

NO TRUMPS PARTNER?

Chapter 12: The 4 D's

By now, you have decided that you would definitely rather be declarer. The hands you have viewed make declarer play a piece of cake, don't they? Declarer has TWO hands to look at and decide what to do. Sometimes declarer can decide whether to play for overtricks, and if so, for how many. But hold on! In the examples I have given, declarer also got the most favourable lead imaginable. What if the defence had defended differently? That is exactly the point of the exercise. When I fill in ALL the hands, you will see that the hands I have shown to be DECLARER'S were in fact the hands that belonged to the defender on lead. Since the defender had a choice of which card to lead, I manufactured a lead that made no difference to how declarer might play the hand. In fact, it was how the real DEFENDER would play the hand, given that he/she could see dummy, which is their PARTNER'S hand. I'm not suggesting that there should be any cheating involved, but you would be surprised how often a good defender can actually 'see' partner's hand. Sometimes, as you will see, the defence can do things that declarer would NOT know to do. So, let us start by looking at all four hands in the first deal.

BOARD 1 DEALER North NIL VUL

North

♠ 7 6 5

♥ 7 4 2

♦ 7 4 3

♣ A K 10 7

West

♠ 9 8 3

♥ A Q 8 5

♦ A Q 6

♣ 8 6 4

East

♠ K J 4

♥ 10 9 3

♦ K 10 8 5 2

♣ J 2

South

♠ A Q 10 2

♥ K J 6

♦ J 9

♣ Q 9 5 3

After two passes you open 1NT and all pass. West leads a low heart, to East's nine and your jack. How would you play the hand from then on? You might thank your lucky stars that opponents have as yet not found their diamond suit, and continue by leading a club to the ace and then a spade from dummy, finessing the queen if East plays low. That, if it works, will probably allow you to make seven tricks and thereby your contract.

That was my analysis when I posed the declarer play problem. OK, you can see that West had a reasonable enough lead of a low heart, but unfortunately EW missed out on finding their diamond suit at trick one. If declarer were to finesse the TEN of spades on the first round, then declarer could make a total of NINE tricks, making four spades, four clubs, and the jack of hearts won on the opening lead. You might say: but West would never have led a diamond, and that is therefore just bad luck for the defence. Now imagine a different set up, with WEST as declarer and North on lead. North would have had an easy lead but I suspect NS would still not have got the best out of THEIR defence. We'll return to this problem later, because the next problem will illustrate the same principle in a much simpler way.

BOARD 3 DEALER South EW VUL

North

♠ K 8 7 2

♥ 9

♦ K J 8 5 4

♣ K 9 2

West

♠ J 9 3

♥ Q 5 3 2

♦ 10 7 6

♣ Q 10 5

East

♠ 6 5 4

♥ A K 10 8

♦ Q 3

♣ A J 6 3

South

♠ A Q 10

♥ J 7 6 4

♦ A 9 2

♣ 8 7 4

This time you are South and you are playing a system where you open 1NT with 11-14 HCP at the given vulnerability. West leads the nine of spades. How will you play this one? Seeing all the hands, it's easy isn't it? But what if you were SOUTH and had to lead against 1NT by EAST? That was the question I posed with this problem. The SOUTH hand is the one I gave our panel of top players as a LEAD problem. In the diagram, it would be EAST who was declarer. It would have been easy to play the NS hands as declarer, especially if you had the FIRST play (i.e. the LEAD) and could see all the hands, wouldn't it?

So, imagine you are South, you have the opening lead, and you have an intelligent partner. AND you can enlist the help of your partner in doing what I call a "Declarer Reversal". No doubt you have heard of a "Dummy Reversal" in declarer play. Now you can try a "Declarer Reversal" as defenders! Let me go through the process of finding the best opening lead first. Our panel of top players chose one of two opening leads. Either the four of hearts, because it was a) what everyone else would lead or b) 'fourth highest of longest and strongest'. And that is DESPITE many of them having a real dislike for leading from a jack. Those who chose a club, did so because they thought it was a nice safe lead. As one panelist said: 'the worst that will happen is you'll pick up an honour card in partner's hand'. You can see that this WAS in fact better than leading a heart, but only because the club lead would probably have saved a heart trick, though not necessarily.

Let me now repeat what I have said before about defending a ONE No Trump contract. Most of the time it will be a case of both you and opponents having balanced hands opposite each other. If ANYONE has a long suit, it is probably the defenders. Declarer and dummy are likely to be balanced and will have a MAXIMUM of 24 combined HCP and a minimum of say 16. A lot of the time both sides will be struggling for tricks. The side that can see both their hands will have a certain advantage, but the side that has the opening lead will have an even bigger advantage, IF they can make the best lead. And if you were able to play the hand as 'declarer' AND have the opening lead, you'd be sure to come out on top, even with fewer HCP than opponents, would you not?

Now let's look at the South hand and imagine that as being DECLARER. Hide the other hands while you think about just the South hand. If you were DECLARER, which suit would you be MOST likely to embark on? In order for you to lead a card from hand towards dummy, what would you be seeing in dummy? If you were to lead a HEART, you would be looking at KQx at least wouldn't you? Of you were to lead a DIAMOND, you would probably be seeing KQxx in dummy. If you were to lead a CLUB, you would be looking at KQ10x minimum in dummy, or surely you would have better things to do? BUT.. if you were deciding to lead the ace of spades, you would be looking at no more than Kxxx in dummy. Maybe even Jxxx(x) with few entries. Does not the ace of spades provide the MOST LIKELY play that South, as DECLARER, would be making? There is also a great advantage in leading the spade ace from the hand that South has. It gives away ONE trick at most, and if partner does not LIKE your lead, you can see dummy and then make a sensible assessment of how to continue. Not only are the ODDS on your side in the first place if you lead the 'unthinkable' ace of spades, you have given little away and still have the chance to do something better. All the other leads have potential to turn out as disasters.

The next chapter will examine the same hands from a number of other perspectives, and the reader should learn a great deal about the 4-D way of defence. It will begin to improve THEIR defence to a quite unbelievable extent, provided they are prepared to start learning to THINK. And to enlist a partner who can also think and cooperate!