

# The Wolves visit the Slow Lane

As the match wound down everyone was surprised to find it still close. The West LA Wolves had come to the ward to do good deeds and to win masterpoints, but my guys were holding their own. We were down only 12 IMPs at the last break, and the leader of the pack was berating his troops.

"We should be crucifying them! They're just a bunch of ..." snarled the captain.

"Hey, calm down. They don't play so badly. And sometimes it's their very, well, simplicity, which wins for them," replied Ace Masters.

"Yeah, sure. Is that why you went down in that routine three no-trumps?" The Wolves' captain evidently did not subscribe to the Blue Team philosophy of providing emotional support.

*East/West Game. Dealer South.*

♠ KJ95  
♥ Q10  
♦ 8432  
♣ J73

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A  
♥ K64  
♦ AKJ75  
♣ KQ62

South	North
1♦	1♠
3♣	3♦
3NT	

Opening lead: ♥7

Ace defended his line. "I had a tough decision to make at Trick 1. With the heart lead marked by the auction, the seven could have been fourth best, or top from two, three or four small. If the suit was 4-4, it probably didn't matter what I chose; good luck in the minors would see me home. So I had to worry primarily about the 5-3 splits."

"That's OK," said the captain. "But why did you put up the queen?"

Ace smiled. "If East has the length, the queen play allows me to control the tempo. I can win the third heart, and probably will be home so long as West has the club ace."

Ace continued ruefully. "But if West has the length, I have to guess the right card. The ten rates to be the winning play more often than not; but if it is covered by the jack, any lie of the cards will probably lead to defeat. Choosing the queen allows more scope for expertise. If it fetches the ace, I can control the play in the suit, and good luck in the minors will be enough. And, if you'll pardon the expression, I had an ace in the hole."

The captain didn't smile, so Ace went on. "My plan was that if the queen held, I would drop a clever six and then finesse the diamond jack. With West holding five hypothetical hearts to East's three, the finesse is not a bad play within the suit. The hoped-for bonus was that West would panic, miscount the hearts, and bang down his ace. All in all, playing the heart queen seemed like a good idea."

Overhearing the Wolves' post-mortem, I chuckled. So Ace had really been hoping for a defensive error. He got one, but it didn't help.

♠ KJ95  
♥ Q10  
♦ 8432  
♣ J73

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ 10842  
♥ AJ875  
♦ Q9  
♣ 54

♠ Q763  
♥ 932  
♦ 107  
♣ A1098

♠ A  
♥ K64  
♦ AKJ65  
♣ KQ62

When Marshall won the diamond queen, he thought and thought. We had drilled on the need to give count at no-trump contracts when dummy wins a minor honour, and he correctly interpreted Rick's deuce. He triumphantly shifted to the spade ten, which was covered by the jack queen (!), and ace. But with East holding the club ace, declarer was doomed.

The Wolves' captain had not finished. "How did their declarer make it, then? Didn't you lead a heart, Hugh?"

"Sure I led a heart," answered the Western Wolff. "But we think fourth-best is too helpful to declarer. I led the five, showing attitude. Their declarer played the hand in ten seconds. He won the heart ten, led a club to the king, and banged down the high diamonds. We couldn't do anything."

The players returned to their assigned wards for the final segment. Strangely enough, lead conventions against three no-trumps played a role in the first swing hand. Both pairs got to three no-trumps and the spade ten was led.

♠ AJ6  
♥ 9853  
♦ K106  
♣ KJ6

♠ 10982	N	♠ K73
♥ KQ4	W	♥ 1062
♦ 753	S	♦ 82
♣ A109		♣ Q7542

♠ Q54  
♥ AJ7  
♦ AQJ94  
♣ 83

The auction was curious. Both Souths opened a 15-17 one no-trump. Andrew miscounted his points, while Ace added one for the fifth diamond. If North had become declarer, the normal club lead would set the hand unless declarer produced a double-dummy line, but playing from the inferior South side declarer needed no more than a 50/50 guess.

In the first Closed Room (we have no Open Rooms here), Hugh, the apostle of non-informative leads, led a non-conventional spade ten. Andrew played low from dummy, Peter encouraged, and Andrew scooped in his queen. In search of a ninth trick, he led a club to the jack. Peter took it and returned a heart. Fearing a second spade through, declarer took his ace to play another club. His luck was in. The opponents could cash only two heart tricks.

Marshall led a conventional spade ten, showing zero or two higher honours. Rick took the king and shifted to a heart. Now, when declarer misguessed in clubs, he was down. The match was even.

But the superior technique of the visitors produced a rally. They gained a surprising 7 IMPs on this part-score defensive problem.



Here's how it looked from Rick's, and from Peter's perspective:

Game All. Dealer South.

♠ Q72  
 ♥ Q  
 ♦ Q743  
 ♣ Q10864

W N E S

♠ 5  
 ♥ 10986  
 ♦ A102  
 ♣ AJ932

West	North	East	South
—	—	—	1♥
1♠	1NT	2♣	2♥
All Pass			

The club seven was led, and declarer dropped the king under East's ace. The spade was returned to declarer's ten and partner's ace and the spade eight was sent back. When East, ruffed, declarer played the king. Now what?

Rick returned ace and another diamond, and the contract rolled home. Peter got it right. He reasoned that partner did not have the singleton club, or he would have returned a lower spade; nor did he have the diamond king, or he would have returned a higher spade. He returned a trump and declarer went down two, the full hand being:

♠ Q72  
 ♥ Q  
 ♦ Q743  
 ♣ Q10864

W N E S

♠ 5  
 ♥ 10986  
 ♦ A102  
 ♣ AJ932

♠ AJ9863  
 ♥ K2  
 ♦ J95  
 ♣ 75

♠ K104  
 ♥ AJ7543  
 ♦ K86  
 ♣ K

Then came a 5 IMP part-score:

♠ J854  
 ♥ KJ10  
 ♦ A1062  
 ♣ K3

W N E S

♠ Q1063  
 ♥ 92  
 ♦ KJ95  
 ♣ Q84

Against Rick, Ace opened a weak two heart bid in third seat. North risked an aggressive double, and Rick tried three spades over the inevitable bump to three hearts. Misguessing in diamonds, he lost the obvious five tricks

On a slower auction, though, Peter showed his skill.

West	North	East	South
—	—	Pass	Pass
1♥	Dble	Rdble	2♦
Pass	Pass	2♥	2♠
Pass	3♦	3♥	3♠
All Pass			

West cashed the heart ace and shifted to a low club. Peter took the king and began the trumps. East won the second round with the king, cashed the ace (West threw a heart), and played back a club. Ruffing the third club in dummy, declarer took stock. East was known to have the spade ace-king and the club jack; West had the heart ace and the club ace. The auction suggested that each opponent had 10 high-card points; who had the diamond queen?

Peter did not guess. He cashed the heart king and played the heart jack from dummy, and when East, perforce, played the queen, Peter knew to finesse West for the diamond queen.

The penultimate board didn't look too promising either.

East/West Game. Dealer East.

♠ QJ9  
 ♥ 763  
 ♦ Q72  
 ♣ Q873

W N E S

♠ 85  
 ♥ Q10854  
 ♦ 9543  
 ♣ 102

♠ 10  
 ♥ AKJ9  
 ♦ KJ86  
 ♣ AKJ5

♠ AK76432  
 ♥ 2  
 ♦ A10  
 ♣ 964

West	North	East	South
—	—	Pass	1♠
Dble	2♠	Pass	Pass
Dble	Pass	3♥	3♠
4♥	Pass	Pass	4♠
Dble	All Pass		

The save was an obvious one; the test was for the defenders. Hugh and Peter passed with flying colours. The ace, king and jack of clubs were led. After ruffing, Peter returned the heart five. Hugh won it and played a club, killing the pitch. Would our guys do as well? West might not lead a club, or he might try to cash two hearts, or he might even (shudder) get himself tangled in an endgame.

The first hurdle was surmounted when Marshall led clubs. After ruffing the third round, Rick returned the heart four. Without even pausing for breath, Marshall won the trick and played the fourth club. Then, as declarer ran off the trumps, Marshall threw the ace of hearts as his first pitch. He kept his diamonds to achieve down two and a push. We were still in the race!

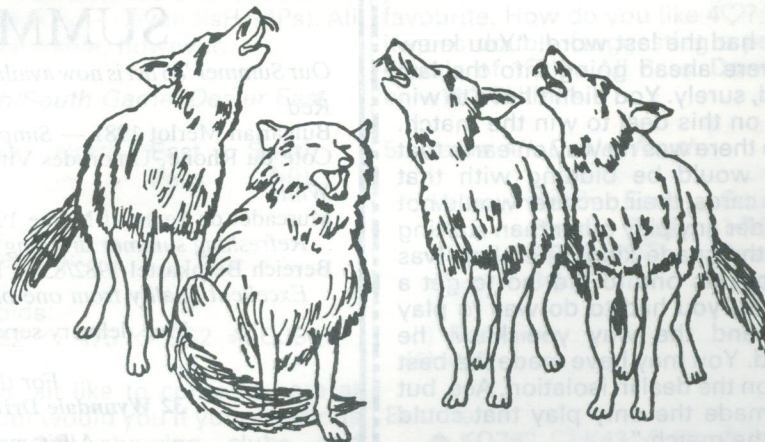
Later I asked Marshall how he had known what to do. "Well, Dr Weiss," he explained patiently, "you taught us how to give count. High card for even, low card for odd. You remember that, don't you?" "Yes, of course, Marshall," I responded. "But that was when you are following suit. Here Rick was leading a suit." "Oh," said our hero, "I guess I didn't understand." Their misunderstanding certainly made the defence easy, I thought.

Down 12 with one board to go, we needed a swing. The bridge goddess co-operated, dealing a slam hand. Still, it looked like a push board.

♠ K9  
 ♥ QJ64  
 ♦ AK875  
 ♣ 52

W N E S

♠ AJ1087543  
 ♥ 5  
 ♦ 4  
 ♣ AKQ





Andrew got to six spades easily enough against silent opponents, and after West took the first trick Andrew took the next twelve.

The replay took a lot longer.

West	North	East	South
—	—	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♦	2NT	3♠
Pass	4♠	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♥*	Pass	6♠
All Pass			

Here Rick had stuck his non-vulnerable nose in with a two no-trump call. This did not affect the auction, but it gave Ace something to think about.

Marshall led the heart king, saw East's deuce, and switched to the diamond six. East's nine fell under the ace.

Now Ace made what I thought was a good play. He cashed the diamond king, no doubt hoping East would be tempted to ruff. However, East followed with the ten. Ace made another good play. He pitched the club queen and played a third diamond. East followed to that one too! With a gleam in his eye, Ace trumped the diamond and led a spade to the nine. Down one! We won!

As the Wolves were leaving, the temptation to eavesdrop was too strong to resist. "You ought to be in here, Ace!" shouted the captain. "How could you go down in that cold slam!"

"Surely it was the percentage play," Ace whimpered. "Once he showed up with three diamonds, shouldn't he have a spade void? After all, I knew he had bid with no high cards."

"Do you really think you're supposed to bank on the bidding of these, uh, residents?" The captain wouldn't let up. "That's why they're in here."

Hugh had the last word. "You knew we were ahead going into the last board, surely. You didn't have to win IMPs on this deal to win the match. Since there was no way on earth that Peter would be bidding with that guy's cards, their declarer would not consider any play other than starting with the spade king. The slam was an obvious one to bid, so to get a push all you had to do was to play the hand the way you knew he would. You may have made the best play on the deal in isolation, Ace, but you made the only play that could lose the match."