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Bridge column by Frank Stewart

29th March 2011

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

South	West	North	East
--	2 Diamond	Pass	3 Diamond
3 Spade	Pass	4 Spade	All Pass

Opening lead: King of ♦

Both the play and defense of this hand should be automatic. However, it is surprising how often thrusts and counterthrusts, both on offense and defense, are missed.

West opened with a weak two diamonds and East raised preemptively. South was too strong to be shut out of the auction and North had an easy raise to game.

West led the king of diamonds, and East defended well by overtaking with the ace and returning a diamond to partner's queen. West continued with the ten of diamonds, ruffed with the ten and overruffed with the jack to complete the defensive book. Declarer had no way to avoid losing a club trick — down one.

The overruff can hardly be considered bad luck. At best, it was a 50 percent shot, though in actual fact the odds were worse because West, long in diamonds, rates to be short in spades, making East a strong favorite to hold the jack of trumps.

Actually, the game can be claimed against almost any defense as long as trumps are not 4-0. Declarer should simply refuse to ruff the third diamond. Instead, declarer should make the loser-on-loser play of discarding a club from dummy, a trick that might have to be lost in any event. No matter how the defense continues, declarer can draw trumps and ruff the club loser on the table for the 10th trick. The loser-on-loser play appears in many guises, of which this is the simplest and most obvious. Be aware of its existence, since it is a play that can only gain. (03/29/11)

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