

Not Just a Guess

by DAVID J. WEISS

On some hands it is easier if your opponents are experts. Experts make rational plays even when they err. The knowledge that your opponents are skilled may be useful in resolving what seem like pure guesses.

Try these two deals, which occurred in high-level match point competition.

Love All. Dealer South.

	♠ A6		
	♥ K75		
	♦ J843		
	♣ AQ95		
<i>You</i>			
♠ QJ1042		N	
♥ Q9853		W	E
♦ Q2			S
♣ 10			

South	West	North	East
1♣	Pass	3♣	Pass
3♦	Pass	3♠	Dble
4♥	4♠	6♣	All Pass

Eschewing the save against a pair whose bidding methods are obviously antiquated, you lead the spade queen. Declarer wins the ace, ruffs a spade and cashes the club king. Then he plays the ace, king and another heart, ruffing that in hand as well. The jack of clubs is led to dummy's queen, partner discarding a spade, and a diamond comes to declarer's king. Quickly now, do you unblock?

Actually, if you do unblock there is no need for haste. You have found the only defence to set the contract, catering to South's holding K-9-x in diamonds. A nice play, except for the fact that his actual hand is:

♠ 5
♥ A4
♦ AK10
♣ KJ76432

Could you have known that the issue was to stop the overtrick rather than to defeat the slam? We won't address the point that South's bidding would be overly aggressive with the hand you played for; people do bid strangely, especially at match-points. But surely an expert South would have led the diamond much earlier with your hypothesized holding, hoping you would not see the strip coming. Should he have done so on the actual hand? Perhaps, but fortunately, few declarers have the courage to take even a slight risk of failing in a laydown slam.

Next take my place, declaring a poor contract against a world-class pair:

Love All. Dealer East.

♠ J932			
♥ AJ			
♦ Q4			
♣ KQJ93			
	N		
	W	E	
		S	

♠ K54			
♥ K1062			
♦ 10865			
♣ A8			

South	West	North	East
—	—	—	Pass
Pass	1♦	2♣	Pass
2NT	Pass	3NT	All Pass

Partner was kind enough to cover the diamond suit, but where is sixth (and seventh!) club? Maybe we both overbid. West begins with a rapid ace and king of diamonds, slowing down when his partner pitches a low club on the king. He emerges from his trance with the jack and nine of diamonds, with East

pitching more clubs as you release spades from the dummy. Now we have eight tricks. Who has the heart queen? Difficulties in transportation force us to decide immediately.

Since East has one diamond and not more than four clubs, he is likely to have more hearts than his partner. On the other hand, West is the one who bid, so he is more likely to have any particular high card. No solid indication here, but psychology may come to our rescue.

We know that West has misdefended. A club switch at Trick 3 would almost certainly do us in. What was he thinking about? He must have the spade ace, and his willingness to give up a diamond trick makes sense only if he thinks we need spade tricks to make the contract. West fears that declarer has the king-queen of spades. If declarer does have those cards along with his marked club ace, then he will not have the heart king; South passed originally, remember. If South does not have the heart king, though, he will have the heart queen, because 9 HCP and a doubtful diamond stopper would not yield a two no-trump call. To sum up, then, West's defence cater to declarer's high cards being the club ace, the spade marriage, and the heart queen.

Once you get that far, the hand is easy. If West's defence is predicated on South's having the heart queen, then West does not see that card. A delicate inference this, made possible only by the knowledge that West is truly a strong player. His hand was:

♠ A8
♥ 983
♦ AKJ972
♣ 106