

Try the Duck

By Charles Goren

Charles H. Goren died in 1991 aged 90. He was the world's foremost authority on the game for most of this century. He was known to millions simply as 'Mr. Bridge'. They bought his books, attended his lectures, took lessons from his accredited teachers, collected cards and accessories imprinted with his logo, travelled on his bridge cruises and read the articles he wrote for Sports Illustrated and McCalls.

Starting in 1937 when he retired from the bar and concentrated on bridge, he won so many tournaments that he headed the top of the masterpoint winners list continuously from 1944 to 1962. His best single result was to be a member of the US team that won the very first Bermuda Bowl in 1950. He was responsible for the development of Standard American and, because his methods were easy to learn, many millions of new bridge players were nurtured, giving the game a boost it had not enjoyed since the Culbertson years. He even appeared on the front cover of Time magazine. It is estimated that his books have sold over ten million copies. Although he lived to a ripe old age, poor health kept him out of the public eye for the last twenty years or so of his life.

TIP: If you aren't sure how to continue after you win a trick, you should consider ducking it.

But there are many cases when you will not have time for consideration when the opportunity arises; the duck will be effective only if you execute it smoothly, leaving declarer in doubt where the high card is. Examples occur when you, as defender, see only these cards:

(1) *Dummy*
 ♥ K Q 10

You
 ♥ A x x

(2) *Dummy*
 ♥ K Q 10

You
 ♥ A x x

Declarer leads low toward dummy and when he plays the queen it holds the trick. Who has the ace? Returning to his hand, he leads the suit again. West once more playing low. Which of dummy's cards should declarer play?

Obviously, unless the ace is the setting trick and you are in danger of losing it, it must be right for both defenders to duck the first time and for West to play low the second time as well. The alternatives – for East to take the ace the first time, or for West either to take the ace the second time or to go into a brown study – leave the declarer no problem.

The next and only slightly more difficult stage of the same situation is this one:

Dummy
 ♥ x x x

You
 ♥ A x x

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Declarer, South, leads low from dummy and plays the king. If he makes this play early, it would be a mistake to take the ace unless you have reason to believe that the king is alone. Declarer is unlikely to have chosen to lead up to an unsupported king at such an early stage of the play; he probably has K-Q-10 or K-Q-x. Suppose declarer has K-Q-10; if you take the first trick with the ace, he will later finesse the ten, with no need to guess who holds the ace.

Even if declarer has K-Q-x, it will still pay to duck whenever dummy is at all short of entries. If you win the first trick, declarer will use dummy's re-entry to find some other play that may gain a trick. If you withhold the ace, he may use that entry to repeat his 'successful' first play.

There are also many less obvious opportunities for ducking plays. Among them is the situation where you can save your partner from a squeeze if you refuse to win a trick. In most squeezes declarer must be able to get within one trick of his required number. To reach this position, he may endeavor to lose a trick while still retaining control, a process known as 'rectifying the count'.

Here is a unique but by no means difficult-to-fathom opportunity for East to thwart declarer's plan:

Board 15
South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ J 10 9 2	♠ Q 6 5	♠ 7 4
♥ Q J 6	♥ 10 9 4	♥ 7 5 3 2
♦ 5 3 2	♦ A K 10 9	♦ 7 6 4
♣ 4 3 2	♣ J 10 9	♣ A 8 7 6
	♠ A K 8 3	
	♥ A K 8	
	♦ Q J 8	
	♣ K Q 5	

South bids 2NT, North raises to 4NT and South goes on to 6NT, against which West leads the jack of spades. Declarer wins in his hand with the ace, which should not fool you. He leads the king of clubs and you duck. Next he leads the five of clubs. It is apparent that he began with only three clubs and cannot be attempting to establish a third trick in the suit. Unless this gives him his twelfth trick – and you cannot prevent that by taking your ace – he must be trying to lose a trick in order to rectify the count so that he can effect a squeeze. So you duck the trick once again! Now he cannot surrender a club trick without letting you cash another. He is forced to abandon clubs and look for his twelfth trick in spades or via a more complex squeeze. But when he runs off four diamond tricks, discarding a club from his hand, West is able also to discard a club. You will never make your ace of clubs, but partner will make a trick in hearts and a trick in spades.

Observe what happens if you take the second club. The count has been rectified. Declarer is able to cash a third round of clubs and the ace-king of hearts. Later, when he leads the fourth diamond from dummy, West cannot discard. If he lets go a heart, declarer wins the twelfth trick with dummy's ten of hearts. If he lets go a spade, declarer makes four spade tricks.

Not every ducking play is as difficult, although some are even more so. But at the bridge table, as at the dining table, the duck can be a spectacular success. Especially, à l'orange. Topped off, of course, with a liqueur by BOLS.