

Duplicate Decision

In most forms of bridge, declarer's main objective is to make the contract, with overtricks being only a secondary consideration. But in duplicate bridge scoring (aka matchpoints) overtricks loom large and it is not unheard of for declarer to risk the contract in search of an overtrick. Here is a case in point.

South opens a 15-17 notrump, North raises to game, and West leads a club. Declarer wins that trick and knocks out the \heartsuit A. Back comes a club, at which point there are nine tricks for the taking in the shape of two spades, four diamonds and three clubs. Is it time for declarer to fold his tent, claim nine tricks and move on to the next hand? Not necessarily!

Board 11

South Deals
None Vul

\spadesuit 8 7 6
 \heartsuit A 6
 \diamondsuit A 4 2
 \clubsuit J 9 7 3 2

\spadesuit 5 4 3
 \heartsuit K 3
 \diamondsuit Q 10 9 6 5
 \clubsuit K Q 5



\spadesuit Q J 10 9
 \heartsuit Q J 10 7 5
 \diamondsuit 7
 \clubsuit 10 8 6

\spadesuit A K 2
 \heartsuit 9 8 4 2
 \diamondsuit K J 8 3
 \clubsuit A 4

West	North	East	South
Pass	3 NT	All pass	1 NT
3 NT by South			
Lead: \clubsuit 3			

The matchpoint player is always looking for that extra trick. Is there one? The only possibility is in hearts, but leading towards the \heartsuit K (before cashing nine tricks) is not without risk, and it's possible that East will take dummy's king with his ace and that the defense will then cash three or four more heart tricks, defeating the contract.

Is it just a 50-50 shot? No, the odds favor going for the overtrick. Half the time the \heartsuit A will be onside and declarer gets his overtrick and a good score. And even when the \heartsuit A is offside it's unlikely that the defense will then run the suit, because (a) the hearts may be blocked (picture West with Q10x or Jx or similar holdings, or East with AQ10 or AJ or the like); (b) even if the hearts are not blocked, the defense may do the job themselves (for example, East may hold AQJx and not realize that, after winning the \heartsuit A, he must return a *low* heart). It's a case of "Heads declarer wins, tails he loses only occasionally"