

Blue Ribbon Deal

TO THE EDITOR:

Here an exercise based on a deal from the 2023 Blue Ribbon Pairs. Geir Helgemo is on your right, an old guy on your left.

Matchpoints

South dealer

North-South vulnerable

NORTH

♠ A 8 6 4 2

♥ A Q 6 4

♦ 6

♣ J 7 2

SOUTH

♠ 3

♥ K 9 5 2

♦ A K Q J 9

♣ A 10 4

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 ♦	Pass	1 ♠	2 ♣
2 ♥	Pass	3 ♣	Pass
3 NT	Pass	4 ♥	Pass
4 NT	Pass	5 ♠	Pass
6 ♥	Double	(All Pass)	

West's matchpoint double has revealed a four-card heart holding. (A five-zero trump break would make the cause hopeless.) The club-nine opening lead goes to East's queen and your ace. *Now what?*

Let's say you cash the heart ace and both opponents follow low. On three top diamonds, West follows with two low cards, then the ten; dummy discards two clubs. When you ruff a club, West pitches a spade. (Had West inserted a trump, you would have discarded from dummy.) On the spade ace and a spade ruff, both defenders follow low. *What next?*

You face a decision. If West started with four diamonds, you need to cash a diamond (because another club would allow West to throw a spade and be in a position to

overruff spades). However, if West began with only three diamonds, you must ruff a club. *Do you try to cash a diamond?*

Under the reasonable assumption that the bidding and defense would have been the same in both layouts, West is more than twice as likely to have been dealt four spades and four diamonds than five spades and three diamonds. However, a critical issue is how likely it is that West would have found the play of the ten of diamonds from a remaining ten-low. This play is difficult, but it does not cost even if East began with jack-third of diamonds—indeed, if the jack and ten were both played, a knowledgeable opponent might imagine Geir as more likely to be the falsecarder.

If you try to ruff your last club, West ruffs in. *What now?*

Overruff, lead a heart to the king, and play diamonds (which are all winners). West can score only his remaining trump.

On the actual deal, West held two clubs, which made things easier for declarer (although not easy enough at the table under consideration). This was the layout:

NORTH

♠ A 8 6 4 2

♥ A Q 6 4

♦ 6

♣ J 7 2

WEST

♠ K J 9 5

♥ J 10 8 3

♦ 7 4 3

♣ 9 6

EAST

♠ Q 10 7

♥ 7

♦ 10 8 5 2

♣ K Q 8 5 3

SOUTH

♠ 3

♥ K 9 5 2

♦ A K Q J 9

♣ A 10 4

In real life, West did not double. The fictional scenario above offered some inte-

testing situations. However, the line of play shown for the declarer is not the strongest.

How should South play?

At trick two, take the king of hearts (keeping low trumps in hand to ruff spades and high trumps in dummy to overruff West); continue with four top diamonds, overruffing if West ruffs (indicating that spades will be safe to ruff in hand).

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