

BETTER BRIDGE

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Look at only the North-South hands in the accompanying diagram. What do you think of South's chances at three no-trump?

It appears the only hope for nine tricks is to bring in the diamond suit. There simply are not sufficient tricks without it. The conclusion you reach is that South must find a doubleton ace of diamonds in either defensive hand.

Now consider all four hands. West's diamond holding is secure. He can duck two leads and effectively isolate dummy's diamond threat. It seems declarer's fate, then, is sealed. The limit of the hand appears to be seven tricks — one spade and two tricks in each of the other suits.

Three no-trump, therefore, looks to be an unlucky contract if not a poor one. Why did North-South get there? East's three club bid, a tactical barricade facing a passed partner, preempted North-South of two levels of bidding. South wasn't about to be talked out of anything so he took the aggressive course and gambled on a no-trump game. A double by South instead would have suggested length and strength outside the club suit and have asked partner to choose a suit. Over three no-trump, North was still free to select a suit contract had he held an unbalanced hand.

Lacking a club, West led from his long heart suit. Declarer won in hand with the queen preserving the jack in dummy. Two rounds of diamonds did not fell the ace but West was saddled with the lead on the third round.

A heart continuation would allow declarer to reach dummy's established diamonds so West switched to a low spade. East won the ace and South made an exceptional play, discarding the ten. East continued with the queen of spades. Declarer took the king and immediately got off lead with the carefully preserved spade deuce, endplaying West in this denouement:

| | | | |
|---|------------|---|-------------|
| S | — | S | — |
| H | J 5 | H | — |
| D | 10 9 | D | — |
| C | J 4 | C | Q 9 8 7 5 3 |
| S | J | S | — |
| H | K 10 8 6 4 | H | — |
| D | — | D | — |
| C | — | C | Q 9 8 7 5 3 |
| S | — | S | — |
| H | A 9 | H | — |
| D | — | D | — |
| C | A K 6 2 | C | — |

West cashed his long spade as declarer threw a club from each hand. With the defensive book filled West was forced to lead from his king of hearts enabling declarer to gain access to dummy's diamonds and win the remainder of the tricks.

East cannot alter the result by bailing West out on the third round of spades. (East might, for example, return the seven of spades rather than the queen.) In this case the forced return of a club permits the jack to serve as an entry to dummy's diamonds.

If South fails to drop the ten of spades under the ace, accurate defense will set the hand. East-West must duck the third round of the suit — declarer's lead of the ten. This gives declarer an extra spade and his eighth trick but cuts him off from dummy forever.

| | |
|-------|------------|
| North | |
| S | 5 4 3 |
| H | J 5 2 |
| D | K Q 10 9 4 |
| C | J 4 |

| | |
|----------------|------------------|
| West | East |
| S J 9 8 6 | S A Q 7 |
| H K 10 8 7 6 4 | H 3 |
| D A 6 3 | D 7 2 |
| C — | C Q 10 9 8 7 5 3 |

| | |
|-------|---------|
| South | |
| S | K 10 2 |
| H | A Q 9 |
| D | J 8 5 |
| C | A K 6 2 |

West was the dealer. North-South vulnerable.

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| West | North | East | South |
| Pass | Pass | 3 C | 3 NT |
| Pass | Pass | Pass | |

West led the seven of hearts.

Better Bridge