

I Enjoy Swindles

Gail Greenberg and I were very successful in the two days that we able to play in the October Danbury regional, winning the open pairs on Saturday and the Swiss Teams on Sunday. Congratulations and thanks to Sunday teammates: Steve Becker and Larry Bausher. The following hand helped us win the teams. We were leading the event when I had the following bidding problem: ♠954 ♥A865 ♦Q10 ♣AK85. Vulnerable vs. Non-vulnerable, Gail opened the bidding with 4♦ Namyats, showing about 8 1/2 - 9 1/2 tricks, similar to, but better than, an opening bid of 4♠. With a hand worth at least 3 tricks, I knew slam was very possible. What would you bid?

With different partners I play different bidding systems over Namyats. Recently I had been working hard on a new partnership, and I had not reviewed Gail's system - I was uncertain if I had to bid 5♦ now to ask for a diamond control, or if I was supposed to bid 4♥ first and follow-up with a 5♦ bid to ask for a diamond control. It seems that every partner that I play with has their own bidding system over this bid. So, rather than guess or give the opponent's a roadmap to my hand, I decided to just jump to 6♠. I figured that it should have a good play.

But I was wrong. I had forgotten that at favorable vulnerability Gail opens Namyats with only 8 tricks, and it turns out that we only had 11 tricks on the hand. So, I am writing about a hand that I am not proud about - in the bidding. But the play was exciting. Do you see any way to make this contract? The opening lead was a small trump, won in dummy, everyone following.

North-South Vulnerable	Dummy (Gail)	
	♠AKQJ863	4♦ Pass 6♠ Pass
	♥4	Pass Pass
	♦J762	
Glenn Milgrim	♣7	Jeff Aker
♠		♠
♥		♥
♦		♦
♣	Declarer(Jeff)	♣
	♠954	
	♥A865	
	♦Q10	
	♣AK85	

If my RHO, Jeff Aker, has the KQJ109 of hearts, the AK of diamonds, and the QJ109 of clubs, I can squeeze him in 3 suits. But it is unrealistic to expect him to be dealt that, and impossible for him to have that and never bid. So I had to look for something else.

I decided that I needed to try to isolate the diamond threat, playing for split diamond honors, and then maybe a squeeze would be more realistic. So, at trick 2, I led the $\spadesuit 2$. Jeff Aker played low smoothly, and my queen lost to the king. My LHO Glenn Milgrim, made a pretty normal play returning another trump, which I won in dummy. He apparently wanted to prevent me from ruffing diamonds in my hand, which would often be his best defense.

Playing this way has clearly improved my chances of making this hand. It is safe to assume that Jeff Aker has the diamond ace (because Glenn would have led diamonds if he began with the Ace-King). If Jeff Aker also started with either 6 clubs, or the QJ109 of clubs, I can now squeeze him in the minor suits. This is a much better chance than what I was originally dealt, but how good is it, and is it my best chance?

Without carefully calculating the odds, I would assume that for Jeff to have been dealt one of those club holdings would be around 2% or 3%. It is possible, but considering Glenn's passive defense, he would typically have stoppers in hearts and clubs that he is trying to protect.

Rather than take such low odds, I opted to play for a swindle. I boldly called for another low diamond from dummy, challenging Jeff to a guess. If I had started with a singleton diamond queen, as seemed likely from the bidding and his partner's defense, then his best defense was to duck this trick. In fact, if I had been dealt something like $\spadesuit 954$ $\heartsuit A865$ $\diamondsuit Q$ $\clubsuit AK852$, then it is absolutely correct to duck his ace of diamonds, and he would be congratulating his partner on his brilliant trump leads.

And that is what happened. I won trick 4 with the diamond ten, and I announced to the table that the contract had just became a lot better, and claimed 12 tricks. I never saw my opponent's cards, but I assume the entire hand was something like this:

North-South Vulnerable	Dummy (Gail)				
	$\spadesuit AKQJ863$	$4 \spadesuit$	Pass	$6 \heartsuit$	Pass
	$\heartsuit 4$	Pass	Pass		
	$\diamondsuit J762$				
Glenn Milgrim	$\clubsuit 7$	Jeff Aker			
$\spadesuit 72$		$\spadesuit 10$			
$\heartsuit K1093$		$\heartsuit QJ72$			
$\diamondsuit K83$		$\diamondsuit A954$			
$\clubsuit Q1064$	Declarer(Jeff)	$\clubsuit J932$			
	$\spadesuit 954$				
	$\heartsuit A865$				
	$\diamondsuit Q10$				
	$\clubsuit AK85$				

Rather than play for a squeeze that had about a 2% chance of success, I played for a holding that I think was going to succeed most of the time.. Indeed, I would be surprised if the identical hand was played 10 times, if Jeff Aker would have risen the $\diamondsuit A$ to beat my $\diamondsuit 10$ twice, because of

my bold bidding and play. It had to be much more likely, from his position at the table, that I held a singleton queen of diamonds than the holding that I actually held. Notice, he never had a chance to get a count signal in any suit from his partner, so he was forced to defend based on likely presumptions.

I think the only problem that Jeff Aker really faced was whether or not to win the diamond ace on the first lead in diamonds. If I had been dealt a singleton diamond king, he would have regretted his decision. But, if I had been dealt the king-ten doubleton, he made the right play. Certainly if he is going to choose to duck, he must duck smoothly, and I applaud his smooth duck. I tend to think it is a better percentage play for him to win the first round of diamonds, as ducking always loses when I was dealt the singleton king, and may not win when I am dealt other holdings.

I also want to praise my opponents for their supportive and fine disposition after suffering this disastrous result. Jeff immediately told his partner that he had ducked the ace, and suggested that perhaps he should have hesitated briefly on the first diamond play, so his partner might suspect that he did hold the diamond ace. (That touches upon difficult ethical questions which I don't want to address now). And Glenn, after a brief thought, commented that he should have returned a diamond to keep his partner from having a diamond guess. Although I think that statement is not completely accurate, I think it is a fine example of partnership harmony at the table. (eg, if I had ♠95 ♥AQ752 ♦A10 ♣AK85 then only a spade return blocks my needed diamond ruff in my hand). I also feel that, at the table, it was very difficult for them to read the hand accurately. It is very hard for them to anticipate the hand that I actually held, considering the bidding and how boldly and confidently I played the hand.

I seem to really enjoy swindles at the table, as I find that I end up writing about them a lot. I think the imagination and logic behind swindles are very exciting. I hope my readers also enjoy them.