

## Holding Your Breath: A Bridge Movie

By

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**Note:** A bridge movie is intended to give the reader bidding and play decision as the hand develops.

Playing matchpoints, neither vul, you pick up a nice opening bid: ♠K4 ♥QJ9 ♦K6 ♣A108642. LHO is a sly, experienced player who likes to be tricky. His partner is having a good day when they don't revoke. After two passes you open 1♣. The bidding continues:

West	North	East	South
-----	Pass	Pass	1♣
1♥	1♠	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♦ <sup>1</sup>	Pass	?

1. Partner is showing a good passed hand (10-12 HCPs) with 5-4 in spades and diamonds.

### What do you bid now?

Although you have a sound opening bid, partner is a passed hand. A simple bid is the best. 2♠, 2NT and 3♣ are all possibilities. Which one is the best choice?

2NT is too aggressive. Although you have a solid opener, there is no clear source of tricks, and if you play there, the hearts will likely be set up on the opening lead. 2♠ is best, as you have already shown a long club suit. 1♠ will often be on a five card or longer suit (partner could have made a negative double with four). In addition, they will not be expecting you to have three card support, once you didn't raise on the previous round of bidding. Plus, your hand is prime for play in spades, with quick tricks and a ruffing value. The bidding continues:

West	North	East	South
-----	Pass	Pass	1♣
1♥	1♠	Pass	2♣

Pass	2♦ <sup>1</sup>	Pass	2♠
Pass	3♣	Pass	?

### What do you bid?

Partner's 3♣ was one last try for game, showing club support, likely a doubleton. Although it is close, bidding game is against the odds, and you pass. But wait! The bidding is not over! LHO balances with 3♥! This is passed back to you.

### Now what?

Your defensive prospects are excellent, and double is the best call. East should have very little, and declarer will unlikely be able to reach dummy. You can expect +300 if partner is anywhere close to his bid. However at the table, the actual south chose 3NT, having not declared a hand all day. Besides, had they doubled there would be no story.

3NT becomes the final contract and LHO leads the ace, king and a third heart, east following twice, then pitching a diamond. You are in. Partner has full values for their bidding:

<u>You</u>	<u>Dummy</u>
♠ K4	♠ AJ983
♥ QJ9	♥ 42
♦ K6	♦ A987
♣ A108642	♣ Q7

### How are your prospects and what is your plan?

Despite a great dummy, I wouldn't bet the family farm on making. Your best bet is that West has ♠Qxx, and you can score five spade tricks and your contract.

### What should you discard from dummy at trick 3?

You need to discard a minor suit card. Either one will reduce some future options if five spade tricks fail to materialize, but it is more important to retain both of dummy's clubs: discard a diamond on the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of hearts. You optimistically play ♠K and another to

the jack. Good news and bad news – the finesse wins but East follows with the ten.

### Now what?

You are fairly certain spades are 4-2. Yes, East might have pulled the wrong spade, but not cashing the ♠A at this juncture is best. It looks like LHO started life with ♠ Qxxx ♥AKxxxx ♦? ♣?. Things are getting gloomier. It looks like West needs the ♣K to justify their bidding. If he has ♣Kx or ♣Kxx you can't make.

### Should you play West for a stiff king?

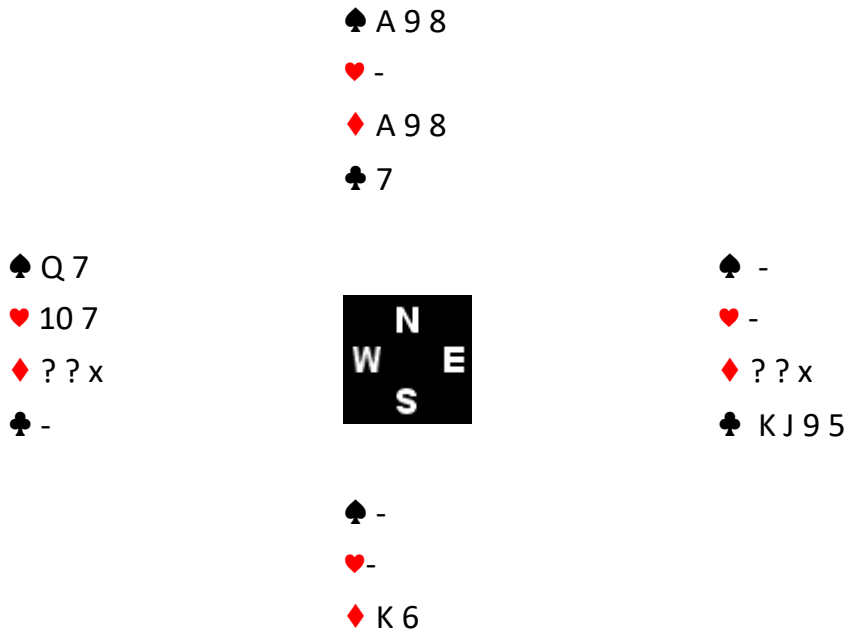
That would mean that West had started with two diamonds and East five. After cashing two clubs, bringing your total up to eight, you would be in dummy. East would still have ♣J9 left, and a diamond shift would ensure your demise. No a stiff ♣K with West is of no help.

### What is left?

You must hope that East holds the ♣K.

### What should you do?

Lead the ♣Q, and if it goes small, hold your breath, and play small from your hand. West shows out, pitching a heart! Here is the end position:



♣ A 10 8 6 4

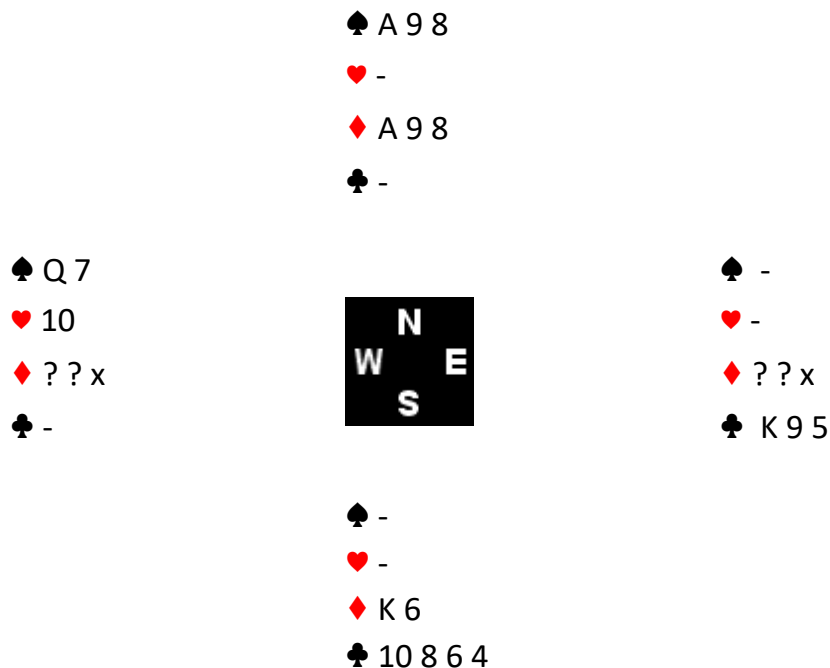
### Should you cash the spade ace now?

It does force East to find a discard, but he can afford a club, and thwart any continuation, as long as West continues to discard hearts. No, it is better to keep the spade tenace intact, as there is still a slight chance of endplaying West.

### So what should you do?

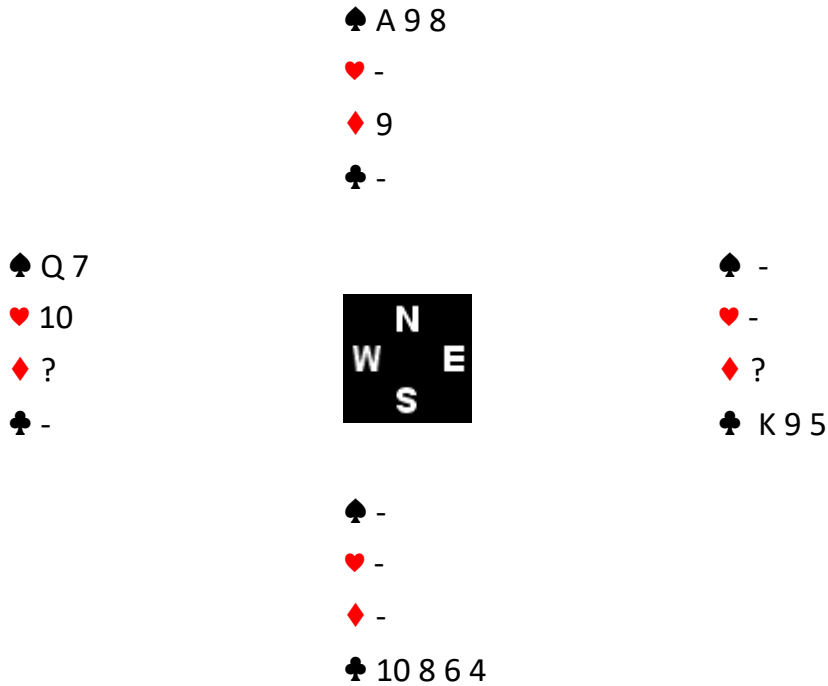
Lead dummy's last club. East must put in the jack, and you win. What does West discard? He can't throw a spade. If he discards a diamond, then you cash, in order, ♦K, ♦A, ♠A, and, at trick 11, throw in East with dummy's last diamond. East can cash the club ♣K, but must give you ♣10, your ninth trick.

So West must discard his second last heart. Here is the ending with E-W having won two tricks and N-S five, and South on lead:



### Now what?

Now cash the two top diamonds ending in dummy, and watch which cards the opponents play.



You need to guess which opponent will win the 3<sup>rd</sup> round of diamonds. If East, cash the spade ace\*\* and lead a diamond, to score your ♣10 at trick 13. If West, lead your diamond. West can cash a heart, but then must lead away from his ♠Q at trick 12.

### What if East covers the club queen with the king?

You don't have to hold your breath anymore (LOL), but it is still best to play small. The reason is that your entry situation is tenuous at best, and ducking will leave you with more flexibility, thus more options. As we know from above, LHO shows out on the 1<sup>st</sup> round of clubs, throwing a heart. Had you won the ace of clubs, you would have had no hope. But you are alive and kicking. You are guaranteed an 8<sup>th</sup> trick. Here is the ending with East on play:



♣ -

♣ J 9 5 3

♠ -

♥ -

♦ K 6

♣ A 10 8 6 4

### What suit are you hoping East returns?

You are really hoping East returns a diamond. You can win in dummy and cash the spade ace. What does he discard? If he throws a diamond you take the club finesse, then cash the king of diamonds. With seven tricks in, the ending, with south to lead, is:

♠ Q  
♥ 10  
♦ ?  
♣ -

♠ 9 8

♥ -

♦ 9

♣ -

W N  
S E

♠ -  
♥ -  
♦  
♣ J 9 5

♠ -

♥ -

♦ -

♣ A 10 6

South gets out the ♣6 and East must win, and give up the last two tricks. What if East, after returning a diamond at trick seven, instead discards a **club** on the ♠A to reach:

♠ Q 7  
♥ 10 7  
♦ ??  
♣ -

♠ 9 8

♥ -

♦ 9 8

♣ 7

W N  
S E

♠ -  
♥ -  
♦ ??  
♣ J 9 5

♠ -

♥ -  
 ♦ K  
 ♣ A 10 8 6

A club finesse and giving up a club to set up the suit brings the total to nine tricks?

**Can you make it if East returns a club after winning the King?**

I wouldn't bet on it! You can't win in dummy, as you only have one entry to your hand and the clubs are not set up. So you win in your hand to reach this ending:

♠ Q 7 ♥ 10 ♦ ? ? x ♣ -	<div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;"> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; margin-bottom: 10px;">             ♠ A 9 8              ♥ -              ♦ A 9 8              ♣           </div> <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; margin-right: 10px;">             W              S           </div> <div style="background-color: black; color: white; padding: 10px; text-align: center; margin: 0 10px;">             N              E           </div> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center; margin-left: 10px;">             ♠ -              ♥ -              ♦ ? ? x              ♣ J 9 5           </div> </div> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;">             ♠ -              ♥ -              ♦ K 6              ♣ A 10 6 4           </div> </div>	
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**Do you have any chance?**

You have won four tricks, and the defence has score two hearts and a club. Your only chance is that West started life with ♦QJ10. Lead the ♣6. West must pitch a heart to give the defence any chance. Dummy discards the ♠8. East wins the ♣9, the defence's 4<sup>th</sup> defensive trick and must return a diamond, which you win with the King.

♠ A 9  
 ♥ -  
 ♦ A 9  
 ♣

♠ Q 7  
♥  
♦ Q J  
♣ -



♠ -  
♥ -  
♦ 5 4  
♣ J 5

♠ -  
♥ -  
♦ 6  
♣ A 10 4

Now lead the ♣A. West has not answer: dummy will simply keep the nine in the suit that West discards. All your breath-holding worked wonderfully, as the full deal was:

♠ Q 7 5 2  
♥ A K 10 7 3 2  
♦ Q J 10  
♣ -



♠ 10 6  
♥ 8 5  
♦ 5 4 3 2  
♣ K J 9 5 3

♠ K 4  
♥ Q J 9  
♦ K 6  
♣ A 10 8 6 4 2

### Epilogue

+300 (or+500) in 3♥ doubled would have been so much easier, plus not having to hold your breath so much. 3♥ doubled is tough to defend, but on the likely ♣Q lead (heart lead is best), declarer doesn't have many options, and will likely wind up down two if he pulls trumps, three if he doesn't. Against 3NT, 4<sup>th</sup> best from longest and strongest would have worked well here, giving declarer no hope.

### And finally...

\*\*By the way, I excluded one other time you needed to hold your breath: In the scenario asterisked, East can brilliantly thwart this alternative by getting rid of his high diamond



when you cash the spade ace!! Our East was not up to it! Kudos to anyone who caught this omission, and I hope I don't have to play you too often!

**(Note:** My thanks to Bob Todd who gave me a very similar hand that started my creative juices flowing.)