

Keeping Good Company

Did you ever get punished for doing something right? Sometimes match points does that to you.

Barry Goldwater ran for president in 1960. His campaign slogan was "I'd rather be right than President. Well, he was far right, and while he might have been right on many issues, he did not come close to winning the presidency.

In 279 and in 280 BC King Pyrrhus of Epirus won two military victories against the stronger Roman Army, but he lost so many soldiers in those fights that he had to surrender before the next battle. He simply could not replace the men that he had lost.

This brings me to a hand that I played recently in an on - line game.

6 5

K Q 9 4

A J 9 6 4

4 2

A K 10 8 5

J 3

Q 10 6

A Q 3

I opened one no trump, partner bid two clubs, I showed spades, and he bid three no trump. West led the six of clubs, and East played the king. I was in no trump, so I counted winners. Four diamonds (an extra if diamonds came home), two hearts after knocking out the ace, two clubs and two spades, at least ten. No worries. But, unlike Goldwater or Pyrrhus, I stopped to ask what could go wrong, and what could I do about it.

What could go wrong? Well, if I won the first trick, and if the diamond finesse lost, and a club came back, and they knocked out my Queen of clubs before I attacked hearts, and if West held the Ace of hearts and five clubs, I would go down in this contract, losing a diamond, a heart and three clubs. So, I ducked the first club, back came a club, and my queen won, West playing the five. So I was right about the long club suit in the West hand. If this were a bridge column in the paper, the diamond finesse would lose, and East would be out of clubs, and I would make 4 for a very good score. But, ALAS, this is real life, and the finesse won, so I was plus 460, again for what I thought would be a great score.

But, when the scores came up, I got a 12% on the board. We looked at what happened at the other tables, and declarer was not so careful. He won the first club and took the diamond finesse right away. It won, and he tried hearts. When things go right, they go right all of the way. East had three hearts to the ten, so the nine of hearts was good, and almost every declarer made 12 tricks.

I gave the hand to my GURU, Harry Gellis, and asked how he would play it. He would have played it the same way that I did. So I was satisfied that I was right.

Like Goldwater, I was right, but lost the board.

Like Pyrrhus, I won the battle, but lost the war.

That is my sad story, and I am sticking to it.