

FROM THE AUTHOR OF "FOCUS ON DECLARER PLAY"

# CHALLENGE

— YOUR —

# DECLARER PLAY



DANNY ROTH

D A N N Y R O T H

# CHALLENGE

— Y O U R —

# DECLARER PLAY



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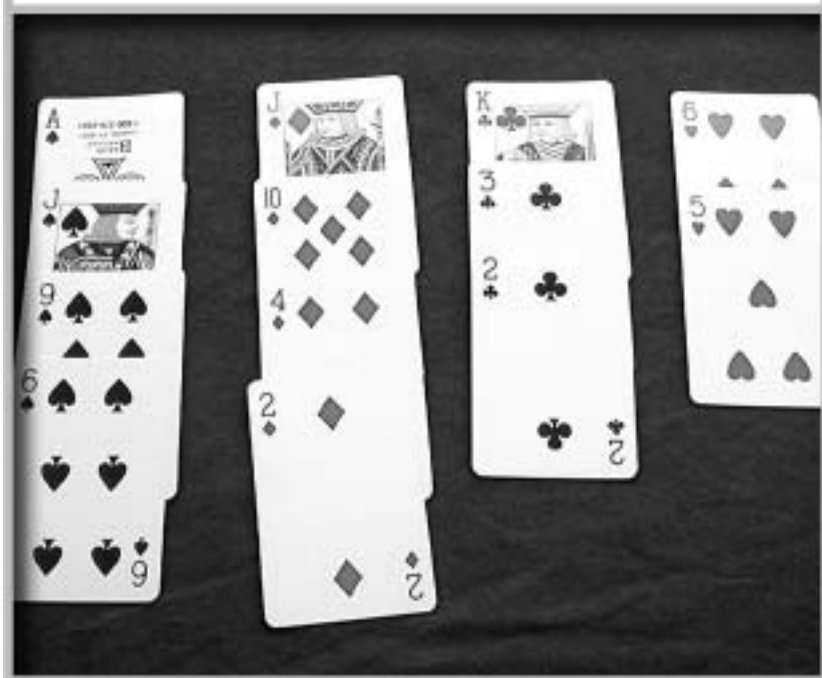
Dedicated to the memory of my father  
who taught me the game.



# CHALLENGE

— YOUR —

# DECLARER PLAY





# Introduction

## **So you think you're a good declarer?**

He always insists on playing the hand! Don't we all hear this, continually and everywhere? From the big tournament to the local club and from the living room to the retirement home, the complaint is the same. Irrespective of their skill, there are a large number of players, the vast majority being men, who believe that their capability as declarer warrants such actions as overbidding, failing to support partner's suit, rushing into notrump on hopeless misfits and even psyching to ensure that they will be in charge of the forthcoming battle with the opponents.

Well, let us be democratic and hear their point of view. Have they any justification? In most cases, the answer is no! It has been demonstrated many times that a weak declarer in a good contract is a better prospect than a good declarer in a poor contract. Furthermore, these so-called 'good' declarers are nowhere near as good as they think they are. This book has been assembled to test them out and to enable the lesser and more modest beings amongst the bridge-playing fraternity to improve their game.

We all play bridge for enjoyment but many see the game as a great ego-booster and, of all the three departments of the game, this element comes out most in declarer play. I have spent most of my life swimming against the tide and bridge is no exception. My standard of bidding is, at best, modest and that of defense even more so. However, there is no doubt that declarer play is the weakest part of my game — but I have yet to meet any other bridge player who puts his capabilities in that order. The point was driven home to me a few years ago when I turned up alone at a well-known club. I asked for a partner and was given a reasonable player for the evening's pairs event. Twenty-six boards were played — I did not play a single one. Admittedly this can happen by pure chance, but the odds are about 1770:1 against. The following day, I turned up alone again. I was given another reasonable partner and excitedly opened 1♠ on the first hand. This should have led to a solid 6♠, but he introduced a heart suit which I supported. The final contract of 6♥ was down two! I was nowhere near playing another hand and the total number of boards in this extraordinary run



had risen to fifty-two and the odds against to about 3.3 million to 1.

What makes a good declarer? He must be able to reconstruct the defenders' hands as far as possible, taking into account any bidding or lack of it, the opening lead (and what was not led) and subsequent line of defense. Declarer then has to devise a line of play which caters for the maximum number of layouts consistent with what he knows so far. This requires a knowledge of how to handle various suit combinations and probabilities.

As is my custom, I shall start with a 'warm-up' hand to enable readers to familiarize themselves with the format, although it is fairly standard for bridge books. In all the problems, you should assume that you are sitting South and are playing with teams or rubber-bridge scoring so that making the contract is of first importance rather than worrying about overtricks, as would be relevant in matchpointed pairs events. The bidding will always be given with a full explanation of any conventional calls used. Assume that your opponents are good players but also fallible human beings.

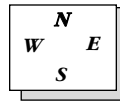
**Dealer South**  
**N-S vulnerable**

W	N	E	S
			1NT <sup>1</sup>
pass	3NT	all pass	

1. 15-17 HCP.

**North**

♠ 9 4  
♥ J 7  
♦ A J 9 6 2  
♣ K Q J 2



**South**

♠ K Q 2  
♥ A 5 4  
♦ Q 10 7 5  
♣ A 10 6

West leads the ♠3, normal fourth-highest. East takes his ace and continues the suit. Plan the play.

Well, there isn't much of a problem, is there? Even if the diamond finesse is wrong, there are eleven tricks. In fact, if it is right, there will be twelve. This hand was obviously copied straight out of a beginners' book. What is it doing here?

The deal:

	<b>North</b>				
	♠ 9 4				
	♥ J 7				
	♦ A J 9 6 2				
	♣ K Q J 2				
<b>West</b>	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W      E</td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W      E	S	<b>East</b>
N					
W      E					
S					
♠ J 8 7 3		♠ A 10 6 5			
♥ 10 8 6 2		♥ K Q 9 3			
♦ 8 3		♦ K 4			
♣ 8 5 3		♣ 9 7 4			
	<b>South</b>				
	♠ K Q 2				
	♥ A 5 4				
	♦ Q 10 7 5				
	♣ A 10 6				

Well — which card did you play at Trick 1? The deuce, of course you are probably saying. In that case, I have some bad news for you — you went down one! What happened? Well, unfortunately, East is one of those confounded nuisances who, instead of returning his partner's suit like an automaton, stopped to work out the whole hand by doing the seven roll-calls. I defined these in my earlier books as follows:

- 1-4) The distribution of the four suits round the table;
- 5) The distribution of high-card points round the table;
- 6) The number of tricks declarer has available or can easily establish;
- 7) The number of tricks defenders have available or can easily establish.

He could see that with at least fifteen points promised in your hand, twelve in dummy and twelve of his own, the best he could hope for from his partner was one. After the lead and your telltale ♠2, it was clear that, if he continued spades, the most defenders would get would be two spade tricks and the ♦K. Therefore, the only hope of setting the contract lay in hearts, which would only require West to hold the ♥10. He therefore shifted to the ♥K, leaving you to lose three heart tricks, the ♠A and the ♦K before you could take enough tricks for yourself. Bearing all this in mind, you have dropped an honor on the first spade. On the lead, *you* know that the suit is breaking 4-4 and that, as long as it is continued, you will, at worst, concede three spade tricks (after sacrificing one

of your honors) and the  $\heartsuit K$  (if it is badly placed). To East, however, the position is less clear. The lead could well have come from  $\spadesuit J8732$  and he is going to look very stupid if you turn up with the  $\heartsuit 10$  (we're not even discussing his partner's reaction!). Chances are, therefore, he will ensure a safe position in the post-mortem by continuing spades. But suppose I had phrased the problem as follows:

'West leads the  $\spadesuit 3$  to his partner's  $\spadesuit A$ . Which card do you play?' No doubt, you would have realized that this was your big moment and very probably produced the right answer. But did you appreciate the point when you thought about the hand for the first time? Seasoned campaigners who know me by now will probably have suspected something as it is in this respect that I differ from other bridge authors. It is an accepted practice in books on play and defense that the reader is taken up to the critical moment and then asked for a continuation. Sadly, this is an obvious departure from reality. At the table, there is nobody to give you that all-important nudge when an unexpected or difficult play is required.

In this book, you will be expected to give a full account of the exact cards you intend to play from Trick 1 to Trick 13 along with good reasons for your decisions. The understanding of what you are doing is critical, so try not to 'guess' at solutions — no credit for correctness without adequate explanation.

Now, enjoy the book and good luck!

# THE PROBLEMS



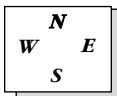
## Hand 1

## To Solution

Dealer West  
Both vulnerable

W	N	E	S
pass	pass	pass	1♠
pass	2♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

**North**  
 ♠ Q 9 8 4  
 ♥ 9 8 7 4  
 ♦ 10 3  
 ♣ K 7 4



**South**  
 ♠ K J 10 7 3  
 ♥ A J  
 ♦ K Q 9  
 ♣ A 8 5

West leads the ♣J. Plan the play.

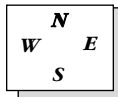
## Hand 2

## To Solution

Dealer South  
Both vulnerable

W	N	E	S
			4♥
pass	6♥	all pass	

**North**  
 ♠ A Q 10 8 4  
 ♥ 10 4  
 ♦ A K 8 4 3  
 ♣ J



**South**  
 ♠ 3  
 ♥ A K J 9 8 7 6  
 ♦ 6 2  
 ♣ A 7 5

West leads the ♦Q. Plan the play.

# CONCLUSION

I consider it fitting to have concluded this book with a Vienna Coup as a tribute to Rixi Markus, a native of that city, who died a few years ago. She was, certainly among the women players, one of the greatest declarers ever.

I hope I have done something to improve your declarer play as well as giving you hours of enjoyment. A reputation as a good declarer is very valuable in that you will be consistently sought out as a partner, particularly in this day and age of aggressive bidding and, on the rare occasion when you stick your neck out in the auction, defenders may think twice before doubling.

## So you think you're a good declarer?

Most books on play take the reader up to the critical moment in a hand and then asked for a continuation.

But at the table, there is nobody to give you that all-important nudge when an unexpected or difficult play is required, and that's the way the hands are presented in this book. The collection of problems here will test those who are confident they are good declarers and will enable more modest players to improve their game.



**DANNY ROTH** is the author of over a dozen previous books, including *'Focus on Declarer Play'*, *'Focus on Defence'* and *'Focus on Bidding'*. His work appears regularly in various bridge magazines in the UK. He lives near London, England.



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