Week 82

This week an interesting card play problem.

K9x
JTx
ATxx
AKx

Xx
AKQ9xx
X
Qxxx

You reach 6H after left hand opponent has made a take-out double of the 1 heart opener.

The lead is the DK - try it as a problem without looking at the answer!

You have six trumps, one diamond, 3 clubs and one spade provided the SA is with the hand which doubled - almost certain and essential for the success of the contract. If the clubs break evenly you will have a twelfth trick there, but that is only a 36% chance. You can of course ruff your fourth club if trumps break evenly having drawn two rounds, and there is a further improvement which is to draw just two rounds of trumps and then play on clubs: if the hand with three trumps also holds four clubs you will be able to ruff the fourth club, or if clubs divide 3-3 when you test the suit you are home.

The best line is rather unusual. Can you think of a way of bumping up your trump winners from 6 to 7?

We are taught to look for ruffs in the shorter trump hand rather than the long hand, but here we have six entries to the dummy (2 clubs, DA, SK and 2 trumps with the Jack and Ten). Imagine we use those entries to ruff 3 diamonds and one spade in the long heart hand. In so doing, we increase our trump winners to seven and can use the HJ and HT to draw the outstanding trumps.

So the play goes: DA, diamond ruff, spade. Let's assume LHO wins and plays a trump. We can win in dummy with the Jack, ruff another diamond, play a spade to the King, then ruff a spade high. Finally, we can play a club to the Ace before taking our fourth ruff, this time with another high trump, which leaves us with Ax in trumps in hand and Tx in dummy with which to draw the outstanding trumps.

We score 7 trumps and 5 top cards. The play is described in the books as a dummy reversal and involves ruffing in the long trump hand and then drawing trumps with the holding in the dummy.

Even the very best players sometimes miss this line of play so if you found it without looking at the solution you did extremely well!