

The Necessary Overtrick

Vanessa Brown was one of many Canberra players who made the trip over the mountains to Bateman's Bay last weekend for their annual congress. During the pairs on Saturday, she found herself as declarer in five hearts with the following hand:

Contract: Five Hearts
Opening lead: Five of Spades

♠ Q
♥ A9752
♦ AQ75
♣ AQ5

♠ T8
♥ KQ643
♦ K93
♣ 987

The opponents, who had bid and agreed spades won the first trick with the King and then switched to the Six of Diamonds. Vanessa played the Three, Left Hand Opponent the Eight and she won with Dummy's Queen. She then drew trumps in two rounds (RHO had two, LHO had one). Rather cleverly, she also ruffed her final spade in dummy, setting the stage for a neat play later.

Cleverness aside, at this point Vanessa forgot she was in Five Hearts and thought she was in game and thus, only had to make ten tricks. She thought to herself "Well, I've lost a spade, I'm going to lose a club on the third round, I'll make eleven if the club finesse is onside, but even if it loses, my contract is safe. In fact, if Diamonds are three-three, I'll be able to throw a little club on the thirteenth diamond and the finesse will decide if I make eleven or twelve."

Testing the diamonds first, she played the Five of Diamonds to her King and the Nine back to her Ace, sadly discovering that they were not three-three, but that her Right Hand Opponent still had the Ten. This was also the point where she remembered that she wasn't merely in Four Hearts but that the opponents had pushed her to Five. That eleventh trick wasn't an overtrick at all! It seemed like the Club Finesse was actually going to decide whether she made her contract.

This was the position now:

♠ -
♥ 97
♦ 7
♣ AQ5

♠ -
♥ Q64
♦ -
♣ 987

Here many of us would shrug, ruff the Seven of Diamonds and then take the club finesse, making eleven if LHO had the King of Clubs and ten if RHO held the key card. Vanessa, however spotted a clever play known as an elimination endplay. Having prepared the way by ruffing her spade earlier, at this juncture, she led the Seven of Diamonds and when this was covered by the Ten, she declined to ruff and instead threw away her Seven of Clubs. (For those attending the current series of workshops on card-play this is an example of a loser-on-loser play; we are giving the opponents a trick they are not strictly entitled to but are simultaneously discarding a different loser they would otherwise have won later).

Here is the final position:

♠ -
♥ 97
♦ -
♣ AQ5

♠ -
♥ Q64
♦ -
♣ 98

RHO is on lead

The defenders have won the King of Spades and the Ten of Diamonds, but crucially the defender sitting *over* the Ace-Queen of Clubs is on lead. Whatever they choose to do now, the defence can take no more tricks. If they lead a Club, it gives declarer a free finesse, no matter who holds the King of Clubs. They have no more Diamonds or Hearts to lead. If they lead a Spade, Vanessa will throw her second Club loser away and ruff in Dummy, then cash the Ace of Clubs and only have trumps left in her hand.

Having endplayed her opponent, Vanessa was destined to score eleven tricks, *regardless of who held the King of Clubs*. Why take a fifty percent line when you can one hundred percent guarantee your contract?

Well played, Vanessa.