

Play of the Hand 202, with Marshall Miles

Lesson 1 - Assumptions

SAMPLE First 4 pages of 12 pages

Matt Granovetter: Welcome to Miles' Play-of-the-Hand course. If you have any questions, please email me at: mattg@bridgetoday.com. Marshall Miles was a great player and writer. His first book, All 52 Cards, has become a classic. Now over to the master...

Miles: I hope you enjoy the course and I feel confident that you will get a lot out of it. Let's begin with a simple idea: making your contract. At matchpoints, it occasionally pays to give up on making a hand and to play for down one. This is only true when the contract is perfectly normal and the chances of making the contract are very remote. But at any other form of scoring, unless the contract is doubled, it almost always pays to make your contract (or to set the contract when you are defending). When declarer fails to try for his contract, it is usually because he just got discouraged and gave up or because he was too lazy to figure out a possible holding that would allow him to make it - not because he figured the odds and decided that, in the long run, he would come out ahead by playing safe for down one.

AQ842

K98

95

K62

5

QJ107643

A7

AQJ

West leads the queen of diamonds against your 6H contract, and East gives an encouraging signal. I can't imagine why anyone would fail to win and take the spade finesse to get rid of the losing diamond. Now suppose South's hand is the same, but North has HA98 instead of HK98. Now you should lead the queen of hearts (hoping West will be foolish enough to cover, even if he doesn't have to), but play the ace whatever West does. You might drop the stiff king offside and, if not, you can return to your hand with a club to take the spade finesse. This way you have better than an even chance of making your contract. The spade finesse is as likely to work as the trump finesse, and you have the additional chance of dropping the singleton king of hearts.

AQ106
A8
10643
K62

5
KQ10964
A75
AQJ

Again West leads the queen of diamonds. You win and lead a heart to the ace and return a heart, East showing out (lets assume he discards a club). With a sure trump loser, you need lots of luck in spades. You want West to hold SKJx. However, a trick is a trick, and there is no purpose in taking an unnecessary risk. Lead a spade to the queen (not the ten), then cash the ace (discarding a diamond), and ruff a spade. If West had SKJx, your ten will afford a discard of your last diamond while West is ruffing with his natural trump trick. And with this line of play you will be down one, rather than down two, when West has the king of spades, but not the jack.

It pays to assume the cards are such that you can make your contract. But the more assumptions you make, the less likely that they will all be favorable. In other words, the fewer assumptions you make, the better your chances.

AQJ1076
A8
1075
K4

4
KQJ1063
A842
AQ

Again your contract is 6H, and the opponents make the only lead that can give you a problem—a diamond. After winning and drawing trumps, there are two possible lines of play. You can lead a spade to the queen, cash the ace, and ruff a spade. Or you can lead a spade to the ace and return the queen for a ruffing finesse. Which do you choose? You should choose the ruffing finesse. It will win any time East has the king of spades, regardless of length. (It will also win when West has a singleton diamond.) The first line of play will work when West has K, Kx, or Kxx of spades, but not when he has four or five spades. (If he had six spades, East, with a void, probably would have doubled for a spade lead.) Your assumption that the king will be with East requires no additional assumptions about distribution, so it is the better assumption to make.

864
K5
KQ76542
10

AK5
QJ7
83
AQ654

You open 1NT and partner raises to 3NT. West leads the four of hearts, East play the nine and you win with the queen or jack. With any other lead, you would have a fighting chance to make this contact, but it looks pretty hopeless now. You lead a low diamond and West plays the ten. Even the weakest opponents will know they should duck with the doubleton ace. Since the opening lead has ruined your only chance to use the king of hearts as an entry, you should duck, hoping West has DJ109 and East the singleton ace! At matchpoints, I would play an honor, but at IMPs or rubber bridge I think you should try to make it. The odds are not as bad as you might think. True, most of the time ducking will lose 50 or 100 points (compared to 500 or 800 points you might gain if you make it, since those who don't try to make it will probably be down two). At IMPs it looks as though you have 11 to 13 IMPs to gain vs 2 or 3 IMPs to lose. But there is another factor (at IMPs). Not everyone will be in your shoes. Some declarers may get a different lead, and if they are making game, your additional undertrick may cost nothing or at most 1 IMP. And, while I approve of North's bid, some players would make an invitational bid in diamonds which your hand would reject based on the lack of diamond fit. If your teammates are -130 or -150, you are bound to lose 6-8 IMPs if you "play safe" for the fewest undertricks, while if you make it you gain 6-10 imps instead of losing a similar amount. One or two more IMPs for trying to make it is a drop in the bucket compared to what you will gain if you make it.

	952	
	K32	
	AQ84	
	875	
1074		AKJ83
108		74
J9753		K10
J103		Q962
	Q6	
	AQJ965	
	62	
	AK4	

West	North	East	South
—	—	1S	2H
pass	3H	pass	4H
(all pass)			

West leads the four of spades. East wins the top spades and leads the jack. You noted that West has played up the line, so you ruff with the nine, rather than an honor. While I have been emphasizing the importance of trying to make contracts and assuming the cards lie favorably, it doesn't hurt to pay attention to the bidding and to make your assumptions realistic. I suppose East could have an opening bid of sorts, without the king of diamonds, if he had all the missing jacks. But when the odds are so great against the diamond finesse working, you should see if another assumption would be more realistic. Playing East for the doubleton king of diamonds gives you a much better chance. So, after drawing trumps, you duck a diamond completely. Next round your ace picks up his king and allows you to discard your losing club.