

Contract Bridge

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CONTRACT BRIDGE

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By Steve Becker

A HAIRSPLITTING DECISION

North dealer.

East-West vulnerable.

NORTH

♠ Q 10
♥ 8 5 3
♦ A J 6
♣ K 10 9 6 4

WEST

♠ A 6 4 2
♥ K 9 6 4 2
♦ Q 7 4 3
♣ —

EAST

♠ 9 8 5 3
♥ Q J
♦ K 10 8 5 2
♣ 8 2

SOUTH

♠ K J 7
♥ A 10 7
♦ 9
♣ A Q J 7 5 3

The bidding:

North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	1 ♣	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	5 ♣	

Opening lead — four of hearts.

The holdup play so often used by declarer in notrump contracts can sometimes be employed just as effectively in a suit contract. The purpose in both instances is the same — to sever communications between the defenders.

Consider today's deal where West leads a low heart against five clubs, and East plays the jack. South notes immediately that he is in serious danger of losing two hearts and a spade trick. If he takes the ace of hearts at trick one, draws trump and forces out the ace of spades, the defenders are likely to cash two heart tricks and

defeat the contract.

Therefore, declarer must arbitrarily assume the hearts are divided 5-2. The question then is how to proceed. One possibility is to duck the first heart, take the second one, draw trump and lead a spade.

If the defender who started with only two hearts has the ace of spades, declarer comes home a winner because that defender will not have a heart to return after taking the ace of spades. Dummy's heart loser can later be discarded on declarer's third spade.

In the present case, however, after East produces the heart jack at trick one, South's correct play is to take the ace of hearts immediately! He reasons that West cannot have the K-Q of hearts, since West would have led the king with that holding, and also that East cannot have the K-J, since he would have played the king rather than the jack initially.

South therefore credits East with the Q-J after East plays the jack on the first trick. Since declarer can't make the contract if East has Q-J-x(x), he takes his ace hoping East started with the Q-J doubleton.

After drawing trump, South leads a spade. Whether East or West turns up with the ace does not matter, because either way the defense is unable to cash more than one heart trick. South's ten blocks the suit and is the critical card that prompts declarer to take the ace of hearts at trick one.

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