

Learning Points – Tales From the NAP 7

By Steve Moese. Edited by Mike Purcell

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Declarer Play Level: Intermediate

West Deals
NS Vul
MPs

♠ 63
♥ Q5
♦ AK875
♣ K862

Mike

Cincinnati Sectional and North American Pair Qualifier - Session 1 of 2 sessions. My partner is Mike Purcell. We play a 2/1 version of Precision.

♠		♠
♥	N	♥
♦	W 12 E	♦
♣	S	♣

Competitive bidding after they open 1NT is almost mandatory anymore. Disrupting their 1NT will profit defenders on average over time. This touchy hand shows how tricky competitive bidding and play can be. Sometimes we need luck to avoid a disaster.

♠ K52
♥ KJ10976
♦
♣ 10753

Steve

The Bidding

West's opening bid is a bit light but common – 14 HCP swayed by interior suit cards. North has a reasonable action (Meckwell) showing a single suited minor hand or a Major 2-suiter (5-5 please). 5=4 in the minors is too risky to bid 2N (both minors) vulnerable. More shape please! East passes, though 7 HCP is a good hand opposite partner's 15-17 HCP 1N hand.

West	North	East	South
1N	Dbl ¹	Pass	2♥ ²
Pass	Pass	Dbl	Pass
2♣	3♥	Dbl	All Pass

West leads ♠A

1= ♦ or ♣ (1 suit) or Major 2-suit hand.

2= I have a place to play

South suggests a better place to play – after all, long suits in the weak hand often lead to an extra trick or 2. East has the perfect shape for a balancing double – “Partner we should be playing this hand”. With 4 ♠s, West is able to comply. North raises gingerly, content to know that partner will not place him with 3 or more ♥s (a tiny inference that North would have raised immediately unless weak). West doubles again, now showing about 7-8 HCP and offering partner an option.

West Deals
NS Vul
MPs

♠ 63
♥ Q5
♦ AK875
♣ K862

♠AQ74		♠J1098
♥A83	N	♥42
♦Q1064	W 12 E	♦J932
♣Q9	S	♣AJ4

♠ K52
♥ KJ10976
♦
♣ 10753

NS: 1♥,
N: 1♣, S: 2♣,
EW: 3N,
W: 2♦, 3♠
E: 3♦, 4♠

The Play

North's values are not working for South. The bidding suggests West is more likely to hold the ♣A. The opening ♠ lead was unfortunate for the defense. Could declarer take further advantage of this misstep? West continued with a small ♦ (perhaps hoping to find shortness with partner, or exhaust entries from dummy). Declarer won the ♦A and pitched a ♣ from hand. Ruffing a ♠ creates another extra trick (ruffs in the short-trump hand are extra tricks). Pitching 2 more ♣s on the ♦K and a small ♦ drives ♣ losers to 1 (and makes EW communication tougher). In all declarer was able to lose 1♠, 1♥, 1♦ and 1♣. Making 3 doubled for +790 was worth all the matchpoints – a lucky result

Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
MP	6.38	11.15				2.15	15.91	16.97	6.38	0.03	11.15	13.79
Result	-170	-140				-200	50	730	-170	-530	-140	-100

The NAP scores cross two different sections. Results from the rest of the field:

Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
MP		13.79				6.38	6.38	6.38	1.09	6.38	6.38	13.79
Result		-100				-170	-170	-170	-420	-170	-170	-100

Post Mortem

The opening lead limited EW to +200 for 3♥ down 1. Failing to count declarer's ♠s (and see that declarer could ruff a ♠ in dummy) gave away the contract. West should switch to trumps (Ace and

another) immediately so that South cannot trump a ♠ in dummy. If you are not counting the hand you will not see the need for this play.

The opening lead decision faced by West is not without its risks. Partner stands to have values in ♠s and North likely has a running minor. From West's perspective either minor could be wrong. Leading a trump seems useless on the face of it as South should have a 6 or even 7-card suit for the bidding. West should consider that this bidding shows EW with at least 22 HCP. NS will have trouble establishing their tricks. A passive trump lead might work well. If declarer wants to see dummy before continuing the defense, leading the ♥A is a great choice. The right switch might be easy to find. Looking a dummy, West will switch to the ♣Q and the defense will have 4 tricks out of the gate. Careful defense from here might limit South to 6 tricks. Down 3 for +800 would be quite a different result.

This is a tough hand for both sides to get right. Worthy of mention is that EW can make 3N (or 4♠ if declared by E – South cannot lead ♦s). Note that if West opens with a pedestrian 1♦, then EW find their ♠ fit early. South might still interfere with a ♥ bid, but North will be reluctant to act holding such good cards in RHO's suit. East will be somewhat better placed to judge the value of his hand if partner ever gets to invite.

Learning Points

1. Intervening in opponent's 1N auctions often improves the possible results for the defense. Sound values when vulnerable make sense.
2. Consider a passive lead when you hold the balance of power and partner has doubled the contract.
3. When defending, remember to count declarer's hand. Where are declarer's tricks coming from? Can declarer score a ruff in the short-trump hand? If so, eliminate that option!
4. When declaring an impossible contract, look for short hand ruffs and suit establishment chance that add tricks to your tally. You might just accomplish the impossible.

Keywords: Meckwell over Strong NT, Competitive Bidding, Passive Opening Leads,