

Bridge Yesterday A Vienna Coup

I frequently go over to visit my friend (and sometime partner) Lewis Barnett to thumb through his huge collection of old bridge magazines, including *Bridge World* back to year one. On a recent browsing expedition I was struck by the relative lack of sophistication of the analyses of yesteryear compared to those of today. Here is a good example, but it's not from Lewis's collection. Rather it's a hand I played in a sectional tournament in Amsterdam, New York back in 1954. The tournament director (I believe his name was Ed Cheronnet) liked the hand so much that he passed it on to Florence Osborn, bridge editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, who used it in her daily column.

A53
KQ10
762
KJ63

10962
75
J1093
752

KQ84
AJ8643
85
10

J7
92
AKQ4
AQ984

(NS were vulnerable.) Sitting South I opened one club which my partner raised to three--a 1954 bid, but certainly effective in this case! East chanced a three-heart overcall (today she might have tried a non-vulnerable four hearts, which would have made the auction much more difficult for us). Over the actual three-heart call, I bid four diamonds, partner cued four hearts and I put it in six clubs.

West led the heart seven; East topped the king with her ace and after some thought shifted to a diamond. The cards made a spade-heart

squeeze against East look possible, although there's also that fourth diamond to worry about. After the ace and king of clubs revealed the three-one break I played off three rounds of diamonds and happily West, who held the last trump, had to follow suit. After ruffing the fourth diamond in dummy, I cashed the spade ace and returned to my hand with a trump. The last trump then squeezed East.

A nicely played hand, if I do say so myself. The unblocking play of the ace of spades is known as the "Vienna Coup" in the bridge literature; it converts a positional squeeze, which would work only against West, to an "automatic squeeze," i.e. one which works against either opponent. But it's crucial to play the diamonds before drawing the third round of trumps; otherwise there's no entry back to the closed hand to play the last club, the squeeze card.

I was so pleased with Florence Osborn's accolades on my play that it was some time before I realized that East had blown the defense at trick one by not ducking! Usually (but not always) a squeeze works only if declarer can take all but one of the remaining tricks; losing a trick or tricks to arrive at such a position is called "rectifying the count." Frequently defenders can defend against a squeeze position by refusing to help declarer rectify, and this was just such a case. There's just no play for the contract if East ducks the heart lead. Since "MUD" leads were popular in those days (middle from three) East may have been worried that I had a singleton heart and six clubs, but then I would have ducked the heart lead and later ruffed out the ace to provide a discard for my losing spade. Today most players lead third best from three so there would be no problem reading the lead as a doubleton (or singleton. But if declarer held three hearts he was dead from the get-go.) Note that if I had held the Qx of spades rather than Jx I can always make the hand, even after the duck, on a throw-in. And if I had held the QJ, I might have opted for the simple finesse instead of the squeeze. But perhaps not. One of my long-ago partners, the legendary Jack Hancock, advised me that if given a choice between two equally promising lines of play I should always choose the more elegant. How else to make the newspapers?

And why didn't East double the slam, telling partner not to lead a heart? And why didn't West lead a spade anyway when East failed to double the four-heart cue bid? East, who was actually a very fine

player, perhaps felt that her failure to double four hearts was an adequate lead indicator. A double of the final bid, calling for an "unusual lead" could then conceivably ask for a heart lead after all.

In retrospect, I think that East played too fast to trick one, and realized a split second too late that she should have ducked the opening lead. She can now easily visualize the end position. After four rounds of hearts and five rounds of clubs, East will be down to K of spades and Jx of hearts. Her only hope is that declarer will have forgotten to make the Vienna coup play of unblocking the spade ace from dummy. *That must be the reason she returned a diamond at trick two, instead of the obvious King of spades; why make it easy for declarer to make the right play?* If the spade king is returned at trick two, East will have to hope that her partner holds the spade Jack.

Today the declarer play might be considered so routine as not to merit comment in a bridge column. The ducking play in hearts would probably be discussed at length, and there might be some dispute as to the proper way for East to coax a spade lead from partner. This is simply a reflection of how much bridge has improved in the past 50 years.