

Learning Points – Planning the Play I

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Thursday June 11, 2009. Mentor Mentee Open Pairs, Annaease and Marvin Comer, Directors, Cincinnati Bridge Association Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513) 631-8070. This hand comes from August Boehm, "Talking Shop" The Bridge World, April 2009 page 26.

Cincinnati's Mentor Mentee program kicked off May 14 and continues through the summer. What a great way to meet new friends, learn more about this game we love, and sharpen our skills at the table. Mentor Mentee pairs always play at strata C in the Thursday Evening Open game.

Your Hand

♠ A43 You sit South tonight, and find a pretty nice hand. 3 Aces a King and a Queen. That's 17 HCP. The hand is balanced so you open 1NT. LHO passes and partner bids 2♣. You know this is the Stayman convention asking you about your major suits. You've got one so you plan to mention it next. Sure enough RHO passes and you bid 2♥. LHO passes once more and partner bids 3NT. You know that partner has enough points for game – you expect at least 9, and not enough for Slam so s/he won't have as many as a good 15 or 16. You also know that partner does not have 4 hearts and that s/he does have 4 spades. Since you don't have 4 spades, 3NT looks like the right place to stop. Partner tables dummy....

South	West	North	East
1N	Pass	2♣ ¹	Pass
2♥	Pass	3N	Pass
Passed Out		1= Stayman	
West Leads ♣7			

	♠ Q862	
	♥ 73	
	♦ KQJ75	
	♣ 82	
♠	N	♠
♥	W	♥
♦	E	♦
♣	S	♣
	♠ A43	
	♥ AKQ5	
	♦ 1092	
	♣ A64	

Well partner didn't have 9 points but this sure is a good looking 8 point hand. The ♠Q is a good help, and Diamonds sure look like a source of tricks. What should you do?

♣7 lead is uncomfortable. It could be 4th best but West could have length since s/he failed to lead a major suit.

How do you plan the hand?

The Plan

Let's start at the beginning.

Count Points - Between the 2 hands you have 25 HCP. They have 15 HCP and passed each turn. While partner's hand is semi-balanced, a NT contract is likely every time this hand is played tonight. The only real question is if all pairs will bid the game.

Making 9 tricks should be a good score.

Count Winners – 1♠, 3♥, 0♦, and 1♣. 5 to start. You only count the very top tricks to see how many tricks you have to develop. Since you've contracted for 9 tricks you have to find 4 more before the opponents cash more than 4 tricks and beat you.

Count Losers – 2♠, 1♥, 1♦, and 2 or more ♣ The opponents might have enough tricks to set you. The lead of the ♣7 found your weakness.

Assume opponents' defense will be perfect. See if you can find a plan that accounts for their threats.

What should you do? **PANIC!!!!????!!!** No – instead formulate your plan...

4 tricks might come from ♦ unless they can cash 5 ♣ first. You might be able to add the ♠Q as a winner if the ♠K is right. ♦ look like the right place to attack.

What should you play to the first trick? Well, if West wins you expect a slew of ♣ lickety-split. West is the **dangerous hand**. If West holds the ♦A, then the contract is down for sure – you will lose 4 ♣ and 1 ♦ before you get to enjoy the tricks you have established. Therefore you place the ♦A with East and plan accordingly.

If East wins the missing ♦A, you will likely get a ♣ back until East has no more clubs to return. What you want to do is let East win the ♦A only after all ♣ have been removed from their hand. You suspect that West has 5 ♣, so East has 3. Waiting to take your Ace until the 3rd round seems like a good first choice. (Called a **Hold-Up play**, the objective is to cut one opponent off from the other). You see that East discards on the 3rd ♣. Hmm, that means West started with a 6-card ♣ suit.

Even after you hold up your ♣A until the 3rd round, you know defenders can do the same against you in ♦. And they do. This time West discards on the 3rd diamond. This means West started with 5 minor suit cards (3♦ and 2♣). Therefore East has 8 major suit cards. This also means that West has 8 cards in the minors and only 5 in the majors.

The opponent's hold-up play has the unfortunate effect of cutting you off from Dummy! You now have no clear way to get back to the board without risking that West wins the missing ♠K (or East takes your ♠Q and returns a ♠). Yep, it looks like you have to place the ♠K in East's hand too.

What do you do?

Well, running Heart winners might help. Can you tell how? Since West has only 5 cards in the majors, let's see how many hearts West has... West plays the ♥J on the 3rd trick and the ♥10 is still missing.

Time to choose.

Playing the 4th ♥ will put the ♥10 owner on lead. This rates to be East unless West is doing something funny. If East is on lead with 3 tricks left, you can play ♠ safely for two tricks!!! You have just made your first **end-play** because East has only ♠ to return and must lead away from the ♠K!

The Full Hand:		♠ Q862	
		♥ 73	
		♦ KQJ75	
		♣ 82	
♠ 97		N	♠ KJ105
♥ J64			♥ 10982
♦ 83	W	E	♦ A64
♣ KJ9753		S	♣ Q10
			♠ A43
			♥ AKQ5
			♦ 1092
			♣ A64

You bring your contract home against expert defense winning 1 ♣, 3 ♦, 3 ♥, and 2 ♠. Well Done!

Post mortem – What East discards at trick 3 is not trivial. A ♥ discard establishes declarer's 9th trick immediately. Which ♠ can East discard? Looks like a fine argument in favor of **upside down signals**.

Learning Pointers:

- 1) Before playing to trick 1, **make a plan** to make your contract. Most importantly use the evidence you gather during play to adjust your plan. Failure to plan before trick 1 can lead to disaster later on.
- 2) **Count HCP** – is this a contract all will reach? How many are missing? **Count Winners** – how many tricks do I need to develop? **Count losers** – how much risk is there and who poses the most risk to my plans? **Assume perfect defense**. You'd be surprised how many contracts succeed because you assume defense is good.
- 3) **Pay attention to discards**. They will tell you the shape of opponent's hands and where their high card points are. Experts would never play past trick one without knowing all 4 cards on every trick.