

Avoid Running

"Avoid running at all times."

– Satchel Paige

In today's deal three notrump would have been easy, as the cards lay. The final contract (five clubs) gave the defenders more than one chance to succeed.

The opening diamond lead was not a good idea. Dummy was surely short in diamonds, and South was known to have diamond strength, given the two-notrump rebid. So a trump lead would have been a better idea.

If South ruffs the opening diamond lead and drives out the heart ace after drawing a couple of trumps, East will return a spade and, with hearts breaking 4-2 and both spade honors offside, declarer is doomed.

Board 15

South Deals
N-S Vul

♠ J 10 6 3		♠ 5 2				
♥ K Q J 4		♥ A 10 9 8				
♦ —		♦ A 6 5 3 2				
♣ K Q J 5 2		♣ 7 3				
♠ K Q 8 7	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">E</td></tr> </table>	N	W	S	E	♠ A 9 4
N						
W						
S						
E						
♥ 6 2		♥ 7 5 3				
♦ J 10 9 8 7		♦ K Q 4				
♣ 6 4		♣ A 10 9 8				

West	North	East	South
Pass	1 ♥	Pass	1 ♣
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	1 NT
Pass	5 ♣	All pass	2 NT
Lead: ♦ J			

So how about discarding from dummy at trick one? Even if East wins and returns a spade, South wins the ace, draws trump, discards two more spades from dummy on the diamond K-Q, and winds up losing two red aces but no spades. But what if East doesn't rush to play the diamond ace at trick one, but instead ducks? Remarkably, the contract can no longer be made. South still has to lose two spades and one heart.

From declarer's point of view, it is definitely right to discard a spade from dummy at trick one with these combined spade and diamond holdings. Most Easts will grab the diamond ace, thinking they have just been given a gift. However, a strong East player who knows what you are up to will play low at the first trick, exchanging his diamond ace for two spade tricks. That is a play worth adding to your repertoire.