

38. Finding the best defence

By Ron Klinger

North dealer : Nil vulnerable

North
♠ AK854
♥ 32
♦ 643
♣ QJ8

East
♠ Q76
♥ AQ976
♦ 10
♣ A643

West	North	East	South
	Pass	1♥	2♦
2♥	3♦	All Pass	

West leads the ♥4. Plan the defence for East. After you win trick 1, what do you play at trick 2?

This deal arose during a BBO session in early April. North-South were robots:

West	North	East	South
♠ J1092 ♥ K54 ♦ 9752 ♣ K2	♠ AK854 ♥ 32 ♦ 643 ♣ QJ8	♠ Q76 ♥ AQ976 ♦ 10 ♣ A643	♠ 3 ♥ J108 ♦ AKQJ8 ♣ 10975

After the auction above, West led the ♥4. East, Jim Biggins of Kansas, USA, played the ♥Q. With three low cards in hearts, say 8-5-4, West would have led the eight, since West was already known to hold 3-4 hearts and the ♥8 would not be top from a doubleton. East therefore knew that the ♥4, West's lowest heart, promised an honour. If the honour was the ♥K, the ♥Q would win. If West had led the ♥4 from J-5-4 or 10-5-4, South was bound to have a trick with the ♥K whether East played the ♥A or the ♥Q and East could always collect the ♥A later.

East then considered how the defence might come to five tricks. East could see two tricks in hearts and the ♣A. Where could the defence collect two more tricks. If West had two trump tricks, it would not matter what East did, but what if South had strong diamonds? East deduced that the only hope then was for West to have club shortage, the actual ♣K-x holding, or a doubleton club plus a high diamond.

East therefore switched to the ♣3. West won with the ♣K and returned the ♣2. East took the ♣A and returned the ♣4 for West to ruff. Back came the ♥5 to the ♥A. East continued with the fourth club and West scored another ruff. That was two down and +100 to East-West.

	North	
	♠ AK854	
	♥ 32	
	♦ 643	
	♣ QJ8	
West		East
♠ J1092		♠ Q76
♥ K54		♥ AQ976
♦ 9752		♦ 10
♣ K2		♣ A643
	South	
	♠ 3	
	♥ J108	
	♦ AKQJ8	
	♣ 10975	

The deal arose originally in an Indian Teams match. At one table it went:

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

North's 2♠ here appeals more than the robot's 3♦ in the auction on the previous page. If East passes, South bids 3♣ and North gives preference to 3♦. You reach the same spot, but you have given your side a chance to play in spades.

It is usually unwise to compete a part-score hand to the 4-level, but here North not only survived, but also did well, since the defence did not double and did not collect all their tricks and 3♥ by East would have succeeded.

Against 4♦, West led the ♦2. South cashed two diamonds and switched to the ♣5. West rose with the ♣K and continued with the ♣2. The defence could now collect a club ruff, two hearts and another club ruff for three down and +150, but after taking the ♣A, East cashed the ♥A and ♥Q. Now there was only one club ruff available and South escaped for two down, -100.

At the other table:

West	North	East	South
	1♠	2♥	Dble ⁽¹⁾
3♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

(1) Minors

South led the ♦K and switched to the ♠3. North won with the ♠K, cashed the ♠A and gave South a spade ruff. East won the club exit with the ♣A, cashed ♥A, ♥K, followed by ♣K, ♠J to discard one club, diamond ruff and club ruff, nine tricks, East-West +140 and +1 Imp.

North dealer : East-West vulnerable

	North		
	♠ 954		
	♥ 84		
	♦ 98		
	♣ QJ9632		
West			
	♠ A76		
	♥ J952		
	♦ 1062		
	♣ A84		
West	North	East	South
	3♣	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West leads the ♥2: four – queen – ace. South plays the ♠Q. What would you do as West?

The deal arose in the final of the 2019 USA Mixed Team Selection:

	North		
	♠ 954		
	♥ 84		
	♦ 98		
	♣ QJ9632		
West		East	
	♠ A76	♠ J1032	
	♥ J952	♥ KQ1076	
	♦ 1062	♦ Q	
	♣ A84	♣ K75	
	South		
	♠ KQ8		
	♥ A3		
	♦ AKJ7543		
	♣ 10		

At one table, it went:

	North	East	South
West	Pass	1♥	Dble
2♥	Pass	Pass	3♦
3♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

South led the ♦A, ♦K. East ruffed and played the ♥K. South took the ♥A and continued with the ♦J. East ruffed and the ♥Q drew trumps. Then came ♣K, ♣A, followed by the ♠A and another spade. South won and could cash another spade, but then had to play a diamond. Declarer ruffed in dummy and discarded the club loser from hand for nine tricks, +140.

At the other table, after the auction in the problem – North’s 3♣ is a ‘joke pre-empt’ – West led the ♥2 and struck gold in the East hand. South could have played diamonds for eight tricks, but then was sure to be one down. Playing for a defensive error, South tried the ♠Q. West obliged by playing low and the ♠Q won. Now South went after the diamonds and with the favourable diamond position (a 2-2 split would also have been fine), South had nine tricks, +400 and +11 Imps.

Meanwhile, East-West could have taken the ♠A, four heart tricks and two club tricks to collect +300 for three down. How could West tell?

There was no strong reason for West to duck the ♠Q. If West takes the ♠A, there is an opportunity for East to signal. This will be helpful for those who use Smith Peters or Reverse Smith Peters.

	North	
	♠ 954	
	♥ 84	
	♦ 98	
	♣ QJ9632	
West		East
♠ A76		♠ J1032
♥ J952		♥ KQ1076
♦ 1062		♦ Q
♣ A84		♣ K75
	South	
	♠ KQ8	
	♥ A3	
	♦ AKJ7543	
	♣ 10	

When declarer first leads a suit in a no-trump contract, the defenders can signal their attitude to the suit led at trick 1. Playing Smith Peters, a high card says, 'I really like the suit led at trick 1' and a low card says, 'Not keen on the suit led'. Most top players prefer Reverse Smith Peters, where the lowest card on declarer's lead says, 'I like the suit led', since one can always afford the lowest card, but to signal with a high card might be costly.

Suppose East-West are playing Reverse Smith Peters. When South plays the ♠Q, West takes the ace and East contributes the ♠2, meaning 'I really like hearts'. West continues with the ♥5. East wins with the ♥K and returns the ♥6. West wins with the ♥J and plays the ♥9. East overtakes with the ♥10 and cashes the fifth heart. On this, West signals for a club switch. East can either play the ♣K and another club or play the ♣5 to the ♣A and West returns a club.

If declarer is tackling a suit, there is usually little use for using attitude signals (I like this suit vs I do not like this suit). If declarer is starting on a suit, it will rarely be the case that the defenders like that suit. Count signals can be useful in some situations, but Reverse Smith Peters will be a more beneficial signaling method most of the time. Why not discuss it with your partner(s)?

Problems for Tomorrow:

1. South dealer : Nil vulnerable

North
♠ QJ65
♥ KQ732
♦ AQJ
♣ 7
South
♠ K
♥ A
♦ 5432
♣ J1098643

South opened 3♣ – not everyone's cup of tea with such poor clubs – and everyone passed. West led the ♠4: five – ace – king and East switched to the ♣A and the ♣2. West won with the ♣Q and cashed the ♣K. East discarded the ♦10, high-encouraging. West switched to the ♦8. Plan the play.

2. East dealer : North-South vulnerable

North

♠ 3

♥ 98754

♦ J875

♣ Q92

South

♠ A954

♥ Q

♦ AK10964

♣ A4

West	North	East	South
		1♥	Dble
1♠	Pass	2♣	2♦
2♠	3♦	3♠	5♦
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West leads the ♥3: four – king – queen. East switches to the ♦2. Plan the play.

Why not discuss the problems by phone with your bridge partners and compare your answers and your reasoning?

“Wagner’s music is better than it sounds.” (Mark Twain (1835-1910))