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POSITIVE DECLARER PLAY at bridge

TERENCE REESE & JULIAN POTTAGE

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Introduction

A large number of bridge players reckon that they can play the dummy well, believing that defending presents a greater challenge. This perception probably bears out in reality, but an interesting point struck us when working on this book. While most defensive problems consist of a single play, a declarer, seeing two hands in partnership, normally has the chance to form a long-range plan. In that sense, problems for declarer can be more instructive than those for defenders.

Some of the problems in this book are quite difficult. Don't be surprised or lose confidence if you get some wrong the first time around. Just thinking about the situation provides excellent training. Avoid, if you can, looking at the problem for only half a minute and then turning the page to see what we say. Unless otherwise stated, you may assume a rubber bridge or teams setting, so you need not concern yourself with overtricks.

Coming as we do from two different generations, our views on bidding differ. One of us likes a simple style, as one might meet at a rubber bridge club in London. The other knows all the latest trends amongst tournament players and believes that certain conventions prove very useful in reaching the right contract. What we have normally done where a deal comes from actual play is to preserve the original sequence. We have, however, explained anything that you might find unfamiliar. Each problem also includes a First Look, which we trust will provide a useful step-off point for the solution.

We hope that you derive as much enjoyment from studying the deals in this book as we did from putting them together.

Terence Reese 1986
Julian Pottage 2005

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For enabling this new, expanded and improved edition to appear in print, the authors also owe their gratitude to William Bailey, Peter Burrows, Maureen Dennison, Mark Horton, Ray Lee and Alwyn Reese.

For suggesting the final problem Hugh Darwen also deserves a reference, as do all the players, both named and unnamed, who played (or misplayed!) the deals in real life.

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♠ 10 7 5 3
♥ Q 8 6 4
♦ 10 2
♣ K 7 3

♠2 led

♠ Q
♥ A K 7 3 2
♦ A K 7 3
♣ 10 5 2

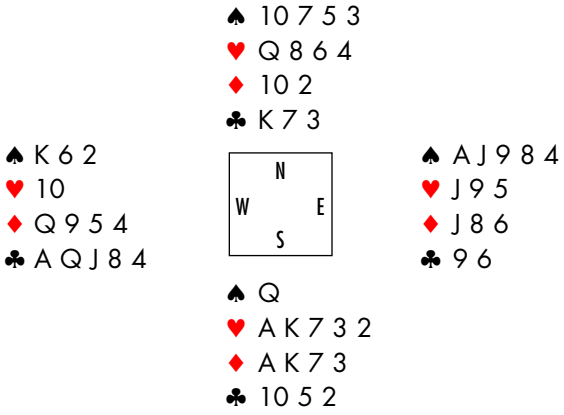
Dealer South
Neither vul.

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
			1♥
dbl	3♥	3♠	4♥
all pass			

East wins the first trick with the ♠A and returns the ♣9. After a little thought, West takes the ♣A and returns the ♣Q. Dummy's king holds the trick. How should you continue?

FIRST LOOK

You should assume a 3-1 trump split. If trumps are 2-2 no problem arises and if they are 4-0 you will have no chance. When West holds one heart and three diamonds, you can ruff two diamonds in dummy. More likely, he holds one heart and four diamonds, creating the danger of losing a spade, an overruff in diamonds and two clubs.



At the table, the original declarer drew two rounds of trumps with the ♥A and ♥Q, and then set out to ruff two diamonds. East overruffed the fourth round and there was still a club loser to come.

A better strategy is to try to combine ruffing diamonds with an elopement. Having scored the ♣K, ruff a spade and then cash the ♥A and ♥K. Continue with three rounds of diamonds, ruffing low. When East follows, your troubles are over. You ruff another spade and ruff the fourth diamond with the ♥Q. After that, lead the fourth spade from dummy and ruff with your last trump. On the last trick West's winning club and East's master trump fall together. You have made ten tricks with one club, two diamonds, the ace and king of hearts, two diamond ruffs and three spade ruffs!

It would not matter if East had started with a club more and a spade fewer. He could discard his last spade when you ruffed the fourth diamond but if he ruffed the fourth spade you would throw your club loser and still make your last trump.

No Entry

♠ 7 6
♥ 8 6 5
♦ A 8 7 4 3 2
♣ 5 2

♥4 led

♠ A K Q 5
♥ A J
♦ K 9
♣ K J 7 4 3

Dealer East
Neither vul.

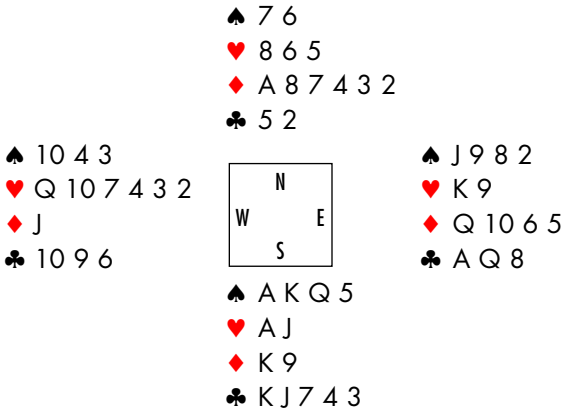
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
		1NT	dbl
2♥	3♦	pass	3NT
all pass			

East's 1NT was weak, 12-14. At rubber bridge, you took North's 3♦ as invitational. (Many tournament players use a 2NT relay, Lebensohl, to differentiate weak and strong hands.)

West leads the ♥4 to East's ♥K and you duck. East returns the ♥9, which you have to win. What do you do now?

FIRST LOOK

You have to assume a 6-2 heart break to stand a chance. East may have the ♣A and the ♣Q but unfortunately dummy contains only one entry. Passing 3♦ might have been wiser …

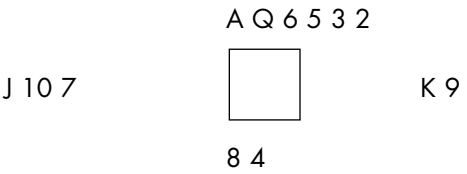


The clubs will surely need to break 3-3. However, it would be very risky to cross to the ♦A to lead a club from dummy. Since you place East with only two hearts and three clubs, he may well have four diamonds. In this case, East will be able to set up and cash two diamond winners, leaving you with five losers.

Did you think of starting with the ♣K (or the ♣J) from hand? Good. This is the winning play. West cannot get in and you can later lead a low club from dummy, scoring three tricks in the suit to make your game. It is too bad if East holds ♣A-Q alone.

Well spotted, by the way, if you saw that East could have beaten you by switching to the ♦5 instead of continuing hearts.

On this deal you had little option, but leading from strength can work well even when you have enough entries to finesse:



If you lead low off dummy, it is hard for East to duck smoothly.

INTERMEDIATE/ADVANCED

ALMOST ALL BRIDGE PLAYERS are confident that they can play the dummy well and consider that defending presents a greater challenge. However, most defensive problems consist of only a single play, while declarer, seeing two hands in partnership, normally has the chance to form a long-range plan. In that sense, problems for declarer can be more instructive than those for the defenders. Some of the problems in this book are quite difficult, which is as it should be: there is no easy path to success at this game. But the reader who is prepared to make a small effort will be rewarded with a real understanding of what planning a hand as declarer is all about.

TERENCE REESE, who died in 1996, held center stage in the bridge world as a player for more than forty years. He is also generally regarded as the greatest bridge writer of his generation, and many of his books are landmarks in the development and understanding of the game.

JULIAN POTTAGE is known as one of the world's best creators of bridge problems, and his *Play or Defend?* was the winner of the 2004 IBPA Book of the Year award. He lives near Basingstoke, England.

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