

Stairway to heaven by Derrick Browne

Desperation is when you can't see any sign of enough tricks. Frustration is when you can see the potential tricks but can't reach them. Surmount your frustrations and you may just reach heaven.

This deal from a club duplicate caused most pairs problems. The first was what to open on the East hand, as dealer with nil vul:

WEST	EAST
S J	S KQ87542
H AQT2	H 7
D AQ5	D KJ983
C AKT62	C —

There is no clearly "right" opening as East. What is certain is that the hand has too much playing strength for a 3S pre-empt. With such extreme shape, a 4S opening has merit, bidding straight to the likely best spot while maximising pressure on the opponents if they are strong.

At the table, East figured she was too strong for any pre-empt, so opened with a bid of 1S. West responded 2C, East bid 2D, and then West asked with 4NT before settling in 6NT. A club is led. The opposition spades are divided 3-2. How can you make your slam?

At the end of the session, one player recounted her travails: "After winning the club lead, I led the SJ but the player with the SA did not take it, so I was locked in hand. I cashed the DA, DQ and the rest of the diamonds, then led the SK, losing to the ace. All my spades were now winners, but I could not get to them."

Can you see her mistake?

After the SJ wins at trick two (the spades are not strong enough to be able to afford to overtake), lead the DQ and *overtake* with the DK to get to dummy to lead a spade honour. Now the DJ is still available as an entry back to dummy to enjoy the spades. It would also have worked to cash the DA first. Diamonds are the stairway over to the East hand and to get there twice, it was necessary to overtake the DQ with the DK to create an extra entry.

Here is an even more unusual situation:

WEST	EAST
S Q6542	S J3
H Q654	H J3
D 5	D AKQJ
C AKQ	C JT983

WEST	EAST
1S	2C
2H	3NT
All pass	

East is declarer in 3NT. It seems there are nine easy tricks in the minors. The clubs are blocked but you plan to cash the A-K-Q of clubs to remove that blockage, then cross to East via diamonds to cash the rest of the minor suit winners. If the opponents lead one of the majors first, they may even provide you with an overtrick.

Unsurprisingly, however, South leads the unbid suit. The diamond lead uses up the only entry to the East hand. If you now lead clubs to unblock, there will be no way back to East.

The solution to this problem is to cash all four of the diamonds from the East hand, flamboyantly discarding the A-K-Q of clubs from West! This allows you to run East's clubs without getting the lead locked in the wrong hand. All you need hope is that the outstanding clubs are not all in one hand; as long as they are divided 3-2 or 4-1, there are nine tricks off the top.