Second-Hand Problems

By Eric Crowhurst

You are the declarer in a notrump contract, and you have a 4-4 club fit containing A-K-Q-J-10-9 in the two hands. How would you plan the play of the suit? If you believe that it cannot possibly matter, read on.

If the adverse clubs are 3-2, one defender (A) will have to find one discard on the clubs, and the other defender (B) two. The important point is that if the fourth round of clubs is led from the hand on his right, Defender B's two discards will have to be made before Defender A has made even one. This can be of considerable advantage to the declarer.

South Deals None Vul



1NT

Pass 3NT All pass

The defenders cash their four heart tricks, on the last of which dummy discards a spade. East throws the nine of spades, after some thought, and South discards the six of diamonds.

West switches to the six of spades, the standard MUD lead from three small cards, and South captures East's jack with the ace. It looks as if East might be under pressure when the clubs are cashed, and this diagnosis is confirmed when South's lead of the jack of clubs produces the three from West and the eight from East. If East began with two clubs at the most, he might be in difficulty if the fourth round of clubs is led from dummy – so that he has to find two discards before receiving any help from West.

South cashes the ace of clubs and crosses to dummy with the queen of clubs, on which East discards a diamond. On the last club, East has a serious problem. Should he throw a spade, retaining a diamond guard if West started with 10-8-7-6 of spades and Q-x of diamonds? Or should he discard a second diamond,

which is vital on the actual layout? It is not easy for him – but only because he has to make the crucial discard before West can clarify the spade position.

There are other situations in which declarer must assume in advance that a particular defender will be his victim. As before, he then ensures that that defender is the second to play to a vital trick – and therefore forced to make a crucial decision before seeing his partner's card.

South Deals Both Vul



West led the five of spades and declarer won the third round. It was clear that he had to make two diamond tricks for his contract. This involved finding East with the ace of diamonds and persuading him to duck two rounds.

At trick four, South led the ten of diamonds. West contributed the five to show an odd number, but South's concealment of the three meant that the position was not clear to East. South now made the key play of overtaking the ten of diamonds with the jack and leading the king from the dummy, forcing East to make a decision before seeing West's second diamond. After some thought, East ducked again, in case his partner had started with 5-3 doubleton, and South cashed his nine tricks.

If declarer had led the second diamond from the closed hand. West would have contributed the six, showing an odd number, and East would have had no further problem.

Finally, a hand on which South could only select his victim on the basis of which defender appeared to hold the doubleton diamond.



West led the queen of hearts. South won in the closed hand and led the queen of diamonds to East's ace, with West contributing the seven. East's return of the two of hearts knocked out dummy's king, and declarer appeared to be one trick short. However, he followed the correct principle by cashing his diamond winners in the optimum order, forcing West, who held the doubleton diamond, to find two discards before his partner had a chance to signal.

South cashed the king and jack of diamonds, on which West discarded the six of spades. When declarer led his last diamond, however, West had a difficult discard. He could not throw a winning heart without permitting South to establish a ninth trick in clubs, and West therefore had to choose between the ten of spades and two of clubs. The winning defense is to discard a spade, but this would not be the case if South had started life with, say, Q-x-x-x in spades and A-x-x in clubs. At the table, West threw a club on the fourth diamond, allowing South to make four club tricks and an overtrick in his 'impossible' contract.

Notice the importance of South's winning the third diamond in the closed hand. If the fourth diamond lead had come from dummy, East would have had an opportunity to show a useful holding in spades, either by discarding the nine of spades or by giving a suit preference signal with the eight of hearts.

Bols tip:

Plan which opponent plays second to the trick