

2012-06-26 Sectional Tournament at Clubs -- Signalling (Problem)

Board 2
 North Deals
 E-W Vul

| | |
|-----------|--|
| ♠ J 4 2 | |
| ♥ A 9 4 | |
| ♦ A K 5 4 | |
| ♣ 10 9 6 | |

♠ 5
 ♥ 10 8 6
 ♦ J 10 8 2
 ♣ A 8 5 4 2

| | | | |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| <i>West</i> | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> | <i>South</i> |
| | Pass | 2 ♥ | 4 ♠ |
| | Dbl | All pass | |
| 4 ♠ x by South | | | |

You lead the ♦ K, dummy follows low, partner plays the 3, and declarer the 6.

On the ♦ A, dummy again follows low, partner plays the 7, and declarer the 9.

The only diamond you cannot see is the queen. Who has it? Do you lead another diamond for partner to ruff, or cash the ♥ A?

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| | | | |
|-----------|-----------------|---------------|--|
| | ♠ 5 | | |
| | ♥ 10 8 6 | | |
| | ♦ J 10 8 2 | | |
| | ♣ A 8 5 4 2 | | |
| ♠ J 4 2 | | ♠ 10 3 | |
| ♥ A 9 4 | | ♥ K Q J 5 3 2 | |
| ♦ A K 5 4 | | ♦ Q 7 3 | |
| ♣ 10 9 6 | | ♣ Q 7 | |
| | ♠ A K Q 9 8 7 6 | | |
| | ♥ 7 | | |
| | ♦ 9 6 | | |
| | ♣ K J 3 | | |

NS 4♠; EW 3♥; NS 3♣; EW 1♦

Bidding commentary: East has a textbook weak two bid, with an ideal suit. The two side queens make this a maximum, not good enough to open 1♥. South has a textbook 4♠ bid, as I play it, an exception to the rule "don't preempt a preempt". The double jump shows a good playing hand. Certainly South hopes to make the contract, but if not, it may still be a good sacrifice. Jumping to 3♠ or a takeout double followed by bidding spades would show a stronger hand.

As you can see, West's double is ill-advised. How could West know? Well the ♥A is likely to be the only defensive heart trick (if any), after South's distributional bid. That's where East promised concentrated strength, all of it wasted on defense. East has his maximum with two queens outside, but neither takes a trick. With East-West vulnerable, there is no profitable sacrifice, and West's flat hand is unattractive for that anyhow, so West should simply pass. Double would be better, but not certain, with the ♠Q, a likely trick, instead of ♠J.

Play commentary: Declarer cannot go wrong. There is no other way to play the hand than to draw trumps, play over to the ♣A, and have the queen pop up in front of the ♣KJ.

However, this is matchpoints. Every trick counts. Yes, this board was lost with the double, but suppose you had passed - then it's crucial to get all your tricks.

So you cash your two top diamonds, partner following with first the 3 and then the 7. What next? As you can see, you have to cash the ♥A. If you play a diamond, declarer ruffs out East's ♦Q, draws trump, and discards his heart on dummy's ♦J.

How could you know? Partner has given you a signal, playing first a low card and then a high one. This is either (1) discouraging [do not continue], or (2) count [odd number]. Partner has told you what you want to know: with a doubleton, he would surely have played high-low.

Counting and signalling are crucial to good defense. Work at it!

- Pete Matthews