



MISDEFEND
these hands
WITH ME

Mark Horton

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INTRODUCTION

Play Bridge with Reese, published in 1960, introduced the now popular method of presenting a deal using an ‘over the shoulder’ style. The follow up in 1976, *Play These Hands with Me*, was even more successful. In 2007 my attempt to follow in the footsteps of the master, *Misplay these Hands with Me*, describes how a series of hands are plausibly misplayed before the eponymous author realizes there was a better, winning line. It did not prove difficult to gather material from top-class events. The book spawned a series of articles that ran in the ACBL Bulletin from 2011-2020.

Although there will never be a shortage of misplayed hands, it occurred to me that it was time to approach the concept from a different angle, and I discovered that my files were awash with deals from major championships where one (or sometimes both) of the defenders had failed in their mission. On many occasions the winning defense was found at another table, a testament to the tremendous standard set by today’s experts.

Defense is difficult. Just like declarer play, it requires the ability to attempt to reconstruct the hidden hands, in this case, declarer’s and partner’s. This process starts during the bidding phase and continues with the opening lead, which is often a vital moment. After the appearance of dummy it is usually possible to form some sort of overall defensive plan, but the devil may prove to be in the details. In the unlikely event that you miss the winning move on a deal, I should remind you that Reese was fond of using the phrase, ‘I should have got that right’.

I invite you to *Misdefend These Hands with Me*.

Mark Horton
Shrewsbury

THE HASTY HEART



There can be little doubt that team events represent the ‘purest’ form of the game. With overtricks reduced to a minor role, both declarer and the defenders can concentrate on making or breaking the contract.

In the qualifying rounds of a long knockout event where my partner is a sound performer, I pick up this average collection as South:

Dealer West. ♠ A Q 6 2
Both Vul. ♥ A 7 3
 ♦ J 10
 ♣ 10 8 6 3

The player on my left opens 1♠ and when partner has nothing to say, East responds 2NT, which is alerted. Upon inquiry this proves to be a somewhat unusual agreement, promising a limited hand (8-12) with both minor suits. I have nothing to contribute and West rebids 4♠, leaving us with this brief auction:

West	North	East	South
1♠	pass	2NT*	pass
4♠	all pass		

My partner leads a fourth-best ♥5 and dummy is as promised:

N W E S	♠ 10 ♥ 9 ♦ K 7 6 5 2 ♣ K Q J 7 5 4
♠ A Q 6 2 ♥ A 7 3 ♦ J 10 ♣ 10 8 6 3	

That does not look too terrifying — I have two trump tricks and as partner’s lead promises an honor in hearts we may be able to defeat this, as they say, ‘on the go’.

I take the ♥A, declarer following with the ♥10, cash the ♠A to remove dummy’s trump, and continue with the ♥7. Declarer wins with the king (partner following with the ♥2) and plays the ♠K, followed by the ♠J. I win with the queen as partner discards the ♣9 and the ♥4. Evidently partner has the ♣A, but when I return the ♣3 declarer ruffs, draws my remaining trump with the ♠9 and proceeds to play out his remaining trumps.

This is the position:

N W E S	♠ — ♥ — ♦ K 7 6 ♣ K
♠ — ♥ — ♦ J 10 ♣ 10 8	

When declarer produces the ♥Q it squeezes my partner in the minors.

This was the full deal:

<p>♠ KJ97543 ♥ KQ10 ♦ A98 ♣ —</p>	<p>♠ 8 ♥ J86542 ♦ Q43 ♣ A92</p>	<p>♠ 10 ♥ 9 ♦ K7652 ♣ KQJ754</p>									
	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		
	N										
W		E									
	S										
	<p>♠ AQ62 ♥ A73 ♦ J10 ♣ 10863</p>										

POST-MORTEM

In general terms, leading away from a king is a losing proposition, so there was no guarantee that North would hold the ♥K.

In the other room, my counterpart found a much more effective defense. Having taken the ♥A, he returned the ♠2. Declarer won with dummy's ten and advanced the ♣K, ruffing when South played an un-concerned ♣3. The ♠K was taken by the ace and now South found the way to avoid all danger by switching to the ♦J. When he came in with the ♠Q he could continue with the ♦10, breaking up the impending squeeze.

There are two lessons to be learned from this deal. Firstly, the importance of retaining trump control — the ace of trumps frequently has an important role to play. Secondly, one must try to anticipate how the play will develop — here it is clear that North will need to hold useful cards in both diamonds and clubs.

In 2007, Horton wrote *Misplay These Hands with Me*, a deliberate homage to Reese’s classic, *Play These Hands with Me*. The difference was that the declarer in Horton’s book always made an error, sometimes obvious, sometimes not so much. This successful book was the basis of a long-running column in the ACBL’s *Bridge Bulletin*, and a sequel appeared in 2019. Now the same author turns to the topic of defense, and once again gives the reader a chance to learn from someone else’s mistakes. All the deals are taken from top-level play.



MARK HORTON (UK) travels the world writing about bridge. Editor of BeBridge magazine and of the Daily Bulletins at World and European Championships, he is also the author of seven previous MPP titles.

