

346. Psychology in declarer play

By Ron Klinger

Pairs: Dealer East : Both vulnerable

North
♠ J52
♥ 9653
♦ A87
♣ K105

South
♠ KQ10964
♥ K2
♦ K3
♣ J84

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

(1) 4+ hearts

West leads the ♣9. What do you make of the lead?

What is your plan of play (a) against weak opponents? (b) against strong opponents?

The lead of the ♣9, the highest-spot card, will be a singleton or a doubleton. Sometimes it could be from precisely K-J-9, but that does not apply here.

You can see that against 3♦ you can collect at most 1 spade, 1 heart and 2 diamonds, so the opponents can score +110 or better. In that case you can afford to be -100, but -200 will be a bottom or shared bottom. You will lose a spade and probably 3 clubs. If the ♥A is with East, you will be one off, fine, but what if the ♥A is with West. Now there is a huge risk of going two down. Is there anything you can do about it?

Perhaps, depending on how the cards actually lie. Here is the full deal, reported by Simon Andrew of Queensland:

	North	
	♠ J52	
	♥ 9653	
	♦ A87	
	♣ K105	
West		East
♠ A73		♠ 8
♥ A1084		♥ QJ7
♦ J1064		♦ Q952
♣ 92		♣ AQ763
	South	
	♠ KQ10964	
	♥ K2	
	♦ K3	
	♣ J84	

What South wants to do is to have East play three rounds of clubs and allow West to ruff. If you dissuade East from giving West a club ruff, East might find the heart switch. Against weak opposition, you do not want to duck in dummy and play the ♣J under East's ♣Q. East might be fooled (for the moment) that your ♣J is singleton and therefore switch to the ♥Q. If you duck and another heart is played, West wins and reverts to clubs. East wins with the ♣A and now gets the gag and continues clubs. You are two down. Disaster.

	North	
	♠ J52	
	♥ 9653	
	♦ A87	
	♣ K105	
West		East
♠ A73		♠ 8
♥ A1084		♥ QJ7
♦ J1064		♦ Q952
♣ 92		♣ AQ763
	South	
	♠ KQ10964	
	♥ K2	
	♦ K3	
	♣ J84	

After ♣9: five – queen – jack, if East switches to the ♥Q and you play the ♥K, West wins, reverts to clubs, receives the club ruff and switches back to hearts. When the ♥J wins, you are two down disaster.

Your best bet against weak opposition is to play low from hand on the ♣Q, low again on the ♣A and let East give West the club ruff. If West switches to a diamond, you win with the ♦K, cash the ♦A and ruff a diamond. Then play a low spade. If West began with a 2-4-5-2 pattern or a 2-5-4-2 pattern including ♠A-x initially, West now has to win with the bare ♠A and is endplayed. A heart gives you a trick with the ♥K and a diamond is ruffed in dummy and you discard a heart. You are one down. Happiness.

West could have avoided that by cashing the ♠A, but players do not always think of that. With the actual layout, this will be the position after ♦K, ♦A, diamond ruff:

	North	
	♠ J52	
	♥ 9653	
	♦	
	♣	
West		East
♠ A7		♠ 8
♥ A1084		♥ QJ7
♦ 10		♦ 9
♣		♣ 76
	South	
	♠ KQ1096	
	♥ K2	
	♦	
	♣	

Here you have to hope that when you play the low spade, West ducks. The next spade then endplays West. If you knew West began with 3 spades, you do better to play a low spade from hand after winning with the ♦K. The trouble with that play is that you lose the endplay when West began with ♠A-x and is now down to ♠A singleton.

Against strong opposition, you are better off to drop the ♣J on the first or second round of clubs. The East player might think, 'Hah, you can't fool me. I am going to give partner the club ruff.' If that happens, you still need to hope for a mistake from West. That is less likely here. If West did begin with ♠A-x, West will probably cash the ♠A after ruffing the third club. If West began with ♠A-x-x, then West might play ♠A and the other spade after ruffing the third club. If West switches to a diamond after the third club (as suggested by East's ♣3 suit-preference at trick 3) and you play ♦K, ♦A, diamond ruff and then play a spade, a strong West is likely to play the ♠A and exit with the third spade, as the endplay is foreseeable.

Problem for Tomorrow:

Teams: Dealer North : Nil vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1♣	1♦	1♥
Pass	2♥	Pass	?

What would you do as South with:

♠ A92
♥ AK1076
♦ 854
♣ J8

Why not phone or email your bridge partners and compare your answers and your reasoning?

*What do a bowling ball and a drunk have in common?
They might well end up in the gutter.*