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The Real Deal

Even though the calendar says it's a new year, I'm still not eligible for Senior events. I can, however, report this deal from a Senior team game played at the Palm Beach FL Regional, thanks to Allan Lyons.

You deal as South, holding:

♠ A Q ♥ A K Q 8 4 ♦ A Q J 6 ♣ A J

When you finish counting up your points (27 high-card points), you open 2♣ and get the expected 2♦ response from partner.

A question that bridge teachers hear time and again, is: "What methods should we play after a 2♣ opener?" My answer: "No big deal." Some people use step responses to show controls. I see no need for such artificiality. Others use the newly popular 2♥ as a "double-negative." That has its good and bad points. Personally, I prefer plain old "2♦ waiting." If I have a good suit (at least five cards with some top honors) and about 8 or more HCP, I'll bid the suit. Otherwise, I'll bid a "waiting 2♦" and "wait" to see what partner does. In any case, all I care is that I am playing it the same way as my partner.

Over partner's 2♦, you rebid 2♥. This is forcing, of course. Partner jumps to 4♦, a splinter bid in support of hearts. He shows zero or one diamond and some values (he shouldn't make this bid with 0 HCP).

Surely you are on your way to

slam, possibly seven. Over your 4NT (let's presume Key Card Blackwood), guess how many partner shows? It seems strange to inquire about key cards when holding all of them (not to mention the trump queen), but your main goal is to ask for kings, and you have to start with this charade of asking for aces. After the zero reply, you bid 5NT and are disappointed to learn partner has no kings! This makes it an easy decision to sign off in 6♥, the final contract.

♠ J 10 9 8 7 3
♥ 9 7 6 3
♦ 10
♣ Q 2

♠ A Q
♥ A K Q 8 4
♦ A Q J 6
♣ A J

A trump is led and right-hand opponent plays the jack. Your plan? (Remember that since this is a team match, you should not concern yourself with overtricks.)

In seven, you'd need to do lots of finessing. In six, your goal is to use dummy's spades as a source of tricks, without concerning yourself about the location of any of the missing kings. You draw trumps in three rounds (LHO started with ♥10 5 2) and then lay down the ♠A and ♠Q. LHO eyes your ♠Q suspiciously, and eventually ducks (RHO following low). Oh well — it might not be so easy. Had West taken the king, you'd have claimed the rest. You now face this position:

♠ J 10 9 8
♥ 9
♦ 10
♣ Q 2

♠ —
♥ 8 4
♦ A Q J 6
♣ A J

Are you tempted to take a ruffing finesse in diamonds? If you lay down the ♦A and play the ♦Q, you are slated for defeat. West covers, you ruff in dummy and are at the mercy of the (losing) club finesse for down one (you still have a diamond to lose).

It is better to make use of the power of dummy's ♦10. In fact, you have a 100% play in the position above. Simply lead a low diamond from your hand. If the defense takes the king, you have the rest (throw a club from dummy on your good diamonds and ruff your ♣J in dummy). What if the defense ducks? Even better! You win the diamond ten and ruff a spade to set up the suit. Now you make all 13 tricks.

♠ J 10 9 8 7 3		♠ 5 4
♥ 9 7 6 3		♥ J
♦ 10		♦ 8 7 5 2
♣ Q 2		♣ 10 8 6 5 4 3
	N W E S	
♠ K 6 2		♠ A Q
♥ 10 5 2		♥ A K Q 8 4
♦ K 9 4 3		♦ A Q J 6
♣ K 9 7		♣ A J

As long as you suppressed the finessing urge, you had a sure road to make your heart slam.

Next month I'll start you on a series of fascinating deals I played recently at a regional in Mexico. □

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