FIND A BETTER WAY

Tim Bourke and Justin Corfield have just published a new book entitled, The Art of Declarer Play. It's a big book full of fascinating declarer play problems. The theme is that the average declarer searches for the solution to a problem and then looks no further. The expert looks for a better solution. Here is an example. South finds himself in 4♠ after the following auction.

North
♠ AK102
♥10763
♦652
♣94

West: ♥K

♠ Q876953
♥ A4
♦ AKJ
♣ K2

West	North	East	South
1NT (1)	Pass	2♦ (2)	Dbl (3)
Pass (4)	Pass (5)	2♥ (6)	2♠ (7)
Pass	4♠	All Pass	

(1) East/West are playing a system that uses a weak 1NT opening. The range of West's hand is 12-14 points.
(2) This is a transfer to hearts, showing at least 5 hearts and unlimited strength.
(3) South is actually too strong to overcall 2♠. Overcalls are made with a range of 7-17 points. Anything stronger is shown by first doubling and then bidding one's own suit, ignoring partner's advance.
(4) West's pass denies 3 hearts. It is forcing. East cannot pass out 2♦ doubled.
(5) I'm not sure what North's pass means. Perhaps he is willing to convert the takeout double to a penalty double. Perhaps he is waiting to see what East will do over West's forcing pass.
(6) East has no choice but to bid his long suit.
(7) South shows his big hand. He has 17 HCP and a seven card spade suit. His partner, naturally, raises him to game.

West leads the ♥K and East plays the ♥2. This confirms a 5-card suit. It is a low card showing an odd number of hearts. Since he can't have 7 hearts, he must have a 5-card holding.

Can you devise a plan that brings in the contract?

Whenever the opponents open the bidding, it pays to count points in the three "known" hands. This often helps to place the outstanding honors. The declarer and his partner have 24 points between them. West opened with 12-14. That means East holds 2-4 points.

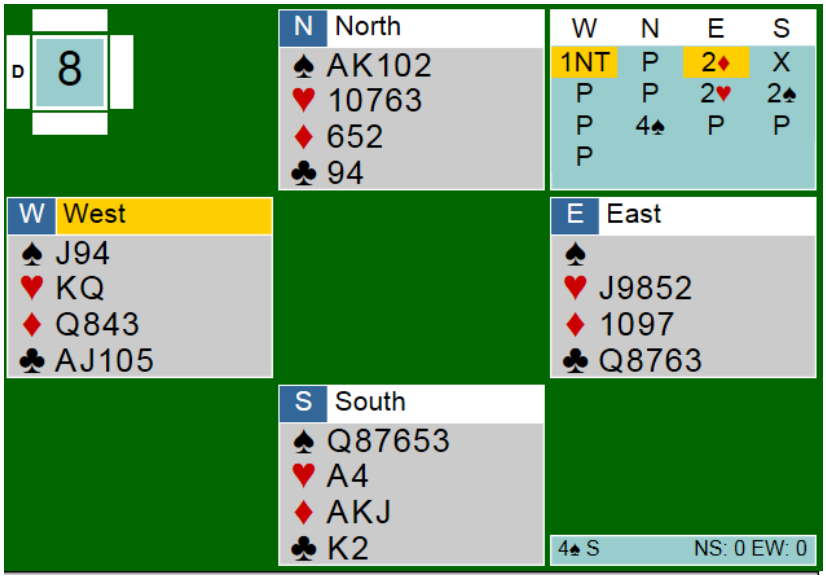
Next declarer should count his losers. He will lose no spades but he has 1 heart, 1 diamond and 2 club losers. He must find a way to eliminate one of them. He can't do anything about the heart loser, so that leaves diamonds and clubs. There is a finesse available in each of the suits. However, West has all but four of the outstanding points so both finesses are doomed to failure.

When things look hopeless, consider the "end-play." This is a technique whereby declarer gets the opponent to lead the suit into his tenace. If West leads either a diamond or a club, declarer takes an extra trick. If the lead is a diamond, the losing ♦J becomes a winner. If the lead is a club, whether the ♣A or a low club, the losing ♣K becomes a winner.

In order to arrange this end play, declarer must eliminate the possibility of West leading a major suit. Since he now knows West started with only 2 hearts, he ducks the first heart and wins the heart continuation. Now he leads to the ♠A and comes back to his hand by trumping a heart with the ♠Q. He leads, again, to the dummy, finessing the ♠10 and pulls the last trump

The next stage of the endplay is to put West in the lead. If declarer simply leads a low diamond to the ♦J, West will win the ♦Q and return a diamond. This puts the declarer back in his hand and he still has the two club losers. He must first play of the ♦AK so that if West returns a diamond, declarer can ruff in one hand and discard a losing club in the other.

This works perfectly. This is the complete board:

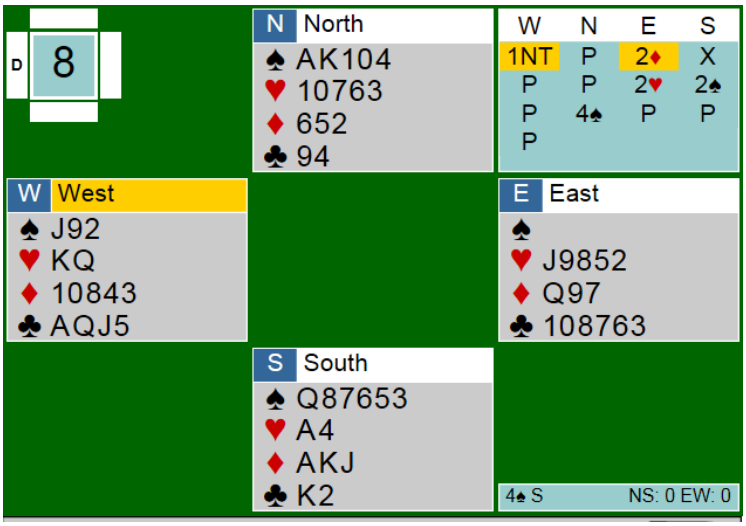


If you would like to see the whole hand played out, click on this link: http://tinyurl.com/k4tf6tl
Or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick.

P.S. Not so fast. What if it is East holds the ♦Q? East can just as easily fit the queen into his hand as can West. When East wins the third diamond he will lead a club through the declarer's ♣K and take both clubs, defeating the contract. The authors of The Art of Declarer Play challenge the declarer to find a full proof solution that can win even if East has the ♦Q. Can you find it?

The answer is to put West in with a club lead. The probability of the West holding the ♦Q is 50%. The probability of West holding the ♣A is nearly 100%. Let West take his two club tricks but then he will have to either lead a diamond into the declarer's ♦AKJ or lead a club and give him a ruff in the dummy and discard of the ♦J in his hand.

This is the full hand with the ♦Q in the East hand:



To see how this arrangement plays out click on: http://tinyurl.com/k28kcyt