

# Board of the Week 50

By Dick Chapman

We intermediate players sometimes are so focused on an immediate threat or task that we forget simple ways to improve our situation. As an example, let's take the following board played in a recent club pairs game:

♠Q ♥A764 ♦8652 ♣AK95		♠K53 ♥KJ3 ♦A93 ♣Q1074
-------------------------------	--	--------------------------------

You are East playing 3NT on the lead of the spade 9. The queen is beheaded by North who returns the spade jack. You duck as South unblocks the 8. Here comes a third spade which you win and South further unblocks the 7. How do you proceed?

It's pretty straightforward, don't you agree? You have 1 spade, 2 hearts, 1 diamond, and four clubs (if the suit is divided 3-2 or the jack otherwise drops). You need one more trick from the heart suit. If the queen of hearts is in North, you make, otherwise you don't.

So it's pretty simple: play four clubs, diamond ace, heart ace, and take the heart finesse. Voila, it works! You win 3 heart tricks and happily write 400 in your personal score sheet.

After the game you look at the scores. What?!? A 45%?!? What happened? Why is this not a tie for top?

Now, 90 minutes after you planned your play and made your game, you start thinking "what did I miss?"

While you think a moment, I will enjoy Lisa Davidsen, not the best Tosca ever, but good enough, and in a Little Rock theater live broadcast of Puccini's masterpiece [this Saturday](#), November 23. Join me? The act II aria "Vissi d'arte" ("I lived for art") is sung right before she plunges a dagger into the evil Baron Scarpia, and an expected assignation ends up badly for him. Check out

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LdulWn-AMQg>

See next column for "what did I miss?" solution.

You know you are going to take the heart finesse, and it either works or it doesn't. You are making or not making. But look at that heart suit again. What if the suit divides 3-3? Here's a better plan: After four clubs, end in dummy. Take the finesse (it had better work, or this wouldn't be a Board of the Week story). It does work. Now the heart king and back to the ace. If the suit is 3-3, you are in dummy for the 13th heart. Now you score 1 spade, FOUR hearts, 1 diamond, and 4 clubs.

It's so simple, yet only 3 of the 8 pairs in 3NT scored 630; the other 5 were 600. This is why you got the below average score. The full board:

♠Q ♥A764 ♦8652 ♣AK95	♠AJ1064 ♥Q82 ♦QJ10 ♣63	♠K53 ♥KJ3 ♦A93 ♣Q1074
	♠9872 ♥1095 ♦K74 ♣J82	

I suppose you could check for the very small chance of a stiff queen of hearts by playing the ace then queen-ace of clubs. But I wouldn't do that because it gives the defenders too much information. Someone will signal count in hearts and a defender might wake up. In my view, it's better to attack clubs immediately, before defenders know what is going on. Someone might sleepily discard a heart, thus changing a 4-2 break into 3-2. Not every defender will know to keep parity with dummy, and even experts get it wrong sometimes.

Why the QA of clubs first? If the suit isn't breaking and the jack doesn't fall, it's now imperative you win four hearts, so you are in dummy to play for the essential 3-3 heart break (along the way, you can also finesse the club jack if it is Jxxx in South, thus restoring your chance for 10 tricks). Play three hearts ending in hand (finessing clubs if marked and necessary), and score up 9 or 10 tricks. Remember that all roads to success go through a heart finesse. Your goal is making nine, but planning for a tenth trick is good bridge.

Simple, right? World-class players see all the permutations and still get the hand played in 5 minutes. We mortals have to spend one more minute to see some of the permutations. I'm sure I left out several in this discussion.