

Learning Points – Beware the Greek Gift

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Declarer Play LEVEL: Intermediate

You are on a sound team at a strong field at the Ft. Wayne Regional in late September locked in a semi-final battle to win Flight 2 of the Compact Knockouts. Your partner is Tony Habash – a very strong reliable partner. Our partnership though brief is sound and effective.

West Deals None Vul IMPs	♠ A10762	← Tony
	♥ J3	
	♦ A2	
	♣ Q654	

You open the last board and cannot escape the sense that victory hangs in the balance. The hand and auction look simple enough. A minor blip has made you declarer instead of partner. Are Fates tempting you? Are you up to the conquest? Your opponents have played error-free bridge. They hail from Illinois (rhymes with Troy). You are in for a fight... *Though you don't know it yet, your team is down 14-22 heading into this last board.*

♠	N	♠
♥	W 24 E	♥
♦	S	♦
♣		♣

Steve →	♠ K543
	♥ AK10
	♦ J3
	♣ A732

The Bidding

Game. Yes, we're not vulnerable, but we need the IMPS. This match is closer than we know. Even in the face of the delayed 3♦ overcall, we rate to make this one. Partner will have 12 HCP with my 14 we rate to make 10 tricks in ♠.

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♠!	Pass	1♠
Pass	2♠	3♦	4♠
	Passed Out		

The Play

West's lead might be a singleton, but then East would have 8♦ cards – not likely given how East bid (Holding ♦KQ 8 times is an opening preempt for everyone). Partner's 5th ♠ is only a mild surprise. We have 6 winners (2♠, 2♥, 1♦, 1♣) and must develop 4 more tricks.

West Leads ♦8

! Partner had a ♠ mixed in with his ♣

Where? The 1st extra trick appears to be a ♥ ruff. ♣ need to break 3-2

with the ♣K favorably placed or we will lose 2 tricks in that suit. We have a definite loser in ♦, up to 3 in ♣, and maybe one in ♠ unless they break 2-2. We need help. The 9 card ♠ fit, the overcall and shortness in ♦, and no clear suit to develop for winners suggests an end play looking for a ruff-slough. Let's play along those lines...

Win the ♦A, cash top 2 ♠ (East drops the ♠Q on the 2nd ♠). This gives us the ♠J as an additional end-play card for East if we need it.

Clear ♥ by playing 2 tops and ruffing the 3rd ♥ in dummy. Then play off the ♦ spot to endplay East (Thank you for that ♦J). In a slightly surprising development East ruffs your 3rd ♥ and drops the ♦K on the table. Then he ponders the next card.

The match hangs in the balance...

In a flourish East plays the ♣K – you stare in disbelief – and look up to see East's rock hard gaze. You are eyeball to eyeball and a strange gift has been offered at trick 8 (rhymes with FATE). *Well King Priam, do you take the ♣K as offered by the Greeks, and celebrate victory and the end of this siege of Troy, or do you listen to Cassandra and Laocoön (and your intuition) and choose another path?*

West Deals None Vul IMPs	♠ A10	← Tony
	♥ -	
	♦ -	
	♣ Q654	

♠	N	♠
♥	W 24 E	♥
♦	S	♦
♣		♣

Steve →	♠ 43
	♥ -
	♦ -
	♣ A732

Results

After taking the ♣K, a sinking feeling came over declarer – If the ♣ split 4-1 there will be 2 losers. That brings the defense’s total to 4: 1♠, 1♦, and 2♣.

Sure enough 4♠ down 1 for -50.

Our partners returned a -50 as well. Details aren’t clear how that North played the hand, but we suspect they started ♣ directly rather than attempt the end play.

Unfortunately, had declarer made the game, the net +470 was worth +10 IMPS and our team wins the semifinal by 24-22. As it was we played our way into 4th place.

West Deals None Vul IMPs	♠ A10762	Tony
	♥ J3 ♦ A2 ♣ Q654	
♠ Q10 ♥ QJ987 ♦ 876 ♣ J1098	N W 24 E S	♠ J98 ♥ 54 ♦ KQ10945 ♣ K
Steve	♠ K543 ♥ AK10 ♦ J3 ♣ A732	

Ancient Bridge Wisdom:

*"Do not trust the horse, Trojans. Whatever it is, I fear the Greeks even when they bring gifts."
Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.
Virgil's Aeneid, Book 2, 19 BC.*

*Nought from the Greeks towards me hath sped well.
So now I find that ancient proverb true,
Foes' gifts are no gifts: profit bring they none.
Sophocles (496 - 406 BC), in Ajax*

Post Mortem

West Deals None Vul IMPs	♠ A10	←Tony
	♥ - ♦ - ♣ Q654	
♠ - ♥ Q9 ♦ - ♣ J1098	N W 24 E S	♠ - ♥ - ♦ Q10945 ♣ K
Steve→	♠ 43 ♥ - ♦ - ♣ A732	

Could declarer make the game? Yes! If the ♣K is singleton it is right to duck, and if doubleton or tripleton a duck causes no loss - the ♣ suit is guaranteed to deliver 3 tricks. Ducking when the ♣K is singleton in fact executes the end play declarer had planned for! Declarer knows that East is out of major suit cards. If East has 4♣, there isn’t room for the diamond overcall! The actual minor suit position is irrelevant except that if East holds 4♣, then they hold only 3♦ cards, not enough to overcall ♦ with!

With nothing but ♦ left, East must allow South to ruff in either hand and pitch an otherwise losing ♣ (ruff-slough). That allows South to play 2 rounds of ♣ tops and ruff the remaining ♣ for the game-going trick. Unfortunately, declarer saw this ending 30 seconds after

returning his cards to the board.

"Next hand, Partner"

Learning Pointers

1. If the winner / loser count shows you are short of tricks and there’s no clear way forward, consider a squeeze or end play to add extra tricks to your haul. End plays offer better chances when one opponent is known to be one-suited. Note that playing ♣ directly on this hand will lead to disaster.
2. If opponent’s present you with an unexpected gift, think twice before you accept. Remember the classics.
3. Play on a proficient team with good spirit and character – that way if you fall short one day, you’ll support each other at the very next opportunity.
4. Take the time to count before you play. Take the time to think before you count...

Keywords: count tricks, end play, ruff-slough, refuse defender’s gift