

THE SHEINWOLD COUP

by
Paul Zweifel
Blacksburg, VA

Suppose that you're defending a contract of four spades and that at a certain point in the play you hold a small trump and a bunch of other, worthless cards. (Your partner has shown out of spades.) Declarer is in dummy for the last time. Dummy has no more trumps, but does hold, among other cards, the 10 and two of hearts, all of the other hearts having been played. Declarer now calls for a low heart from dummy. The essence of the Sheinwold coup is that you, the defender, are psychologically oriented to the fact that declarer is going to ruff the two of hearts, so you discard instead of ruffing. Declarer thereupon discards his losing club, enters his hand by ruffing the ten of hearts, and draws your last trump.

If on the other hand declarer had called for the ten of hearts instead of a "low heart" you would have been alerted, and would have trumped the trick yourself to prevent the discard. Eventually declarer would have lost that club to your partner and gone down one. This coup might not work in the Blue Ribbon Pairs (but don't bet on it); however it's amazing how often it *does* work.

An article in a recent ACBL *Bridge Bulletin* has motivated me to tell my own Sheinwold coup story, one I've been concealing for forty years. (The hand occurred in Ann Arbor, and my partner, Zeke Jabbour, was declarer.) The *Bulletin* article in question is an interview of Zia by Barry Rigal (March 2001, p. 64). In the course of this interview Zia mentions that Rita Shugart waived a penalty against him and his partner Michael Rosenberg when Michael made a mechanical error, playing the ace of diamonds on the king of hearts--he thought Rita had played the king of diamonds. Zia goes on to say "It seems to me to be a major flaw in the laws of the game when an obvious mishearing or mechanical mistake cannot be corrected without penalty. To my mind it is the obsession with winning at all costs that blinds some of the experts' minds to the fact that this approach will ultimately kill the game..."

I wonder what Zia would say about this hand, declared by Zeke:

A2
63
Q5432
9762

87
KJ54
86
Q10832

964
Q10872
AK7
J5

KQJ1053
A9
J109
AK

Opening lead: 8 of diamonds.

Zeke and I got to four spades pretty fast, a contract which became marginal when the opponents took the first three tricks, A, K of diamonds and a diamond ruff. The legitimate chance for the contract is that West hold three spades, in which case trumps can be drawn with the King and Ace and a heart discard taken on a diamond. But on the actual layout the only hope is the Sheinwold coup. After winning the club shift at trick four and playing King, Ace of spades, Zeke calls for a "small diamond" from dummy and when East carelessly discards, Zeke is able to get rid of his losing heart. The only trouble was that under the ace of spades East accidentally dropped the spade nine on the table while he was playing the four! "Oh, I'm sorry," he said. "I guess this is a penalty card," indicating the nine of spades.

Well, so much for the Sheinwold coup. When Zeke calls a "small diamond" from dummy, East will be *penalized* into making the correct play! But *I* was up to the challenge. Having carefully followed the play from my dummy seat and realizing that the Sheinwold coup would probably be necessary, I turned to East and gave him the old Shugart routine. I told him to pick up the penalty card, that we were waiving the penalty. "We don't want to win that way," I assured him. (I realized of course that if *declarer* were to waive the penalty East might well smell a rat and leave the penalty card on the table. But who would ever suspect dummy?)

"Why thank you," East gushed. "You fellows are real gentlemen." He picked up the penalty card, and Zeke executed the Sheinwold coup forthwith, bringing in yet another hopeless contract.

At the end of the round Zeke and I discussed whether or not I had committed a breach of ethics or was I, a *là Zia*, merely attempting to remedy a "major flaw in the rules of the game, when an obvious...mechanical error cannot be corrected without penalty." After all, it's not as though I had seen anybody's hand. Any presumption on my part as to how the play was supposed to go was mere speculation.

Zeke and I finally decided that I had indeed been within my ethical rights, but I decided, on my own, not to talk about the hand, just to be on the safe side. And in fact I have not talked about it to this day, and still would not have had I not had the implicit imprimatur of Rita and Zia. Thanks, guys!