

The Many Faces of Duplicate Bridge

Like most activities, the game of bridge does indeed sometimes have its darker side. People can be rude or even cruel and newcomers or inexperienced players might need to develop a thick skin (or the fortitude to look for a different group to play with). As Alan Truscott once said, "Bridge is essentially a social game, but unfortunately it attracts a substantial number of antisocial people." To tell the truth one gets use to abuse (it's waiting for it that is so trying.)

Slow play can be a problem at duplicate bridge since the game is a timed event. Even experts are subject to criticism along these lines, sometimes lighthearted and sometimes not. Once, when his opponents in a world-championship match took an unusually long time to act, the late Lee Hazen remarked, "I was a young man when this deal began." Along that same line, I still like the quote: "you have to play a hand in the same day it was dealt."

Traditionally, the stereotypical characteristic of bridge players is their monomaniacal dedication to the game. More than once I have been involved in a bridge conversation only to have someone tell the group a bit of very bad news....like the death of a bridge acquaintance. While this is greeted with quiet reflection for a brief period, it's not long before some member of the group returns us to our happier thoughts with "What do you do with AKxxx.....?"

No doubt there are "bridge widows" much as there are "golf widows," but the term is not heard much, perhaps because women are as likely to become fascinated by bridge as are men. Alfred Sheinwold, who wrote extensively about bridge throughout his lifetime, when asked whether men or women were better players, answered "both." This was not merely a very diplomatic reply; it is the truth.

I find that one of the better things about bridge is the humorous side. I happen to associate (by choice as surprising as it may seem) with bridge players who not only enjoy discussing bidding, declarer play, and defense, but particularly enjoy the funny things that happen along the way. Not long ago a friend of mine, flustered and defensive at criticism of his declarer play, was heard to remark in all seriousness: "You play it the way I did and see if you can make it." Then there was the man who put down a 4-4-3-2 dummy having bid his four-card heart suit freely at the two level in a competitive auction. When asked if he played negative doubles, he replied with a deadpan face, "Not when there's interference".

But the main attribute of bridge IS the game itself. We keep coming back to see if we are going to be the hero or the goat today. So take a few moments to see how you would play this hand:

| | |
|---------------|-------------|
| | North |
| Vul: Both | ♠ J 9 8 3 |
| Dir: West | ♥ K 5 4 2 |
| IMPs | ♦ A J 8 4 3 |
| Open Lead: ♣Q | ♣ -- |

| |
|-----------|
| South |
| ♠ K 10 |
| ♥ A 9 8 3 |
| ♦ K 7 6 5 |
| ♣ A K 9 |

| | | | |
|------|-------|----------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| Pass | Pass | Pass | 1NT |
| Pass | 2♣ | Pass | 2♥ |
| Pass | 4♥ | All Pass | |

Only clue is that trumps break 3-2. And remember that you only need 10 tricks since it's IMPs. Good luck. And don't look at the answer below until you've figured it out!!!

Complete hand:

| | | |
|---------------|-------------|-------------|
| Vul: Both | ♠ J 9 8 3 | |
| Dir: West | ♥ K 5 4 2 | |
| IMPs | ♦ A J 8 4 3 | |
| | ♣ -- | |
| ♠ A Q 2 | | ♠ S 7 6 5 4 |
| ♥ J 7 6 | | ♥ Q 10 |
| ♦ 9 | | ♦ Q 10 2 |
| ♣ Q J 8 7 4 2 | | ♣ 10 6 5 3 |
| | ♠ K 10 | |
| | ♥ A 9 8 3 | |
| | ♦ K 7 6 5 | |
| | ♣ A K 9 | |

The hand was from a recent team match on the internet. The auction and the opening lead (the ♣Q) were the same at both tables. Two rounds of trumps are played and they split 3-2. Now would be a good time to claim before you screw up and go down☺.

The correct line is to just lose two round of spades (notice those good spot cards) and use the two established spades to pitch diamonds. Just be sure that you don't pitch one of dummy's good spades on the opening lead. Perhaps ruffing the ♣Q in dummy at trick one would be a good idea. Then pull two rounds of trumps and proceed to set up the spades.

If I were a betting person I'd bet that more average declarers would go down on this in spite of the fact that there's a 100% line of play. Why is it so hard to see?