

A Christmas Deal

The deal is a fair illustration of how (and why!) to count the opponents hands. It is not a particularly easy thing to do as a declarer but there are some tips below how to practise it.

Here at trick 1 a diamond is ruffed on the right.

So left hand opponent had 6 diamonds and right hand opponent had none.

At trick two left hand opponent fails to follow to the spade lead

So left hand opponent had no spades and r.h.o had 9 spades.

When a trump is led the r.h.o has none left (but trumped at trick one)

So left hand opponent had 4 clubs and r.h.o had 1 club

We now know that the right hand opponent started the deal with :-

AKQJxxxx spades + zero diamonds + 1 club + (therefore) 3 Hrts

We now know that the left hand opponent started the deal with :-

zero spades + 6 diamonds + 4 club + (therefore) 3 Hrts

As the left hand opponent will have to follow to three rounds of diamonds that is what the declarer plays next. On the last diamond a heart is thrown from dummy. [all the time r.h.o having no trumps left has had to discard]. Next declarer cashes the A + K Hrts. There is now a void in Hrts in dummy (remember we threw one on the diamond). A heart is trumped in dummy. [we knew the hearts were 3--3 so our last hrt is a winner]. Next we draw trumps and finally , triumphantly , play our winning small Hrt.

It is rare that a declarer knows for certain the exact distribution of the opponents hands. Often declarers make educated guesses as to the layout e.g here it might have been guessed that the r.h.o had 8 spades for their 4Sp bid. (that would have been wrong this time note).

A declarer is under time pressure not to mention other sorts of pressure and a student player can't expect to be able to count the opponents hands without having put in a fair amount of practise. The place to learn the art is as a *defender*. Often as a defender you are hardly involved in a hand and have plenty of time to try and work out declarer's hand. The bidding will be the first clue. If declarer bid two suits you will guess they have 5-4 in those suits. And if declarer trumped a third suit on the second round of that suit then they probably originally had 5--4---3---1
Those are educated guesses and maybe the declarer is actually 5---5---2---1 but its a start. And as more cards are played you can add to the picture .

The bidding ? 6C was lucky but what should South bid?

Someone suggested bidding 5NT (meaning -pick a minor suit partner). Hmm..

A bid of 5Sp (the opponent's suit) would also force partner to wake up and bid something. Hmmm ...again. Double ? but that's penalty and anyway 4Sp makes 10 tricks.

In good company the best bid is probably PASS. (yes pass).

Remember you opened 2C so partner knows they HAVE to bid something.

[It is called a forcing pass for those who like to know these things].

Not sure even that that bid helps here. Perhaps 6C wasn't so bad after all.