

Getting Into the Heads of your Opponents by Jeff Hand

Playing in the finals of bracket 4 (out of 25 brackets) in the Tuesday-Wednesday Gatlinburg 2005 regional KO team event, you encounter the following defensive situation.

Dummy (North)

♠ Q943

♥ ---

♦ KJT953

♣ 765

You (West)

♠ J75

♥ QJ9532

♦ 6

♣ AQ4

<u>Declarer</u>	<u>You</u>	<u>Dummy</u>	<u>Partner</u>
1 ♦	1 ♥	1 ♠	2 ♥
Double*	3 ♥	5 ♦	<input type="checkbox"/> Pass
6 ♦	Pass	Pass	Pass

The double of 2 ♥ showed 3-card ♠ support.

You lead the ♥Q, which is ruffed in dummy. Declarer continues with the ♦K and follows with the ♦J, covered by partner's queen and declarer's ace. You discard a small heart. Declarer now leads the ♥10, and you pause to assess the defensive prospects. You feel good as declarer is certain to lose two ♣ tricks to you. Should you play a small heart as a suit-preference signal? Which heart do you play?

More on that defensive situation in a moment.

One of the challenges in bridge is envisioning problems that you can create in the minds of your opponents. We just looked at the beginning of the hand from the defender's viewpoint. We will now look at the same hand from my standpoint as the declarer.

One of the joys of being a bridge pro is when your client-partner misbids and you get to an impossible contract, and as the pro, you somehow manage to fulfill the contract. Sometimes you get lucky and find an exotic play that works. Sometimes you find a way to mislead the defense. It can happen in lots of different ways. On the above hand as declarer I saw:

Dummy

♠ Q943

♥ ---

♦ KJT953

♣ 765

Declarer

♠ AT6

♥ AKT4

♦ A842

♣ K8

We arrived at the wrong contract when my partner first misbid by not making a negative double (which would have been followed quickly by 3NT by me), and then showing game-going values with an intended preempt of 5♦. I never imagined that 6♦ would be a hopeless contract when I bid it.

But I saw a ray of hope. If I could lull the defender into playing second hand low on the second round of hearts, I would be able to discard all three of dummy's clubs away on my hearts, and then all I would have to do is lose only one spade trick. So I played as described. And it worked. The defender, perhaps distracted by counting the diamonds, or perhaps remembering an overtrick that his partner gave away foolishly on a previous hand, or just lazily playing second-hand-low assuming that I was trumping my low hearts in dummy -- for whatever motive, he carelessly let me win the trick with the ♥10.

The defender should have taken time to count my tricks. He could see 6 diamond tricks and perhaps 4 spade tricks. The only way that I could have legitimately have 12 tricks would be if I also held the ace and king of hearts. And if I held those hearts, then he absolutely should have covered my ♥10 with the jack.

I quickly discarded dummy's 3 small clubs on the ♥10, ace and king, and then I paused to consider the spade situation. There are 3 different ways to take 2 finesses in the spade suit. I could lead first from my hand and guess to play LHO for either of the missing honors, and if that finesse lost, then finesse my RHO for the other missing honor. Or I could lead originally from dummy and play RHO for at least one honor, finessing twice. Either way, I needed only one of two finesses to work.

In my hand after cashing the hearts, I chose to lead the ♣K as a discovery play. My LHO quickly covered with the club ace -- in his panic over his mistake in the heart suit he certainly wasn't going to let me win another trick with an unprotected honor. That clue was all that I needed. I was now certain that my RHO held at least one spade honor for his raise to two hearts, so I continued by leading the spade queen from dummy, to make my slam. If the ♣K had been

ducked smoothly, I probably would have guessed that my LHO held the ♠K, and still gone down in my contract. (After playing a spade to the queen and having it lose to the king, I would finesse RHO for the ♠J and that also would lose).

So I fulfilled the contract and we ended up winning our KO match by 13 IMPs. I felt the joy of my orchestration on this hand. I had been successful in envisioning a situation where I lulled my opponent into a misdefense. And we earned over 48 master points for our victory.