

Brian's Brighton The Summer Meeting 2015

Saturday 15th - Deadly Defence

The first session of the Swiss Pairs Championship on Friday evening saw back-to-back boards offer up these two defensive opportunities - though possibly only at our table in the first case.

Board 12. Dealer West. N/S Vul.

	♠	J 7 6 5 3		West	North	East	South
	♥	K 9		Pass	1♠	2♠	4♠
	♦	K 3		5♥	Pass	Pass	Dble
	♣	A Q J 8		All Pass			
♠	A 8		♠	K			
♥	Q J 6 4		♥	A 7 5 3 2			
♦	7 6		♦	10 9 8 4 2			
♣	10 9 7 5 2		♣	4 3			
	♠	Q 10 9 4 2					
	♥	10 8					
	♦	A Q J 5					
	♣	K 6					

East made a disgusting two-suited overcall, showing specifically the red suits. It would not occur to me to force partner to bid at the three level with this piece of filth, so I was happy to see justice done. Anyway, West took him seriously and, seeing the favourable vulnerability, took the save in 5♥ doubled.

North led a spade to dummy's bare king. Declarer could have saved a trick by overtaking then picking up the hearts without loss, but that only works because hearts are two-two with the king onside. Rather than 'waste' the ace of spades, he instead allowed the king to hold and led a diamond at trick two.

North rose with the ace to play king and another club. South won the jack and continued with a third club, ruffed low and over-ruffed. A diamond to the king put North in to lead the fourth club and declarer could only cut his losses, ruffing with the ace and playing a trump. That lost to the king, of course, but that was all; down four for -800.

Had declarer ruffed the fourth club low, he would again have been over-ruffed and a diamond through would have seen an over-ruff from North for down five. As mentioned, declarer could have saved a trick by overtaking the spade at trick one and drawing trumps without loss. However, on a slightly different layout that could easily have cost a trick rather than saved one.

Board 13. Dealer North. All Vul.

	♠ J 6		West	North	East	South
	♥ A Q 9 4		-	1♣	Pass	1♦
	♦ K 7 2		Pass	1NT	Pass	2♦
	♣ K 7 3 2		Pass	2♥	Pass	3♥
♠ A Q 8 4		♠ 10 7 5 3 2	Pass	4♦	Pass	4♥
♥ J 6		♥ K 7 3	All Pass			
♦ 8 6		♦ J 10 5 3				
♣ J 10 6 5 4		♣ 9				
	♠ K 9					
	♥ 10 8 5 2					
	♦ A Q 9 4					
	♣ A Q 8					

1♣ could have been a doubleton. 2♦ was game-forcing checkback and 3♥ and 4♦ both showed at least mild slam interest. East led the nine of clubs. Declarer won with dummy's ace and tried a heart to the queen. That lost and East returned a spade to the king and ace. West cashed the queen of spades before switching to a club so there was only one ruff for down one; -100.

Though the 1♣ opening could have been a short suit, the club lead screamed singleton. That gave declarer an awkward decision how to play the trumps. Some might argue that it is best to cash the ace, cross to dummy with a diamond and lead a second heart up, the idea being to minimize the risk of conceding ruffs. But when West holds ♥K-x, this line concedes a ruff which would have been avoided by the line actually chosen of low to the queen.

To make the winning defence as clear as possible, East should return a high spade spot card when in with the king of hearts. This avoids the risk that declarer will call for dummy's king, losing to the ace, and that West, not holding the queen himself, will then return a spade in expectation of finding East with the queen. Of course, a high spot-card switch denies interest in the suit and encourages partner to go back to the first suit led.

On the actual deal, if West trusts his partner the contract should be two down. High spade from East, West wins and gives a club ruff, and is put back in with a second spade to give another ruff. I would consider this to be a routine defence in an expert game. I wonder how many people were allowed to escape with nine tricks in the more mixed field of a big congress. I'd bet on fewer than half going down two.