

THE ADVENTURES OF BORIS THE IMPROVER

Hand from the club

This is board 23 from the 10th December 2018. The par result should be six hearts making seven. We had ten tables and nobody actually achieved that. Two pairs bid the slam and somebody in four made seven. I didn't play the hand and didn't think of it as a bridge problem until I saw how many players got it wrong.

The Bidding - North's hand doesn't fit well into the system. You are too strong to open one heart, not strong enough for two clubs and the wrong shape for two no trump. Boris is an optimistic player and since he only has a four loser hand bids two clubs. He hits the jackpot as Felicity gives a positive response of two hearts. He bids four clubs she responds four hearts. He bids five clubs she responds five hearts. Having found an ace and a king Boris bids six hearts. The opposition are silent throughout the auction and this becomes the final contract.

Boris
♠ A 3
♥ K Q 7 5 4
♦ A K 8 3
♣ A J

♠ J 7 2
♥ J T 8
♦ T 9 6 5 2
♣ Q 8
Albert

♠ K Q 5 4
♥ void
♦ Q 7 4
♣ T 9 7 6 3 2
Agatha

♠ T 9 8 6
♥ A 9 6 3 2
♦ J
♣ K 5 4
Felicity

Contract six hearts, try and make seven. Lead ten of diamonds.

The play - Felicity was very happy with dummy. She only had one spade loser and could see that six hearts was cold. At trick two she played the King of hearts and discovered the trumps were split 3-0. The Queen of hearts was played next followed by the Ace these two rounds drawing the last of the opposing trumps. Now to get rid of that pesky spade loser.

At trick five Felicity led the 4 of clubs to dummy's Jack. When this won the trick, she cashed up the Ace of clubs, Ace of spades and the Ace of diamonds on which a spade was discarded from hand. At trick nine the 2 of diamonds was led from dummy and trumped in hand. The King of clubs followed with the 3 of spades being discarded from dummy. The 9 of spades is trumped next followed by the 8 of diamonds in hand and the ten of spades in dummy to make a total of thirteen tricks. Sounds simple enough so why didn't more people do it?

Many players look at suits in isolation. They are reluctant to take an unnecessary finesse that may cost them a trick. In the case above an unsuccessful finesse trades a spade loser for a club loser and six will still be made. The only circumstance when the finesse is too dangerous is

after a spade lead. A losing finesse will be followed promptly by the defenders taking a spade trick. With the Ace of spades yet to be played this is easily avoided.

Practical hints – card vision

Dummy
 ♠ A K 4
 ♥ 7 5 3
 ♦ Q J T 9
 ♣ A 6 4

Dummy
 ♠ A K 4
 ♥ 7 5 3
 ♦ Q J 7 6
 ♣ A 6 4

♠ 8 7 6
 ♥ A K 6
 ♦ A 4 3 2
 ♣ K 7 5

Declarer Board one

♠ 8 7 6
 ♥ A K 6
 ♦ A 4 3 2
 ♣ K 7 5

Declarer Board two

The bidding on both boards has gone one no trump three no trump and the Queen of spades has been led. What is the difference between these two boards is it;

A – no difference B – small difference C – big difference

HINT – I asked what is the difference between the boards not the cards.

If you didn't answer C, have another look.

Board one is 100% stone cold any distribution any defence for 3NT. You also have a 50% chance of making 4NT.

Board two the inferior line of play will give you 3NT 68% of the time. A better alternative increases your chances to 87% but 13% of the time declarer is going down no matter how good they are. Assuming defence doesn't have a senior moment and deliberately throw their King under the Ace without taking the Queen or Jack with it, there is zero chance of making 4NT.

It is important to notice these possibilities at trick one, as soon as dummy goes down. This is what I mean by card vision. In the examples above declarer has two spade tricks, two heart tricks and two club tricks. The contract will stand or fall on the number of diamond tricks obtained. In board one you try and get four by leading the Queen. If it holds the trick try the Jack and if the King is on the right four diamond tricks and 4NT will be made.

In board two this is a waste of time as against adequate defence 4NT is unobtainable. Running the Queen makes the position of the King irrelevant. If the diamonds are split 3-2 or 2-3 defence will always make a diamond trick. The secret of good play on this hand is to minimise the defence's chances of making two diamond tricks. This is done by leading the 6 of diamonds to the Ace at trick two and then leading small to the Queen at trick three. This will still give you three diamond tricks whenever they are split 3-2 or 2-3 plus whenever they are split 4-1, 1-4 whenever the 1 is the King and when they are 5-0.

The best way to develop card vision is to practice looking at all 4 hands and see if you can work out how the computer was able to make as many tricks as it did. Remember it's best declarer play vs best defence.

Brian Spendelow.