

Learning Points – Learning from Mentor Mentee Bridge

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Declarer Play LEVEL: Intermediate

South Deals
EW Vul
MPs

♠ Q62	←Bruce
♥ 8	
♦ A10832	
♣ QJ97	

♠ 1074	N	♠ J95
♥ Q3	W	♥ A10976
♦ QJ965	S	♦ K74
♣ A42		♣ 83

Joan→

♠ AKJ3
♥ KJ542
♦
♣ K1065

South	West	North	East
1♥	Pass	1N	Pass
2♠	Pass	3N	All Pass

East Leads ♦4

Mentor-mentee bridge is a great way for interested players to hone skills at the table with an advanced partner. There's nothing like learning in real situations. Mentors have a great opportunity to sharpen their own mastery, and give back to this game we all love. Here's Bruce's account of an instructive hand from the mentor mentee game:

"I was playing with Joan Hickey against Rick O'Connor and Michael Remondino.

The Bidding

Joan Hickey dealt and opened 1♥ (the opponents would pass throughout the auction). After West's pass I bid 1NT, even though my partner does not yet play the forcing notrump convention and could have passed 1NT. At Joan's turn she bid 2♠. Note that she has 15 HCP plus a diamond void, a pretty strong hand.

Whether you play the forcing notrump convention or not, North denies 4♠ by bidding 1NT, and South needs extra strength to rebid 2♠. Some people might have bid 2♣ instead of 1NT, again whether playing forcing notrump or not. Some think opener should be strong enough to reverse to bid 2♠ here, others think a little less like 16-17 or more is enough.

Counting the distribution and the good quality of the ♠ and ♣ suits, Joan is close to the strength for a reverse and certainly enough for the lower requirement. Now, North's hand gets a little better. If she has the extra values needed to bid 2♠ over my 1NT bid I have 2 stoppers in each minor, so I bid 3NT. Not wishing to risk setting up opener's heart suit, East's opening lead was the ♦4.

The Play

- 1) The ♦4 went to the ♦J (♥ pitch from dummy) and my ♦A won the trick.
- 2) I led the ♣9 which held the trick, and
- 3) then the ♣J which lost to the ♣A.
- 4) Here the ♦Q was led (I pitched a 2nd ♥ from dummy), and
- 5) then another ♦ and I put in the ♦8 losing to the ♦K. I could not afford to pitch a third ♥ - that might let the opponents run the ♥ suit. Since both hands followed to 2 rounds of ♣, there was only one ♣ left out, so I pitched the ♣K from dummy keeping ♣Q7 still in my hand.
- 6) Now opening leader led a ♥. If I guess wrong I will be down 1, losing 5 tricks 2♥, 2♦, and a ♣. I guessed that since the one hand had ♣A and ♦QJ that he was less likely to hold ♥A as well and played the ♥K from dummy which won the trick.
- 7) Then I took 2 ♣s
- 8) 1 more ♦ and
- 9) → 13) 4 ♠s to end up with 10 tricks.

East felt very bad about this result. I told him not to feel bad and that he had done his best and that many players would have guessed wrong. He was just unfortunate to play the hand against someone who guessed right even though it was still just a guess.

It is just giving up to cash the ♥A here and hold the contract to 9 tricks. He would have gained only one half match point by doing that. The result will be much the same if a small ♦ is returned before cashing the ♦Q. I will still put in the ♦8 and still have to guess the heart if that is returned, but I will only have 9 tricks now (still bad for EW). If opening leader returns a 3rd ♦ then I am at no risk for going down but they still might hold me to 9 tricks.

Post Mortem

The ♥10 (or any ♥ except the ♥A) seems like it might beat the hand if West shifts to a ♦, but it is quite a risky lead. After further thought, a ♥ lead doesn't defeat the hand.

Declarer has to reason out that for a ♥ lead EAST needs to have 5 good ♥ including the ♥A. To have led a ♥ from ♥Q109xx is really strange and to lead a short ♥ suit through dummy's first bid suit when declarer is likely to have 2 ♥s is even stranger. This means that dummy will have two ♥ stoppers. East is unlikely to lead 10 9 or small from AQ109x so the ♥ suit is likely to block with Qx with West. Even if East DOES hold the ♥AQ-5th, then the ♥J a 2nd stopper.

The greater danger is losing 2♥ and getting a ♦ shift before the ♣A is knocked out. Again, 5 losers: 2♥, 2♦ and 1♣ down one. Instead, put up the ♥K at trick one. Now declarer knocks out the ♣A, winning 9 tricks: 4♠ 1♥ already plus 1♦ and 3♣.

This is what they call being fixed. Nothing you do gets you more than one half a match point. I would be upset if it happened to me too.

As a consolation someone once bid to a very excellent slam against me. I underled the ♦Axx and dummy had the ♦K and declarer had the ♦J. After much agony he eventually played small and lost to my partner's ♦Q. Partner had no trouble returning a ♦. Down one.

I felt really bad for him too. Really. He was a really nice guy and bid the hand so well and against almost anybody else he gets a top”.

Learning Points:

- 1) Talk with your partner about reverses – agree how much strength they show, and how to stop bidding once you make one.
- 2) Reevaluate your hand throughout the auction. It might improve as partner has more to say.
- 3) Play for split values – the more HCPs opponents hold, the more likely they are to say something.
- 4) When defending, save Aces to win Kings or Queens:
 - a. If declarer leads low toward a tenace on the board and you hold the Ace, duck! Declarer might take the wrong finesse and let partner in with a lower honor.
 - b. If Declarer leads a low card to an otherwise running suit, consider ducking if doing so might use up declarer's entries to dummy before the suit can run. Don't be afraid to duck even if declarer's 1st lead is a likely singleton. It's more important to impede the run of the long suit than capture your Ace!
 - c. Consider under-leading your Ace if the King & Jack are to your left and partner can have the Queen. The earlier in the hand you do this the more of a guess it is for declarer. We always want Declarer to guess when we defend. (This also works when you suspect the K&J are split between declarer and dummy. It's just a little riskier because the closed hand might not have the card you hope for.

Key Words: Fixes, Reverses, Forcing NT, Opening lead, Duck your Ace.