

A Matter of Timing

Four spades is a precarious contract, and requires careful timing if declarer is to succeed. West leads the $\heartsuit K$, which declarer ruffs in dummy. What are the dangers, and how will declarer overcome them?

Some heart tricks are required, but it won't do to draw trumps and then play on hearts, in that case the defense will cash their diamonds. Better timing is required and declarer must play on hearts first, allowing dummy to handle a diamond continuation. So, the $\heartsuit A$ is cashed, and a heart lost to West's king. Back comes a diamond, ruffed in dummy, what next?

It's still too soon to draw trumps! That would leave dummy without a quick entry to the hearts, and the defense would get in with their $\clubsuit A$ and again have diamond winners to cash. So, declarer makes another fine play, he leads dummy's $\clubsuit K$! Now East has only losing options:

- He can take his $\clubsuit A$ and persist with diamonds, in which case dummy ruffs (with the ace!), trumps are drawn, and the $\clubsuit Q$ is an entry to dummy's hearts.
- He can take the $\clubsuit A$ and return a club (knocking out dummy's entry), in which case declarer can scamper home on a cross-ruff, scoring one heart, one club, and all eight of those trumps.
- He can duck the $\clubsuit A$, in which case it's another cross-ruff.

That was delicately timed, as drawing even a single round of trumps early in the play would be a mistake. Look what happens: diamond opening lead is ruffed, spade to declarer's king, $\heartsuit A$, heart to West's king, diamond ruff, $\heartsuit Q$ ruffed by West, $\clubsuit J$ covered by the king and ace, club to dummy's queen. Now declarer has an awkward guess ... if the remaining two enemy trumps are split then dummy's ace must be cashed before running the hearts ... but if East has both missing trumps (the actual case) then the hearts must be played first. It's better to avoid that guess!

Board 16

West Deals
E-W Vul

\spadesuit A 9 6 4		\spadesuit 7 5 2									
\heartsuit Q 10 9 6 3 2		\heartsuit 8 7 5									
\diamondsuit —		\diamondsuit A J 8 6									
\clubsuit K Q 3		\clubsuit A 5 2									
\spadesuit 8 3	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td style="background-color: #008000; color: white;"></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		\spadesuit K Q J 10
	N										
W		E									
	S										
\heartsuit K J		\heartsuit A 4									
\diamondsuit K Q 10 7 2		\diamondsuit 9 5 4 3									
\clubsuit J 10 9 6		\clubsuit 8 7 4									

West	North	East	South
Pass	1 \heartsuit	Pass	1 \spadesuit
Pass	2 \spadesuit	Pass	3 \spadesuit
Pass	4 \spadesuit	All pass	

4 \spadesuit by South

Lead: $\heartsuit K$