

Crockfords swings and roundabouts

IT is the last match of the final of Crockfords. Your team (*de Botton*) is in second place, one victory point behind the leaders (*Mizel*) and half a dozen or so ahead of third. You consider that you need a sizeable win, for your rivals are playing the team in last place, while other teams behind you may catch up unless you can make it impossible for them to do so. You arrive in a routine 3NT as South with these assets:

E/W Game. Dealer South.	
♠	K 10 9
♥	10 3 2
♦	K 10 4
♣	A J 6 3
♠	A J 3 2
♥	A 6 5
♦	J 9 3
♣	K Q 10

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	All pass	1NT*
* 15-17			

West leads the king of hearts which holds, continues with the queen which also holds, and persists with the jack on which East shows out. Plan the play (a) in normal circumstances and (b) in the given circumstances.

If you can make four spade tricks, you will make the contract. If you can't, you may make an extra trick from diamonds. There are thus two possible lines of play:

Line E ('Eggs in one basket') – play a spade to the king and run the ten, succeeding when East has the queen of spades and failing when he doesn't;

Line C ('Combining chances') – play a spade to the ten, succeeding when West has the queen of spades, or the queen of diamonds without the ace.

If the location of each of the three crucial cards - the queen of spades, and the queen

and ace of diamonds – were simply a 50-50 chance, it would be correct to follow line C. That would work half the time (when West has the queen of spades) plus a quarter of the rest of the time (when West has the queen, but not the ace, of diamonds), while line E would work only half the time (when East has the spade queen). But it's not as simple as that. West has five hearts and East two, which means that West has eight non-hearts and East eleven. The chance that West has the spade queen is thus only 8/19, while the chance that East has the spade queen is 11/19. Line E, then?

Just a moment. Line E will work 11/19 of the time, or 57.89%. Line C will work 8/19 of the time (West has the queen of spades) plus some fraction of the other 11/19 of the time. That fraction is specifically 4/9 (the chance that West has the diamond queen given that he doesn't have the spade queen) times 10/17 (the chance that he doesn't have the diamond ace, given that he does have the diamond queen but doesn't have the spade queen). All of that comes to 57.24%, which is less than 57.89%. Line E after all, then?

Just another moment. In normal circumstances, where you are not playing for a swing, line E would be correct. But given the state of the tournament, now is perhaps a good time to follow line C, because taking slightly anti-percentage actions and enjoying a little good fortune is the accepted way to retrieve a trailing position. You want, in short, to do what declarer in the other room won't do, and hope for the best.

'Just another moment!'

One piece of information I have so far withheld from you is that declarer in the other room is Surrey's Frances Hinden, whom you know not only to be a fine player but a mathematical wizard. She will have worked out in seconds what has taken you about half an hour – that line E is technically correct – and she will have followed it. So you follow line C, and you go two down when East turns up with the queen of spades and West with the ace of diamonds, and you lose 11 IMPs, and you wish you'd never taken up this stupid game.



David Burn

REPORTS

The first half of the match ends, and your team is 25 IMPs ahead despite your own best efforts. But the leaders are ahead by 42 IMPs and, provided they don't lose any in the second half, they will score the maximum 25 VPs and you won't be able to catch them. You go to the bar, muttering darkly about vacant places and state of the event considerations and whether drinking hemlock would be a better idea than hanging yourself. Fortunately the bar doesn't have any hemlock, so you sit and watch the television with Jack Mizel and Andrew McIntosh.

Wigan Athletic and West Ham United perform heroics on the football field, escaping relegation in dramatic fashion. You go back upstairs, wondering if . . . Your team-mates emerge, and have done enough to ensure that 25 VPs are added to your score. Half of the *Charlwood* team, who are opposing *Mizel*, come out of the playing room, and a quick glance at their scorecard indicates that they have played at least as well as the Latics and the Hammers. You wait for an eternity. To their great credit, *Charlwood's* players have retrieved almost all of their half-time deficit, and you have won. The Director hands the Crockfords Cup to Janet de Botton, who promptly hands it to you because the thing weighs half a ton. Not such a stupid game, after all.

Crockfords Final Leaderboard:

1. Janet de Botton, Jason and Justin Hackett, Artur Malinowski, Nick Sandqvist, David Burn.
2. Jack Mizel, Alexander Allfrey, David Bakhshi, Tony Forrester, Andrew McIntosh, Andrew Robson.
3. Brian Senior, Espen Erichsen, Sandra Penfold, Nevena Senior. □