

BRIDGE

One Deceived by Experience, the Other by the Heart Queen

By Phillip Alder

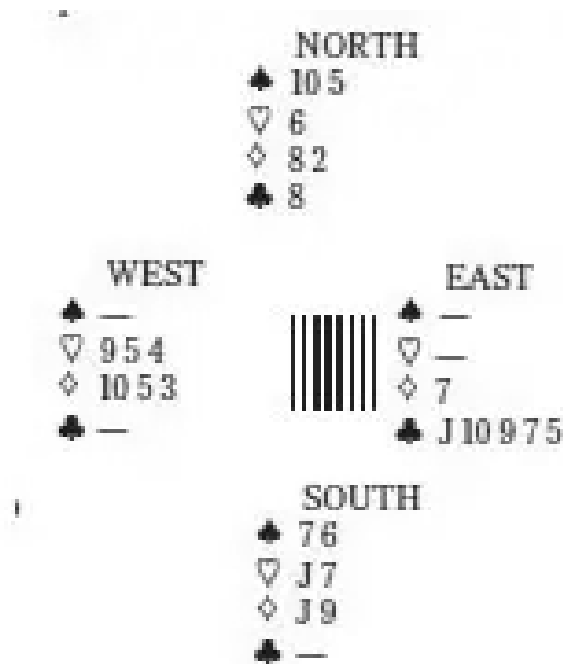
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In the April 10 column I claimed on the basis of personal experience that it is easier to get a huge match-point score in a pair event that has many tables. But Richard Zeckhauser, the Frank P. Ramsey professor of political economy at the Kennedy School at Harvard University and twice a national bridge champion, points out that the fewer tables, the more likely you are to have a big score.

He observes that we tend to judge events that we vividly remember as being more likely to occur than they really are. This bias is called the availability heuristic.

Here are a couple of bridge examples.

Inexperienced players may believe that experts win by executing brilliant plays, since these appear in newspapers and magazines, whereas experts usually succeed by making fewer errors than their opponents.



You use a particular convention and get a bad result from it. Although it was unlucky, not the fault of the convention, you promptly give it up.

The moral: Try to be realistic, and don't judge likelihoods by a single good or bad experience.

The diagramed deal occurred during the Von Zedtwitz Life Master Pairs at the 2006 Summer Nationals in Chicago. Zeckhauser (South) was partnering the Italian world champion Fulvio Fantoni.

Five clubs doubled would have cost only 500, so East-West had misjudged the auction. But getting an overtrick in four spades would add to the match-point haul.

West led the club queen. South played low from the dummy and, after East overtook with the king, ruffed in his hand.

Declarer led his spade jack, which was covered by the queen and ace. West won the next trump with the king and played his remaining club, South taking it in the dummy and discarding a diamond from his hand.

NORTH(D)			
♠ A 10 5 2			
♥ 6 3 2			
♦ A 8 2			
♣ A 8 6			
WEST		EAST	
♠ K Q		♠ 8 4	
♥ A 10 9 5 4		♥ 8	
♦ K 10 5 3		♦ 7 4	
♣ Q 2		♣ K J 10 9	
		7 5 4 3	
SOUTH			
♠ J 9 7 6 3			
♥ K Q J 7			
♦ Q J 9 6			
♣ —			
Both sides were vulnerable.			
The bidding:			
North	East	South	West
1♣	3♣	3♣	4♣
4♣	Pass	Pass	Pass
West led the club queen.			

Now declarer led a low heart from the dummy. To induce West to take the first heart trick, which card should South have played from his hand?

Usually declarer should play the top of touching honors from the closed hand. But in this case Zeckhauser felt that West would be almost sure to duck the king, because declarer with the king-jack would play his jack, not the king. However, West might be afraid to play low on the queen, lest his partner have the king.

West did take South's queen with his ace and returned the ten. Declarer won with his king and led the diamond queen, covered by the king and ace to give this position:

South was confident that West had the diamond ten; otherwise he would not have covered the diamond queen. So declarer ruffed dummy's club, played off the diamond jack (a Vienna Coup, for squeeze aficionados), overtook his last trump with dummy's ten and cashed the spade five, discarding his diamond nine. This squeezed West in the red suits.

Plus 650 was a near-top.

Note that if West had ducked the first heart, won the second and returned a heart, he would have killed declarer's communications. And, yes, it was unlikely that East had a doubleton heart king. With that and eight clubs, he would not have made a weak jump overcall. But West, a top expert, failed to draw that inference at the table.

Remember this queen play when you want lefty to win with his ace.