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8 March 2018

Asleep at the Wheel

Chris Bayliss

This hand occurred in the first round of the Iredale Teams. At our table, north-south reached 3NT after a slight bidding mishap. Still, this was not a hopeless contract with five of the eight tables getting there and three of the five declarers making their contract.

| | | |
|--------------|---------|-----------------|
| BD: 4 | ♠Q2 | Dir: W |
| | ♥A98 | Vul: All |
| | ♦AK | |
| | ♣AQ9875 | |
| ♠9753 | | ♠AJ864 |
| ♥KT532 | | ♥76 |
| ♦J72 | | ♦86 |
| ♣J | | ♣K643 |
| | ♠KT | |
| | ♥QJ4 | |
| | ♦QT9543 | |
| | ♣T2 | |

| | ♣ | ♦ | ♥ | ♠ | NT |
|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| N | 4 | 4 | 2 | - | 2 |
| S | 4 | 4 | 2 | - | 2 |
| E | - | - | - | 1 | - |
| W | - | - | - | 1 | - |

| | | | |
|---|---|----|---|
| | | 19 | |
| 5 | | | 8 |
| | 8 | | |

One of the successful declarers was at my table where I occupied the west seat. Partner led the ♠6. This was unfortunate for the declarer as it meant the ♠K could no longer be used as an entry once the diamonds were established. Furthermore, declarer could not afford to lose the lead because of the dangerous spade suit.

North set about creating an entry in hearts. He won the opening lead in dummy and played the ♥Q. West having been trained to cover an honour with an honour, duly played the king and North won with the ace. Now, North cashed the ace and king of diamonds. When both defenders followed, it was back to the ♥J in dummy and all the lovely diamond winners.

Well done, North.

Not nearly so well done, West. If I had played low on the ♥Q, the ♥J would no longer be an entry and declarer is doomed.

Asleep at the wheel.

Chris

8 March 2018

Defending against notrumps

Rakesh Kumar

The first night of the Iredale Teams had lots of interesting hands. Although the points were running almost entirely North-South's way, there was plenty of action in defence – and the usual unfortunate consequences of getting it wrong. Here's one that illustrates the application of a well-known defensive rule.

You are defending against a notrump contract by your left-hand opponent, who opened 1NT (it doesn't matter whether the final contract was 1NT, 2NT or 3NT). Your partner leads the $\heartsuit 5$ (fourth highest) and what you see is this dummy – your hand is below and to the right:

\spadesuit AJ
 \heartsuit Q732
 \diamondsuit JT
 \clubsuit T8654

\spadesuit T976
 \heartsuit JT98
 \diamondsuit K962
 \clubsuit K

You rise with the \diamondsuit K and it holds the trick, declarer playing the \diamondsuit 3. Of course you correctly return the \diamondsuit 2 to show partner you had 4 cards, declarer follows with \diamondsuit 8 and partner wins with the queen. Partner now plays the ace of diamonds. What do you play?

This is all about the rule of 11. Partner led the \diamondsuit 5 so there should be 6 cards higher than that between your hand, declarer and dummy. You could see 5 of them when dummy came down, and declarer produced the sixth when you returned the \diamondsuit 2. All of which means what? Yes, you should unblock your \diamondsuit 9 on partner's ace so that 5 diamond tricks can be cashed! Here's the full hand:

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| BD: 19 | \spadesuit K32 | Dir: S |
| | \heartsuit AK6 | Vul: E-W |
| | \diamondsuit 83 | |
| | \clubsuit AQ973 | |
| \spadesuit T976 | | \spadesuit Q854 |
| \heartsuit JT98 | | \heartsuit 54 |
| \diamondsuit K962 | | \diamondsuit AQ754 |
| \clubsuit K | | \clubsuit J2 |
| | \spadesuit AJ | |
| | \heartsuit Q732 | |
| | \diamondsuit JT | |
| | \clubsuit T8654 | |

If you don't unblock, declarer will easily take 9 tricks, even without a finesse in spades, because of the favourable lie of the clubs. All 4 declarers in a notrump contract did so ...

13 March 2018

A strong hand with a minor suit

Rakesh Kumar

| |
|--------|
| ♠86 |
| ♥AT9 |
| ♦JT532 |
| ♣KT5 |

What do you do if partner opens a strong 2C and you hold this hand?

Well of course a lot depends on your agreements – perhaps you will simply bid 2D waiting, or will make some response showing a positive hand without a 5-card major, or perhaps you will show the number of controls you hold (in steps, A=2 and K=1).

In any case, partner now bids 3C and we get to the real question: *now* what do you do? There are several issues here:

1. Partner may have a powerful one-suited hand; or may have a 5-card club suit and a 4-card major, looking for a fit; or may be looking for a 3NT contract if you have an outside suit stopped.
2. There's insufficient room to both show your own suit and show support for partner's clubs below 3NT.
3. There's a real possibility that going past 3NT to explore a minor suit slam will be a disaster at matchpoints.

| | | |
|--------------|------------|-----------------|
| BD: 3 | ♠KT952 | Dir: S |
| | ♥K7652 | Vul: E-W |
| | ♦64 | |
| | ♣3 | |
| ♠AQ4 | | ♠86 |
| ♥Q | | ♥AT9 |
| ♦AKQ8 | | ♦JT532 |
| ♣AQJ96 | | ♣KT5 |
| | ♠J73 | |
| | ♥J843 | |
| | ♦97 | |
| | ♣8742 | |
| | ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT | |
| N | - - - - - | 6 |
| S | - - - - - | 24 8 |
| E | 7 7 - 1 6 | 2 |
| W | 7 7 1 2 6 | |

This hand came up on Monday 12 March and it seems to me that no East-West pair really took the most effective action. Of the 9 tables, 4 pairs played in 3NT and 5 in a contract in diamonds. One of the latter pairs reached 6D.

As East doesn't have a 4-card major to show, why is she/he showing the jack-top diamond suit? True, on this occasion there's an unexpected wonderful fit, which actually makes 7D an easy contract, but when partner has opened with a strong hand and then shown clubs, isn't it responder's duty to show a fit with opener's suit?

Taking the argument further, what has partner promised? With a hand containing a minor suit, opening 2C consumes a great deal of bidding room, so it would be a very unwise partner who had anything less than a 3-loser hand. Responder has every reason to believe that two of those losers are covered with ♥A and the ♣K.

One could raise to 4C and hand control over to partner, or go via Blackwood to check out the possibility of a grand slam (no, you don't want to be there, even though Deep Finesse makes it by ruffing out the ♥J) but even a fairly crude jump to 6C would not be such a bad thing ...

19 March 2018

Squeezed!

Chris Bayliss

| | | | | | | | |
|---------------|---------|-----------------|---|---|----|----|----|
| BD: 19 | ♠T6 | Dlr: S | | | | | |
| | ♥943 | Vul: E-W | | | | | |
| | ♦KQ9874 | | | | | | |
| | ♣42 | | | | | | |
| ♠AQ532 | | ♠K94 | | | | | |
| ♥85 | | ♥AKQ6 | | | | | |
| ♦32 | | ♦A65 | | | | | |
| ♣KQ76 | | ♣A95 | | | | | |
| | ♠J87 | | | | | | |
| | ♥JT72 | | | | | | |
| | ♦JT | | | | | | |
| | ♣JT83 | | | | | | |
| | ♣ | ♦ | ♥ | ♠ | NT | | |
| N | - | - | - | - | - | 5 | |
| S | - | - | - | - | - | 11 | 20 |
| E | 6 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 7 | 4 | |
| W | 6 | 2 | 5 | 7 | 7 | | |

Most of us have little familiarity with squeezes. Sometimes you will hear a defender say "I was squeezed" but often that just meant he or she was under pressure to find the right discard and picked the wrong one.

At the Saturday session, there was an example of a genuine squeeze. The great thing about it was that it happened automatically – perhaps that is why it is called an "automatic squeeze"!

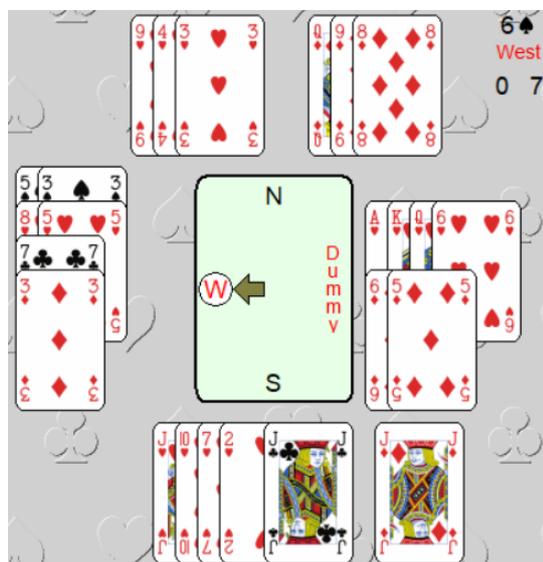
Most east-west were in 6♠ and North led the ♦K. When the spades break, there are twelve top tricks, five spades, three hearts, a diamond and three clubs.

There are prospects of a thirteenth trick if the club suit breaks evenly. Unfortunately, it doesn't and most declarers ended up with just twelve tricks.

So, what is going on? The computer says that thirteen tricks can be made.

Let's go back to the start. Win the opening lead in dummy and draw trumps. Now cash the three club winners, hoping for the even break. When that doesn't happen, there is still the prospect of a squeeze. We are hoping that South has four hearts to go along with the club winner.

After the clubs have been cashed, the position is this.



Instead of playing out the hearts (eventually losing a club or a diamond), why not cash the two spades first? On the first spade, East and South will both discard a diamond. On the second spade, East can discard the last diamond but South is in a dilemma. A club discard will give West the thirteenth trick straight away while a heart discard, will set up the fourth heart in dummy.

This time, South can genuinely say, "I was squeezed!"

19 March 2018

An interesting card combination

Rakesh Kumar

There are many books that discuss how to play card combinations and I certainly haven't read all of them, nor do I remember much of what I've read! However, on Saturday 17 March I saw something that was new to me.

With sufficient entries, I'm sure you know how to play this holding:

632 (your hand) AJT75 (dummy)

for 4 tricks: you finesse twice and hope for split honours and a 3-2 break (or maybe KQ on side).

But what about if the position of the ten (or jack) is changed so that you hold:

T32 (your hand) AJ765 (dummy)

Now the standard recommended play for 4 tricks is to finesse the jack and then play the ace, hoping to drop an on-side doubleton honour and thus avoid losing a trick to the 9.

But is this right? If you lead the ten from hand, if LHO holds an honour, the 9 and a small card, s/he can see that covering the 10 ought to generate a trick for the 9 and will therefore probably do so. However, if after winning the ace you now play a low card from dummy, you will concede a trick to the off-side doubleton honour but will be able to draw the 9 with the jack ... 4 tricks! And of course if LHO does not cover, then the situation reduces to a straightforward split-honour finesse.

| | | |
|--------------|------------|-----------------|
| BD: 6 | ♠Q8 | Dir: E |
| | ♥86 | Vul: E-W |
| | ♦K97 | |
| | ♣AQ9642 | |
| ♠K42 | | ♠A5 |
| ♥AQJ95 | | ♥KT72 |
| ♦T53 | | ♦AJ842 |
| ♣T5 | | ♣J3 |
| | ♠JT9763 | |
| | ♥43 | |
| | ♦Q6 | |
| | ♣K87 | |
| | ♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ NT | |
| N | 2 - - 2 - | 11 |
| S | 2 - - 2 - | 10 13 |
| E | - 4 4 - 1 | 6 |
| W | - 4 4 - 1 | |

Looking at the suit in isolation, that's the best line of play in a 4H contract on the hand shown here. Of course suits are never in isolation ... this hand is actually a good example of an elimination and throw-in. Win the likely spade lead, draw trumps, play another 2 rounds of spades ruffing the third, and exit with a club. Whoever wins the second club has to either give a ruff-sluff or open up the diamond suit, to declarer's advantage.

25th March 2018

A Tough Contract

Chris Bayliss

| | | |
|--------------|--------|-----------------|
| BD: 7 | ♠JT76 | Dir: S |
| | ♥92 | Vul: All |
| | ♦K9 | |
| | ♣KJ872 | |
| ♠Q95 | | ♠K82 |
| ♥KT83 | | ♥AQ6 |
| ♦A543 | | ♦QT862 |
| ♣53 | | ♣A4 |
| | ♠A43 | |
| | ♥J754 | |
| | ♦J7 | |
| | ♣QT96 | |

| | ♣ | ♦ | ♥ | ♠ | NT | |
|---|---|---|---|---|----|------|
| N | 1 | - | - | - | - | 8 |
| S | 1 | - | - | - | - | 9 15 |
| E | - | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | 8 |
| W | - | 4 | 3 | 1 | 2 | |

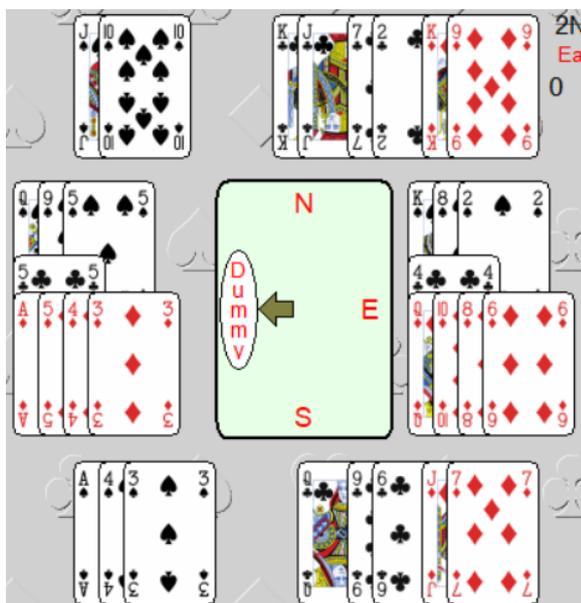
On this hand from Saturday's session, the opening lead proved decisive. Five declarers sitting east played in 2NT. Three got a heart lead and had an easy job making nine tricks. Two unfortunate declarers received a club lead and went down.

After the club lead, the prospects are gloomy. Four clubs and a spade are certain to be lost. Any attempt to establish diamonds will result in another trick to the defence and the contract will be down.

Since trying to establish diamonds is futile, is there a way that has at least some chance of success? We have one club trick, one diamond trick and with a bit of luck, four hearts. After forcing out the ace of spades, we have a spade trick too. That's seven tricks and we need to find an eighth. Suppose...

Win the opening lead. There is no point holding up anyway. Cash the ace and queen of hearts and finesse the ten (a better chance than hoping for an even break of the suit). On the last two hearts, north will have to let two spades go if all the clubs are to be retained.

At this point, the position is:



Now play a low spade to the ten, king and ace. The defence will take their four club tricks but west is left with three winners: the queen and nine of spades and the ace of diamonds.

The moral of the story? When the obvious line of play cannot possibly work, try something else – and never give up!

Would I have managed this at the table? Not a chance! 😊

Chris