

DIARY OF A DISASTER



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There is little worse in a bridge score-up than a double game swing against your side. There was more than one hand last night where “the 5 level did belong to the opponents” contrarily to the common saying.

At our table on the following board, we all reached the optimum contract of 5♠ but only one side achieved the optimum score...and it was not ours!

The “5 level minefield”

<p>Board 17 North Deals None Vul</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #006400; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <table style="border-collapse: collapse; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 10px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 10px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px 10px;">S</td></tr> </table> </div>	N	W E	S	<p>♠ A J ♥ 4 ♦ Q 10 9 5 4 ♣ K Q 10 3 2</p>																						
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	<p>♠ Q 5 ♥ A 9 5 3 ♦ K J 8 2 ♣ A 6 5</p>																										
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">West</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">North</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">East</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">South</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>dummy</i></td> <td style="text-align: center;"><i>you</i></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">1 ♥</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2 NT</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3 ♣</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">4 ♠</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5 ♥</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5 ♠</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Dbl</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">All pass</td> </tr> </table>		West	North	East	South				<i>dummy</i>	<i>you</i>			1 ♥	2 NT	3 ♣		4 ♠	5 ♥	5 ♠	Dbl		All pass					
	West	North	East	South																							
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	4 ♠	5 ♥	5 ♠	Dbl																							
	All pass																										

Your 3♣ was a strong hand, at least a game invite, with heart support. West announced a lot of spades after their partner’s minor showing 2NT. After partner’s second heart bid, you decide to take the axe to the freely bid 5♠ and see your partner start off with a useful looking ♦A. You encourage with ♦2 and partner continues ♦7 to the ♦10 and your ♦J as West follows with ♦6.

Which card do you play at trick 3?

The play at our table did not go like that at all but it might have done. We will examine the actual defence shortly.

What about trying to promote a trump trick for yourself by leading your $\spadesuit 8$? Assuming your $\heartsuit A$ will stand up, you might even beat this contract by two or three tricks. Maybe cash $\clubsuit A$ first? Before all is revealed, how many trumps do you think your partner has? West must have at least 8 considering they do not hold three of the four top honours. At best, your partner has one trump....at worst none.

Thus, before you start trying for two down (maybe 3 if we include the $\clubsuit A$), make sure you beat the contract. Cash that $\heartsuit A$. Then start trying for a trump promotion. Not the other way round!

Board 17		\spadesuit —									
North Deals		\heartsuit K J 10 8 7 2									
None Vul		\diamondsuit A 7									
		\clubsuit J 9 8 7 4									
\spadesuit K 10 9 8 7 6 4 3 2	<div style="background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <table style="border: none; 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		\spadesuit A J
	N										
W		E									
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\heartsuit Q 6		\heartsuit 4									
\diamondsuit 6 3		\diamondsuit Q 10 9 5 4									
\clubsuit —		\clubsuit K Q 10 3 2									
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All pass											

West might go for gold if you play the low diamond before cashing the $\heartsuit A$. Discard one heart on the low diamond, ruff out the $\diamondsuit K$, draw trumps and claim. Not a good result for the defence.

Avoiding Disaster

Yet, that was not the disaster that happened at our table. I was vaguely aware that leading doubleton $\diamondsuit A$ at trick one could cause problems for my partner in terms of my having no trumps. So, I opted for the lead of the $\heartsuit J$. Partner won but was not sure what to do at trick 2. The “safe” trump exit proved not so safe when the $\clubsuit K$ was advanced with dastardly effect. Very soon, one of West’s diamonds had disappeared on the established $\clubsuit Q$ and the contract had made.

How then to take one’s three defensive tricks? There was no reason to expect that leading $\diamondsuit A$ was going to be the winner for the defence though in itself,

the heart lead was not going to create enough winners. So, start off with that ♦A but ignore partner's encouraging signal. Switch to the ♥J at trick 2. Now, if partner thinks you only have one diamond, they will cash the ♦K before giving you your hoped-for trump trick. Kind of saving partner from themselves and recording +100. If only....

5♠ made 3 times and was defeated twice, once on a heart lead and the other time on the ♣7 from North. Obviously, declarer did not insert ♣10 from dummy. At several tables 5♥ was bid and made, each time on the ♠A lead. Were the ♣K led, North must not play the ace or else there will be three losers. As long as declarer ducks, the third round of clubs produces a trick for declarer.

However, the 5 level this time belonged to your side not the opposition if you were East-West. -100 was a good outcome as compared with -450 and +450 or 650 an even better one!

Richard Solomon