

Learning Points Competitive Bidding and Counting During Play

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N Deals	♠ 65	
NS Vul	♥ A53	
	♦ QJ632	
Mike	♣ AJ8	Steve
♠ KJ84	N	♠ AQ92
♥ 98	W 5 E	♥ Q64
♦ 105	S	♦ 874
♣ K7543		♣ Q109
	♠ 1073	Duplimate:
	♥ KJ1072	EW: 2♣, 2♠
	♦ AK9	NS: 3N, 5♥,
	♣ 62	5♦

North	East	South	West
1♦	Pass	1♥	1♠
Double*	2♠	3♥	3♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

North leads the ♦3

– right where EW want them. Bidding could be wrong if both sides have 8 card fits. South needed only an invitational hand to bid 3♥ freely South reasoned similarly, but believed EW held a 9 card ♠fit. Doubling would risk a large game bonus for a small gain and is probably right by South if North passes 3♠.

Planning the Play

Count losers before planning your campaign in a suit contract. Count winners too. Follow this with a review of the possible sources of tricks, transportation and control threats that might exist and you'll find logical reasons for playing with odds in your favor. Counting continues through the hand for suit length, hand pattern, tricks, and high card points. Clues in bidding and play combine to paint a clear picture for declarer and for the defense.

Declarer counts 5 losers with a possible 6th in clubs if the Ace can't be avoided. Declarer starts with only 4 winners, and has to develop 5 winners from side suits to make the contract. Clubs could provide either 3 or 4 tricks. Declarer has to avoid shortening trumps in hand unnecessarily. There's a threat that defenders might set up the 3rd round of diamonds if declarer draws 3 rounds of trumps after the heart ruff in hand. 3♠ undoubled is a contract not many pairs will reach. It is likely that a result of down 2 will be good for our side. Declarer wants to avoid going down 3 as this will likely be a losing result.

The Play

North made the natural attacking lead, and the defense took their 4 red suit tricks in quick succession. The 5th trick was the ♥K ruffed in hand. Suppose declarer takes only 2 rounds of trumps with the Queen and Jack ending in hand (*Why?*). One key to this hand is to play clubs for one loser. There are two chances in clubs: 1) guess the ♣J; and 2) find the ♣Ace.

Declarer reasoned as follows: North's final pass tells of a minimum balanced hand with 3 hearts (*would you have passed?*). North had 2 spades, South led 2 rounds of ♦ and switched to a ♥ not a ♣. Declarer

From the 2 session Stratiflighted Open Pairs in a tough B flight at the January Cleveland Regional. Here's an example how favorable vulnerability and competitive bidding can talk opponents into a tough decision. While we use Precision with 2/1 Game Force, our competitive bidding approach is natural.

The Bidding

West's 1♠ overcall on 4 cards is frisky, but low risk. A ♠ lead by East might be useful in the defense. North's double at his 2nd turn is a **support double**,

promising exactly 3 cards in South's major (♥). West's 3♠ rebid is competitive and sounds a lot like a 5 or 6 card suit. North and South now have the final decision

Support Double/Redouble – shows a 3 card major raise in competition. Many like to play this through 2♥ so that the final contract could still be at the 2 level in a 7 card ♠ fit (Law of Total Tricks). All suit raises by opener are 4 cards or longer. A pass or other rebid by opener tends to show ≤2 cards in responder's major. With a penalty double, opener must pass and hope responder reopens with a double. The support double is alertable, and does not limit strength. A simple rebid of the major at the 2-level is an attempt to play there, likely in the 4-3 fit. Responder's rebid of opener's minor may be passed. Responder's new suit at the 3 level is forcing. 2NT by responder can be invitational or better with a 4 card major. A cue bid is a game force looking for a stopper. As with any convention, talk through the possibilities and inferences with your partner.

infers a singleton ♣ in South is unlikely. In fact, since both opponents passed 3♠, neither is likely to have a singleton in any suit. Declarer should be facing two balanced hands. South likely has 2 or 3 clubs. South did not bid on, and North did not test clubs early but continued hearts at trick 4. South will have 2 or 3 clubs.

South produced the ♦AK and the ♥KJ. North showed ♥A. Declarer can place North with likely ♦QJ. With no high card points in ♠, North needs 5+ HCP in ♣ to open in first seat. North likely holds 2 or 3 ♣ to the ♣AJ.

Declarer chose to lead ♣3 intending to finesse the ♣10. At the table, North played the ♣Ace (the setting trick) and returned the ♦Q, forcing declarer. This is just what declarer expected. By not drawing all trumps the ♠K acted as a sentinel against this final force. Ruffing in Dummy with the ♠K allowed declarer to return to hand with the ♣Q, draw the last trump with the ♠Ace, and run out the remaining clubs.

3♠ by West down 1 for -50 resulted in 9 of 11 matchpoints.

Defense Post Mortem

It's usually a good idea to duck (smoothly please!!) rather than play an Ace if retaining control of the suit can enable more tricks later. Ducking might also talk declarer into a losing finesse option. Don't be too quick to jump up with your Ace if it will only beat air. Have a purpose for playing or not playing your Ace. Here if North ducks the ♣Ace, declarer will finesse the ♣10 and will have to ruff the 3rd ♦ himself. Then a 2nd ♣ from dummy is problematic. North wins the Ace and continues ♣s - South scores the 3rd trump and voila, down 2.

Can declarer counter this? Yes – can you see how?

Declarer needs *transportation in the trump suit itself* to finish drawing trumps after losing the ♣Ace. The answer is to draw at most **one** round of trumps in dummy then lead clubs once. Whether North takes the Ace or ducks, declarer can ruff out the 3rd ♦ and return to hand in trumps to take the rest. With 2 trumps guarding the dummy and no immediate ruff available to defenders, declarer should always make 8 tricks, and a pretty good matchpoint score in this field.

Would you get to game in Hearts with the North – South hands? Look closely. Count support points: North values 13 and South values 12, totaling 25 – enough to contract game. Once an 8+ card fit is found Support Points can be added: +1 for a doubleton, +3 for a singleton and +5 for a useful void. (Some prefer a more conservative +1, +2, +3 approach). Never count honor points where you add support points. A singleton Ace is 4, period.

Bidding Comments

As for NS bidding, perhaps South should bid 4♥, not 3♥ over 2♠. The known 8 card fit and a desire to compete would guide this choice. Perhaps North should bid 4♥ over 3♠, since North has the best view of the combined strength of the hands. A double by North is a distant second.