

Bridge Theory for the Practitioners

Amit Chakrabarti

22. Strong Psychological Aversion to Instant Defeat

Bob Hamman wrote [Reference 1] about having a “strong psychological aversion to following lines of play that lead to instant defeat if they fail.” In simpler English, this means, don’t go down at trick one or two.

Here is an example from Hamman on this idea. I have slightly modified the bidding sequence to match what I play with my partner.

K 5 4
8 6 5 3 2
A Q
8 6 3

A J 9 2
A K J 9 4
7
K 9 5

Red versus white you open 1H as South and the bidding goes thusly:

Bob	LHO	Partner	RHO
1H	2N [1]	3C [2]	5D [3]
P [4]	P	X [5]	P
5H [6]	all pass.		

- [1] 5-5 in the minors. In this favorable vulnerability the strength of the hand is unpredictable.
- [2] Lower cue bid shows a limit raise or better for partner’s suit with 3+ trumps.
- [3] I have a psychological aversion to let you have it easy.
- [4] Forcing pass with a slam try. I do not have two quick D losers. Partner must double or bid 5H; pass is not an option.
- [5] With my values in D, double is my bid.
- [6] In this color I will try 5H. Also if I pass, Amit will not have a story for his column.

The opening lead is the J of D. Do you take the D hook?

The D hook is a simple choice to make 5H. However, if it fails, you are down instantly. Rightly, you have a strong psychological aversion to going down at trick one. So you do not take the hook but play the Ace. Now you can make 5H if you are careful.

Trick 2. Ruff the D-Q with the 9-H to preserve an entry to dummy.

Trick 3-4 A and K of H.

Trick 5. Small spade to the King.

Trick 6. Hook the 9 which loses to the Ten.

At this stage, LHO has no safe exit. Whatever he does, you can go to dummy by overtaking your 4-H with the 8-H and taking the S-hook. Making 5H.

My partner Elizabeth belongs to the class of experts who feel this way about going down in trick one or two. Here is an example of her brilliance from a team game in Springfield Regional against Jacob Morgan and David Grainger. Jake Morgan is a grand life master with over 15,000 points and David Grainger is another professional player with over 7,000 master points. When you play against players of such caliber, you know you cannot IMP them out. You have to play a Winner's game instead of a Loser's game [Note 1].

Elizabeth opens 1C with

Q x

A Q x x

x x

K J x x x

and the bidding progresses thusly:

Elizabeth	Morgan	Amit	Grainger
1C	P	1S	2D
P [1]	3D [2]	4C [3]	P
4S [4]	P	6C [5]	All pass

[1] No support X, hence she does not have 3 Ss.

[2] It's the raise of partner's bid that causes havoc.

[3] Not discussed whether it is Key Card ask or not; however, playing in 4C in IMP is pathetic and if you want to play at least to 5C, you might as well answer Key Cards.

[4] 2 Key Cards but no Q of Cs.

[5] Winner's game, pard! Now make it.

Jake leads a small D and dummy hits with:

A K x x x

J x x

x

A Q x x

David wins the first trick with the D-ace and instantly returns a small H. Looking at the spades, he realized that if he gives time, declarer will first test the spades and then try the H-hook. But if he returns the heart NOW, declarer will not have the luxury of testing the spades before deciding whether to take the heart hook or not.

Elizabeth paused, decided not to go down on trick 2 and played the heart Ace. Spades were 3-3 and the slam was made. Bravo!

Outside chatting, David told me: your partner should play the overcaller for the King of Heart. I said, my partner has this client type appearance but you might want to take another look at her. She actually knows how to play this game!

References and Notes:

Reference 1 With the help of Barry Rigal, Bob Hamman has come up with a CD called “A view from the top”. I highly recommend this interactive CD where you can play the hands yourself and then see step by step what Hamman would do and why. Highly instructive!

Note 1: The concept of Loser’s game versus Winner’s game is extremely important in various spheres of life. A loser’s game is, for example, a club bridge game against uneven opponents or a tennis match at the local country club. Whoever makes less mistake win --- hence the name, *loser’s game*. However, against enterprising opponents, loser’s game is not enough --- they will not make *unforced* mistakes. You have to take a view, be the architect of your own fate and thus play the Winner’s game. As I said, this is a widely applicable concept; for example, Charlie Ellis has used these concepts in the context of investing:

http://www.amazon.com/Winning-The-Losers-Game-ebook/dp/B000FA5KSC/ref=dp_kinw_strp_1