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1<sup>st</sup> June, 2011

## DECLARE & DEFEND

On **Board 25** we expect some N-S pairs to reach 6NT, probably played by North. But we've rotated the hands to make South the Declarer. This is not an easy hand, be ready to do lots of counting and to watch the defenders' discards carefully.

*Dummy*  
 ♠ AK432  
 ♥ J5  
 ♦ Q73  
 ♣ QJ4  
*Declarer*  
 ♠ 8  
 ♥ AQT84  
 ♦ AKT2  
 ♣ AK6

West leads the Club Five, and Declarer can count two Spades, at least three Hearts, at least three Diamonds, and three Clubs. That's 11 tricks, where's the 12<sup>th</sup>? That will come from Hearts (if the suit is 3-3 or 4-2) or from Diamonds (if the Jack comes down). Things look promising, it's a case of maximizing your chances. How?

Suppose that you win the opening Club lead in hand (East playing the Seven), and then cross to Dummy's ♣Q (West plays the Three and East the Ten), and run the ♥J, which holds the trick. The lazy play now would be to finesse Hearts again, hoping that the suit is 4-2, and if it isn't then to rely on Diamonds. That line has about an 80% chance of success, not too shabby, eh?

But what's the rush? After the ♥J holds the trick, suppose that you cash the ♦A next. East shows out (pitching a Club). Whoa! Now that the ♦J cannot be picked up, does everything depend on the Hearts? Maybe it will, so you now cross to the ♦Q (East pitching another Club). Before you take the Heart finesse perhaps you should do some counting.

It seems that West made a top-of-nothing lead and that East started with four Clubs. East's most likely starting distributions are 4=5=0=4 and 5=4=0=4. In

the first case you can take a deep Heart finesse for 12 tricks (but losing if West has ♥9x), and in the second case you can just play Hearts from the top (but losing if Hearts are 5-1). Here is the end-position:

*Dummy*  
 ♠ AK432  
 ♥ 5  
 ♦ 7  
 ♣ J  
*Declarer*  
 ♠ 8  
 ♥ AQT8  
 ♦ KT  
 ♣ K

Is it a guess which way to play the Hearts? No, it's a sure thing. You finesse the ♥Q and West pitches a Diamond. You guessed wrong in Hearts, is that bad news? Not at all! Now you cash the ♣K and East is squeezed. His last seven cards are four Spades and ♥K97. He cannot spare a Heart so he must pitch a Spade. Now the missing Spades are known to be 3-3 so you cash the ♠AK and exit a Spade:

- If on the third round of Spades East plays the higher remaining Spade, then Declarer pitches a Diamond and East is end-played in Hearts!
- If on the third-round of Spades East does not play the higher remaining Spade, then Declarer pitches a Heart and West is end-played in Diamonds!

Here is the full deal:

	♠ AK432 ♥ J5 ♦ Q73 ♣ QJ4	
♠ QJ7 ♥ 6 ♦ J98654 ♣ 532	<i>Dummy</i>  <i>West</i> <i>East</i>  <i>Declarer</i>	♠ T965 ♥ K9732 ♦ ♣ T987
	♠ 8 ♥ AQT84 ♦ AKT2 ♣ AK6	

A lovely deal! Declarer did well to cash two Clubs and two Diamonds before taking the second Heart finesse, that clarified the position and set up the end-play.

Take a look at **Board 14**.

	♠ Q86 ♥ K97 ♦ Q984 ♣ 873	
♠ ♥ A8532 ♦ AKT75 ♣ A52	North  Declarer Dummy  South	♠ A9542 ♥ JT64 ♦ J2 ♣ Q6
	♠ KJT73 ♥ Q ♦ 63 ♣ KJT94	

West declares 4♥. Looking at all four hands it may appear that Declarer loses a Heart and a Club for sure, and that if he ruffs two Diamonds on the board then the defense will also get a second trump trick. So making only 10 tricks? Not so! Assume that North finds an opening Spade lead. The play proceeds as follows:

- ♠A wins (Declarer pitching a Club)
- Cross to the ♥A
- Cash ♦A and ♦K
- Ruff a Diamond
- Ruff a Spade
- Ruff a Diamond
- Cross to the ♣A

Declarer has the first 8 tricks and here is the 5-card ending:

	North ♠ Q ♥ K9 ♦ ♣ 87	
Declarer ♠ ♥ 853 ♦ T ♣ 5		Dummy ♠ 954 ♥ J ♦ ♣ Q
	South ♠ KJT ♥ ♦ ♣ KJ	

Now, Declarer leads the last Diamond and North has no answer. Whether she ruffs high or ruffs low or pitches a black card, Declarer will come to three more tricks and 11 altogether. This coup has a name, it's an "Elopement Play".

Finally, a defensive problem from **Board 32**.

	♠ 973 ♥ K765 ♦ 93 ♣ 9864	
♠ KT84 ♥ AJ982 ♦ A87 ♣ 2	North  Declarer Dummy  South	♠ A65 ♥ 3 ♦ KT2 ♣ AKJ753
	♠ QJ2 ♥ QT4 ♦ QJ654 ♣ QT	

On their way to 3NT, E-W bid everything but Diamonds, and North's opening lead is the ♦9, covered by the Ten, Jack, Ace. Declarer's percentage play in Clubs is to finesse the Jack, so at Trick 2 Declarer loses a Club to South. What next? Will South know that Declarer has the Diamond Eight, or will she lead a low Diamond now, hoping that North has the Eight?

This is a good hand for the Smith Echo, whereby North can signal her interest (or otherwise) in Diamonds. At Trick 2, when Declarer leads a Club from hand, North will:

- Either play a low Club saying "I don't like Diamonds"
- Or a high Club saying "I do like Diamonds".

Remember, at Trick 1 the Diamonds went *Nine, Ten, Jack, Ace*. That being so, the Eight becomes a big card, the biggest that North might have remaining. So, on that first Club trick, North will play according to whether she has the Diamond Eight (high Club if she does, low if not).

The bottom line is:

- If South mistakenly returns a Diamond then Declarer has 10 easy tricks.
- If South avoids that trap (perhaps aided by Mr Smith) and returns a Heart then Declarer plays the Nine to North's King. Declarer can still make 10 tricks if he plays all out and also guesses well (he must win the Diamond, lose a Club, and squeeze South in the majors to get 10 tricks). But more likely, Declarer will duck the second Diamond trick, holding himself to 9 tricks.

A triumph for the Smith Echo!