

Safety Plays..if you can afford them.

Two 3NT contracts illustrated principles of safety plays though in one case, it was doubtful that the declarers could afford to take one. Here was one which should be taken.

Board 19		♠ 5										
South Deals		♥ Q J 8 2										
E-W Vul		♦ A 9 7 3										
		♣ A 7 4 2										
♠ Q 8 6 2	♥ 10 7 4	♦ J 10 5 4 2	♣ J									
		<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; border: 1px solid black;"> <table style="border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> </div>		N		W		E		S		♠ J 9 4 3
	N											
W		E										
	S											
			♥ A K 9 5 3									
			♦ 8									
			♣ Q 8 5									
		♠ A K 10 7										
		♥ 6										
		♦ K Q 6										
		♣ K 10 9 6 3										
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>									
			1 ♣									
Pass	1 ♥	Pass	1 ♠									
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 NT									
All pass												

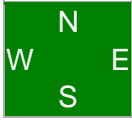
Despite declarer's heart bid, East led a low heart against 3NT with H10 drawing declarer's queen. If diamonds broke evenly, then a declarer would only need their top two clubs to make 9 tricks.

However, initially clubs offered a better opportunity to make at least 9 tricks..but declarer did not want to lose the lead to West who was itching to play a second heart. So, cross to dummy with a diamond at trick 2 and play CT intending to play low if West did not play an honour. When the jack appeared declarer won in hand to play a second club...no finesse. They lost a club trick to the safe hand and North soon had 10 tricks. (playing ♣K and then ♣A was an alternatively successful line.)

What, though, would be your plan with the following on a low heart lead from North?

Board 10

East Deals
Both Vul

♠ 7 5		♠ A K Q 10 9 6
♥ A Q 5		♥ 8 7
♦ K 5		♦ 8 7 6 3
♣ K 9 8 5 3 2		♣ Q

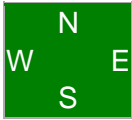
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♠	Pass
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦	Pass
2 NT	Pass	3 NT	All pass

2♦ seems a strange choice of second bid but even after a 2♠ response instead, there is still the opportunity of reaching 3NT, with the West hand as declarer, good protection on either red suit lead.

The heart lead gives West a little time in that all being well in the spade suit, they only have to lose the lead once in clubs to make 9 tricks. The unknown position of the two minor aces makes any safety play in the spade suit “less safe .Our declarer tried spades from the top and ended three down when all was not well in that suit:

Board 10
East Deals
Both Vul

♠ J 8 4 2
♥ K 9 3 2
♦ Q 10 4 2
♣ A

♠ 7 5		♠ A K Q 10 9 6
♥ A Q 5		♥ 8 7
♦ K 5		♦ 8 7 6 3
♣ K 9 8 5 3 2		♣ Q

♠ 3
♥ J 10 6 4
♦ A J 9
♣ J 10 7 6 4

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

The spade “safety play” (small to the 10) becomes a dangerous play as half the time, not only will there be a spade loser but also two hearts, (assuming a 4-4 break), ♣A and at best ♦A. Indeed, a wrongly placed ♦A would see declarer several light.

So, the so called safety play will only work half the time and even then West still required the minor suit aces split the way they were. So, no safety play and really maybe 4♠ was a better contract, really needing little more than a well - placed ♦A and at most only one loser in the major suits.

Sometimes, such safety plays are just not safe!

Richard Solomon