

## **HAND OF THE MONTH FOR NEWER PLAYERS**

January, 2015

Having focused for the last several months on the subject of combining chance(s) as declarer, I was planning to begin the new year with a new theme. However, as a faithful reader of the daily bridge columns by Frank Stewart, a highly regarded player and teacher, as well as a brilliant and prolific writer, I enjoyed his recent analysis of the hand shown below and could not resist passing it along.

Note the importance of first recognizing the various possibilities for making a contract, and then looking for a way to test them all.

	NORTH	
WEST	S A1053	EAST
S 9764	H K95	S Q82
H 643	D 94	H 7
D AQ62	C AQ62	D J8753
C 75		C J1084
	SOUTH	
Vul: none	S KJ	
Dealer: North	H AQJ1082	
Opening lead: H3	D K10	
	C K93	

NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST
1 club	pass	2 hearts! (strong)	Pass
3 hearts	pass	4 notrump (standard Blackwood)	pass
5 hearts (2 aces)	pass	6 hearts	all pass

Many people today play weak jump shifts and key card Blackwood. However, this NS pair showed that good old fashioned bidding methods – i.e. strong jump shifts and standard Blackwood – still work as they reached an excellent slam in hearts. You may want to review with your favorite partner(s) how your auction might have gone; hopefully you too would reach six hearts.

As can be seen, there are eleven top tricks, six trumps, three clubs, and two spades; where could that crucial twelfth trick come from? According to Frank Stewart, the actual declarer drew trumps and then played three high clubs hoping for a 3-3 break. When that failed, he led a diamond from the dummy toward his king and went down one when the ace and queen proved to be badly placed.

Before reading further, do you see where the declarer missed his extra chance?

Declarer failed to note that the spade suit also offered a chance for the crucial extra trick. A successful spade finesse either way might work, **OR** a 4-3 spade break with the queen in the hand with three. A good principle of declarer play is that finesses should usually be delayed for as long as possible; the possibility of the 4-3 break can be tested without the risk of losing the lead.

Here, after drawing trumps, if declarer had played the ace and king of spades and ruffed a spade, he would have been rewarded by the drop of the queen, setting up the ten in dummy as the twelfth trick, to be used to pitch a diamond. Had the spade queen failed to drop, declarer could revert to the original plan of looking for the 3-3 club or a favorable lie of the diamond ace in front of the king.

In other words, testing the spades first could not hurt, and might be rewarded.

**MORAL:** By now you know, the alert declarer is always watching for ways to combine chances to make the contract.