

The dummy reversal

One evening at my local bridge club, I picked up ♠A32 ♥AK432 ♦432 ♣AK as East, and opened 1♥ in the third seat. The bidding proceeded:

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	1♥	Pass
1♠	Pass	2NT	Pass
3♣	Pass	3♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Unhappy as I was to have my contract stolen – and by my own partner no less! – I obediently put down the dummy when North led the ♠Q, and sat back in my chair. It had been a stressful week: clients from a real estate deal in Hong Kong were getting antsy to close, Liz had taken the kids to her mother’s for the weekend, leaving nothing but a vaguely passive aggressive post-it note, all while my personal assistant had been on vacation in Morocco. Granted, diplomacy had never been my strong suit, but I was starting to suspect a conspiracy.

So perhaps I could welcome a moment’s respite. As luck would have it, my paranoia was confirmed when partner uttered a lame excuse about a family emergency and scuttled away to make a phone call, leaving me to play the hand so as not to incur the wrath of the director upon realizing we had to play a late board. Here is what I had to deal with (now sitting West):

♠ K7654	W E	♠ A32
♥ 5		♥ AK432
♦ K54		♦ Q32
♣ J432		♣ AK

We may as well assume the spades are breaking, since otherwise two spade losers and two diamonds will be enough to hang us. (The astute reader will note that we could bank on two diamond tricks coming home, but that is an unnecessary long shot.) Even still, the spade lead seems to spell doom: we needed both little spades to ruff our club losers! We might get away with one club ruff, but unless the ♣Q drops, the opponents will take a club, two diamonds and a spade.

Having read the title of this column, I decided

to embark on a dummy reversal. After winning the spade lead, I played the ♦K, losing to North’s ace, who returned a spade to my ace. I followed with the ♥A and a heart ruff, ♣A and another heart ruff, and finally the ♣K and a third heart ruff, leaving

♠ —	W E	♠ 3
♥ —		♥ K
♦ 54		♦ Q3
♣ J4		♣ —

This is the position with only 2 more tricks to collect (we have only lost the ♦A). We now cash our red suit tricks: assuming the spades split 3-2, there will be one trump remaining, so either the ♥K and ♦Q both hold, giving us 10 tricks, or an opponent ruffs one of them, setting up our small spade.

The breakdown: we didn’t have the timing to take care of our losers in hand, so we chose to play dummy’s hand as the master hand. For the beginner, ruffing dummy’s cards isn’t supposed to help: only losers in the master hand matter. Advanced declarers count winners, not losers: in this hand, the dummy reversal line of play can see two spades, five hearts, two clubs and a diamond (10), while the ‘usual’ line has four spade tricks, two hearts, one diamond, and two clubs (9).

When my partner returned to the table, I proudly told him of my success with the dummy reversal. He was not impressed: ‘Don’t be stupid. Just because the dummy had to take over for declarer doesn’t make it a dummy reversal.’ Not receiving any assistance from my opponents, who were discussing the advantages of trump leads, I emitted the loudest sigh I could muster and prepared to move for the next round.

See if you can figure out the winning line on this hand:

♠ A75	W E	♠ J82
♥ AKQ103		♥ J987
♦ 2		♦ A743
♣ AKQ3		♣ 92

The contract is 6♥, and North leads the ♦K.