

Learning Points – Lemons? – Make Lemonade!

By Steve Moese (Mike Purcell, ed.)

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Declarer Play Level: Intermediate

Thursday Night Club Game, October 14, 2010 Mrs. Annease Comer, Director. Cincinnati Bridge Association Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513) 631-8070 . Mike Purcell is my partner. We play a 2/1 version of Precision.

East Deals NS Vul MPs	♠ A8 ♥ A7 ♦ A82 ♣ AK9865
♠ N ♠ ♥ W 18 E ♥ ♦ S ♦ ♣ S ♣	
	♠ J4 ♥ 98532 ♦ QJ9 ♣ J32

Sometimes we get to the wrong contract. One or both partners forget system agreements or bidding nuances. Regardless of the reason, you're in a poor contract. The solution? Find the winning line and expect the cards to be distributed as you need them...

The Bidding

North shows a big hand and South initially denies interest in game, unless partner has extra values. The opponents find their ♠ fit and bid to 2♠. North shows ♣s (in this context likely 6 cards + or a 2-suiter with ♦s. Opener would double to show 4 ♥s and ♠ shortness). Opponents could afford to compete as high as 3♠ (they hold 9 trumps) but they don't. South finds himself in a pickle. 5 HCP could be enough for game given reasonable breaks. ♥s might work well if partner has ♥HHx or better (H=A, K, or Q). South has 2 options: 1) double for takeout showing 4 ♥s and ♠ shortness, or 2) introduce the anemic ♥ suit at the 3 level. 2N would promise a ♠ stopper – something South doesn't even come close to having. South chose to bid ♥s and partner assumed the best.

East	South	West	North
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♣ ¹
Pass	1♦ ²	1♠	2♣ ³
2♠	3♥ ⁴	Pass	4♥!!

All Pass

West leads ♠6

1= Strong Forcing Artificial (16+ HCP)

2= 0-7 HCP any shape

3= Natural, likely 6+ cards or 2-suiter w/♦s

4= 5+ Cards (5-7 HCP).

The Play

NS belong in 3NT – the safer game. Odds are well against 4♥ (more on that later). Declarer can count 6 or more losers. There is 1 in ♠s, 1 in ♦s and 1 in ♣s. The ♥ suit will likely deliver 3 losers (4-2 split is 48% likely). The ♠ attack means that defenders will get their ♠ trick after winning their trump trick(s). Declarer has no choice but to hope that the trumps are 3-3 (36%) and plan accordingly.

Declarer wins the 1st trick in the dummy (ducking does not help) and plays ♥A and a small ♥, opponents following to both tricks. The opponents quickly cash their ♠, won by West, who switches to a small ♦. While this appears threatening Declarer knows the ♦ finesse must win if the hand is to be made, and plays low, winning the ♦9 in hand. The 3rd trump crashes the remaining honors. All that is left is to play the ♣ suit for 6 winners. Any 3-1 trump split is futile unless the ♣10 is singleton with East. Notice that Declarer has no transportation back to hand once West plays the ♣Q. Also notice that declarer wants to unblock the ♣J under either the ♣A or ♣K or ♣s can block. Declarer decides to repeat the ♦ finesse (winning) then play the ♣J from hand (ducked by West) to the ♣K cashing the ♣s top-down.

East Deals NS Vul MPs	♠ A8 ♥ A7 ♦ A82 ♣ AK9865
♠ N ♠ ♥ W 18 E ♥ ♦ S ♦ ♣ S ♣	
♠ K10762 ♥ J104 ♦ K103 ♣ Q7	♠ Q953 ♥ KQ6 ♦ 7654 ♣ 104
	♠ J4 ♥ 98532 ♦ QJ9 ♣ J32

N 4♣, 3♥, 4N
S 5♣, 3♥, 4N
EW 1♠

4♥ making 4 was top board. Our +420 scored as a -420* for our opponents.

Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
MPs	0.5	4	4.5	3	0.5	3	4.5	5	2	1	0	2
Score	130	600	-130*	170	130	-150*	-130*	620	-170*	-600*	-620*	150

*This match was played as a Howell or One-Winner movement, so the Press Report shows positive and negative scores based on the result and direction at the table. The * indicates EW scores.*

Post Mortem

Partner and I made a bidding error on this hand. We each share the blame – South should consider doubling since 5 small ♥s are more like a 4 card suit than a normal 5-card suit. Separately, North should rebid 3N, as the likely best game facing a partner who has 5-7 HCP in the existing auction.

How would 2/1 or Standard bidders fare? First let's agree on the value of North's hand. The 4-3-2-1 HCP approach says 19, but the Expert Point Count says 21 (4Ax4.5 + 1Kx3). Partner would have been within agreement to have rebid 2N after opening 1♣. Standard or 2/1 bidders could open this 2NT and not be too far off the mark.	East	South	West	North
	Pass	Pass	Pass	1♣
	Pass	1♥	1♠	2N/3♣
	Pass/3♠	3♦/Dbl	Pass	3N/4♣
	All Pass			

We recommend a natural 1♣ opening (because North has 7 losers – too many for a 2N opening). 1♣ also keeps alive any chance for a ♣ slam. South would bid a natural 1♥. West will overcall and North will jump to 3♣ (though 2N is possible). 2♠ by North is an overreach and implies better ♥ support than in that hand. East will choose to either pass or bid 3♠ (best). Over east's pass South's bid depends on whether North bid 2N or 3♣. If North bid 2N, then South will bid 3N directly expecting the intermediate values to support game. If North rebids 3♣, then South can fit in a 3♦ call suggesting 5 ♥s (though some would see this as an overbid). Over 3♠, South should double suggesting 5 ♥s and spade shortness.

Looking at the results most played in a ♣ partial though one pair did reach the 3N game.

For the statistics buff: 3N requires 6 ♣ tricks (after a ♠ lead, if declarer can get only 2 ♣ tricks before giving up the lead, then the game will fail by 1 trick. Try it!). Declarer must have ♣s splitting 2-2. This is a **41% chance**. Notice the 3-1 split chance with the ♣Q onside and East holding the ♣10 singleton is irrelevant – declarer must choose to finesse on the 1st trick. The odds are much LOWER for this approach: $0.5(36\%) + 0.33(24.8\%) = 26.2\%$ or so. Ugly. Notice the ♦ finesse is irrelevant in 3NT.

In 4♥, declarer needs the 3-3 ♥ split (36%) the 2-2 ♣ break (41%) and the ♦ finesse working (50%). This makes 4♥ a whopping **7.4% game** or 12.5 to 1 against.

Talk about lemons...

Learning Points

1. When in a terrible contract, do not panic. Instead concentrate on exactly what you need to make your contract and play accordingly.
2. Regardless of your system, be sure you and partner are on the same page in competitive auctions. Take time to review causes for mistakes and agree to corrections consistent with your approach.
3. Strong 18-19 HCP hands with a long minor and no shortness can be dicey – if you choose the strength option (NT) you might miss slam. If you choose the suit option you might tell the opponents too much about how to defend your NT game if that's where you land.
4. Bad bidding can sure help you improve your declarer play!

Keywords: Competitive bidding, Off shape 2N rebids, Hand valuation, playing to your success vision.