

HAND OF THE MONTH FOR NEWER PLAYERS

March, 2016

In recent months, we have focused on the importance in declarer play of counting the opponents distribution and points. To date, our emphasis has been on watching the play of the cards as the hand unfolds. However, it is every bit as important to be alert to the inferences that can be drawn from the bidding.

One of my reads each morning is the daily article by Frank Stewart, a brilliant and prolific bridge writer/teacher/player. Below is a hand he presented in which declarer was a bridge pro who made an aggressive bid and then played the hand extremely well, based in **VERY** large measure on inferences from the bidding.

	NORTH	
	QJ2	
WEST	752	EAST
76	742	A1083
Q93	AQ106	AJ84
K963		QJ10
J842	SOUTH	97
	K954	
Dealer: North	K106	
Vulnerable: None	A85	
Opening lead: Diamond 3	K53	

North	East	South	West
pass	1 diamond	pass	2 diamonds
pass	pass	2 spades	all pass

When two diamonds was passed around to him, South could assume some strength in partner's hand and made a gutsy overcall on a very meager spade suit and a smattering of points.

The opening diamond lead was won in hand by the ace and declarer paused to consider what was known about the shape of the defender's hands based on the bidding. He accurately drew all of the following inferences:

- Ø East must have opened a three card diamond suit because West would not raise with just three diamonds.
- Ø East must have a two card club suit because standard practice would be to open one club with 3-3 in the minors.
- Ø Therefore, East must have eight cards in the majors, and they must be divided 4-4; with a five card major, he would have opened that suit rather than one diamond.

So based on the bidding, and before playing to the first trick, declarer already “*knew*” that East held 4-4-3-2 distribution. And by further inference, he also “*knew*” that West must be 2-3-4-4.

Armed with all that information, the play proceeded, at trick two, trump to the queen and ace; East cashed two diamonds, then led the ace and a small heart to the king; declarer now crossed to the jack of spades in dummy and, knowing East now held 10x – since he had started with four – confidently finessed the nine. He next drew the last trump, then played ace and king of clubs, followed by a confident finesse of the 10 in dummy, knowing West had started with four.

The result was plus 140 for a matchpoint top.

I hope all readers will agree that declarer’s logic was actually quite simple, based on straightforward inferences drawn from the opponent’s bidding. The trick is to develop the analytical mindset and habit.

MORAL: Pause to reflect on the bidding before playing to the first trick; it may provide important clues to the opponent’s distribution.