

March 20, 2021

Bridge with Richard Ward

In bridge, a 'Morton's fork' play creates a dilemma for the defence, offering two choices which are both equally undesirable. The term is named after John Morton (1420-1500), Archbishop of Canterbury, who is believed to have developed a method of levying forced loans by arguing that those who were obviously rich could afford to pay, and those who lived frugally must have amassed savings.

NORTH		
♠ A		W/ NIL VUL
♥ A K 3		
♦ K J 8 5 3		
♣ Q J 9 6		
WEST		EAST
♠ Q J 10 9 6 4		♠ 7 2
♥ J 10 2		♥ 8 7 6 4
♦ A 6		♦ 10 9 7 4
♣ A 4		♣ 8' 3 2
SOUTH		
♠ K 8 5 3		
♥ Q 9 5		
♦ Q 2		
♣ K 10 7 5		

West opens 1S and North-South reach 3NT played by South on the lead of the queen of spades. It might seem that West, holding both minor suit aces, should be able to establish the spade suit before South can take nine tricks. But declarer, knowing that West must hold both aces can counter by crossing to the queen of hearts and leading a low diamond towards dummy – a 'Morton's fork'. If West rises with the ace, declarer will make 2 spades, 3 hearts and 4 diamonds. If he ducks, declarer will switch back to clubs – 2 spades, 3 hearts, 1 diamond and 3 clubs.

NORTH		
♠ -		N/ EW VUL
♥ K 4		
♦ J 10 8 6 3 2		
♣ 9 7 6 4 2		
WEST		EAST
♠ 9 8 7 5 3 2		♠ K Q J 10 6
♥ 9 7 6 3		♥ A 10 8
♦ 5		♦ Q 7
♣ Q 3		♣ J 10 8
SOUTH		
♠ A 4		
♥ Q J 5 2		
♦ A K 9 4		
♣ A K 5		

Similarly, when South is declarer in 6D [via PASS – 1S – DBL – 4S – 4NT - PASS – 6D], she ruffs the opening spade lead, draws trumps in two rounds, crosses to the jack of diamonds and leads a small heart away from the king. If East rises with the ace, declarer can throw three of dummy's club losers away. If East plays low, declarer wins and throws the king of hearts on the ace of spades – losing just one club.
