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Bridge column by Tanna Hirsch

24th September 2011

Dealer : South Vul : Both	NORTH ♠ 9 5 ♥ Q 10 7 ♦ K 7 4 ♣ A J 10 6 3	
WEST ♠ K J 6 4 3 ♥ A 9 8 ♦ J 3 2 ♣ 5 4		EAST ♠ 10 7 2 ♥ 6 5 4 2 ♦ Q 10 9 6 ♣ K 7
	SOUTH ♠ A Q 8 ♥ K J 3 ♦ A 8 5 ♣ Q 9 8 2	

South	West	North	East
1 NT	Pass	3 NT	All Pass

Opening lead: Four of ♠

The race does not always go to the swiftest. The one who prepares for all challenges frequently emerges victorious, as this hand illustrates.

With a balanced 10 points and a five-card minor, there was no point for North to probe for a suit contract. There was no point to looking for any better contract than three no trump, and North chose the direct route.

West led a fourth-best spade, and declarer was looking at five fast tricks. Because it is well to prepare for the worst, declarer presumed that the king of clubs was off-side, so the suit would produce only four winners. Therefore, a trick in hearts would have to be established if the contract were to succeed.

However, foresight was needed to land nine tricks. Suppose declarer wins the first trick as cheaply as possible and takes the club finesse. East will win and return a spade, and the defenders will force out South's remaining stopper in the suit. Now when declarer tries to set up heart tricks, West can grab the ace and collect enough spade tricks to defeat the game one trick.

Note the difference if South wins the first trick with the queen of spades and immediately leads the king of hearts. If West wins and reverts to spades, declarer holds up the ace of spades and wins the third round of the suit. Now declarer can take the club finesse in complete safety. If it wins, declarer has 11 tricks. If it loses, Either East will be out of spades or the suit splits evenly. No matter which, declarer has at least nine tricks. And should West hold up the ace of hearts, declarer simply abandons the suit and goes after clubs to assure the game.

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