

The Law of Innocence

In Michael Connelly's novel, *The Law of Innocence*, the protagonist Mickey Hauler says that a good trial lawyer tries not to ask a question to which he does not already know the answer. It is important to always ask the right questions.

This axiom often applies to bridge hands. Take this hand from the Richmond newspaper.

A 6
J 9 5
K Q 8
Q 10 6 5 4

10 9 5 3
A K
A J 10
A 9 8 3

West leads the 4 of spades against three no trump and we try to ask the right questions.

Winners: Three diamonds, two hearts and one spade.

Where can more come from? With a little luck, we will only lose one club, and make ten tricks.

What can go wrong? They can take one club and four spades if West has five spades and can get in when we play clubs.

What can we do about it, if anything? Well, if we hold up, as we are taught to do, in no trump contracts, and if spades are 5/2 and if East has the king, West cannot run his suit; and if spades are 4/3, we only lose one club and 3 spades, no matter who has the king of clubs.

Is this the best plan?

If you said yes, you will be found guilty of blowing a cold contract because you asked the wrong questions. The right question is this:

What would West lead if he held K Q J 8 4 of spades?

What would he lead if he held K Q 8 7 4?

What would he lead with the Q J 8 7 4?

In the first case he would lead the top of his strong sequence; and in the second case he might lead the king, instead of fourth best, or he might lead fourth best. In the third case he would lead the queen or lead fourth best.

Why is this the right question? Because the answer is that since West led the four of spades, East surely has either the King, the Queen, or the Jack of spades. If you play the ace at trick one, the suit will block. Once the king of clubs is knocked out, if East plays his honor, he cannot get back to West. If West overtakes his honor, your ten is a second stopper. Lay the cards out and try it.

This is a holding that you need to remember, as it comes up in real life, and you need to recognize it when it does.

In the hand in the paper, declarer ducked, won the ace at trick two, and East's queen fell. West had the King of clubs and took his spades. Down one. Guilty as charged.

Bonus Question Number 1

You are playing 4 spades. West leads the King of clubs; they have not bid. These are your clubs.

DUMMY J 5 4

YOU A 7 2

Do you duck or do you take the ace?

There is nothing to be gained by ducking. West has the Queen, unless he has made an unusual lead, and your jack will stand up later in the hand. Unless they get an early ruff, you will win two tricks in the suit.

Bonus Question Number 2

Please do not get this one wrong:

They are in 3NT. Declarer has one entry to dummy if he can set up his clubs. Here are dummy clubs and yours. Declarer leads the Queen of clubs. Do you cover dummy's queen; after all, you are taught to cover an honor with an honor. If you duck and declarer plays the Jack, do you cover the Jack?

Dummy: Q J 10 8 5 3

You K 9 2

DO NOT COVER. If you do, the clubs are up. Your hope is that declarer has the doubleton Ace, and when he leads the suit the second time, you will still have the King, and the club suit is dead.

Please support the games from the Bridge Center, and Friendly Bridge/RBA Here is the schedule for the Bridge Center. Contact Mimi for further information.

Mondays 2:15 0-3500

Wednesdays 10:15 0-1500

Wednesdays 6:35 0-300

Thursdays 1:15 0-1500

Fridays 1:15 0-500

Fridays 6:45 OPEN (starting February 5)

Friendly Bridge: Sundays 1:15 (0-500), Sundays 6:35 (0-200), Tuesdays 9:00 am (Learning Game 0-500, sign up), Tuesdays 7:00 (0-500), Thursdays 6:35 (Open Mentor-Mentee Invitational).