

Learning Points – Find the Overtick in a Cautious 3NT

January 8, 2009

by Steve Moese; edited by Mike Purcell

W Deals
Both Vul

♠ 62
♥ A1095
♦ K95
♣ 9864

←Mike

Tuesday January 6, 2009. Tuesday Evening Open Pairs, Mr. Bob VeVerka, Director, Cincinnati Bridge Association Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513) 631-8070

♠		N	♠
♥			♥
♦	W 4	E	♦
♣		S	♣

Sometimes we can take a small defensive gift and turn it into a top.

It's a good idea to take stock before playing to the first trick. How many winners do you have? What are your potential losers? How many HCP do we have? How many do they have? What tricks can be developed into winners? What suits are threats? Which opponent is a threat to the contract? What did the auction tell you? What does the fall of the cards say and how should your plan change? Declarer must remain alert to what the play of the cards says.

♠ A87
♥ K74
♦ AQ74
♣ AK7

Duplimate:
NS: 3♦, 3♥, 3N
N: 4♣
S: 3♣

Steve→

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♣ ¹
1♠	Dbl. ²	Pass	1N ³
Pass	3N	Passed Out	

The Bidding

Mike and I play Precision and that let West announce a ♠ suit at their 2nd turn. While our auction got us to the right spot, North should choose to investigate whether we have an 8 card fit in Hearts. North's small doubleton in ♠ should cause interest in ♥.

South leads ♠K

1 = 16+ HCP, any shape

2 = 6-7 HCP any shape

3 = 18-20 HCP Balanced – no 5 card major or 6 card minor.

Most Standard and 2/1 bidders would open South's hand 2N then reach 3N in a Stayman sequence. That auction reveals less to declarer and defense than the one we had.

Some enterprising Wests might open with a weak 2♠ (yes, even with a 5 card suit). If so, many Souths will bid 3NT at their first turn counting on partner for 6-8 HCP, whether or not East raises. If East does raise, South has a choice to double and defend or contract for 3NT.

The Play

Let's look at the facts in play sequence and see how they impacted declarer's thinking.

Fact	Thinking
Winner Count	8 top tricks.
Loser Count	There are 2 losers in spades, 1-2 in hearts, 1 in diamonds, and 1-2 in clubs bringing the loser count to 5-7. When losers and winners add up to more than 13, declarer must be careful to avoid cashing top tricks too soon. Declarer should lose 1 trick before cashing tops cards. If declarer cashes top cards 1 st then s/he develops winners for the defense if the suit breaks 4-2.
High Card Points	NS have 27 HCP and EW have 13. East's silence suggests <6 HCP or no support for West's ♠ suit. Since both opponent's passed initially, neither should have more than 10-11 HCP. We should expect an even split (7-6, 8-5, 9-4)
Source of Tricks	Declarer has three 4-3 fits that might yield a game going trick, but which? Missing 6 cards the suit is more likely to break 4-2 than 3-3. What if all three suits break 4-2? We have only 1 ♠ stopper. ♦ appears to be the only suit where a possible 3-3 break adds a trick to our total. However our ♥ and ♦ holding suggest a finesse opportunity in either suit that might add an additional chance. ♣ doesn't present the same chance as opponents hold ♣QJ10.

West overcalled 1♠ and Trick 1: led the ♠K-2-5-7.	West would likely have 5 spades for that bid. Likewise, missing 8 cards a 5-3 split is much more likely than a 4-4 split. It's important to play the ♠A on the 3 rd ♠trick. This exhausts East of ♠ when West does hold 5 and render's East safer than West. Safety means we can lose tricks to East. East must return a safe card or break a new suit – both help when working to develop slow tricks.
Trick 2: West switches to the ♦3	West pauses and switches to the ♦3. West certainly has the ♠Q but does not have the ♠J. East does. With ♠KQJxx(x) West would play the ♠J at trick 2. West is worried about a potential Bath Coup (Declarer holds up once with the ♠AJ, gaining a trick). The lead of the small ♦ suggests honor 4 th (or honor 3 rd , but likely not J10x – West would lead the ♦J with those cards). Declarer plays for split ♦ honors and plays the ♦5 from Dummy keeping the ♦A9 minor tenace. West likely has 5♠ & 4♦.
East plays the ♦2!!	Showing an even number and Declarer pauses. Where does Declarer want the lead to be? The defense just gave us the game going trick so that contract is no longer in jeopardy. Now we can manage the ♥ and ♣ to create the elusive overtrick. Undoubtedly ♥ must be started from Declarer's hand and ♣ from dummy. Let's take the small gift and leave the lead in dummy. Declarer underplays the ♦4 winning this trick in dummy. (♦3-5-2-4)
Trick 3: Dummy plays ♣9. East plays ♣10 & South wins the ♣A. West plays ♣J	West seems to have either a stiff ♣ or a doubleton ♣J. Would have been better to hold that ♣J if it is a doubleton. This trick was very rich, perhaps we can make the defense pay.
Trick 4: Declarer leads ♥4-6-9-Q	While it's tempting to play off the 3 high diamonds, better to try that ♥ finesse now. If it loses, East will return a ♠ and we lose 3 losers early retaining control in all suits. This will put pressure on opponents in the end game.
Trick 5: East leads ♠J-8-3-6	East duly switched back to the ♠J. Declarer ducked, winning the ♠ continuation exhausting East of ♠ (again assuming a 5-3 split).
Trick 6: East leads ♠9-A-4-♣6	The spade hold-up is complete. If East has a 4 th spade declarer will lose only 3 spade tricks.

Now on the run of the ♦s West followed and East had to find 2 discards. Here is the hand with 5 cards left:

Declarer plays the ♦A and pitches the ♣9 from dummy. The play of the ♣J early made the ♣7 a threat to win a trick. South now plays ♥ first and either they split or the ♣7 is the overtrick on a finesse. West must help East cover ♣ and avoid a squeeze and a costly overtrick. While perfect defense stops the squeeze, the defense is in a bind. Envisioning squeezes on defense and breaking them up or keeping a key winner is among the hardest plays in bridge. West should realize that the hearts and spades are worthless.

3NS + 4 for +630 earned 8 of 8 MPs.

W Deals Both Vul	♠ ♥ A105 ♦ ♣ 94	← Mike
♠ Q10 ♥ 86 ♦ J ♣	N W 4 E S	♠ ♥ Q3 ♦ ♣ Q52
	♠ ♥ K7 ♦ A ♣ K7	Steve→

Duplimat:
NS: 3♦, 3♥, 3N
N: 4♣
S: 3♣

Bd 4	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
MP	3.5	5.5	---	---	---	5.5	1	8	5.5	1	1	---
Score	120	600	---	---	---	600	-100	630	600	-100	-100	---

W Deals
Both Vul

♠ 62
♥ A1095
♦ K95
♣ 9864

←Mike

♠ KQ1043	N	♠ J95
♥ 86	W 4 E	♥ QJ32
♦ J1083	S	♦ 62
♣ J3		♣ Q1052

♠ A87
♥ K74
♦ AQ74
♣ AK7

Duplimate:
NS: 3♦, 3♥, 3N
N: 4♣
S: 3♣

Steve→

Post Mortem

←Here's the full deal.

West did indeed have 5♠ and 4♦. As long as West starts ♦ declarer will earn 4 tricks in that suit.

What should West do at trick 2? East signals encouraging attitude to the ♠ opening lead. A ♠ continuation avoids the small gift. NS might still make their game but an overtrick requires delicate play. Even the 1st round ♦ finesse can be thwarted by careful West.

West believed ♦ were the suit where defensive winners would be established. Leading low (would you?) would expect to fine

partner with an honor. Generally a close game with balanced hands suggests passive defense and not breaking new suits.

Learning Pointers:

- 1) **Count winners and losers** before playing to trick one.
- 2) **Count HCP** and look for clues from bidding and passing.
- 3) Identify where the **game-going tricks** will come from. Pay attention to side suit holdings to identify suits to develop. Develop them in order of likely success. Always go after the suit with most tricks to offer or the best chance of adding tricks 1st, as long as you can do it without jeopardizing the final contract. When you have your tricks, look for safe overtricks.
- 4) When stoppers are limited in opponent's suit, **hold up to make one opponent safe. Rule of 7:** Subtract the total cards held in the threat suit from 7 and hold up that many tricks. Here NS holds 5 spades so South holds up 2 tricks. Never hold up if a switch will set the contract.
- 5) **Respect a priori statistics** – don't count on a 3-3 split unless it's the only chance or you have information that changes the *a priori* odds. Find a way to deal with bad breaks where you can. See Richard Pavlicek's website: <http://www.rpbridge.net/rpbr.htm>
- 6) **Lose losers early.** This helps create safety for developing tricks when suits might not break well, and also helps rectify the count for a squeeze if you really need one. There's an old saw that beginners cash winners and lose all their losers, while experts lose losers and make all their winners.
- 7) **Count the hand** as you go. West had 9 cards in ♦ and ♠ inferentially. That left East with 8 cards in ♣ and ♥. Use this information in the play of the later tricks. Carding on this hand suggested a squeeze.
- 8) **Run the long suit** to put pressure on one opponent. Watch what they do. Here East could not deal with the pressure to discard twice on the run of the diamonds.
- 9) **Be alert for a squeeze.** Even if one does not exist the opponents might make a play that creates one for you. Defending well against squeezes is very hard indeed.

Possible Splits of Outstanding Cards				
Cards	Split	Cases	Frequency	Probability
2	2-0	2	4992288	0.480
	1-1	2	5408312	0.520
3	3-0	2	2288132	0.220
	2-1	6	8112468	0.780
4	4-0	2	994840	0.096
	3-1	8	5173168	0.497
	2-2	6	4232592	0.407
5	5-0	2	406980	0.039
	4-1	10	2939300	0.283
	3-2	20	7054320	0.678
6	6-0	2	155040	0.015
	5-1	12	1511640	0.145
	4-2	30	5038800	0.484
	3-3	20	3695120	0.355
7	7-0	2	54264	0.005
	6-1	14	705432	0.068
	5-2	42	3174444	0.305
	4-3	70	6466460	0.622

Notice that when missing an even number of cards the most likely split is odd, while holding an odd number of cards the most likely split is even!