Dummy
♠98
♥Q62
♦QJ92
♣AQ86

You
♠AK753
♥1095
♦AK
♣943

You hold the hand shown above and open 1S. The next person doubles, your partner passes, and the opponents end up in 3 diamonds.

You lead the AK of spades, your partner following with the 10 and J. You clearly have 2 diamond tricks. What is your best chance for a fifth trick?

Send your answers to me: bilpuzzles@bridgesights.com

The Answer

Partner has the QJ10 of spades. Since he did not raise to 2S over the double, he has no other high cards, except perhaps a jack. Therefore, your best chance is a trump promotion, hoping partner has 3 diamonds to the 10.

Lead another spade, which will be ruffed in dummy. When you get in with a diamond, lead yet another spade. Although this gives declarer a ruff and sluff, it does not matter, because he has all winners outside the trump suit anyway, so he will be throwing off a winner. Dummy will be forced to ruff high to avoid having partner ruff with the 10.

When you get in with the next diamond, lead another spade. You have now succeeded in setting up partner's 10. If dummy ruffs high again, partner's 10 will be high. And if dummy ruffs low, partner will over ruff.

This type of play is known as a “trump promotion”. You forced declarer to ruff high, thereby “promoting” a trump in partner's hand that ordinarily would not have been good had declarer been able to draw trump.

The other important point of this hand is the use of the “negative inference”. A negative inference is a conclusion you draw based on what someone did not bid (or play). It is analogous to the famous Sherlock Holmes story where the mystery is solved because “the dog did not bark”. Because partner did not raise spades, and is known to have 3 spades, he cannot have 6 points. Since he has already shown up with 3 points (Q and J of spades), he cannot have an outside A or K in his hand.