

BRIDGE YESTERDAY
Zero Tolerance

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Back in the good old days (the 50's and 60's) when I played most of my competitive bridge, it was considered *de rigueur* to insult and excoriate opponents and partners alike. I once heard "Mr. Bridge" himself, Charlie Goren, tell his partner, a well-known Cleveland expert, "Sid, my girl students bid better than you do." (Sid had misconstrued a natural four notrump bid as Blackwood.) Other colorful characters and incidents I could mention better not be published, as many of the perps are still alive.

Nowadays, of course, we have "zero tolerance." This means we must grin and bear partner's idiotic plays, pretending that we view bridge as "only a game." Here's a case in which I almost got into trouble three or four years ago; observe how cleverly I managed to worm my way out of it.

I'll present the hand first as a defensive problem. Say you hold this inspiring collection:

QJ97
QJ109
109
932

You are not too surprised when lefty opens two clubs. Righty responds two diamonds, lefty bids two notrump and righty overbids him to seven. Partner leads the two of spades and dummy takes

K108
A87
AJ64
1084

The spade eight is played from dummy. Take some time, and plan the defense.

Solution: It's obvious that partner has a Yarborough. Assume declarer has eight tricks in the minors (if he has nine, you're dead, and if he has only seven, he's dead). Obviously you are in severe peril of being subjected to a major-suit squeeze if declarer holds three hearts to the A6 or four hearts to the ace. In any event, you must give him an alternative to the squeeze. Play the queen of spades at trick one! An expert declarer wouldn't fall for this--after all, who leads from Jxxx against seven notrump--but persuading him to finesse the 10 of spades for his thirteenth trick may be your only hope.

In case declarer has a 234* lacking the six of hearts, you must somehow persuade partner to hold all three of his hearts; this is probably best done by discarding the heart queen followed by the nine at your first opportunities. But if your aim is to fool declarer into finessing the ten of spades, you have to hold three hearts and blank the jack of spades.

I finally decided to take the legitimate play, and discarded the queen and nine of hearts. And my brilliant defense (should have) paid off. The other two hands:

6542

632

532

765

A3

K54

KQ87

AKQJ

So what does all this have to do with zero tolerance? My (mercifully unnamed) partner didn't think very much about the hand, and casually discarded a heart somewhere along the line. So declarer took the thirteenth trick with the five of hearts. To say I was furious was an understatement. "Bravo! Bravo!" I shrieked at partner with all my ironically sarcastic might.

Declarer looked at me. "What are you talking about?" he asked. Suddenly I saw zero-tolerance suspension staring me in the face. "Why, I was just congratulating you on making seven no with a great squeeze," I replied. Quick thinking! "Why thank you," declarer said. "There aren't many gentlemen like you playing bridge these days."

Maybe our teammates will be in the ice-cold seven diamonds, I thought. But of course, they weren't! Oh well, *c'est la guerre!*

*It's about time somebody adopted this (Sidney) Lorvan notation for hand distributions: a three (occasionally four) digit integer gives the number of spades, hearts and diamonds in that order. (To state the distribution of all four suits is clearly redundant.) I proposed this notation a number of years ago to Jeff Rubens, editor of *Bridge World*. You would have thought Jeff, being a mathematician, would have liked the idea, but instead he ridiculed it. Such is the fate of so many geniuses!