

The Bath Coup

Not so long ago in a regional KO event a situation arose that gave new meaning to the term Bath Coup.

All was going well until two local and otherwise friendly teams met in the finals of the event. One of the women professed to be allergic to perfume. Unfortunately, although it was now evening, a woman on the other team had started the day by applying a dab of perfume. Now this didn't matter to anyone for the first half of the match as the two teams played each other with the women at different tables.

At the half way point of the match, the perfumed woman wanted to play at the table of the allergic woman. A rather long hassle with teammates and directors ensued.

The matter was resolved when one of the directors allowed the perfumed woman to use his room to take a very quick bath before the match continued. When the now nonperfumed woman returned, the match continued with a new version of the Bath Coup being used by Sometimes Perfumed Team to oust the Allergic Team.

The term Bath Coup seems to come from the game of Whist and the name may be derived from city of Bath which was once a favorite meeting place of the aristocracy. The coup is simply a hold-up of the Ace of any suit when the Jack of that suit is also in the control of the declarer. The following two examples, which are the classic examples for illustrating the Bath Coup, explain the reasoning. Every bridge player, at one time or another, has applied the Bath Coup, but may not have been aware that it actually has a name.

	North	
	432	
West		East
KQ1065		87
	South	
	AJ9	

The player sitting West leads the King of any suit against the declarer, who holds the Ace and the Jack. Declarer realizes that West also has the Queen. In order to get two tricks in this suit, the Declarer will hold up once, waiting for West to lead the Queen. Declarer then gets two tricks.

A second situation may apply with the following holdings:

	North	
	A32	
West		East
KQ1065		87
	South	
	J94	

As you can see the same principle applies when the Ace and the Jack of the same suit are not in the same hand. Ducking the opening lead will either provide you with two tricks in the suit if West continues the suit or will cause West to switch to another suit. (Except, of course, when a devious West has led the King from Kx or when East ruffs the second lead of the suit.)

An extenuating circumstance of the Bath Coup (as with any other holdup play) is that declarer doesn't fear a switch to another suit. In the following example, sometimes even that can be compensated for:

NORTH
K J 10
8 6 5
7 2
A Q 10 9 6

WEST	EAST
9 6 2	8 7 4 3
K Q 10 9 4	7 3
J 10 8	K Q 9 5 3
4 2	K 3

SOUTH
A Q 5
A J 2
A 6 4
J 8 7 5

When this hand was played, Ira Chorush, of Houston, realized that the real threat was in diamonds and he wanted to keep the opening leader from shifting to that suit. So, instead of ducking the heart by playing his heart deuce at trick one, Chorush ducked but played the Jack of hearts.

Evidently West now believed East had the remaining small hearts and South the A-J doubleton. West then led another heart (as who would not). Chorush was able to win with his heart ace and take a club finesse with safety. It lost to East's king, but Chorush was guaranteed his nine winners and his contract.

Note that Chorush's deceptive move cost nothing if the heart suit was divided 3-3 but gained handsomely on the exact layout. (If East had held a third heart, the most the defense could win was three hearts and one club.)