

Bridge Today Digest - Online

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To Ruff or Not to Ruff . . .

Difficult Card Play Dept.

Here's a hand from Martin Hoffman. How would you play 6♥?

West dealer
All vul

North
♠ K 7 2
♥ 9 6 5
♦ K 7 3
♣ Q 10 6 2

South
♠ —
♥ A K Q J 7 2
♦ A Q 5 4 2
♣ A 9

West leads the ♠5. You ruff East's queen and play two high hearts, West discarding a spade on the second round. Now what?

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1 ♠	double
3 ♠	pass	pass	5 ♥
pass	6 ♥	(all pass)	

Before drawing a third trump, you must test diamonds (you may need dummy's third trump for a diamond ruff). In which order should you play the diamonds?

———Solution———

In real life, declarer played the ace of diamonds and a diamond to the king. This was the whole hand:

North	
♠	K 7 2
♥	9 6 5
♦	K 7 3
♣	Q 10 6 2
West	East
♠	J 8 6 5
♥	3
♦	J 10 9 6
♣	J 8 5 3
South	
♠	—
♥	A K Q J 7 2
♦	A Q 5 4 2
♣	A 9

When South played a diamond to the king, East made a very fine play — he did not ruff the diamond and instead pitched a spade. Notice that if East ruffs the DK, he is endplayed and must give declarer either a spade or a club trick.

Declarer now played a third round of diamonds to his queen, but when he ruffed his diamond loser on the fourth round, East was able to overruff and exit with the ♠A. Declarer ruffed but was not able to reach dummy to cash the ♠K, and he went down.

Martin Hoffman points out that if declarer begins with the ace-queen of diamonds, East has no answer. Do you see why? (This is very difficult!)

If East ruffs, he's endplayed as before, so he pitches a spade. Declarer continues with a third diamond to dummy's king. Again, East must discard. Now declarer ruffs a spade, and plays his fourth diamond. West plays the jack and declarer throws away dummy's remaining spade! Now West is endplayed, and must give a ruff-and-sluff (dummy still has a trump), or break clubs, which declarer will not misguess because of the bidding.

Here's a hand from the wonderful new David Bird book, "Having Nun, Partner?" (Finesse Bridge Books, 2000, available from your favorite bridge supply house):

Matchpoints
 North dealer
 All vul

♠ J 9 3
 ♥ A J 2
 ♦ A K 5
 ♣ A J 7 4

♠ K 4
 ♥ Q 9 8 7 3
 ♦ J 6 3 2
 ♣ K 6

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

♠ 10 6 5
 ♥ K 10 5 4
 ♦ Q 7 4
 ♣ 8 5 2

West	North	East	South
Sister	Sister	Mother of	Sister
Thomas	Carol	Discipline	Colleen
—	1 ♣	1 ♠	pass
pass	double	pass	2 ♥
double	(all pass)		

Sister Colleen, a pale-faced novice from County Cork, had a close decision on the second round of the auction. Should she bid 2♣ or 2♥? Partner's reopening double suggested four cards in hearts and she opted eventually for the higher-scoring contract.

Sister Colleen regretted her decision when she heard a sharp double on her left. There was no further bidding and West led the king of spades. The defenders scored three tricks in the suit, Sister Thomas discarding a diamond on the third round. Declarer won the diamond switch with the queen and took a successful finesse of dummy's jack of trumps. The ace of trumps brought less good news, East showing out.

Sister Colleen looked apologetically at her partner. It seemed that she would lose two club tricks and two trump tricks, in addition to the three spade tricks already lost. "Sorry, partner," she said. "I'm afraid this is going to be a bad one."

Two more diamond winners stood up, leaving this end position:

Sr. Carol
♠ —
♥ 2
♦ —
♣ A J 7 4

Sr. Thomas
♠ —
♥ Q 9 8
♦ —
♣ K 6

M. of Discipline
♠ 8
♥ —
♦ —
♣ Q 10 9 3

Sr. Colleen
♠ —
♥ K 10
♦ —
♣ 8 5 2

"Ace of clubs, please," said Sister Colleen.

Sister Thomas peered down her nose at this card, eventually unblocking the club king. It brought her little relief. Declarer exited with a club, won by East's ten. When the Mother of Discipline played another club winner, Sister Thomas had to ruff her partner's trick. The trump return into South's tenace gave the young declarer the last two tricks and the contract was made. [Sister Colleen took four heart tricks, three diamonds and the ace of clubs.]

"Bad luck, partner," said Sister Carol. "Most unfortunate trump break. How many down were you?"

Sister Colleen was unsure of the correct etiquette in this situation. It was surely against Convent regulations to make a doubled contract against the Mother of Discipline. "I lost count of the tricks," she replied. "One down, was it, Reverend Mother?"

"There are many unscrupulous characters in this world who would take advantage of a concession like that," replied the Mother of Discipline. "You made eight tricks. That's plus 670."

Sister Carol opened the scoresheet and wrote down the score in the laborious copper-plate handwriting that was compulsory for members of the novitiate. "It's quite a good one for us," she announced.

"I don't think my doubled can be faulted, Reverend Mother," said Sister Thomas stiffly. "I had to try for the 200 and you had very little for your overcall. How many points did you have, in fact?"

"Points?" exclaimed the Mother of Discipline. "What relevance are points when you have a chance to call One Spade over One Club?"

A subdued Sister Thomas sat back in her chair. "Minus 110 would have been bad for us anyway," she said.

"There was nothing wrong with the bidding," declared the Mother of Discipline. "It was the defense that went wrong. When you ruffed my queen of clubs you had to give them a trick with your return."

Sister Thomas gritted her teeth. It was typical of the MD to state the blindingly obvious. What alternative to ruffing was there when you had nothing but trumps in your hand?

"You ruffed the wrong winner," continued the Mother of Discipline. "You should have ruffed my ace of spades at Trick 3! Then you can exit peacefully and still come to your queen of trumps in the endgame."

The Mother of Discipline turned toward Sister Colleen. "Do you follow what I'm talking about?" she said. "Sister Thomas was blessed with the opportunity to make an extremely rare play — a Grand Coup by a defender at Trick 3."

"Yes, I see, Reverend Mother," replied Sister Colleen, who had not understood one word of the analysis.

The Mother of Discipline looked severely across the table. "There you are," she said. "It was obvious to the merest novice!"

See you next time!