

Monday, June 27, 2011

Tuesday, June 28, 2011

Wednesday, June 29, 2011

North 06-27-11
 ♠ A K Q 5
 ♥ 4
 ♦ K Q 10
 ♣ K 8 6 5 2

West East
 ♠ J ♠ 10 9 8 6 3 2
 ♥ Q J 10 9 7 ♥ 8 6 3
 ♦ A 6 2 ♦ 7 5 4
 ♣ A 10 9 3 ♣ 7

South
 ♠ 7 4
 ♥ A K 5 2
 ♦ J 9 8 3
 ♣ Q J 4

Dealer: West
 Vulnerable: Both

South	West	North	East
1 ♥	Pass	3 NT	Pass
2 NT	Pass	3 NT	All pass

Opening lead: ♠ 6

Bad splits require good declarer play

By Phillip Alder

Pierre Trudeau said, "Let us overthrow the totems, break the taboos. Or better, let us consider them canceled. Coldly, let us be intelligent."

It is good to be intelligent at the bridge table, and part of that intelligence is recognizing when to break the taboos, those "rules" that players like to follow. In this deal, what is the intelligent line for South in three no-trump after West leads the heart queen?

North has a textbook takeout double over one heart: short hearts and length in the other three suits. South's jump to two no-trump shows 10-12 points with, usually, at least two heart stoppers. North has an easy raise to game.

The original declarer saw that he had only five top tricks: three spades and two hearts. But he expected to get four more tricks from clubs, and he knew all about the "honor from the shorter side first" dictate. So, after taking trick one in his hand, South led the club queen. West won with his ace and persevered with the heart nine. Declarer took that and cashed the club jack. When East discarded a low spade, South knew that he was doomed.

Rules be damned! This is one of the rare deals when declarer must ignore the textbooks. The correct play at trick two is to lead the club four from the South hand. How can West defend?

If West takes his ace, declarer wins three spades, two hearts and four clubs. Alternatively, if West plays low on the club, South wins with dummy's king and shifts to diamonds, taking three spades, two hearts, three diamonds and one club.

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North 06-28-11
 ♠ K 7 5 4 2
 ♥ 8 2
 ♦ A 6 4 3
 ♣ J 5

West East
 ♠ J 10 6 ♠ Q 9 8
 ♥ J 10 5 ♥ Q 9 7
 ♦ J 8 ♦ Q 10 9 2
 ♣ K 10 8 6 3 ♣ Q 4 2

South
 ♠ A 3
 ♥ A K 6 4 3
 ♦ K 7 5
 ♣ A 9 7

Dealer: South
 Vulnerable: Both

South	West	North	East
1 ♥	Pass	1 ♠	Pass
2 NT	Pass	3 ♦	Pass
3 NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening lead: ♣ 6

South avoids to avoid failure

By Phillip Alder

Evan Esar, a humorist who died in 1995, said, "The girl with a future avoids a man with a past." That made me wonder if a man with a future avoids a girl with a past.

In bridge, we have an avoidance play, which comes up in today's deal. South is in three no-trump. West leads the club six, and East puts up his queen. How should South plan the play?

North rebid three diamonds, not with aspirations of making that suit trumps, but in the hope that South could show three-card spade support. Since South did not and had a club stopper, he continued with three no-trump.

South had seven top tricks: two spades, two hearts, two diamonds and one club. South played low at trick one, played low again when East returned the club four (the higher of two remaining cards), and won the third club.

Now declarer knew that he had to establish either spades or hearts without letting West win a trick; otherwise, he would cash two club winners. That needed the major suit to split 3-3. In spades, though, surely West would be able to take a trick in the suit. But as long as East had exactly queen-third in hearts, he could be forced to win the defensive heart trick.

South led a spade to dummy's king and called for a heart. After East played low, declarer won with his ace, crossed to dummy's diamond ace, and led the remaining heart. If East played low, South would win and lead a third round. If East put up his queen, he would be allowed to take the trick.

Mission accomplished.

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North 06-29-11
 ♠ A Q J
 ♥ K J 5 4
 ♦ K 7 3 2
 ♣ A 3

West East
 ♠ K 8 5 3 ♠ 10 9 6 4 2
 ♥ 9 6 ♥ --
 ♦ 9 8 4 ♦ Q J 10
 ♣ Q J 10 6 ♣ K 8 7 5 2

South
 ♠ 7
 ♥ A Q 10 8 7 3 2
 ♦ A 6 5
 ♣ 9 4

Dealer: North
 Vulnerable: Neither

South	West	North	East
1 ♥	Pass	1 ♦	Pass
4 ♦	Pass	4 NT	Pass
5 ♥	Pass	5 NT	Pass
6 ♣	Pass	6 ♥	All pass

Opening lead: ♣ Q

Aces you win, deuces they lose

By Phillip Alder

Dr. Seuss wrote, "Will you succeed? Yes, you will indeed! (98 and three-quarters percent guaranteed.)"

That is a decent percentage for a bridge declarer, but 100 percent would be better. Can you see the guaranteed line in this deal? South is in six hearts. West leads the club queen. After winning with dummy's ace and drawing trumps in two rounds, how should declarer continue?

North's hand was worth a three-and-a-quarter heart rebid. South, now knowing of an 11-card heart fit, showed some slam interest by control-bidding (cue-bidding) four diamonds. North took over with Blackwood.

South started with two potential losers: one diamond and one club. He had only 11 winners: one spade, seven hearts, two diamonds and one club. He was guaranteed a second spade trick, but that would not help if he lost two tricks.

Declarer could take the spade finesse. If it won, he would discard a minor-suit loser on the spade ace. But if the finesse lost, he would go down because East would cash the club king.

Instead, South should play dummy's spade ace, then call for the spade queen. If East could cover with the king, declarer would ruff, lead a diamond to dummy's king, and discard a loser on the spade jack. And when East plays low, South pitches his last club. West wins with the king, but declarer's diamond loser disappears on the spade jack. The ruffing finesse guarantees the contract.

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Thursday, June 30, 2011

Friday, July 1, 2011

Saturday, July 2, 2011

North 06-30-11 ♠ A 10 5 ♥ A 10 6 3 ♦ J 8 7 ♣ 9 4 2			
West ♠ 8 3 ♥ 7 4 2 ♦ Q 6 3 ♣ A K Q 6 5		East ♠ Q 9 7 6 4 ♥ J ♦ 10 9 5 4 2 ♣ 10 3	
South ♠ K J 2 ♥ K Q 9 8 5 ♦ A K ♣ J 8 7			
Dealer: South Vulnerable: Both			
South	West	North	East
1 ♥	2 ♣	2 ♥	Pass
3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	All pass
Opening lead: ♣ A			

North 07-01-11 ♠ 5 3 2 ♥ 10 9 7 ♦ A Q 9 8 6 ♣ K 4			
West ♠ A J 6 ♥ K 4 ♦ 7 3 2 ♣ 9 6 5 3 2		East ♠ K 10 7 4 ♥ 8 6 3 2 ♦ 10 5 ♣ A J 7	
South ♠ Q 9 8 ♥ A Q J 5 ♦ K J 4 ♣ Q 10 8			
Dealer: South Vulnerable: Both			
South	West	North	East
1 NT	Pass	3 NT	All pass
Opening lead: ♣ 3			

North 07-02-11 ♠ K Q 6 3 ♥ K Q 9 ♦ 7 ♣ A K 8 5 2			
West ♠ A 10 7 4 ♥ 10 8 7 3 2 ♦ A 8 4 ♣ 3		East ♠ J 9 8 5 2 ♥ A J 5 4 ♦ 3 ♣ 9 6 4	
South ♠ -- ♥ 6 ♦ K Q J 10 9 6 5 2 ♣ Q J 10 7			
Dealer: South Vulnerable: Neither			
South	West	North	East
5 ♦	Pass	Pass	Pass
Opening lead: ♣ 3			

Counting cars on the turnpike

By Phillip Alder

Paul Simon in his song "America" wrote, "Counting the cars on the New Jersey Turnpike."

At the bridge table, you do not have to count nearly that high. But South had to do some counting to find the best play in this deal. He was in four hearts. West led the club ace and followed with the club king, East playing high-low with his doubleton. West cashed his club queen, then shifted to a low diamond. How did South continue?

North had a good-looking two-heart response with nine high-card points, four trumps and two aces, but his 4-3-3-3 hand contained 10 losers (two spades, two hearts, three diamonds and three clubs), which is one more than a normal single raise -- another good-news, bad-news story.

South had to play both majors without loss. After winning with his diamond ace, he cashed the heart king so that he could pick up jack-fourth in either opponent's hand. When everyone followed, declarer took his heart queen and diamond king, led a trump to dummy's ace, and ruffed the diamond jack in his hand. It was time to find the spade queen. What had South learned?

Declarer knew that West had begun with five clubs, three hearts and at least three diamonds. So he had at most two spades. Similarly, East had at least five spades. Therefore, the odds heavily favored playing East for the spade queen.

South led a spade to dummy's ace, then returned a spade to his jack. Success!

Counting often turns apparent guesses into (near) certainties.

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The leads made life trickier

By Phillip Alder

Alfred North Whitehead, an English mathematician and philosopher who died in 1947, said, "It requires a very unusual mind to make an analysis of the obvious."

At the bridge table, though, what is obvious to some players requires analysis for others.

In today's deal, follow the defense against three no-trump and decide how many errors were made.

West led his fourth-highest club, the three. South played low from the board and won East's jack with his queen. Declarer cashed the diamond king, overtook his diamond jack with dummy's queen, and ran the heart 10. West won with his king and led back the club two. East captured dummy's king with his ace and continued with the club seven. South won with his 10 and claimed three hearts, five diamonds and two clubs for an overtrick. What is your error count?

North added one point for his good five-card suit, making his hand worth the jump to three no-trump.

First, West should have led the club six, second-highest from an honorless suit when the top two cards are not touching. Fourth-highest ought to guarantee an honor in the suit. Second, at trick five, West, who knew South had the club 10 (East would have played the 10 at trick one if he had had both the 10 and jack), should have led the club nine to deny the 10. Then it should have been easy for East to win with his ace and shift to spades.

However, third, East could have found the right play because if South had begun with Q-9-x of clubs, he surely would have played dummy's king at trick one.

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Cut their line of communication

By Phillip Alder

Joseph Priestly, the English chemist and clergyman who discovered oxygen, said, "The more elaborate our means of communication, the less we communicate."

If only he had added the words "face-to-face," we would all agree. These days, though, we all communicate more, using our smart phones and e-mail.

Bridge involves communication. Bidding is a language in which each partner sends information about his hand. And defenders should signal to each other. However, there is a third type of communication, which is relevant in today's deal.

How should the play and defense proceed in five diamonds after West leads the club three?

What would you open with that South hand? Most players would pick five diamonds, willing to risk missing a slam in return for making it much harder for East-West to bid the majors.

The original declarer took the first trick in his hand after East carefully played his four, the lowest card being a suit-preference signal for hearts, communicating where his entry lay. South continued with the diamond nine, which held the trick, and the diamond 10, but West took his ace (East discarding the heart jack as a second signal for that suit) and shifted to a heart. East won with his ace and returned a club, which West ruffed to defeat the contract.

That was good defense, but South should have suspected that the opening lead was a singleton. He should have taken the first trick on the board and led the spade king. When East played low, South could have discarded his singleton heart, cutting the communication between West and East. Declarer would have lost only one spade and one diamond.

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