

Play Bridge With Paul

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In 1960, Terence Reese (generally regarded as the greatest British Bridge player of all time and, arguably, also the best Bridge writer of all time) wrote a book “Play Bridge With Reese”. It read as if I was looking over his shoulder and hearing his thoughts as he bid and played a series of hands from actual competition. It made a lasting impression on me and, in this lecture, I will imitate Reese for 6 hands taken from recent duplicate club play.

All hands have been rearranged so that I am sitting (and declaring) in the South position. In a few cases, some details in the actual bidding and play have been altered to better illustrate the lessons of the hands.

Hand #1

In first seat I held ♠AKQ762 ♥AQ84 ♦93 ♣6. This is a powerful 4 loser hand, although only 15 high card points. I opened 1S and partner made the meager response of 2S, showing a minimum hand (5 – 9 high card points) with at least 3 trumps. Since all he needs to have is, say, the J10 of hearts and an entry to dummy in spades for me to have a play for game, I closed the auction with 4 spades.

Here's the dummy and my hand

♠983
♥K72
♦Q82
♣J1072

♠AKQ762
♥AQ84
♦93
♣6

The opening lead was the ♣K and East signaled encouragement with the ♣9. West continued a low club and I ruffed East's A with the ♠2.

I would have to lose 2 diamonds in addition to the 1 club I had already lost. So, to make the contract I needed to win all my hearts. If trump split 2-2 that would be easy – even if the hearts did not split 3-3, I could ruff my last heart with dummy's third trump. So, I played two top spades and discovered that West began with 3 trumps to the J. Now it looked like I would have to hope for a 3-3 heart split (only about a 36% chance). Was there anything I could do to increase my chances? Yes, don't pull the last trump! Instead, play 3 rounds of hearts. If they split 3-3, pull the last round of trump and cash the 4th heart. If, however, they split 4-2 or worse, maybe West was the one with the length and I could ruff my 4th heart loser and come back to my hand by ruffing a club and then pull West's J of spades.

It turns out West held 4 hearts and, by not pulling all the trumps before playing hearts, the contract made. Here's the full hand. Note that East might have overcalled 2♠ with 3♦ if he were very aggressive and then the lead of the K♦ would have defeated 4 spades.:

	♠983	
	♥K72	
♠J54	♦Q82	♠10
♥J963	♣J1072	♥106
♦K4		♦AJ10765
♣KQ83		♣A954
	♠AKQ762	
	♥AQ84	
	♦93	
	♣6	

Bidding Points: A 4 loser hand with a trump fit is worth jumping to game even if it only has 15 high card points.

Play Points: When you need a suit to split 3-3 you may be able to improve your chances by not pulling all the outstanding trumps (including dummy's trumps) and trying to ruff the loser in dummy. You risk nothing, since the only time the

defender left with a trump can ruff is when the suit does not split and you would have a loser anyway.

Hand #2

I was in 4th seat after 3 passes holding ♠AK10876 ♥Q72 ♦8 ♣Q76. This is 11 HCP points opposite a passed hand partner. If I open 1S (which I would do in 1st, 2nd or 3rd seat), the opponents might find a good diamond fit, or even a heart fit. But with such a nice spade suit it would be very pessimistic to pass.

There is a solution for this situation: Open 2♠. **This is not a weak 2-bid!** The way many experts play it, you are showing about 10 to 14 high card points (HCP) and a good 6 card suit. It is hard for the opponents to come in and partner can make a game try with a fit and a very good passed hand. A standard weak 2 bid is used to preempt the opponents who may have the balance of high card points. There is no reason to pre-empt when you can just pass the hand out.

The hand was passed out at 2♠ and the opening lead was the K♦. Here's what I was looking at (defenders hands shown but assumed "invisible" to declarer:

	♠54	
	♥AK106	
♠9	♦Q10875	♠QJ32
♥J954	♣J10	♥63
♦AKJ3		♦642
♣6432	♠AK10876	♣AK98
	♥Q72	
	♦8	
	♣Q76	

East played the 2♦ to trick 1 and West switched to the 6 of clubs. East took the K and the A of clubs and led the 6 of diamonds. I ruffed and lay down the A♠. When West played the 9♠, I could play him for the J9♠ or the Q9♠ or I could go to dummy with a heart and play a spade to the 10. The latter is a **safety play** and loses nothing if spades split, but gains a trick if East has all the remaining spades. Since East did hold the ♠QJ32, the safety play saved a trick and I made 3♠.

Bidding Points: You and partner should discuss what an opening "weak" 2 bid means in 4th seat. Some play as described here, but only for the majors. Others play all suits are strong 2-bids in 4th position.

Play Points: Look for safety plays – especially those that don't cost but can help!

Hand #3

I held ♠A93 ♥A942 ♦865 ♣A94 in first position. Too good to pass with 3 aces, so I opened 1 club. West jumped to 2♥ and partner doubled. I had no other bid than 2NT and partner raised to 3NT. The K♥ was led and I viewed dummy:

	♠K1085	
	♥106	
♠J742	♦A10	♠Q6
♥KQJ873	♣KQ1062	♥5
♦94		♦KQJ732
♣7	♠A93	♣J853
	♥A942	
	♦865	
	♣A94	

I won the A♥ and could count 9 tricks if clubs split 3-2. I didn't want to risk losing to a doubleton J in West's hand so I played the A and 4 of clubs, getting the news that I should have gone to dummy first and finessed the 9 of clubs. I continued clubs and lost the 4th round, West pitching 2 hearts and a diamond. East then led the K♦, which I ducked, followed by a low diamond to dummy's A (West showing out). I cashed the last club and West was clearly down to QJ♥ and 3 spades. I knew then that he had started with 4 spades, 6 hearts, 2 diamonds and a club. This was the ending:

	♠K1085	
	♥10	
	♦-	
♠Jxx	♣-	♠Qx
♥QJ		♥-
♦-	♠A9	♦QJ10
♣-	♥942	♣-
	♦-	
	♣-	

A lead of the 10 of hearts left West with nothing better to do than cash both hearts and give up the last 3 tricks.

Bidding Points: Three aces and a flat hand is a marginal opener too good to pass.

Play Points: Count opponents hands and try to make them the ones to play a suit like the spade suit where the side that leads the suit loses a trick ("Frozen" suit).

Hand #4

I held ♠J8 ♥K962 ♦A864 ♣AK4 in first position and opened 1NT. Partner transferred to spades and bid 3NT, which I passed. The 3♥ was led and I saw the following dummy:

	♠KQ765	
	♥A8	
♠A32	♦K1053	♠1084
♥J1053	♣Q6	♥Q74
♦QJ2		♦97
♣873	♠J8	♣J10952
	♥K962	
	♦A864	
	♣AK4	

I played the 8, East played the Q and I had my first decision to make. Should I duck? From the lead, West probably had 4 hearts headed by the J. If East held 4 spades to the A9 or A10 and did not also hold the 10 of hearts, I would be held to 9 tricks if I won the heart and 10 if I ducked. But if spades were 3-3, I had 11 tricks with possibilities of 12 only if I won the first trick. Also, ducking would not matter if West held 4 spades or if East had Q10x and the suit was blocked (because I held the 9 fourth). So, it seemed right to be optimistic (especially playing match points) and win the first trick and lead the J♠.

The A♠ in West's hand won and played another heart won by dummy's A. Both defender followed to the K and Q of spades so I had 11 top tricks and was looking for a 12th one. Here's the layout after 2 hearts and 5 spades have been played:

	♠ -	
	♥ -	
♠-	♦K1053	♠ -
♥J10	♣Q6	♥-
♦QJ2		♦97
♣8	♠ -	♣J1095
	♥9	
	♦A8	
	♣AK4	

On 3 rounds of clubs West must pitch either both hearts or a heart and a diamond. Either way, all the rest of the tricks were mine by just looking to see if the 9♥ was good and, if not, playing three rounds of diamonds. It's easy to see that the squeeze will work whenever West has any 3 or more diamonds.

Playing Points: Ducking a trick in NT may not be advisable in a duplicate game when there are possibilities to make many tricks if your long suit splits and there are several holdings where ducking would not help anyway when your long suit doesn't split. Here, a duck at trick 1 would have held me to 11 tricks. Whenever I can count winners up to all but one of the remaining tricks, I hope for a squeeze or a defensive mistake in discarding to make all of the tricks - often it will happen automatically without my having to do anything but play my winners in the right order and watch for other cards to become winners. **Don't automatically duck when you have just 1 stopper!**

Hand #5:

With nobody vulnerable, my left hand opponent opened 2♠ and my partner bid 2NT. East then bid 3♦. I held ♠Q106 ♥AQ9754 ♦9 ♣984 and bid 4♥ ending the auction.

The J♦ was led and I viewed dummy:

	♠A9	
	♥63	
♠KJ8532	♦AK6	♠74
♥J10	♣AK7652	♥K82
♦J		♦Q10876432
♣QJ103		♣ -
	♠Q106	
	♥AQ9754	
	♦9	
	♣984	

Partner had a difficult bid over 2♠ and felt it was too good (5 losers, 18 HCP) to just overcall 3 clubs and the wrong shape to double. Bidding 2NT was perhaps the best choice among evils. The other unusual aspect to the auction was both opponents bidding when they only had 14 high card points between them.

After winning the A♦, I considered how to play the trump suit. First I noted that there was no way to avoid at least 1 loser and it was possible to lose 2 or 3 trump tricks – especially if I finessed and lost to the K which might be a singleton. In situations like this it is often best to not finesse on the first round – instead lead the A and then lead up to the Q and try to decide whether to duck or play the Q. This way of playing the suit can be especially rewarding if West has a singleton K of trumps.

After playing to the ♥A at trick 2 and seeing the 10 fall from West, I tried to return to dummy with a club to lead a second heart. West played the ♣10 and East ruffed dummy's ♣K. I pitched a spade on the diamond return and sadly watched as West ruffed with the heart J. My ♣A was ruffed by East's ♥K and East led another diamond, hoping to find partner with a 3rd trump (a critical mistake, it turns out).

I pitched my last club on the diamond won in dummy and played a heart to hand (all opponent trumps were gone and I had lost 3 trump tricks!!).

Unfortunately, I now knew why East, with less than 6 points, risked a 3♦ bid. I was regretting my safety play of the trump suit. A simple finesse would have held the losers to 1. But the way was clear to at least make my contract. All that was needed was for West to hold the ♠K and he almost certainly had this card for his weak 2-bid. I played out all my trumps, coming down to the Q10 of spades in my hand. On the last trump, dummy had the 7♣ and the A9♠ and West had to either un-guard the club or the ♠K.

Bidding Points: The weak 2-bid by West gave North a difficult bidding problem which he solved by aggressively bidding 2NT without a heart stopper and with only 1 spade stopper. East's bid of 3D often is based on spade support and a suggestion of what to lead if the opponents play the hand. In this case, however, it was based on an 8 card suit

Play Points: Despite the fact that it did not work out well on this hand, when you have to lose at least one trump trick, it is often best to play the A first and then lead up to the Q (holding AQ in the same hand).

Hand #6

With both sides Vul and 2 passes, I opened 3rd hand with a good 1 spade bid holding ♠KJ1096 ♥QJ2 ♦A104 ♣K3. West bid 2♥ and partner made a game try in spades by bidding 3♥. I closed out the auction with 4♠. West led the A♥.

	♠A852	
	♥K105	
♠7	♦K982	♠Q43
♥A8643	♣J2	♥97
♦Q76		♦J53
♣A1094	♠KJ1096	♣Q8765
	♥OJ2	
	♦A104	
	♣K3	

West continued with the A♣, helping me in that (“frozen” as the cards lie) suit, and then led a small heart, followed by East, and won by my Q.

I had a possible trump loser and unless the Q and J of diamonds were doubleton, I would lose a diamond trick (if I had to play the suit). Should I take the trump finesse playing East for the Q third? If it lost and another heart was played, I would surely go down. Could I make the hand if I played the A and K of spades and the Q did not fall? Yes – I could cash the K♣ and my last heart and throw the defender who has the Q♠ in with a trump forcing either a diamond lead or a ruff and a sluff! As long as the diamond honors are split (highly likely), if a defender leads the suit, my loser will vanish after winning over an honor and then finessing.

Note that playing the hand this way works for any 2-2 or 3-1 spade split and taking the spade finesse against the right opponent does not gain you a trick. Also, it does East no good to ruff the third heart as long as you play the K♣ after two trumps and then cash the heart.

Bidding Points: When partner opens or overcalls and the next opponent bids, use a cue bid, if there is room, to show support and at least invitational values.

Play Points: Avoid leading frozen suits – instead, look for ways to force the defense to lead them. Playing the A and K from a 9 card trump fit is the usual percentage play and cannot lose when you can set up an endplay when the suit doesn’t split 2-2. Be sure to cash all possible safe exit cards a defender might have before throwing him in.