

The Unseen by Derrick Browne

If you aspire to greatness at bridge you need to try to see the unseen hands. Defence is commonly considered the hardest part of the game because partner's hand is one of those you cannot see.

On this first deal from a club tournament, a mix of inspiration and luck helped Karen Smith find the winning defence:

Dealer West, both vul.

NORTH	
S QJT	
H J764	
D Q8754	
C 4	
WEST	EAST
S 42	S 975
H 9	H A853
D J92	D K3
C AKQT752	C J963
SOUTH	
S AK863	
H KQT2	
D AT6	
C 8	

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
3C	Pass	Pass	Dble
Pass	3D	4C	4S

All pass

If North had shown the major in reply to partner's takeout double, the unbeatable 4H would have been reached. Then again, East-West could have done more – a Gambling 3NT opening by West would have shown this sort of hand, or given that West opened just 3C, East could have bid an immediate 4C to heighten the pre-empt.

Karen was West and realised clubs would not provide many tricks, so she led her singleton heart instead. East won the HA and returned a heart for the ruff. Now Karen wanted to get partner in for another ruff, so led a low club, figuring East would likely have the CJ for her 4C bid. East did indeed win the CJ and returned a heart for another ruff, and the contract eventually went two light.

The next deal comes from a match between Japan and England in the 2008 World Championships:

Dealer West, both vul.

NORTH	
S AKQ5	
H 6	
D 98763	
C KT5	
WEST	EAST
S 9432	S J6
H 4	H JT987532
D AQ5	D K
C J6432	C AQ
SOUTH	
S T87	
H AKQ	
D JT42	
C 987	

The Japanese North opened 1D, East pre-empted 4H, and South doubled, ending the auction. At the other table, the English North elected to open 1S, East overcalled 2H, South bid 2S, and when this came around to East she rebid 3H, doubled by South.

At both tables, South led a top heart to see the lie of the land. What next?

Looking at all four hands, it is easy to see that a spade switch allows the defence to take five tricks. At the table, both South players switched to the DJ, a normal lead "through strength" to trap dummy's DQ under North's hoped-for DK.

Declarer now called for the DA. This caused the DK to crash helplessly underneath but was the only way to get to dummy to cash the DQ and then take the successful club finesse. The English East thereby went only one down in 4H doubled, while the Japanese East was even happier, having made 3H doubled.

Was there any way for South to find the spade switch? Yes – lead a second round of hearts before deciding what suit to play next. North will then have the opportunity to signal with her discard, and the winning spade switch should be found.