

Ivaska on Bridge



Investigation before the Key Play saves Contract

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	North	
	♠954	
	♥AQJ72	
	♦A763	
	♣7	
West		East
♠A7		♠J103
♥965		♥K84
♦42		♦1098
♣J109653		♣AK82
	South	
	♠KQ862	
	♥103	
	♦KQJ5	
	♣Q4	

North	East	South	West
	Pass	1♠	Pass
2♥	Pass	2♠	Pass
4♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening Lead: ♣J

In this IMP teams game hand South made a spectacular play at trick five, but the key play was an innocuous looking one at trick three.

East took the opening lead with the ♣K and switched to the ♦10. At this point, most players would take the trick in dummy to lead a spade toward the closed hand – intending to play one of the high honors if East followed small. Unless East made the very poor play of gratuitously splitting his ♠J-10, the contract would fail when the heart finesse lost (one heart, one club, and two trump tricks for the defense).

South was not most players. He won the ♦K in hand, and unsuccessfully finessed dummy's ♥Q. He remembered East's original pass and realized that the play at trick one marked his right hand opponent with both the ♣A and ♣K (because West wouldn't normally underlead an ace against a suit contract, especially on this auction). Declarer now knew for a certainty that West had the trump ace, and that the normal play in spades was doomed to failure, so he used dummy's two entries to double-finesse East for the ♠J10x! South played very well, but as usual, it was based on

a sound fundamental principle. He simply put off a guess in the key suit until he had gathered as much information as safely possible about the hand.

It's interesting to note that East probably could have defeated the contract by winning with the ♣A at trick one and returning a low trump. Not knowing about the location of the ♣K and ♥K, declarer would have had no reason to reject the normal play of the ♠K.

That defense was not at all easy to find, but the false card at trick one would have been a good play. Partner obviously would have little part to play in the defense, and it might mislead South about the position of a key trump honor.