

Baron May of Oxford



ROBERT MAY, Baron May of Oxford, has been Chief Scientific Adviser to HM Government, President of the Royal Society, and a Professor at Sydney, Princeton, Oxford and Imperial College London. He is a Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, a crossbencher in the House of Lords and an appointed member of the council of the British Science Association.

How did you start playing bridge?

I learned as a postgraduate student, but only started playing seriously as a young lecturer at Sydney University. Sadly, by the time I became good enough to be considered for the New South Wales state team, I switched from physics to ecology, which meant spending more time on my academic career, and less and less on bridge.

How often do you play?

Not nearly enough, maybe four or five times a year, mostly at the House of Lords.

What does bridge mean to you?

I have always loved puzzles – I could spend my life solving problems and playing games, and bridge is one of the best. All my training as an administrator comes from bridge. It taught me to make decisions in a fog of uncertainty, relate to partner and team-mates, and move on cheerfully when things go wrong even if you have done everything right!

If you could change one thing about bridge, what would it be?

I would like to see it taught in schools as it is an excellent way of fostering cooperation and equanimity under uncertainty.

What are your hobbies apart from bridge?

Walking amid beautiful scenery. My wife and I have just finished walking the entire 630 miles of the South West coast path from Minehead to Poole.

Limit your losses in a popular contract



PAIRS TACTICS

Andrew Robson

NEVER forget that your real opponents are those players sitting in your direction at the other tables. And never forget too that when the cards lie badly for you, they lie badly for those others as well. So when you are declarer in a normal contract, destined to fail because of bad splits, do not lose heart/focus. Restricting those undertricks can be worth a bushel of match-points.

Take this issue's South:

N/S Game. Dealer South.			
		♠	9 3
		♥	A Q 10 7 6
		♦	K 10 4
		♣	9 8 6
♠	Q 10 8 4	♠	2
♥	8 5 2	♥	K J 9 3
♦	3	♦	Q J 9 8 5 2
♣	A K 7 4 2	♣	10 3
		♠	A K J 7 6 5
		♥	4
		♦	A 7 6
		♣	Q J 5

West	North	East	South
			1♠
Pass ¹	2♥	Pass	3♠ ²
Pass	4♠	All Pass	

¹ Not a two-level overcall by any sane standards

² Two-and-three-quarter spades

West leads the ace of clubs, East encouraging with the ten, then follows with the king and a third club, ruffed. East returns the queen of diamonds and you as declarer (correctly) win with the ace, then leading

out the ace of trumps.

When East discards, you should not think: 'Oh, woe is me, I am going way down,' and lose interest. Instead you should think: 'Everything that has happened so far is pretty normal. I am doing just as well (or as badly) as other declarers. Okay, some might have avoided trouble by rebidding 2♠ but many will have liked the look of the hand and jumped to 3♠. Most of the match-points are still very much at stake.'

You can 'escape' with down two, but only if you play perfectly. Reject the heart finesse – West would surely have overcalled 2♣ with the king of hearts in addition to his ♣A-K-x-x-x and ♠Q-10-x-x. Lead to the ace of hearts and ruff a heart. Now lead up a second diamond. West will discard his remaining heart (best) but you win dummy's king of diamonds and ruff a third heart. West overruffs, but has no good return. A trump away from ♠Q-10 avoids a further trump loser, but his likely choice of a fourth club allows you to ruff with dummy's remaining trump and discard your losing diamond from hand. All you concede from here is one further trump – down two – and you can look forward to opening up the traveller and salvaging 55%.

Andrew's Tip: Limit your losses in a popular contract. The cards lie just as badly for the other declarers too. □



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