with that offensive-oriented hand. True, 4♠ can be beaten, but it probably won't be in real life, lending further ammunition to the theory that it is so often right to bid 4♠ over the opponents' 4♥.

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