

Thanks, Geza

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Cynics often deride the value of 'book learning', but at a recent US National Tournament I was at the table during three deals which might have been extracted from textbooks. Try them as problems, armed with the (unfair?) knowledge that something is afoot.

DEAL 1 – MIXED PAIRS East/West Game, Dealer North.

♠ 1075
♥ Q7
♦ AK1076
♣ 1086

♠ KJ864
♥ A2
♦ 854
♣ K76

	N	E
W		S

South	West	North	East
—	—	2♦*	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

*5-6 diamonds, 8-11 HCP

You lead the ♠6, to dummy's seven, partner's nine and declarer's ace. The ♦3 is led to dummy's king, partner following with the two. Next comes the ♠10, to partner's nine and declarer's four. What is your plan?

In real life you would win the king and return a spade, as did the actual West. But you would have been suckered, because declarer (my partner!) had smoothly reproduced a classic coup, holding:

♠ AQ2
♥ J8
♦ Q93
♣ AQJ43

My East berated his partner for not switching to hearts, which I thought showed a lack of grace. When someone makes a play that good against you, you pay off and then offer compliments.

Our second deal occurred in the Blue Ribbon Pairs, and I blew the defence.

DEAL 2 – BLUE RIBBON PAIRS North/South Game, Dealer North.

♠ A932
♥ A4
♦ KJ975
♣ 62

♠ KJ65
♥ J109876
♦ AQ
♣ K

	N	E
W		S

South	West	North	East
—	—	1♦	Dble
2♣	Pass	Pass	2♥
Pass	Pass	2♠	Pass
2NT	All Pass		

Partner led the ♥K, which held the trick. He continued with the ♥5. Declarer, an excellent player, thought for a long time and then called for a small diamond from the table. What should I do?

I duly won the queen, cleared hearts and defeated the contract by a trick. This non-effort was worth one match-point out of 25. I had missed my magic moment.

There is a trap here. Did you think of winning the ♦A instead of the queen? Wrong book! The winning defence was to play the ♠K after winning the ♦Q. This stroke is correct even though South is likely to have, and in fact did have, the ♠Q. (*But only because he only has two diamonds. Ed.*) If declarer ducks, hearts can be established with an extra trick in hand (for +200), while if he wins the trick, dummy's diamonds are useless and five tricks would appear to be declarer's limit. What I had missed was the opportunity to inflict a double Merrimac Coup on South. Partner's sacrificial king was fortuitous, a simple lead of my suit; but mine would have been an historic gamble. South's hand was:

♠ Q4
♥ Q32
♦ 108
♣ AJ8754

On our third deal, taken from a Swiss Teams match, I did better. We bid the spots off the cards, reaching a slam which was reasonable after the opening lead, and then the contract came home. But not trivially.

DEAL 3 – SWISS TEAMS North/South Game, Dealer South.

♠ 10654
♥ Q8
♦ AK1064
♣ A5

	N	E
W		S

♠ AQ2
♥ AK9
♦ 73
♣ KQ964

South	North
1♣	1♦
2NT	3♠
4♣	4♦
4♥	4NT
6♣	

The opening lead was the ♠3, which went to the four, king and ace. Now I was home if trumps split 3-3, but East had J-10-x-x. Things were still OK if diamonds behaved well, but I lacked entries to set up the fifth card, so either Q-J doubleton or a 3-3 split was needed.

Unfortunately, East had Q-J-x-x of diamonds, so a routine play problem had become interesting. The position, after the ruff of the third diamond, was:

♠ 106
♥ Q8
♦ 106
♣ —

	N	E
W		S

♠ Q2
♥ AK9
♦ —
♣ 9

East had a high diamond and a trump. What would Ottlik and Kelsey do?

I crossed to dummy's high heart and scored my last trump by ruffing another diamond. If East's original five major-suit cards consisted of three hearts and two spades, he would have to follow suit helplessly while I cashed my winners. If he had only two hearts, then he would ruff the third round, and I would have to hope that his remaining two spades included the jack. Alas, the cards were distributed benignly and I did not get to add the final endplay to the elopement. East held:

♠ K7
♥ J107
♦ QJ98
♣ J1087