

Rick's Tricks

BRIDGE PERFECTION! A BRIDGE TOO HIGH?



By Rick Roeder

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Suppose you are an absolute genius with an off-the-charts IQ. You aspire to become the perfect bridge player. You are willing to practice 8 hours a day. Oh, and by the way, you are rich enough to own 3 Islands in the South Pacific as well as untold numbers of bank accounts in Cayman. In other words, so well-heeled financially that you could have Meckwell and Helgemo at your beck and call.

The sad truth is that bridge will find ways to humble even the best among us. To attain mastery of all the probabilities of all suit combinations is possible. To successfully employ each of the best 79 conventions in your partnerships is doable. However, there is one element that will always be perfection's daunting hurdle: The nature of your opponents. Sometimes, they perpetrate the most astonishing actions that defy belief and analysis.

I offer Example #1 at my personal expense, declaring in 6 No Trump:

DECLARER	DUMMY
♠ Ax	♠ Q8xx
♥ KQJx	♥ Axx
♦ KJ	♦ Q8xxx
♣ AKQJx	♣ x

My LHO led the ♠9 after this auction:

2♣	2♦
2NT	3♣
3♥	4NT (quantitative)
6NT	

My heart sank quicker than the Titanic's anchor. 6NT had excellent play on any lead but a Spade. The spade lead was even more discouraging since my Partner's auction showed 4 spades (Lacking 4 spades, Pard could have jumped directly to 4NT after my 2NT rebid). In other words, we had warned the opponents about the dangers of a spade lead. I mentally conceded going set. However, it is in my nature to fight to the end so I played low from dummy and quickly took the Ace. I played the ♦J at trick 2, which held. If clubs broke 4-3, I was now up to 11 tricks. Not willing to settle for

down 1, I played the ♦K from my hand. LHO won and sealed my doom by returning the ♠10. I ducked, hoping for King doubleton of Spades on my right. Then, I almost fell over when I saw his play to the next trick: The KING OF SPADES!!! In other words, after his unorthodox lead, he was unwilling to settle for down 1! That greedy *****! He gave me a second chance for me to successfully play the ♠Q. For the second time, I whiffed. Down 2. An icy zero!

I was thunderstruck and embarrassed. My LHO held a 7 count as we charged into 6 No Trump. In other words, his partner rated to have roughly zero high cards. Did that deter our intrepid hero from leading away from his unsupported King. Not in the least!

I do not blame you if you think these events were fictional. You may well think of me as just another degenerate bridge journalist who is running out of real life material. Mac Busby can provide testimony that the above events were not a byproduct of a truly warped imagination.

I quickly ran into another hand that humbled me (Why, I ask myself, do I run into hands that humble me so frequently?). I was Dealer and wound up playing 4♠ in an IMP game.

DECLARER	DUMMY
♠ KQJ9x	♠ A432
♥ Qx	♥ x
♦ AKJ	♦ 8753
♣ 943	♣ KJ105

With the opponents silent, we had an easy auction:

ME	PARD
1NT	2♣
2♠	4♠

I really like opening 1NT with a 5 card major, especially when my honor location suggests that it might be prudent for me to declare. If you feel likewise, I highly recommend that you incorporate 3♣ as Puppet Stayman into your arsenal.

I received the ♦4 lead and happily gobbled up Righty's ♦Q. This hand seemed like a piece of cake. 5 Spades, 3 Diamonds, a Heart ruff and at least one club. I played a Spade to the Ace and received the news that Lefty was spadeless. Not a catastrophe, but RHO's 4 spades were a nuisance. I could now see a scenario where 10 tricks was not a lock. Suppose the ♣Q is offside. Pulling all 4 of RHO's trumps means I cannot ruff a Heart. However, if I keep on my initial tack of ruffing a heart, I run a significant risk that LHO led from a 5 card diamond suit and has one of the 2 high Heart honors. In this scenario, if Righty has a stiff Diamond and the ♣Q, a Diamond ruff would sink me. After some thought, I decided to come back to my hand with a second trump. Then, I made the play of a low Club and held my breath. I played the ♣J and was delighted to see the Ace on my right. The 4-0 break required some thought and my clever Club play seemed like the antidote. Now, I could afford for Righty to flip a Heart back to Lefty. Even if diamonds were 5-1, the ensuing Diamond ruff would be the 3rd and last trick for the defense.

This triumph was definitely going to be balm for my earlier 6 No Trump fiasco. Now, the rest of the story, as Paul Harvey always said. Upon winning the ♣A, RHO flipped back the ♦9. I smugly won. Diamonds were not 5-1, but brilliant declarers like myself must cater to all the possibilities. With the ♣Q surely on my left, I no longer needed a Heart ruff. 5 Spades, 3 Diamonds and 2 Clubs equals "Bingo." So, I finishing pulling trumps and finessed another Club as a formality. For the 2nd time in 24 hours, I was thunderstruck. RHO won the Queen. Two rounds of Hearts were promptly cashed as I became comatose.

RHO's entire hand:

♠ 10xxx ♥ AK10x ♦ Q92 ♣ AQ

RHO was brilliant. His recognition that his Pard rated to be broke triggered his well executed and creative defense. Kudos to RHO! Alas, the damage to my psyche has been considerable and, I pray, not irreparable. As a result, I have started to see a therapist and am deeply worried about the relatively low ceilings on my insurance's psych coverage.

As for those who badly want to become the perfect bridge player, good luck! However, you really should keep my contact information. Just in case you need a referral. ♣