## How to get a zero

## Rakesh Kumar

With neither side vulnerable, as South you hold the hand below and the auction proceeds as shown:

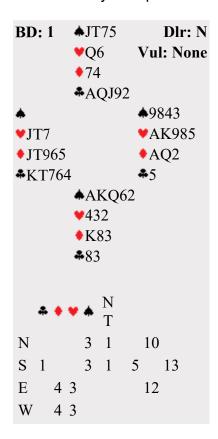
| ♣AKQ62       | , |
|--------------|---|
| <b>¥</b> 432 |   |
| ♦K83         |   |
| <b>*</b> 83  |   |

| W  | N  | Е   | S  |
|----|----|-----|----|
|    | Р  | 1H  | 1S |
| 2H | 3H | Dbl | 3S |
| Р  | Р  | 4H  | ?  |

Partner's 3H bid showed a good raise to 3S, but with a 7-loser 5332 hand you attempted to sign off below game. East, who had doubled to show a willingness to play in at least 3H, then continued to 4H. What will you do?

It does sound suspiciously like East is bidding to make, so a sacrifice in 4S appears to be a good idea – even if you finish two down doubled that's -300 which is better than -420 if East-West can indeed make 4H. But maybe you aren't convinced that they will make and/or decide discretion is the better part of valour. If you pass 4H, what will you lead?

I'd be surprised if you chose anything other than a top spade. As it turns out, there is now no way to stop East-West raking in 10 tricks, because this was the full deal, from Monday 22 April:



On a spade lead, East ruffs in dummy and plays a small diamond towards hand, inserting the queen. Or at least this is what East *should* do – if instead East leads •J and plays a low card from hand, the diamond tricks in dummy will be forever lost.

Now if South wins the king it's actually not possible to stop East from making 11 tricks – South has to duck the queen to hold declarer to 10 tricks, as declarer ruffs two more spades in dummy and then ♥AK drop the queen.

Yes, it is possible to beat 4H, but that requires South to lead a trump or a club, neither of which is likely in the real world. That makes the sacrifice in 4S the best way for North-South to achieve the par result of -100 after they are doubled.

Partner and I did reach 4S – in fact partner passed at the point in the auction shown above, but I decided that a 4S sacrifice was in order. We weren't doubled. Partner duly made 9 tricks and both of us believed at the time that a mere -50 must be a very good score.

See how wrong we were:

| Contract  | Result | Score | Frequency |
|-----------|--------|-------|-----------|
| 4♠X by NS | =      | 590   | 1         |
| 3♠ by NS  | +1     | 170   | 1         |
| 5♥ by EW  | -3     | 150   | 1         |
| 3♠ by NS  | =      | 140   | 1         |
| 2♠ by NS  | +1     | 140   | 1         |
| 2♠ by NS  | =      | 110   | 1         |
| 4♥ by EW  | -1     | 50    | 2         |
| 4♠ by NS  | -1     | -50   | 1         |

Yes, an absolute bottom! Sometimes I wonder ... anyway full credit to John Philp for raising to 2H based on shape and a fit, as well as to Steve Brabyn for pushing on to 4H to put maximum pressure on us.

