

Ecstasy

By Michael Lawrence

Almost everyone I know will admit to the following mishap. You are declaring, say, 3NT, and due to unfortunate circumstances, the defenders are running their five-card suit so you are going down at least one. Being depressed about the bidding, you discard poorly, thus messing up your entries. Suddenly, your eight remaining tricks become only six when the opponents take advantage of your sloppy carding.

Three down. It's bad enough you're getting a zero, but even with your head hung halfway to the floor, you catch a glimpse of partner whispering to his kibitzer.

Sound familiar?

Bad news is infectious. It brings with it emotions ranging from disappointment to sadness to depression, any one of which can distract and cause muddled thinking.

Most players know that it is important to keep your wits when things go sour. The trick is to recognize when your concentration is failing and to get your thoughts back together.

The tough player does this automatically. The good player struggles, but usually succeeds and the rest of the world does it occasionally but not routinely.

You say, 'I know that.' I agree that you probably do know that, but do you really know it on a usable conscious level?

Strong negative emotions. They do obstruct our thoughts.

Is there anything worse for our emotions than bad news? Try this.

The bidding goes 1NT–Pass–3NT. You lead fourth best from K-J-8-6-4-2 of spades. Dummy has two small spades and 12 HCP.

Have you led into the ace-queen of spades? No. Partner plays the ace and starts to think. Does he have another spade? Is he thinking of switching?

Partner leads = a spade! Please! Partner leads = the spade ten. You are now in charge with six running spades which you proceed to take. Each one a little firmer than the one before, you pound out your remaining spades, the last one being especially satisfying because it is getting you +200. You're feeling a little ecstasy mixed with a little power as you turn the final spade. Feels good, doesn't it?

Now what? Cutting through a euphoric glow, you reconstruct the last four tricks. Let's see now. Partner discarded the – what did he discard? I know his last card was the seven of diamonds. But the one before that, and the one before that = Come to think of it, what did dummy discard, or for that matter declarer?

Do you think you're going to get it right? What if partner has another ace and you don't get it. Can you stand to see partner talking to that kibitzer again?

Ecstasy plays no favorites. It muddles your bidding judgment, your declarer play, and your defensive awareness with equal facility.

♠ 9 5
♥ K Q 6 2
♦ A 10
♣ A J 9 6 3

♠ Q J 8
♥ J 9 5
♦ K Q 7 3
♣ K Q 4

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1♦	Pass	2♣
Pass	2NT	Pass	3♥
Pass	3NT	All pass	

West leads the six of spades to East's ace. This is your basic dull contract which looks like a routine nine tricks. Perhaps you have been unlucky to get a spade lead. For instance, if North hadn't bid three hearts,

you might have gotten a heart lead allowing you ten tricks. Therefore, when East returns a spade ducked by West, you have to consider whether to finesse the ten of diamonds in order to try for ten tricks.

First, just to put your mind at ease, you cash the king of clubs. West pitches the three of hearts.

Eight fast tricks. Not nine. So, where is the ninth coming from? You have two possible plays:

- (1) Play on hearts and hope spades are 4-4
- (2) Finesse the ten of diamonds

Which play is right? The answer depends on your opinion of the spades. If East returned the two, the suit rates to be 4-4 in which case you should play on hearts. If East returned a higher spade, then spades are likely to be 5-3 in which case you have to hope for the diamond finesse.

The issue here is very simple. Either you paid attention to the spade spots and made an educated decision or you didn't pay attention to the spade spots and therefore had to make an uneducated guess.

If you allowed the comfort of nine apparent tricks to cloud your vision, you're in trouble. Conversely, if you ignored emotional intrusions and paid attention to the cards, then you were able to determine rather than to guess the correct play.

My BOLS tip is:

Any time you feel yourself succumbing to an emotion, whether sadness, depression, irritation, COMFORT, ELATION, or ECSTASY, you should fight it off.
STOP AND PAY ATTENTION