

HAND OF THE MONTH FOR NEWER PLAYERS

March, 2015

Anyone who has played bridge for any time at all, has had occasion to declare a seemingly hopeless contract, sometimes as a result of a bidding misunderstanding, but more often simply as a result of over-optimism by one or both halves of the partnership. When – not if – it happens to you, it is usually best to smile – why let the opponents know you have a problem – thank partner for the fine dummy, look very optimistic, and then play for miracles; there are always the possibilities of defensive slips, a favorable lie of the cards, or some combination of the two.

A memorable moment for one declarer came when his normally composed and reliable partner had a minor mental lapse that led to a seemingly hopeless contract.

	NORTH	
	S A10	
WEST	H 86	EAST
S KJ975	D AQ532	S 842
H 942	C A873	H AKJ107
D K97		D J8
C J10	SOUTH	C Q52
	S Q63	
	H Q53	
	D 1064	
	C K964	

Dealer: East
Vulnerable: All

BIDDING

East	South	West	North
Pass	pass	pass	1 diamond
1 heart	1 notrump	2 hearts	3 notrump!!!!
all pass			

North's final leap to three notrump requires explanation. Due to some distractions at a nearby table, she forgot that she had opened one diamond; thus, when she turned her attention back to her table, she thought she saw a one heart opening by East, and a one notrump overcall by her partner, a bid that should show 15-18 HCP; hence her confident leap to game.

After the opening heart lead, declarer counted four top tricks, a bit shy of the nine needed to fulfill the contract. East slipped in the defense by winning the first two heart tricks and playing a third round to the queen. This made it safe to have West on lead as he had no heart to return to partner.

However, the contract still required a very favorable lie of the cards. Declarer discarded a club from the dummy on the queen of hearts and finessed the queen of diamonds; when it won, he continued the ace and a small diamond putting West on lead. With no heart to lead, he tried the club jack (note that a spade would have been no better for the defense) which was won in dummy; now two good diamonds, discarding spades, and then a small club; when East followed low, the club was ducked to West; the spade return was won with the ace and the lead of dummy's last club dropped the queen, and set up the long club.

Thus, 1) the contract was made via four diamond tricks, three clubs, one heart and one spade, 2) the result was a cold top, and 3) North was forgiven. The "miracles" included one defensive slip, and a very favorable lie of the cards in all four suits.

Re the defensive slip, East should have inferred from the notrump bid and partner's heart raise that South had exactly three hearts to the queen, and that his partner held three small. Armed with this inference, better defense would have been to win the first heart trick and return the jack. This might have led declarer to misread the situation and duck, in which case East could then run the whole heart suit; even if South guessed right and put up the queen, West would still have had a heart to return upon gaining the lead, and the contract would have failed, probably by several tricks depending on the subsequent defense and declarer play.

MORAL: Never give up the ship!!!