

OFF-ROAD DECLARER PLAY

Unusual Ways to Play a Bridge Hand



DAVID BIRD

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This book is dedicated to my friend and fellow bridge writer, Tim Bourke, who constructs two or three great deals every day and sends the best of them in my direction.

CHAPTER 1

FIGHTING YOUR WAY TO THE DUMMY

From me to you
The Beatles

When dummy is short of entries, or apparently contains no entries at all, you may need to employ special measures to reach it. In this chapter, we will see some useful techniques that can help you.

LEADING ONE HONOR TO SET UP ANOTHER AS AN ENTRY

First, we will look at a play that is strangely difficult to spot at the table. Would you have made 4♥ here?

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|--|------------|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| ♠ 10 8 5 | ♠ Q 2 | ♠ K 9 6 4 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ 10 9 7 | ♥ 6 3 | ♥ 8 4 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ Q 9 8 4 | ♦ A J 7 5 3 2 | ♦ K 10 6 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ Q 5 4 | ♣ 9 7 2 | ♣ A J 10 8 | | | | | | | | | |
| | <table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | | E | | S | | |
| | N | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | | E | | | | | | | | | |
| | S | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♠ A J 7 3 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ A K Q J 5 2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ — | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ K 6 3 | | | | | | | | | | |

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|----------|-------|------|-------|
| pass | 1NT | pass | 1♥ |
| all pass | | | 4♥ |

West leads the ♥10 and you win with the ♥A. How will you play the contract?

Suppose your next move is a spade to dummy's queen. All will be well if West holds the ♠K. If he rises with the card, you will have three spade tricks and an entry to dummy's ♦A. You will make at least ten tricks. When East holds the ♠K, the situation will be less bright. He will win and return a second round of trumps, preventing a spade ruff. You can draw trumps and exit on the fourth round of spades, forcing the defenders to play a club for you, but you will still lose two spades and two clubs. What else can you try?

At Trick 2 you should lead the ♠J from your hand! As the cards lie, the defenders can do nothing. If East wins with the ♠K and returns another trump, you will win in your hand and draw the last trump. You can then cross to the ♠Q and discard a club loser on the ♦A. Finally, you will lead towards the ♣K for the contract. What if East chooses to hold up the ♠K? You will cash the ♠A and reach dummy with a spade ruff. You can then cash the ♦A for a club discard and lead towards the ♣K for an overtrick.

Here is another example of the play, this time in a notrump contract. Your objective on this occasion is not to reach a stranded winner, but to take a successful finesse.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------|--|----------------|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|--|
| ♠ 10 9 6 4 3 | ♠ Q 7 2 | ♠ A J 8 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ J 10 7 5 | ♥ 9 8 3 | ♥ Q 6 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ 9 6 | ♦ 7 5 4 | ♦ Q J 10 8 3 2 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ 6 5 | ♣ J 10 7 4 | ♣ K 8 | | | | | | | | | |
| | <table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | | E | | S | | |
| | N | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | | E | | | | | | | | | |
| | S | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♠ K 5 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ A K 4 2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ A K | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ A Q 9 3 2 | | | | | | | | | | |

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|----------|-------|------|-------|
| pass | 2♣ | 1♦ | dbl |
| all pass | | pass | 3NT |

West leads the ♦9, overtaken by East's ♦10. How will you tackle the notrump game?

If you simply play ace and another club, East will win and clear the diamond suit. You will then be one trick short. A better idea is to lead the ♠K at Trick 2. What can East do? If he wins with the ♠A and clears the diamonds, you can cross to the ♠Q to run the ♣J through East's ♣K. An overtrick will result. If, however, East holds up the ♠A to prevent you reaching dummy, you will have one spade trick in the bag and can afford to play clubs from your hand. You will score one spade trick, four red-suit winners and four club tricks.

What would have happened if South had headed for 5♣ instead of 3NT? With certain losers awaiting him in each major suit, declarer would need to reach the North hand to take a trump finesse. Not today! When the ♠K is led, East can simply hold up the ace. That's down one.

'UNNECESSARY FINESSE' TO GAIN AN ENTRY

Sometimes the straightforward entries to dummy will be insufficient to establish a side suit and reach the long cards. In that case, you may have to risk an otherwise unnecessary finesse, hoping to gain an extra entry. That's the only real chance on this slam deal:

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-------------|--|------------|---|--|---|--|---|--|---|--|-------------|
| ♠ A 7 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ K 7 5 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ Q 8 7 3 2 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ A 7 5 | | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♠ 9 6 4 | | ♠ 5 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♥ Q 10 3 | <table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table> | | N | | W | | E | | S | | ♥ J 9 8 6 2 |
| | N | | | | | | | | | | |
| W | | E | | | | | | | | | |
| | S | | | | | | | | | | |
| ♦ K 9 6 | | ♦ A J 10 5 | | | | | | | | | |
| ♣ Q J 10 2 | | ♣ 9 8 4 | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♠ K Q J 10 8 3 2 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♥ A 4 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♦ 4 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | ♣ K 6 3 | | | | | | | | | | |

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|----------|-------|------|-------|
| pass | 1♦ | pass | 1♠ |
| pass | 1NT | pass | 3♠ |
| pass | 4♣ | pass | 4NT |
| pass | 5♥ | pass | 6♠ |
| all pass | | | |

West leads the ♣Q against your ambitious small slam in spades. How will you play the contract?

You need to set up a long diamond, on which you can discard your club loser. Even if diamonds break 4-3, the three obvious entries to the dummy will not be enough to allow you to ruff three diamonds and then return to enjoy the established long card in the suit. Your best chance is to seek a fourth entry to dummy by finessing the ♠7.

You win the club lead with the king and play a diamond. East wins and returns a club to dummy's ace. You take your first diamond ruff with the ♠8 and, trying not to look worried, play the ♠2 to dummy's ♠7. Yes, it wins! You ruff a diamond with a high trump, everyone following, return to dummy with the ace of trumps and ruff another diamond high. You can then draw West's last trump, cross to dummy with the ♥K and discard your club loser on the established diamond.

Suppose you make the mistake of ruffing the first diamond with the ♠2 instead of the ♠8. A top-class West can then defeat you by inserting the ♠9 when you lead the ♠3 for the intended finesse of the ♠7. You would then have only one trump entry to dummy.

WINNING WITH AN UNNECESSARILY HIGH CARD AT TRICK 1

When dummy contains a potential entry card in the suit that has been led, you can often promote its value by winning in your hand with an unnecessarily high card. Look at this deal:

| | | | |
|-------------|---|------------|--|
| | ♠ 7 4 3 | | |
| | ♥ Q 5 3 | | |
| | ♦ Q J 10 7 3 | | |
| | ♣ 7 4 | | |
| ♠ 10 8 | | ♠ Q J 9 5 | |
| ♥ K J 9 6 4 | | ♥ 8 2 | |
| ♦ 9 5 | | ♦ A 6 4 | |
| ♣ K 9 6 3 | | ♣ J 10 8 5 | |
| | <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> N </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> W E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; width: 100%;"> S </div> | | |
| | ♠ A K 6 2 | | |
| | ♥ A 10 7 | | |
| | ♦ K 8 2 | | |
| | ♣ A Q 2 | | |

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|------|-------|----------|-------|
| pass | 3NT | all pass | 2NT |

West leads the ♥6 against your game in notrump. You play low from dummy and East produces the ♥8. How will you play the contract?

Suppose your mind is on the bottle of wine awaiting you in the fridge and you win with the ♥10. You will go down. East will hold up the ♦A for two rounds and you will never reach the two good diamonds in dummy. The ♥Q will not provide an entry to dummy, because the ♥A and ♥K will win the next two rounds of the suit. Restricted to only two diamond tricks, you will be struggling to avoid down two.

To make the contract, you must win the first round of hearts with the ace. Dummy's ♥Q is now the second-ranked card in the suit and will provide an entry, provided West holds the ♥K as you expect. Let's say that East again holds up the ♦A for two rounds and then switches to the ♣J. You will win with the ♣A and lead a heart towards dummy. West will take his ♥K to stop you reaching dummy immediately, but the clubs will be safe with West on lead. Nine tricks will soon be yours.

Sometimes you employ this technique to give you a second entry to dummy in the suit that has been led.

| | | | | | |
|-------------|--|-----------|----------|---|--|
| ♠ 5 3 | ♠ Q J 10 7 6 | ♠ A K 8 4 | | | |
| ♥ J 10 | ♥ 6 4 2 | ♥ Q 9 8 5 | | | |
| ♦ Q 10 4 2 | ♦ 7 5 | ♦ J 8 6 | | | |
| ♣ Q 9 7 5 2 | ♣ K J 3 | ♣ 8 4 | | | |
| | <table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 60px; height: 60px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table> | N | W E | S | |
| N | | | | | |
| W E | | | | | |
| S | | | | | |
| | ♠ 9 2 | | | | |
| | ♥ A K 7 3 | | | | |
| | ♦ A K 9 3 | | | | |
| | ♣ A 10 6 | | | | |

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|------|-------|----------|-------|
| pass | 1♠ | pass | 1♦ |
| pass | 3NT | all pass | 2NT |

GET OFF THE BEATEN TRACK!



Every intermediate player is familiar with the routine techniques of dummy play. What this book describes are less well-known stratagems that may save the day in situations where straightforward lines are not going to work. They include methods for creating entries, surviving bad trump breaks, elopements, getting the defenders to help you out, and many more. In this unique book, you will learn new ways of thinking about declarer play — ways that just might help you make the next contract!



DAVID BIRD is a regular contributor to bridge magazines around the world, and has written over seventy books on the game. His most recent Master Point Press title is *25 Ways to be a Better Defender* (with Barbara Seagram).

