

Improve your bridge with me



By Migry Zur Campanile

One of the most important keys to a successful game is for declarer to stop and to comprehensively assess the hand once the opponents lead and dummy is tabled. This is the moment where we have the chance to shine: we should check how many losers we have in a trump contract (or winners if playing in no trump), examine possible ways of disposing of them using the three alternatives we have (to ruff them, to finesse or to pitch them on high cards in another suit) and then select the plan which has the best chances of success. Let us look at this hand for instance:

IMPs All Vul Dealer South
You are South and you hold:

♠ A5
♥ K10986
♦ K82
♣ K97

You open 1 heart and your partner bids 2NT, a game-forcing raise in hearts.

What do you rebid?

The idea of having a forcing bid of 2NT is to allow plenty of space to investigate slam below game level. A bid of 4♥ would tell partner that we have a minimum opening and we do not see any chance of slam unless he has a huge hand. In this case we have a fairly normal opening with a good assortment of aces and kings so the best thing to do is to bid 3♥ and let partner carry on describing his hand. The auction is game-forcing so there is no danger of us being left to languish in 3♥ when we have game.

Partner quickly closes the auction bidding 4 hearts.

West leads the ♠Q and this is what you see:

♠ 86
♥ AJ72
♦ 53
♣ AQJ85

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A5
♥ K10986
♦ K82
♣ K97

How many losers do you have?

5 losers: one in spades, one in hearts if we do not find the ♥Q and three in diamonds.

How can we get rid of some of them?

It looks easy in theory: we have two club winners in dummy that we can use to pitch two diamond losers from hand.

Is there anything we should worry about?

Yes, we have a very weak holding in diamond and if by any chance East takes the lead before we can discard our diamond losers we may be in trouble if the ♦A is behind the ♦K.

How can East gain the lead?

Either with a spade or possibly with a heart if he holds Qxx or more in the suit.

Can we prevent him gaining the lead?

Yes, first we must duck the ♠Q to avoid that East might come in with a spade and then we must play trumps in a rather

unusual way by finessing East for the ♥Q despite the fact that we have 9 trumps on the line and that normally we would simply cash the top honors with such holding. We can see that even if we lose a heart to a doubleton ♥Q in West, he is now unable to get East in to play a diamond across thanks to our foresight in ducking the lead.

Here is the complete hand:

	♠ 86	
	♥ AJ72	
	♦ 53	
	♣ AQJ85	
♠ QJ974		♠ K1032
♥ Q54		♥ 3
♦ A106		♦ QJ974
♣ 64		♣ 1032
	♠ A5	
	♥ K10986	
	♦ K82	
	♣ K97	

The really crucial point about the hand is that had we routinely taken our ♠A on the first trick and then started to think, like a lot of players I know would have done, we would have had no chance to recover and would have gone down in a contract where a more patient declarer would have easily succeeded. Finally if you worry about what people might say if you stop for a couple of minutes to consider the hand at trick one, you should simply think of how much time you will save later on if you examine and plan the hand properly at the start.

