

DECLARER PLAY 14 – SNEAKY STUFF

♠ 43
♥ AQ3
♦ Q10432
♣ 432

♠ AK2
♥ KJ2
♦ J987
♣ AK5

S	W	N	E
1D	1S	2D	2S
3NT	P	P	P

West leads SQ which South ducks. South wins the spade continuation with SA. What's the best line of play?

	♠ 43	
	♥ AQ3	
	♦ Q10432	
	♣ 432	
♠ QJ1098		♠ 765
♥ 1098		♥ 7654
♦ A6		♦ K5
♣ J1098		♣ Q76
	♠ AK2	
	♥ KJ2	
	♦ J987	
	♣ AK5	

S	W	N	E
1D	1S	2D	2S
3NT	P	P	P

Notice with a flat 19 points South opens 1 of a minor. If North responds with a suit at the 1 level and there is no interference, South will rebid 2NT. This action shows a flat hand of 18-19 points. The South hand is too weak to open 2NT (20-21 or 20-22 depending on your agreement with partner) or 2C.

On this hand, knowing partner has 6 points for their 2D raise, South with their 19 points and good spade stoppers simply bids the 3NT game.

West leads SQ which South ducks. South wins the spade continuation with SA. What's the best line of play?

You're going down on this hand if the defenders get it right. But the defenders are in the dark in the early stages of a hand and you should give them maximal opportunities to go wrong.

You have 7 tricks on top (CAK, HAKQ, SAK) and need 2 more. The diamonds are the only chance for these 2 but it looks awfully slow. It looks like the defenders will get their spades running before you get the diamonds going and you will lose 3 spades and 2 diamonds and go down.

What do you do in these situations? Try to knock out the entries to the hand with the long spades. I would go across to dummy with HA and lead a LOW diamond towards the South hand. With luck, East plays low and your DJ forces the DA out. West leads another spade to your SK and the spades are now wide open. But when you now lead another diamond, East wins with the DK but can't get to their partner's spades. Making 10 tricks.

East could defeat the contract by rising with the DK when you lead a low diamond off the table. But you have made it as difficult as you can for them to see this. If you lazily lead a diamond out of the South hand, West will duck without too much trouble and East win with the DK and clear the spades. And West still has the DA to get in and run the spades.

Note when South went to dummy with the HA, they didn't lead the DQ off the table. East is likely to cover this and you have forced the defenders to get the defence right!

This brings us to the first law of sneaky declarer play:

If you want a defender to play a missing honour, play the biggest honour under this card to try to induce them to cover. If you DON'T want them to play a missing honour, use the lowest card that will do.

I remember in a congress many years ago, I was in a 6H contract from South and had already lost an outside ace. This was the position of the trumps:

K10654

Q32

-

AJ987

With 10 trumps, playing the AK from the top usually drops the Q (78% of the time) but, as you can see, I have a surprise coming. However, I led the HJ from my hand intending to rise with the HK but West kindly covered the J with the Q and saved me going down. West could see the 5 hearts in dummy and I had opened the bidding with 1H, so West should have known to play low.

The converse situation might be where I am concerned about the defenders ruffing my winners. From a trump suit in my hand like KQJ102, I might lead the 10 in the hope the defender to my left has the ace and ducks for fear of dropping an honour from their partner. When they see the 10 win, they will be awake enough to grab the A the next round but I have got an extra round of dangerous defence trumps off the table.