

A Hand to Declare...But where?

Welcome back after the break to some more stories from the Akarana Bridge Club. Akarana closes during December but had a small Rubber Bridge event during January. This week, it was back to normal...and as normal, that meant back to some problem hands. One particular was the following, rotated for convenience to the South seat:

♠ A74

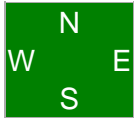
♥ A2

♦ AQJ8

♣ A952

A pretty nice 19 count which you get to open. My choice would be 1♦ as I like to open a “real suit” with 1♣ promising often less than 4. However, it mattered little which on this occasion as after whichever minor you chose, West made a weak jump overcall in spades. This was followed by a negative double from your partner...and you to bid next?

There was the pragmatic “let’s be in the 9-trick game contract (3NT)”, reasonable as one could hold up the spade suit for two rounds if necessary. Alternatively, one might see if your partner could hold spades by cueing 3♠. When partner could not but could support diamonds, you might either settle for the diamond game or maybe try more ambitiously for the diamond slam. All three options were chosen from the 8 tables in play. [Let’s look at all three contracts with the dummy hand in view.](#)

| | |
|-------------|---|
| South Deals | ♠ 6 |
| N-S Vul | ♥ Q J 9 3 |
| | ♦ K 5 4 3 |
| | ♣ K J 6 4 |
| |  |
| | ♠ A 7 4 |
| | ♥ A 2 |
| | ♦ A Q J 8 |
| | ♣ A 9 5 2 |

In 3NT, you receive the ♠J lead. You have 8 top tricks and need either a successful heart finesse or a third club trick for your contract. It would seem to be a good idea to duck the first two rounds of spades (East held ♠Q85)

throwing two hearts from dummy. Next comes four rounds of diamonds. West only needed one discard, a spade while East threw a non-descript heart and a medium club. You finish in the South hand. **What next?**

You know your left-hand opponent started with six spades and three diamonds. Being not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, there was no requirement for West to hold either ♥K or ♣Q but they might have one or both. You can afford to lose the lead to East but not to West. Should you lose the club finesse to East, you know a heart will be returned. So, your play is?

6♦ by South. Lead ♠J. What is your line? Ruff a spade.... ♦K and back to hand with a trump (both opponents follow) and ruff a second spade. What next?

5♦ by South. Lead ♠J. You do as in 6♦ but what now?

In 3NT, or in 6♦, playing ♣A or, in the diamond slam a club to the ace was not a good idea! Neither was the heart finesse!

In fact, in the slam, you would be very happy for the heart finesse to fail!

| | | |
|----------------|--------------|--|
| South Deals | ♠ 6 | |
| N-S Vul | ♥ Q J 9 3 | |
| | ♦ K 5 4 3 | |
| | ♣ K J 6 4 | |
| ♠ K J 10 9 3 2 | ♠ Q 8 5 | |
| ♥ K 8 5 4 | ♥ 10 7 6 | |
| ♦ 10 7 6 | ♦ 9 2 | |
| ♣ — | ♣ Q 10 8 7 3 | |
| | ♠ A 7 4 | |
| | ♥ A 2 | |
| | ♦ A Q J 8 | |
| | ♣ A 9 5 2 | |

In 3NT, cashing the ♣A after the four rounds of diamonds meant certain disaster as the heart finesse failed too. While South may not have picked West's actual shape, it seemed most unlikely that East had been dealt a singleton club (especially as then they had discarded it). Therefore, cashing the ♣A was unlikely to gain and on the actual lay-out was very costly. East's club discard either meant they had no or total club control. South could afford one club loser but not two. So, ♣2 was the winning card, scoring 3 club tricks.

In 6♦, the declarers could always fall back on the club finesse but there was an interesting extra chance if the heart finesse failed. The club suit can be safety-

played for one loser, a 100 % safety play by leading the ♣ K from dummy and simply covering whichever club East played. Try it.

However, had South returned to hand after ruffing both spades with a heart to the ace, South could draw trump (throwing a low club from dummy) and then lead a heart towards the ♥QJ9. If West takes the ♥K, then there will be two discards on ♥QJ, no club loser, or if West ducks the king, then declarer can play ♥Q and will safety play clubs as above for one loser... discarding the low club from the North hand on the third round of trumps takes away the 100% safety play but after following to three diamonds and two hearts, West cannot have 3 or 4 clubs. (Of course, declarer could go wrong by inserting ♥9 losing to ♥10. How unkind to be dealt such a high heart as ♥9!)

In 5♦, declarer should play a heart to the ace and draw trump. Where ever the ♥K is, declarer cannot lose more than the ♥K and a club.

A nice hand to be recording a plus score whether you were in game, especially 3NT, or the diamond slam. Alas, three out of seven declarers went minus. Don't we just love the problem deals!

Richard Solomon