

HAND OF THE MONTH FOR NEWER PLAYERS

October, 2015

This month will conclude the series on safety plays, i.e. declarer plays intended to ensure a contract against adverse distribution. The number of possible safety plays is virtually unlimited and entire books are devoted to the subject; it is not feasible to comprehensively cover the subject here. The message is simply that your results will benefit as you develop the habit of pausing on the seemingly cold contracts to consider 1) could something go wrong, and 2) if so, what protection is available?

Managing the trump suit to protect against a bad trump break is a common challenge. Looking only at the NS hands, consider the following:

NORTH

S K74

H K82

D A32

C K962

SOUTH

S A82

H AJ9643

D 95

C A7

South	West	North	East
1 heart	pass	3 notrump!	pass
4 hearts			

NS were playing, as many pairs do now, that responding 3 notrump to a major suit opener shows 13-15 HCP with a balanced hand and specifically three card trump support. It suggests the possibility of playing in notrump – for the extra ten points – even though an eight card major suit fit exists. Had South also held a balanced hand, a notrump contract might have been preferable. In this case, however, with a six card heart suit and two doubletons, South quite properly preferred four hearts to three notrump.

At first glance, the contract looks cold. The only losers appear to be one diamond, one spade, and possibly one heart if the suit breaks 3-1 and the queen does not drop. Having learned to pause to consider what could go wrong in a seemingly cold contract, South noted the remote risk of two trump losers if the suit broke 4-0, less than a 1 in 10 chance, but a chance nonetheless.

Before reading on, do you see how the trump suit can be played to ensure a maximum of one loser if either opponent holds all four missing trumps?

As long as declarer plays the ace first – i.e. the honor over the jack – there can never be more than one trump loser. If East shows out on the play of the ace, next lead low toward the king-8 in dummy forcing West to split his queen-10 holding. If instead West shows out, next play low to the king in dummy and lead the 8 back toward the jack.

Plays like this will become increasingly obvious over time as long as you develop the habit of pausing to consider what could go wrong when things look good.

MORAL: Better safe than sorry!