

Open slather *by Derrick Browne*

The playoffs for this year's Australian teams were held in late March. In the Open, the two teams which qualified to represent Australia were those of Sydney's Al Simpson and Canberra's Richard Brightling.

How do you play this suit when your left hand opponent leads the Jack?

Dummy
K852

You
Q94

Here's a clue: Left hand opponent led a low diamond at trick one and now, in the midgame, switches to the CJ. We'll return to this later.

Meanwhile, here is a deal from the playoffs. You are dealer as South, and open 1D. Partner, North, responds 1H. What call should you make?

Dealer South, NS vul.

NORTH
S J952
H J986
D K8
C AKJ

WEST
S QT7
H T
D Q9754
C T873

EAST
S A43
H Q7432
D —
C Q9642

SOUTH
S K86
H AK5
D AJT632
C 5

At some tables, South raised to 2H. With three good trumps and a singleton (or even a weak doubleton), it is often a good idea to raise responder's major, even though it may be only a 4-card suit. Note that this applies only to a simple (non-jump) raise – the jump raise would guarantee an 8-card fit.

If South does raise to 2H, what should North do? Being aware that South may have only 3-card support, North should bid 3NT, offering a choice of games. This time, South has only three hearts so should leave the contract in notrumps. Four of the six pairs in the Division 2 play-off made nine tricks in 3NT, while one played in 4H going two light, and the other pair were in 6D, down three.

After opening 1D and hearing North respond 1H, it would be quite reasonable for South to jump to 3D, showing six diamonds and 16-18 points. A 15 HCP hand with a good 6-card suit should usually be upgraded and treated as a 16-count.

A pushy North might then bid to slam. Unfortunately, South's singleton is in the wrong place – opposite most of partner's points, where it is of little use. It is a terrible slam and made catastrophic by the 5-0 trump break; three down.

Back now to the card combination we saw earlier. This was the layout of the suit:

NORTH (dummy)
C K852

WEST
C J6

EAST
C AT73

SOUTH
C Q94

After having led a diamond from three rags on the opening lead, West switched in desperation to the CJ during the mid-game. Declarer called for dummy's C2, and East correctly played low, keeping the CA to capture dummy's CK later.

In deciding which club to play from dummy on West's CJ, declarer must decide who has the C10. If West is leading from the J-10, a low club should be played from dummy. If East plays low, declarer wins the CQ and later finesses to the C8.

This time, that did not work because East was the player with the C10. Usually the lead of a jack promises the ten, so how does declarer work out that is not the case this time?

The clue was West's failure to lead the CJ at trick one. Surely West would have chosen that card, rather than a small diamond, if holding J-T or better in clubs. If declarer can work out that West's switch to the CJ is an act of desperation, high-low from a doubleton, then the correct play can be found: cover the CJ with the CK. This loses to the CA, but East's C10 is now a sitting duck under South's Q-9 of clubs.

If declarer had played that way and made two club tricks that would have been enough to make the contract, and save 12 IMPs.