

Crocodile Coup

Let's face it. There are some plays or maneuvers in bridge that are just more interesting than others.....if only for the name they carry. Such is the Crocodile Coup.

A favorite subject of bridge players is declarer play and, specifically, card combinations. Usually, with a sense of humor, they present situations as best they can and solicit comments, suggestions, and remedies of the situation. This is how the situation called the Crocodile Coup got its name.

A crocodile just swims above the surface of the water and opens its mouth wide, thus presenting itself as an impending threat. Anyone observing this action would take steps to retreat before the jaws of the crocodile reach out for him. In bridge there are situations when the opponents become the crocodile.

A Crocodile Coup is a defensive maneuver and portrays itself as a threatening action to prevent declarer from following through an intended endplay. It could also be only a scare tactic in order to deceive declarer into believing that his course of action is threatened thus causing declarer to change his plan.

The normal execution of a Crocodile Coup is when one defender steps up to play an unnecessarily high card in order to snap up his partner's high card (but not as high as his card) so that partner doesn't get endplayed. An example:

	North					
	♠K64		Auction:			
	♥Q982		West	North	East	South
	♦742		2♦	Pass	Pass	3♥
	♣Q74		Pass	4♥	Pass	Pass
			Pass			
West		East				
♠QJ2		♠A109853				
♥10		♥75				
♦AQJ986		♦K				
♣932		♣J1086				
	South					
	♠7					
	♥AKJ643					
	♦1053					
	♣AK5					

West leads the Queen of Spades, which holds the trick. West continues with the Jack of Spades, which South, the declarer, ruffs in his hand. South draws two rounds of trump, and ruffs the King of Spades and then plays off his three club tricks ending in his hand. Since declarer is now down to nothing but diamonds and trumps in his hand he must lead some diamond. (Note that it's best not to play off more trumps as it will allow East to pitch the King of diamonds and also note that it is mandatory to lead diamonds from declarer's hand, not from the dummy.)

Thus declarer leads a diamond from his hand....doesn't matter which one. As you can see, if West tries to win this trick cheaply, East is forced to overtake with the King of Diamonds and has no entry back to West. Instead East will have to lead back a spade or a club giving the declarer a ruff and a sluff.

West's logic should be that South has three diamonds in his hand and that therefore, partner has only one. (West is counting!). So when declarer plays a low diamond at trick 8, West must put up the Ace of diamonds just in case his partner has the stiff King. If partner's singleton diamond is a small diamond it still does not hurt to play the Ace because you will be endplayed. Thus the playing of the Ace of diamonds is the Crocodile Coup as it snaps up partner's singleton King thus allowing three diamonds trick on defense.

Usually plays like this are too deep to be executed during the actual play of the hand, but I have found that at the bar several hours and several drinks later, everyone has been the crocodile! That only goes to show that we often play a lot better at the bar than at the table.

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