

Dummy

♠KQ1053

♥7

♦94

♣AQJ32

You

♠A982

♥43

♦AK765

♣54

You are playing IMP scoring at your favorite BBO club when the following hand occurs. Your right hand opponent opens 4 hearts, followed by 3 passes. You lead the A of diamonds, and dummy appears as pictured above. Plan your defense.

There is not necessarily one right answer to this problem. The idea is to form a reasonable picture of what declarer's hand might be, and plan the defense accordingly.

Send your answers to me: billpuzzles@bridgesights.com

The Answer

You can see a possible 3 tricks for the defense, 2 diamonds and a spade, although it is certainly quite possible that declarer has a spade void. However, if that is the case, it is much less likely that declarer will go down.

As a working theory, assume declarer has 8 hearts. If they are headed by the AK (or even AQ), there are no heart losers. This leaves declarer with 5 other cards. There are essentially 2 cases to consider:

1. If declarer has 3 diamonds and at least 1 spade, then you must remove the trump from the dummy so the third diamond cannot be ruffed.
2. If declarer has 2 clubs, 1 spade, and 2 diamonds, then you must knock out the club ace before declarer has a chance to knock out your ace of spades and throw the losing club on a spade.

Either could be right. However, I would choose case 2 (knocking out the club ace) for a couple of reasons. First, it is slightly less likely that declarer has 3 diamonds; generally speaking, you should assume the remaining cards are evenly distributed if you have no other information. Second, even if declarer has 3 diamonds, your partner might still have the K of hearts. In that case, if declarer ruffs a diamond, your partner will score the K of hearts.

Therefore, I would lead a club hoping partner has the club K. I would do this at trick 2, rather than cashing another diamond, because it gives me more flexibility on defense, and caters to the possibility that declarer has Qxx of diamonds.

The important point to remember is to plan your defense whenever possible. Try to visualize what declarer has, based on the bidding, the dummy, and partner's signaling, and constantly readjust your thinking as the hand proceeds. Sometimes it is right to be passive, meaning you make plays that are in no danger of giving up tricks. Other times, as in this hand, you must be aggressive, setting up tricks for your side before declarer can throw away losers.