

# Rick's Tricks

## The Big Bluff

By Rick Roeder

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Summertime in Australia! How can life get much better? ANSWER: When you travel to Canberra to play in their annual National championships. The winner of the Senior Teams will represent Oz in the 2023 world championships in Marrakech. My lack of Aussie citizenship has “poisoned” our team. Even if we are among the top four qualifiers after three days of nine, 20-board Swiss matches for the ensuing four-team knockout, we would be excused from the event due to me being from the land of Stars and Stripes. Thankfully, my teammates do not seem to hold this failing against me.

We have easily won our first two matches but match #3 rated to be stiffer opposition against the #2 seed. Early on, I face a challenge declaring 3 No Trump, after a snappy 1 No Trump-3 No Trump auction.

DUMMY

♠K96

♥K104

♦875

♣A1052

MY MITT

♠A1042

♥AQJ6

♦J106

♣K4

You receive a standard ♣7 lead. How would you proceed? A conundrum. Not the first, I muse. For example, I remain perplexed at our use of upside down carding. When playing Down Under, does this make our carding “right side up?”

I digress. You have eight toppers. Trick nine is quickly available if you judge your LHO as having underled the ♣QJ. Do you insert the 10? After some thought, I judged not to do so. From either QJx or QJ97, QJ97x or QJ97xx, the ♣Q would have been led. From QJ87, QJ87x, or QJ87xx, the choice of lead is not as clear. By playing low from dummy, there is some chance that RHO will err and play a club honor or have started life with a stiff club honor.

After electing to play low, my RHO plays a disappointing 6, forcing my king. What now? A reasonable line is to travel to dummy with a heart and play a spade toward your 10 at trick 3. This line may work if spades break 3-3 and LHO is inhibited about breaking the diamond suit. In this approach, you are rooting against RHO holding both spade honors. With your vulnerable diamond situation, the last thing you want is to give RHO an early trick with dummy's feeble diamond holding. In practice, this likely is your best shot.

Sadly, I do not always take the best shot as my partners will painfully acknowledge. Instead, I chose to get in touch with my inner Zia. I did travel to dummy with a heart at trick two, inserting the 10. At trick three, I decided to beat my opponents to the punch. I played a diamond!! RHO played low. I played the 10 and nearly fell off my chair when the 10 won. I happily showed my hand and claimed 400.

Ironically, my diamond play was slated to have more success against these experts than the vast majority of others. LHO's hand:

♠J53 ♥932 ♦A4 ♣Q9873

LHO could not imagine that I would play this way as his duck of my ♦10 was as smooth as silk. If I had good diamonds, he may have wanted me to use up a potential entry to dummy to further work on diamonds. Also, he may have held out some faint hope of preserving his sole outside entry to a club suit that still held a degree of promise.

My seemingly crazy diamond play at trick three had one subtle advantage. If my expert opponents place me with a diamond honor or two, they will play me for less elsewhere. Imagine if my bluff play induced a spade shift!

Kudos to my RHO for making an excellent play at trick one. From ♣J6 doubleton, he found the play of the 6. Well done! In retrospect, I wish I could have made my trick one play more rapidly to increase the chances of a defensive error. Near-instant recognition of such situations separates the Meckstroths of the world from mere mortals.

At the end of our 20 boards, I felt quite confident about our chances of winning the match, thanks in some measure to my Big Bluff. This was borne out by the "datum" which showed us as plus 25 IMPS on the set. Australia is way ahead of the USA in this regard. All teams play the same boards and each pair's performance is weighed against "average." In fact, the final margin proved to be 33 IMPS. A LOSS by 33 IMPs!!

On my Big Bluff hand, our opponents found the "best shot" line of the spade avoidance play. I do not fault my teammate for not finding the diamond shift that would have set the contract two tricks. Just too tough a play to find in practice. A push board.

I am a bit ashamed of my behavior in the aftermath. One of my teammates, a good friend, had a set from Hell. Three decisions at the five level all went awry. In addition, he failed to count his nine tricks at 3 No Trump (never mind that their 5-4 Spade fit would have produced an easy 11

tricks). At dinner that night, I said that I was angry about the match's outcome. Shame on me!! Your teammates should always be your best friends during an event. If you do not like the way your teammates play, one always has the option of getting new teammates down the road. Both my partner and I had made special accommodations to take care of our pets during our absence (he boarded his beloved dog and my beloved outdoor/indoor cat, Sylvester, needed much tending from my neighbors). My sense is that such "sacrifices" might have had us more fully "invested" in doing well in the event.

Still, no excuse for my comment! One should never lose sight that bridge can be a very humbling game for all of us – even the cream of the crop. ♣