

Margaret River Bridge #080319c12

Today we have some tricky bidding resulting in a very difficult contract. If you don't realise the problems early, then you miss the opportunity of making the contract.

Dealer - West	♠A Q T 9 3		
Vul - both	♥J 4 2		
	♦9 3		
	♣A 6 4		
		N	
♠5			♠J 8 7 6 4
♥Q T 9 8	W	E	♥6 5 3
♦Q J 7 5			♦2
♣K 9 5 3		S	♣Q J 7 2
			♠K 2
			♥A K 7
			♦A K T 8 6 4
			♣T 8

Bidding

N	E	S	W
			P
P	P	1NT	P
2C	P	2D	P
2S	P	3H	P
3NT	all pass		

South opens strongly, indicating 16-18 points (some players would open 1D, but I prefer to tell my partner about the points rather than the long minor suit). North responds with a stayman 2C, asking if partner has a four card major. The 2D response denies majors and implies a diamond suit (otherwise you could have gone 2NT), so when North still calls 2S, they are telling their partner that they have at least 5 spades in their hand. South now decides to look for no trumps and bids 3H to tell partner they have hearts covered. North can now call 3NT since they know that they have cover in all suits.

West is on lead and will lead the 3 of clubs, fourth highest from longest and strongest suit and also the weakest suit for NS given the bidding. This will be taken by East's Queen, and East will return the Jack of Clubs, which will also win since most players will duck the first two rounds of clubs and be forced to win the Ace of clubs on the third lead.

If you count your tricks now, you have two heart tricks, two diamond tricks and most probably four or five spade tricks, so the contract should make. You lead a small spade to the King and then return a small spade back to the Ace, finding out the bad news about the spade suit. How will you play from here?

If you persist with Spades, West has a problem since they have to discard every time you lead a spade. Unfortunately so do you and if West chooses to discard their King of clubs on the fourth spade lead you are still in trouble since you also cannot keep all you options open. I still like this line of play since it seems sensible and would work in most cases.

The actual line of play that will work on this hand is to play the Queen of spades and then lead the nine of diamonds, letting West win. West can take their King of clubs but now must lead away from one of their winning tricks giving you a free finesse and allowing you to make the contract. This also allows you to protect your hearts and diamonds. Without knowing all four hands, it is hard to play this line since you will have placed West with five clubs and would be trying to avoid letting win a trick.

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