

Dummy

♠AQ
♥J1084
♦AK8
♣A972

You

♠K1053
♥A2
♦QJ1043
♣KJ

You are vulnerable and your opponents are not Your left hand opponent opens 2 hearts, your partner passes, and his partner raises to 4 hearts. After a little thought, you decide that pass is the best course of action, although you are a little annoyed you were not able to bid with such a good hand.

Your partner leads the nine of diamonds, and after looking at dummy, you are glad you passed. It looks like the opponents would take at least 4 tricks against any contract you bid, and there is a reasonable possibility that you will be able to defeat 4 hearts by taking one trick in each suit. However, you know declarer is an expert, so you must carefully consider what dangers lurk for the defense. What are the dangers, and how do you plan accordingly?

Send your answers to me: billpuzzles@bridgesights.com

The Answer

The point of this puzzle is for you to visualize declarer's hand and figure out if the contract can be beaten. Your best hope is that declarer has 2 spades, 6 hearts, 3 diamonds, and 2 little clubs, allowing you to take one trick in each suit.

The main danger is that declarer will strip himself of diamonds and clubs, throwing you in with the K of clubs and force you to either give him a free spade trick by leading away from your K of spades, or to give him a ruff and sluff, by leading a minor suit and allowing him to pitch the spade loser. You may recall this strip and end play technique was discussed in 2 recent previous puzzles, and you need to take steps to avoid the end play.

For the sake of argument, assume the play goes as follows. Declarer wins the A of diamonds and plays a trump. You win the Ace of hearts and play another diamond. Declarer wins the K. He draws one more round of trump. This leaves the following position:

Dummy

♠AQ
♥J10
♦8
♣A972

You

♠K1053
♥
♦J104
♣KJ

Declarer

♠xx
♥Kxxx
♦x
♣xx

Assume declarer now plays a diamond. You win the diamond and must now play the K of clubs. If you play the J of clubs, declarer can win the ace and play another club, leaving you end played.

You may be worried that playing the K of clubs may give declarer a free trick with the Q. However, if declarer had the Q of clubs, he could make the hand himself by simply leading a low club to the Q. This would give him 10 tricks (5 hearts, 2 diamonds, 2 clubs, and a spade). So playing the K of clubs will not cost you a trick.

Trying to visualize declarer's hand is a good habit to get into. When declarer is known to have a long suit (such as when he preempts), this is not as difficult as it might seem, because you already know half his cards (the suit in which he preempted). If partner leads another suit, you probably have a pretty good idea about how that suit is distributed, which only leaves a few possibilities for the other 2 suits.