

## Some Thoughts on Luck and Cheating in Duplicate Bridge

Does anyone really believe that there's no luck involved in duplicate bridge? If so, perhaps these folks can be convinced by the hand below, in which my partner and I missed a win because two cards stuck together.

I know what you're thinking, and, no, there was no revoke. There was no misinformation. There was no penalty card. No one miscounted his hand. But two sticky cards not only cost partner and me our win, they also got me thinking about a way to cheat at duplicate bridge with no possibility of getting caught.

Allow me to explain.

Partner and I were playing East-West. North was dealer, none vulnerable. The bidding went as follows:

North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♥
Pass	4♣	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

When the bidding was over, I (East) tabled the dummy, North led the 3♣, and partner (West) saw:

→ 5♣

♠AQ72  
♥J10974  
♦Q95  
♣3

♠J943  
♥AQ862  
♦K8  
♣A10

(Hand rotated for convenience; declarer is West.)

There's some work to be done in spades, and a slim chance of setting up a discard on a diamond if partner finds RHO with a doubleton A♦ or either opponent with ♦J10 tight, but there seems to be no harm in winning the A♣ and ruffing a club, both to eliminate that suit and to cross to dummy to take a trump finesse.

Partner did so, but when he called for the J♥ from the table, RHO dropped two small trumps on the table, one stuck to the bottom of the other. RHO quickly picked these back up and placed them in his hand, and then put the 6♥ on the table, saying "I don't know if anyone saw the other card or not..."

No one called the director, but partner's natural play—finessing the K♥—now looked much less appealing; perhaps the K♥ was singleton offside? So, partner played the A♥ from hand and grimaced when LHO showed out.

Neither spades, diamonds, nor the opponents cooperated on the subsequent play, so partner was one down, losing two spades, the A♦, and that fateful K♥. The tied-for-top we were due had partner taken the trump finesse became a tied-for-bottom, and cost us our first-place finish. All because two cards stuck together. Here's the complete hand:

	♠K1086	
	♥—	
	♦J742	
	♣KJ852	
♠J943		♠AQ72
♥AQ862		♥J10974
♦K8		♦Q95
♣A10		♣3
	♠5	
	♥K53	
	♦A1063	
	♣Q9764	

Note that even had partner called the director and made one of RHO's small trumps a penalty card, we would have achieved the same result when partner went up with the A♥.

This got me thinking. RHO knew from the bidding and seeing dummy that we had ten trumps. He knew his partner was void and his K♥ was finessable. *Let me state unequivocally that I believe RHO's dropping of two cards on the table was not intentional.* But a devious defender might "accidentally" let the two small trumps hit the table in hopes of inciting declarer to forego the winning finesse. And there'd be no way to prove that said defender had done anything wrong.

Of course, no one with a shred of ethics would play this way, but all of us who enjoy duplicate bridge have to accept that luck and the ethics of our opponents sometimes affect our performance. Try as we might, we don't always have the ability to control for these factors.