



Don't Make Choices That Give You Bad Boards

Andrew's Tip: Make choices that reward you with a good board even when you make the wrong choice.

HEADS I win, Tails you lose. That's a good game to play!

Iain Climie reports this instructive and very typical pairs decision. All his bridge instincts told him to take a finesse, yet he played for the drop. His instincts were right (as so often), yet his play was logical, correct and netted him an 80% board . . .

N/S Game. Dealer West.

♠ Void
♥ A Q J 8 4
♦ A 10 7 3 2
♣ J 9 6

♠ Q J 10 9 6 2
♥ 9 7
♦ 9
♣ A K Q 4

♠ A K 5 3
♥ 10 2
♦ Q 6 5
♣ 7 5 3 2

♠ 8 7 4
♥ K 6 5 3
♦ K J 8 4
♣ 10 8

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♠ ¹	3♠	4♥
4♣	5♥ ²	Pass	Pass
Dble ³	All Pass		

¹ Michaels, showing 5-5 in hearts and an unspecified minor.

² On the strength of the void spade. Still a marginal decision at adverse vulnerability, given his poorish minors.

³ Not quite sure where West got this double from. With dummy about to table a big red two-suiter, West can't really double 7♥ let alone 5♥.

Climie, South, saw West try to cash his three top clubs. He ruffed the third, drew trumps (splitting 2-2) and had to pick up diamonds to chalk up +850. He crossed to the (nine and) ace of diamonds and led back a second diamond, East playing low. Decision time.

At either teams or rubber, declarer would think along the following lines: 'West's 4♠ bid suggests he does not have two losers in both red suits; he is more likely to be shapely with a singleton diamond: finesse!'

At pairs, declarer thinks along entirely different lines: 'If I finesse and lose to West's queen, I have a very bad score, because 4♠ would not be making (losing four red-suit tricks) and I have taken a phantom sacrifice. On the other hand, if I play for the drop (rising with the ace) and that is wrong because West discards, I am nonetheless getting a good result for 5♥ doubled down one, because many Wests will be allowed to play in 4♠, which will (under those circumstances, i.e. West with just three red cards) make.'

Climie duly rose with the king of diamonds, losing 200 (when West discarded) instead of collecting +850 (which he would have earned by finessing).

Mildly disappointing – yes. But at pairs, not very disappointing, because the traveller revealed the expected row of East-West +420s. Losing 200 scored 80%. Funny old game, pairs.

Here is the flip side:

Love All.

♠ K 6
♥ K 2
♦ 9 7 5 3 2
♣ J 9 6 3

♠ A Q 10 5 3 2
♥ A 3
♦ 8 4
♣ 10 8 4

East-West bid up to 4♥ and you as South unilaterally (and dubiously) bid 4♠ which is doubled. How do you play on an opening heart lead?

The point is this: most East-Wests will be playing in 4♥. Because you clearly cannot make 4♠, your only hope of a good match-point result is for 4♥ to make (as well as, naturally, 4♠ doubled going for less than the value of 4♥). If the opposing spades are 3-2, you have made a phantom sacrifice and are booked for a (near) bottom whatever you do. So don't worry about that. You must assume that 4♥ is making, which means spades are 4-1. After winning the heart lead, you cross to the king of spades and lead a spade back (East playing low) to your . . . ten.

If West wins the jack (or indeed follows low), you've a mouldy result – which you lost in the bidding. However, if West discards on the second spade, you can thank your lucky stars: 4♥ is making and you needed to finesse to escape with minus 300.

In other words: it is no use making a choice that will get you a bad board even if you make the right choice. □

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