

Board of the Week 55

By Dick Chapman

This week we look at a “take your chances” theme again. As West, play 3NT on the very favorable lead of the club 4 followed by the 7 in dummy and the king from South:

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| ♠863 ♥K64 ♦K54 ♣AQ109 | Matchpoints V: NS | ♠AK4 ♥AQ53 ♦A10873 ♣7 |
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You are going to make this contract easily: 2 spades, 3 hearts, 2 diamonds, and 2 clubs off the top. How many matchpoints will you lose playing all your winners off the top? You want every trick you can get!

Make a plan before reading further. Meanwhile, I will listen to and follow the score of Carl Maria von Weber's concerto for clarinet and orchestra:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BO4xdIPCjIM>

Ok, are you ready? Most intermediate players will get this right, but I didn't. Try this: lose a diamond at Trick 2. South wins, a club comes back, you duck. Win the third club and run diamonds. If they break 3-2, you have 4 diamonds, 2 clubs 2 spades, and 3 hearts, or some other combination. Easy +460, onward to the next board.

Wait, did you miss a trick? Yes, you did, just like I did and just like three other West players did. When I lost a diamond to South, I ducked the second club. Why? I know I have 11 tricks no matter what, even if I take the club queen on this lead, so ducking (thus losing a second trick) does nothing to improve my trick count.

Where, you might ask, is a 12th trick going to come from? I have mentioned Eddie Kantar's books on “take your chances” and discussed his repeated theme of exploring everything before giving up. Did I explore everything? No, I settled for an easy 11 tricks. What did I miss?

I will listen to some more of that concerto while you ponder.

Ready? See next column.

The hearts might be 3-3, that's what I missed. If they are, then I have 12 tricks if I don't duck that second club. Win the club queen and win one top diamond. If both defenders follow, the suit is breaking 3-2 and you have four tricks there. Then, before squeezing yourself, run three top hearts. If they don't break 3-3, you still have 11 tricks: 2 spades, 3 hearts, 4 diamonds, and 2 clubs. Just cash out and be done with it.

But on the 36% of cases where the suit breaks 3-3, you don't have to lose a club. You win 2 spades, four hearts, 4 diamonds, and 2 clubs. The full hand today:

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| ♠863 ♥K64 ♦K54 ♣AQ109 | ♠Q109 ♥1092 ♦62 ♣J8543 | ♠AK4 ♥AQ53 ♦A10873 ♣7 |
| | ♠J752 ♥J87 ♦QJ9 ♣K62 | |

I scored 11 tricks without thought, gaining a nice solid 37% on the board. Do you like 37% bridge? Neither do I. The six West players who made 12 tricks scored 75%. Do you like 75% bridge? I think I would.

Notice there is no need to panic over the club suit. Because you have the lovely club 9, you have the suit stopped again even if you do (correctly) fly the queen on the second trick. On some layouts you must duck a lead around to the danger opponent, who then can't attack your single stopper. But that is not the case with today's board. Play the queen, test the red suits, and claim 12 tricks. Or 11 if things don't work out. There is no down side to trying for 12.

We finished tied for second place. Thinking for 10 seconds and playing the club queen would give us second outright. I will pass on something I once heard: “it's good to think at the bridge table.” No charge for that wisdom.

See you at the table.