

Learning Points – Misdeclare This Hand with Me

By Steve Moese (Mike Purcell, ed.)

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Defense Level: Intermediate

Saturday Evening Open Pairs, Middletown Sectional Tournament, August 28, 2010 Mrs. Anaease Comer, Director. Ron Babcock is my partner. We play Precision.

West Deals NS Vul MPs	♠ Q4 ♥ A964 ♦ K1093 ♣ 742	
Steve	N W 12 E S	Ron
♠ A109 ♥ 85 ♦ 86 ♣ KJ10983		♠ J653 ♥ KJ73 ♦ A ♣ AQ65
	♠ K872 ♥ Q102 ♦ QJ7542 ♣	NS 1♥, 3♦ EW 2N, 3♠, 5♣

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

Every once in a while a hand is perfectly suited for the bidding system you are playing. This is one such hand. Precision uses 1♣ as the strong forcing and artificial (16+HCP) opening bid, 5-card majors (11-15 HCP), 2♣ with 6+ ♠s (11-15 HCP), leaving the 11-15 HCP hands with 4414, 4315, 3415, and 4405 shapes needing an opening bid. That's when Precision opens 2♦.

The Bidding

The Standard and 2/1 auctions could unfold in several ways: East will open 1♣. South might preempt 2♦ and West will compete to 3♣. Without South interference, West will call 2♣ if a simple raise (many play inverted minors: 11+ and forcing), or 1N or 3♣ (preemptive) depending on how constructive West views their strength and distribution. North would likely raise to 3♦, and East might just double, showing shortness and a desire to compete. West must choose some number of ♣s since there's no defense for 3♦.

Our Precision auction was somewhat similar though it looked and sounded different. We were able to share specific information shared about the ♦ suit and opener's HCP range. West knew partner held a 6-loser hand (Losing Trick Count). While West holds an apparent 8 loser hand, the singleton ♦ in partner's hand means it is only 1 ♦ loser. Contracting for 11 tricks looks like a finesse at worst. The 10-card ♣ fit is encouraging. Indeed, EW must have a 10 card ♦ fit too – making this a 20 trump hand. If they can make 9 tricks in ♦s, we can make 11 tricks in ♣s. So West bid the nonvulnerable game.

The Play

The trump lead is passive. The leader is not trying to take away ruffing opportunities so much as not give away a trick by leading something else. Declarer can count 4 losers: 2♠s and 2♥s. Both ♠s and ♥s offer finesse opportunities to reduce loser count in those suits. The ♠ suit offers a 74% success chance and the ♥ finesse is a straight 50% chance, assuming declarer can finesse the right honor. There is one additional chance – the ♠s break 3-3 with split honors or both on-side. This is about a 36% x 75% or 27% possibility. Can declarer take advantage of this additional opportunity?

Declarer was in no hurry to draw trumps once the bad split was revealed. The spade finesse was taken immediately at trick 2 losing to West's ♠Q. A ♦ back was won by the ♦A perforce and declarer's ♠10 won the 2nd finesse. A ♦ ruff cleared that suit and declarer was at the crossroads. Other than the ♠ suit the defenders have not revealed anything about the ♣ or ♦ honors. Declarer now thought along these lines: "If the ♠s are 3-3, then the ♠J will allow declarer to eliminate 1 ♥ loser. There is no clue as to the position of the ♥A and ♥Q. Backing this wishful line, declarer led the ♠6 to the ♠A, intending to return to the Dummy with the ♣Q and pitch a losing ♥ on the then good ♠J." Wishful thinking it was as North

West Deals NS Vul MPs	♠ ♥ A964 ♦ K10 ♣ 4	
Steve	N W 12 E S	Ron
♠ A ♥ 85 ♦ ♣ KJ103		♠ J6 ♥ KJ73 ♦ ♣ Q
	♠ K8 ♥ Q102 ♦ QJ ♣	NS 1♥, 3♦ EW 2N, 3♠, 5♣

gratefully ruffed in and cashed the ♥A immediately to set this otherwise very makeable contract. 5♣ down 1 for -50 was worth 0.5 of 5 Match Points.

Post Mortem

Declarer fell victim to a common illusion ... do you see it?

Over the long run, go with the higher odds chance when you have 2 choices to make a hand. There was no valid data that suggested ♣s were splitting 3-3 (36% chance a priori) 4-2 is more likely (48% chance a priori). A finesse is simply a 50% chance (all else equal). 50% is better than 36% all the time.

Instead Declarer should bank on West's refusal to lead ♥s given 2 opportunities (a negative inference) and 1) Pull Trump with the ♣Q, 2) Go to hand with the ♠6, and 3) Lead a small ♥ toward dummy, inserting the ♥K when West plays low.

Ever notice how 20/20 hindsight always scores better than the 1st time around?? ☺

Learning Points

1. The **Modern Losing Trick Count** and the **Law of Total Tricks** can help you decide how high is safe to bid once a GOOD FIT is found.
2. *A priori odds*: A 3-3 suit break is a 36% chance. A finesse is a 50% chance.
3. Don't depend on a 36% chance when you have a 50% chance available, unless you can test one without committing your contract. (Not the case in this hand).

Keywords: Losing Trick Count, 10 Card Trump Fit, Law of Total Tricks, *a priori odds*, 3-3 Split 36%, finesse 50%.