

Learning Points – Planning the Play I

by Steve Moese (Mike Purcell ed.)

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
♥ AKQ5 know this is the Stayman convention asking you about your major suits. You've got one so
♦ 1092 you plan to mention it next. Sure enough RHO passes and you bid 2♥. LHO passes once
♣ A64 more and partner bids 3 NT. 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....

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

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

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!

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.

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