

Icarus and the Bumblebee by Bob Pustilnik

Most of us know the story of Icarus, a Greek myth about a father and son who escaped from the Labyrinth by making wings out of bird feathers and wax. The father, Daedalus, warned his son not to fly too close to the sun, but the warning was ignored. The sun melted the boy's wax, and Icarus fell into the sea and drowned. He was given good advice; his plan could not work. He ignored the advice to his peril.

We also know the story of the bumblebee. Scientists examined the bee, its body, its parts and concluded that the bee could not fly because the body was too heavy for the wings. Unfortunately, no one told that to the bumblebee, who, as we know, has no trouble flying because he was built by nature to fly.

These stories bring me to this suit combination.

♠ Q 8 7 5 3

♠ A 4 2

In Linda's Monday lesson we went over a hand in which almost every pair played in four spades, with this spade suit. Most pairs made 4 spades or even five, but five pairs went down. I told the group that I knew what happened, without even looking at the way these hands were played. I said that the declarer played the queen of spades from the dummy to take a finesse. Linda said that this was impossible because that is not a finesse. (More on this later.) We went to the hand records, and the one that we looked at played it exactly that way. We both shook our heads.

That play can never work. It can never gain. It is not a finesse. Here is why.

When you play the queen, if East has the king, he will cover, and you will have to play the Ace. Since they have the jack, the ten and the nine, their spades will all be winners, and you will lose as least two tricks, if the suit splits 3/2, and will lose all of the rest of the tricks if it splits 4/1. If West has the king, he will win, and the only trick that you will win is the ace, which you would have won anyway. Like Icarus' wings, that play will never work, and you will wind up drowning in the outstanding trumps. Linda and I have been telling you this

for months and months, but for some reason we cannot make everyone understand the concept.

Even if you are the bumblebee, and no one tells you that this won't work, and you do it anyway, you will still lose. After all, you are not a bumblebee. Cards are not made by nature, and things which seem impossible are really impossible.

I would not bother to make this point if there were not a better way to win tricks with this holding. Try this experiment. Take a suit, any suit, out of the deck - it works equally as well for black cards or red cards, for round suits or pointed suits - and lay out your hand in the pattern shown in the example. Put the king of spades in the West hand, and lead the ace, and then lead all towards the queen. If West started with the singleton king, it drops, and you win the ace and the queen. East's high cards win the rest. If he started with a doubleton king, he must play it when you play towards the queen, and when you get in, you pull the last trump, and you win four spade tricks. If he started with three, and wins the second one, the result is the same. If he ducks, you win the queen, and go about your business. He can take the king whenever he wants, but it is the only spade that he will take. You will win three tricks.

Now put the king in the East hand, and when you play the queen, cover it with the king. The result is the same. You will only win one trick, the ace. Of course if East does not cover, HE becomes Icarus, because we have all been told to cover an honor with an honor in this situation, and ducking cannot win, particularly when you have the ace, or have the 10 and 9.

What is better, winning one trick or winning four? Icarus would win one. The bumblebee, knowing that he can succeed, will do what he does naturally, play the ace and then lead towards the queen, and will win four when the king is in the right place. Even bumblebees know how to protect the queen bee.

Bumblebees can sense danger. So can experienced bridge players. Look at this hand.

Q 8 7 5 3

3 2

Q J 4

A Q 3

A 4 2

K J 10

A Q 10 8

K 5 4

East opens one heart, you

overcall one no trump,

partner transfers you to

spades, and you wind up in

four spades. West leads a

heart, East wins and

plays a second heart.

Like the bumblebee, you sense danger. Because of his opening bid, you know that the king of spades is in the East hand. What can you do about it? Is this the time to play The Queen from dummy? NO NO NO. It cannot win. Play the ace and play a spade to dummy. Play small from dummy. If East started with a doubleton King, it will fall. The Queen does not have to leave her hive. If it turns out that East has three spades, you will lose two, but there is nothing that you can do about it.

Again, lay out the spade suit - or any suit - and try it. Put the King and a small spade in the East hand and play the ace and a small spade, ducking the second spade. East will take his spade "on air," and the Queen is safe. Remember, you use this play when you are certain that East has the king, or at least when it is more likely than not, because of the bidding and play so far that he has the king.

While Icarus might get this wrong and ignores good advice, the bumblebee will always get it right. So should you. Sometimes bridge hands are like a Labyrinth. There are dangers lurking there, but if the Labyrinth is "fair," there is a correct path out. All that you have to do is find it. I hope that this lesson helps you do that.