

Learning Points – Fragile Line Between Success and Failure
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Declarer Play LEVEL: Expert

South Deals Both Vul IMPs	♠ KJxxxx ♥ Ax ♦ Jxx ♣ A9	← Partner
♠ Axx ♥ KJxxx ♦ AKQx ♣ x	N W E S	♠ Qx ♥ xx ♦ xxxxxx ♣ Q8x
Bruce →	♠ xx ♥ Qxxx ♦ ♣ KJ10xxxx	

West	North	East	South
1♥	1♠	Pass	Pass
3♦	Double	4♦	5♣
All Pass			
West Leads ♦A			

“Recently my partner and I conspired (for I can come up with no politer description of our bidding) to reach a horribly inferior contract with no plays for success. I decided partner was fairly strong to double at such a high level and probably had 3♣ so I ventured 5♣, which became the contract.

A high ♦ was led and dummy hit the table. Things looked pretty bleak (optimistically speaking). As the cards lie declarer has no plays (even fewer than none).

I ruffed the ♦ in hand and led a little ♠. If declarer miss-guesses the ♠s, East gets in to lead a ♥ through the ♥Q and remove the ♥ entry from dummy before ♠ are set up or trumps are pulled.

But West was not an expert. An expert would play a small ♠ in a nice smooth tempo, and the hand would come crashing down around my ears. Non-experts are very afraid of losing their Aces if they do not take them quickly. So West quickly rose with the ♠A.

Now the hand is unbreakable. After just one card at trick two the hand went from no plays to make, to no plays to defeat it!!

I can now ruff out the ♠ and take a ♣ finesse to ensure they are out. Declarer can get back to the ♥A to run the spades. Making 5♣ even if I lose a ♣.

West was good enough to see this and killed the dummy by leading the ♥K at trick 3, **the Merrimac Coup** (a low ♥ would just run to my ♥Q). Now I cannot set up the ♠ but I can cash the ♠K and lead a second ♥ back to my ♥Q and then (important) ruff a ♥ with the ♣A. This could not be over ruffed. A ♦ ruff put me back in my hand and I led my last ♥ to ruff with the ♣9 now an over ruff does not hurt me.

East did over ruff. I ruffed back in and pulled trumps making 5♣.

Best for East would be to not over ruff, and hope West had a stiff honor in ♣ to set up the ♣8 for the setting trick but that fails on the actual layout. One small defensive error early at trick 2 turned this hand completely around”.

Learning Points

1. In a hopeless situation, count on help from the opponents. Sometimes it takes a very minor error to swing the odds in your favor.
2. Duck your ace, smoothly without hesitation when defending. Save it to win a King or to stop the run of a long suit later. You might just convince declarer to take the wrong finesse. Playing the Ace always eliminates a guess. Playing it on nothing can promote a trick for declarer.
3. Attacking dummy’s entries early can make using any long suit there impossible. Sacrificing a high honor to do just that is spectacular and often not found. This play is known as the Merrimac Coup.
4. Doubling after you overcall shows a very good hand with shortness in opponents suit(s) and support for the unbid suit(s). Maybe North just hadn’t seen any cards all night long...

Keywords: Duck your Ace, Ruff with trump ace, trump promotion, Merrimac Coup, entries