

# SIX STEPS TO WINNING DECLARER PLAY

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# Preface

I wrote this book because, in fifty years of playing bridge, I have seen countless declarers go down in contracts that they should have made. I believe they did not take into account the available information in planning the play of the hand. Defenders bid. Their bids give information about their hands. Defenders discard. What and when they discard gives further information.

My focus is on the process a declarer should follow in taking full advantage of all information in planning the play of each hand. The six questions presented for each of these fifty-two hands are the guide to developing the most effective strategy.

These hands are not presented in a particular order because there is no order of increasing difficulty at the table. We really cannot plan exactly how to play a hand until we see the dummy. For every hand, we ask the same six questions. The purpose is to help train the reader to ask these questions every time. This book is not so much about how we play a particular hand as it is about teaching the process for planning the play.

- 1)       How many tricks can we take right now?  
These are the tricks we can win without letting the defenders on lead. Suppose we are declaring a 3NT contract. If we begin with six fast tricks, it becomes easier to put together a plan when we know that we need only three more to make the contract.

- 2) How many tricks can the defense take right now?

These are the tricks the defenders can win without letting us on lead. Again, suppose we are declaring 3NT. If we know that the defenders can win three fast tricks, our plan must allow for the loss of one other trick at most. A plan that requires us to lose two tricks to build our ninth trick is a ticket to failure.

- 3) Where can we get more tricks?  
We must count the number of tricks we can build in each suit. We need to know which suit or suits will get us the tricks we need. We might have to build winners in more than one suit to succeed.

- 4) Where can the defense get more tricks?  
We need to know which suits the defenders will attack to build their winners. We might have to disguise our weakness in those suits. We might have to keep one defender off lead to protect our holding in a suit. Very often, when playing 3NT, we might have to build our winners faster than the defenders can build theirs.

- 5) How many tricks do we need for a good score?

At IMPs, that is often just making the contract. At matchpoints, the goal might be to make an overtrick or hold our losses to down one. That will depend on what we think the players holding the same hands will do. We need to set a goal that offers the best chance for that good score. Making nine tricks in 3NT is a poor result if every other declarer makes ten tricks in 4♠.

6) What is the best way to play the hand?  
This is where we create our plan. We put together all the information available in the auction and play, and decide what to do next. We determine which suit to play first, and how to play it. We must also be prepared to pause mid-hand to consider new information.

I believe that bridge is just as dynamic as life, love, politics and warfare. All offer incomplete information. Happenings occur without warning. A seemingly hopeless contract succeeds. A seemingly impregnable contract fails. The strong declarer makes the best plan based on everything that is known and might include acquiring more information to improve the chances of success. The technical term for this is abductive reasoning.

I could not have written this book without help of two wonderful people. I owe them both a thank you. My cousin/editor Iris helped me to make the writing clear and consistent and make my explanations more understandable.

My other thank you is to my wife, April. She reviewed each of these hands and asked me questions that helped me improve on my explanations. She also inspired me to write *Six Steps to Winning Declarer Play*. Happy and winning bridge to you all!



# Hand 1

Dealer: North  
 Vul: North/South  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ 5 3 2  
 ♥ K 9 7 6 4  
 ♦ J 5  
 ♣ K 8 5

South

♠ J 8 6  
 ♥ A 5 3  
 ♦ A K 10 6 3  
 ♣ A 6

|          |       |      |             |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| West     | North | East | South (you) |
| ---      | Pass  | Pass | 1NT         |
| Pass     | 2♦    | Pass | 2♥          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♠A, on which East plays the ♠9 (encouraging). West continues with the ♠K (East plays the ♠4) and then the ♠7 to East's ♠Q. We follow suit to all three rounds of spades. East now plays the ♣J (promising the ♣10). Plan the play.

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have the Ace and King in hearts, diamonds and clubs. That gives us six tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
The defense has already taken three spade tricks. They cannot take any more tricks right now.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we have eight trumps, missing the ♥Q, ♥J and ♥10. If the defenders' trumps divide 3-2, we will get two more tricks by cashing our ♥A and ♥K. The defenders will follow suit to both tricks, leaving them only one more trump. If their trumps divide 4-1, we will get only one more trick by cashing our ♥A and ♥K.

The diamond suit might supply another trick if either the diamond finesse wins or the long diamond is set up by ruffing out the ♦Q. We take the diamond finesse by leading the ♦J and hoping that East has the ♦Q. We ruff out the ♦Q by first cashing the ♦A and ♦K and looking at the cards the defenders play. If neither defender plays the ♦Q, we continue by ruffing a diamond. If the ♦Q still does not appear, we get back to our hand to ruff another diamond.

Another possibility is to cash the ♣A and the ♣K and then ruff a club in our hand.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders will win at least one trump trick. If a defender holds four trumps, they will win two more tricks. Also, the defenders will win a diamond trick if we take a diamond finesse and West has the ♦Q.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** The defenders took three spade tricks, but it looks as if that is normal. We need at least two other tricks to make our contract. That should be fairly easy as long as the trumps divide 3-2. We can get a good score by winning nine tricks (or eight if trumps divide 4-1). We did not overbid, which some pairs might do.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** East will have the ♦Q half the time. So, the odds for a diamond finesse are about 50%. Ruffing a diamond will get us a third trick if either defender has the ♦Q and no more than three diamonds. That will happen about two-thirds of the time. Ruffing a club in our hand will give us a third club trick just about all the time. That is the best chance, so we will ruff a club.

We plan to ruff a club in our hand for an extra trick. Do we draw trump first and then ruff a club, or ruff a club and then draw trump?

The right line is to play the ♥A and see what happens. If both defenders play a small heart, continue with a heart to the ♥K. Now, play the ♣A, a club to the ♣K and then ruff a club with our last trump. When the hearts divide 3-2, we make nine tricks.

Here is the full hand:

| North |            |      |              |
|-------|------------|------|--------------|
| ♠     | 5 3 2      |      |              |
| ♥     | K 9 7 6 4  |      |              |
| ♦     | J 5        |      |              |
| ♣     | K 8 5      |      |              |
| West  |            | East |              |
| ♠     | A K 10 7   | ♠    | Q 9 4        |
| ♥     | J 10 2     | ♥    | Q 8          |
| ♦     | Q 8 7 2    | ♦    | 9 4          |
| ♣     | Q 3        | ♣    | J 10 9 7 4 2 |
| South |            |      |              |
| ♠     | J 8 6      |      |              |
| ♥     | A 5 3      |      |              |
| ♦     | A K 10 6 3 |      |              |
| ♣     | A 6        |      |              |

**Final Comments:** The six-question process led us to the correct percentage line of play and, on this hand, the maximum result. There are many hands where an inferior percentage line of play will win more tricks. That does not alter the process. In the long run, choosing the best percentage line of play gives you the best results. We should adopt an inferior percentage line of play only with a very good reason.

# Hand 2

Dealer: West  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ K J 10 7 3  
 ♥ 9 6  
 ♦ Q 9 8 7 3  
 ♣ 2

South

♠ A Q 8 4 2  
 ♥ K 3  
 ♦ J  
 ♣ A K 9 8 4

|      |       |                 |             |
|------|-------|-----------------|-------------|
| West | North | East            | South (you) |
| 1♣   | Pass  | 2♥ <sup>1</sup> | 2♠          |
| 3♥   | 4♠    | All Pass        |             |

- 1 A preemptive bid. Shows a maximum of 4-5 high card points and a six-card or longer suit.

West leads the ♠5. We play the ♠10 from dummy at trick one. East plays the ♠6. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have ten spades between us. The defenders' trumps are divided

2-1. We could take five trump tricks right now. We can also take two club tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defenders can win one diamond trick and one heart trick.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we can win three more trump tricks by ruffing diamonds in one hand and clubs in the other. It might be possible to lose a diamond and a heart and then do a complete cross-ruff, leaving the ♠9 outstanding. We might get another trick by setting up either the long club or the long diamond. Finally, there is a chance of the ♥K being a winner.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders can get another trick if we are unable to set up a long club or long diamond.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** we are safe for our contract. We are a little lucky that West was on opening lead. East would probably lead a heart, and the defense would have three fast winners. Winning an eleventh trick should get us a good score. It also is the best we can do.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** West opened the bidding. It is unlikely that the ♥K will win a trick. So let us examine other possibilities.

We are missing the ♠9. There is no reason to draw trump at this time. First, cash the ♣A and ♣K. Discard a heart. Now, lead a diamond. West will win and lead a club. Ruff this high and take stock. Did East follow suit to the third round of clubs?

If East follows to the third club, draw the last trump (winning in our hand) and then ruff out the club suit. We will win eight trump tricks (six by ruffing) and three club tricks (the ♣A, ♣K and long club).

If East does not follow to the last club, lead a second round of diamonds and ruff it. Next, draw the last trump with dummy's winner. Now, ruff the third round of diamonds. If everyone follows suit, ruff the fourth round of clubs and then ruff the fourth round of diamonds. Dummy will have three cards left: one trump, one heart and one diamond. The trump and the diamond are winners.

Here is the full hand:

|      |            |       |               |
|------|------------|-------|---------------|
|      |            | North |               |
|      |            | ♠     | K J 10 7 3    |
|      |            | ♥     | 9 6           |
|      |            | ♦     | Q 9 8 7 3     |
|      |            | ♣     | 2             |
| West |            | East  |               |
| ♠    | 9 5        | ♠     | 6             |
| ♥    | A 10       | ♥     | Q J 8 7 5 4 2 |
| ♦    | A K 6 2    | ♦     | 10 5 4        |
| ♣    | Q J 10 7 6 | ♣     | 5 3           |
|      |            | South |               |
|      |            | ♠     | A Q 8 4 2     |
|      |            | ♥     | K 3           |
|      |            | ♦     | J             |
|      |            | ♣     | A K 9 8 4     |

**Final Comments:** West opened the bidding with 1♣. He is unlikely to have five diamonds. He probably would have opened 1♦ were that the case. Also, East showed a long heart suit with a weak hand. He is unlikely to have five diamonds as well as a long heart suit. Based on the bidding, we are more likely to get our eleventh trick with a long diamond.

# Hand 3

Dealer: East  
 Vul: North/South  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ 5  
 ♥ 7 6 5 3 2  
 ♦ A Q 9 2  
 ♣ K 9 7

South

♠ A Q 8 2  
 ♥ 10 8  
 ♦ K J 10 8 4  
 ♣ A 8

| West | North           | East     | South (you) |
|------|-----------------|----------|-------------|
| ---  | ---             | Pass     | 1♦          |
| Dbl. | 1♥              | 1♠       | 1NT         |
| Pass | 3♦ <sup>1</sup> | Pass     | 3♠          |
| Pass | 5♦              | All Pass |             |

1 Limit raise in support of Diamonds

West leads the ♦3. We play the ♦A from the dummy and the ♦4 from our hand as East plays the ♦5. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have one spade, five diamonds and two club tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?** The defense can win two heart tricks right now.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we have three ways to get more tricks. First, we can lead hearts to set up tricks in that suit. Second, we can take a spade finesse. Third, we can ruff spades in the dummy.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense can get more tricks if we take a line of play that gives them more tricks.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** we are in an aggressive contract. The other team might be in 3NT. That contract will make whenever West leads a spade or whenever East holds the ♠K. We want to make this contract to equal the score at the other table. That means we need three more tricks.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** we can lead hearts and try to set up a long heart in the dummy. We will get two heart tricks if the defenders' hearts divide 3-3 (36%). That plus one spade ruff will give us eleven tricks. However, the defense started with a trump lead. We must assume they will lead a trump if they win a trick and have one to lead. If the hearts do not divide 3-3, we will not have the tricks we need for the contract.

We can take a spade finesse (50%). If it wins, we will ruff two spades in the dummy. If it loses, we will go down.

The third possibility is to ruff three spades in the dummy. The defenders led a trump, which reduces the dummy to three trumps. We cannot afford to let the defenders on lead if we are to ruff three spades in the dummy. A second trump lead would make this plan impossible.

We need three fast entries to our hand to ruff three spades. The ♠A is the first fast entry. The second fast entry is the ♣A. Our third fast entry is by ruffing a club. We have enough entries for this plan to succeed.

Of the three possible lines of play, the best by far is to ruff three spades in the dummy. We start by cashing our ♠A and ruffing a spade. Next, we play a club to our ♣A. We use this entry to ruff a second spade in the dummy. We then cash the ♣K and ruff a club to return to our hand and ruff our last spade in the dummy. All these ruffs are with high trumps. We finish with our five diamonds, three spade ruffs in the dummy plus two clubs and one spade. We win eleven tricks for a plus score.

Here is the full hand:

| North |            |      |          |
|-------|------------|------|----------|
| ♠     | 5          |      |          |
| ♥     | 7 6 5 3 2  |      |          |
| ♦     | A Q 9 2    |      |          |
| ♣     | K 9 7      |      |          |
| West  |            | East |          |
| ♠     | K 9 7 4    | ♠    | J 10 6 3 |
| ♥     | Q J 9 4    | ♥    | A K      |
| ♦     | 3          | ♦    | 7 6 5    |
| ♣     | Q J 5 2    | ♣    | 10 6 4 3 |
| South |            |      |          |
| ♠     | A Q 8 2    |      |          |
| ♥     | 10 8       |      |          |
| ♦     | K J 10 8 4 |      |          |
| ♣     | A 8        |      |          |

**Final Comments:** We had to count our entries to know that we could ruff all three spades in the dummy. If we did not have enough entries to ruff all three of our spades, we would have to rely on setting up the heart suit or taking the spade finesse.

# Hand 4

Dealer: South  
 Vul: North/South  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ A J 8 7  
 ♥ Q J  
 ♦ K Q 7 5  
 ♣ J 7 5

South

♠ K 9  
 ♥ A K 8 7 6 4 3 2  
 ♦ 10 8 6  
 ♣ ---

| West     | North           | East | South (you)     |
|----------|-----------------|------|-----------------|
| ---      | ---             | ---  | 1♥              |
| Pass     | 2♦ <sup>1</sup> | Pass | 2♥              |
| Pass     | 3♥              | Pass | 4♣ <sup>2</sup> |
| Pass     | 4♠ <sup>3</sup> | Pass | 6♥              |
| All Pass |                 |      |                 |

- 1 Natural and game forcing
- 2 First round control and slam interest.
- 3 First round control, cooperating with South's slam interest

West leads the ♣K. We play the ♣5 from dummy and ruff as East plays the ♣10 (encouraging). Plan the play.

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have eight heart tricks and two spade tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
The defenders can take the ♦A right now.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we can get one or two tricks in the diamond suit, depending on which defender holds the ♦A. We can get a second diamond trick if West has the ♦A. A second chance in diamonds is if a defender holds only one or two diamonds, including the ♦J.

We have two spade tricks, and can get a third trick if West holds the ♠Q and we finesse him for that card. We can also ruff a spade. If either defender holds two or three spades as well as the ♠Q, we can get a third spade trick.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders might get a second trick in either spades or diamonds, depending on our line of play and where their key cards are located.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** we need to make the contract for a good score. To do that, we need two more tricks. One will be a diamond. There are several choices for getting the second trick.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** There is no certainty of making this hand. The problem with leading diamonds twice is that East might decide to let

us win the first diamond. When we lead a second diamond, East will be able to take two diamond tricks. We will not get the chance to test the spade suit.

The spade finesse offers a 50% chance of success. The problem with taking a spade finesse is that, if it loses, we will always lose a spade and a diamond.

Leading diamonds is a little better. West might have the ♦A. That is a 50% chance. Even if East has the ♦A, either defender might have only one or two diamonds with the ♦J. There is a 16% chance that a defender's doubleton diamond includes the ♦J. There is also a 2% chance that a defender holds a singleton ♦J. The overall chance of success here is about 59%.

There is a way to combine our chances in these two suits. We should give up on a simple finesse in spades and start by drawing trump. We will ruff a spade. The defenders hold seven spades between them. The chances of either defender holding three or fewer spades that includes the ♠Q is about 36%. If the defenders still have the ♠Q, we fall back on getting two diamond tricks. The overall chance of success here is about 74%.

Here is the full hand:

| North             |  |                |  |
|-------------------|--|----------------|--|
| ♠ A J 8 7         |  |                |  |
| ♥ Q J             |  |                |  |
| ♦ K Q 7 5         |  |                |  |
| ♣ J 7 5           |  |                |  |
| West              |  | East           |  |
| ♠ 5 4 3 2         |  | ♠ Q 10 6       |  |
| ♥ 10 9            |  | ♥ 5            |  |
| ♦ 9 4 2           |  | ♦ A J 3        |  |
| ♣ K Q 8 2         |  | ♣ A 10 9 6 4 3 |  |
| South             |  |                |  |
| ♠ K 9             |  |                |  |
| ♥ A K 8 7 6 4 3 2 |  |                |  |
| ♦ 10 8 6          |  |                |  |
| ♣ ---             |  |                |  |

**Final Comments:** As it happens, the ♠Q can be ruffed out. Notice that trying the diamond suit first will lead to disaster. East should play low on the first diamond. If we lead a second diamond, East will win two diamond tricks. If we lead a diamond before ruffing a spade, we will not have an entry to cash the ♠Q.

# Hand 5

Dealer: West  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ 5 4 3  
 ♥ K Q 8 2  
 ♦ J 5  
 ♣ A Q 6 4

South

♠ A K Q J 7 2  
 ♥ 7  
 ♦ A 9 6 4  
 ♣ 8 2

|          |       |      |             |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| West     | North | East | South (you) |
| Pass     | 1♣    | Pass | 1♠          |
| Pass     | 1NT   | Pass | 4♠          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♥J. We play the ♥Q in the dummy. East wins with the ♥A and we follow suit with the ♥7. East leads the ♠6, which we win with the ♠A as West plays the ♠9 and we play the ♠3 from the dummy. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have six spade tricks, one heart, one diamond and one club.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

None.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we can take a club finesse for one extra trick. We might also take an extra trick by ruffing a diamond in the dummy.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** we must give the defenders a diamond trick before we can ruff a diamond in the dummy. The defenders will get a club trick if we take the club finesse and it loses.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** we are in a normal contract. We should take a safe line of play to make the contract, but give ourselves at least a chance for eleven tricks.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** The most likely way to get another trick is to ruff a diamond in the dummy. The defenders led trump, so we must ruff a diamond right away. We play a low diamond from our hand. If the defenders win and play a second spade, we will win. Our line of play will depend on how the spades divide.

Whether the spades are 2-2 or 3-1, we will cash the ♦A and watch the diamond spots. Just in case a defender plays the ♦K and ♦10 on the first two rounds of diamonds, we will ruff a diamond. Just possibly, that defender started with only three diamonds to the ♦K-Q-10. If so, our ♦9 will be the high diamond. If the ♦9 is high, the best line is to lead a low heart and ruff it high, then draw the outstanding enemy trump.

It is unlikely the ♦9 will be the high diamond. If the ♦9 is not high, the safest line at that point is to cash a heart, discarding our diamond. Then, ruff a heart high and draw the outstanding enemy trump before trying the club finesse.

Here is the full hand:

| North |             |      |            |
|-------|-------------|------|------------|
| ♠     | 5 4 3       |      |            |
| ♥     | K Q 8 2     |      |            |
| ♦     | J 5         |      |            |
| ♣     | A Q 6 4     |      |            |
| West  |             | East |            |
| ♠     | 10 9        | ♠    | 8 6        |
| ♥     | J 10 9 6 5  | ♥    | A 4 3      |
| ♦     | Q 10 3 2    | ♦    | K 8 7      |
| ♣     | J 3         | ♣    | K 10 9 7 5 |
| South |             |      |            |
| ♠     | A K Q J 7 2 |      |            |
| ♥     | 7           |      |            |
| ♦     | A 9 6 4     |      |            |
| ♣     | 8 2         |      |            |

**Final Comments:** Some hands are laid out so that every table is supposed to get the same result. This is one of those hands. That does not change how this hand should be played. At the table, West won the diamond as East played the ♦7. West led a second spade, on which East followed suit. On the ♦A, West played the ♦2 and East played the ♦8. If East had played the ♦10, we would ruff a diamond to see if the ♦9 became a winner.

# Hand 6

Dealer: West  
 Vul: Both  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ J 9 7 3  
 ♥ 6 3  
 ♦ Q 7 3 2  
 ♣ A J 10

South

♠ A K 10 6 5 2  
 ♥ A 4  
 ♦ 10 6  
 ♣ K 6 3

|      |       |                 |             |
|------|-------|-----------------|-------------|
| West | North | East            | South (you) |
| 1♥   | Pass  | 3♥ <sup>1</sup> | 3♠          |
| Pass | 4♠    | All Pass        |             |

1 preemptive

West leads the ♥K. We play low from the dummy and win with the ♥A as East plays the ♥10. We cash the ♠A. West follows suit with the ♠4 and we play the ♠3 from the dummy. East plays the ♥8. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we start with two spade tricks, one heart trick and two club tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?** The defense can win one heart trick and two diamond tricks right now.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we can get three more spade tricks once we give West his spade winner. We can also win a third club trick by guessing the location of the ♣Q.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense has four certain tricks (one spade, one heart and two diamonds). They will get one more trick if we take a losing finesse in the club suit.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** we are in a normal contract that cannot make because of the unlucky position in the spade suit. Our job at this point is to find a way to go down only one.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** we can go down one by persuading the defenders to lead a club. West cannot lead a spade without giving up his trump trick. We can use that to force the defenders to help us.

We start by leading a heart. The defenders will be forced to help us eliminate the diamonds in the dummy. If they will lead a spade, heart or club, they will give us an extra trick. If either defender leads a club, we are guaranteed a third club trick. If West leads a spade, we do not have a trump loser. If either defender leads a

heart, we get an extra trick by ruffing the heart in the dummy and discarding a loser from our hand.

Therefore, the defenders will have to lead diamonds. We ruff the third diamond, cash our ♠K and then lead a club to the ♣A in the dummy. Finally, we ruff the fourth diamond. If West over ruffs the fourth diamond, he will have to lead a club (taking the finesse for us) or lead a heart (giving us an extra trick by ruffing the heart in the dummy and discarding a loser from our hand). If West follows suit or discards, we lead a spade to his ♠Q. Here is the position with West on lead:

| North |      |
|-------|------|
| ♠     | J    |
| ♥     |      |
| ♦     |      |
| ♣     | J 10 |
| South |      |
| ♠     | 10   |
| ♥     |      |
| ♦     |      |
| ♣     | K 6  |

If West leads a club, he takes the finesse for us. If West leads anything else, he gives us a ruff and discard. Either way, we get nine tricks for down only one.

Here is the full hand:

| North |              |
|-------|--------------|
| ♠     | J 9 7 3      |
| ♥     | 6 3          |
| ♦     | Q 7 3 2      |
| ♣     | A J 10       |
| West  | East         |
| ♠     | Q 8 4        |
| ♥     | K Q J 9 7    |
| ♦     | A J 4        |
| ♣     | Q 5          |
| South |              |
| ♠     | A K 10 6 5 2 |
| ♥     | A 4          |
| ♦     | 10 6         |
| ♣     | K 6 3        |

**Final Comments:** It is unfortunate that East/West will not make more than nine tricks. However, this is a normal contract. Going down only one gives us the best chance of a reasonable score. In fact, going down one, not doubled, is worth a little better than average. Going down two would be a poor result. The lesson here is to remember that every trick is important. Every player in a spade contract faces the same bad luck in the trump suit.

# Hand 7

Dealer: East  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ A 10 7 2  
 ♥ A J 6  
 ♦ J 10  
 ♣ K 5 4 3

South

♠ Q J 8 6 3  
 ♥ K 8 3  
 ♦ Q 4  
 ♣ A 6 2

| West             | North           | East | South (you) |
|------------------|-----------------|------|-------------|
| ---              | ---             | Pass | 1♠          |
| 2NT <sup>1</sup> | 3♦ <sup>2</sup> | Pass | 3♠          |
| All Pass         |                 |      |             |

- 1 Promises at least five cards in each minor suit.
- 2 Promises at least four trumps and strong support (invites game). This is a cue bid that shows spades. A 3♣ bid would show a strong hand with hearts.

West leads the ♣10. How do we play this hand?

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have two clubs, two hearts and one spade.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
The defenders can take two diamond tricks.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we can establish at least three more spade tricks, and we can take a heart finesse for a third heart trick.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders will win a club trick eventually. They will win a spade trick if East has the ♠K and a heart trick if East has the ♥Q.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** Many pairs will be in game, which we avoided. Our goal should be to make the hand and hope that the pairs that bid game will go down.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** we could easily lose five tricks on this hand. We start with two diamond losers. There is very little chance of avoiding a club loser, and then there are the finesses in both spades and hearts. We will have to take a finesse in both major suits and hope that at least one finesse wins.

We have a concern that West could give East a club ruff. West promised at least five cards in both minor suits. We must minimize the chance that East will be able to ruff away one of our club winners. The best way to stop this is to win the first trick in the dummy. West led the ♣10, which promises the ♣9 and denies the ♣J. So, we start by winning the first trick with the ♣K in the dummy.

We cannot know whether West has the ♠K or the ♥Q, or even if he has either honor. We need to take a finesse, and it is better to take a spade finesse first. That way, there is less of a chance for the defenders to get enough ruffs to defeat this hand.

We could lead a club to our ♣A, but that would give East a chance to ruff and lead a diamond to West for a second club ruff. We would then have to avoid losing a trick in both major suits.

The better chance is to lead a heart to our ♥K, and then lead the ♠Q. If West has the ♠K, we will not lose a spade trick. If East has the ♠K, he may be able to put West on lead in the diamond suit to get a club ruff. It is unlikely that West has both the ♦A and the ♦K. If he had, he would have led a high diamond rather than the ♣10.

When we lead the ♠Q, we will play a low spade from the dummy, unless West plays the ♠K. If East has the ♠K, he will not be able to put West on lead twice to lead clubs. Eventually, we will win a trick and draw trumps before taking a heart finesse.

Here is the full hand:

| North |            |           |
|-------|------------|-----------|
| ♠     | A 10 7 2   |           |
| ♥     | A J 6      |           |
| ♦     | J 10       |           |
| ♣     | K 5 4 3    |           |
| West  |            | East      |
| ♠     | ---        | ♠ K 9 5 4 |
| ♥     | Q 10 7     | ♥ 9 5 4 2 |
| ♦     | A 8 6 5 2  | ♦ K 9 7 3 |
| ♣     | Q 10 9 8 7 | ♣ J       |
| South |            |           |
| ♠     | Q J 8 6 3  |           |
| ♥     | K 8 3      |           |
| ♦     | Q 4        |           |
| ♣     | A 6 2      |           |

**Final Comments:** If we make the mistake of winning the opening lead in our hand, East will be able to lead a diamond to West. West will follow up by leading the ♣Q. We will play the ♣K, but East will be able to ruff and then get off lead. Even with a successful heart finesse, we will lose a spade, two diamonds, a club and a club ruff. By winning the opening club lead in the dummy, we stop East from ruffing one of our two club winners. If East ruffs the second club lead from West, we will be able to play a low club (preserving our club winner).

The simplest line of play after West discards on our spade lead is to let East win the first round of spades

and then draw trumps as soon as we can. Once that is done, we will take the heart finesse for our contract.

# Hand 8

Dealer: East  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ 7 5 4  
 ♥ 3  
 ♦ A 7 3  
 ♣ Q J 10 8 6 2

South

♠ A K Q J 3  
 ♥ Q 7 6 2  
 ♦ J 9  
 ♣ A 3

| West     | North | East | South (you) |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| ---      | ---   | Pass | 1♠          |
| 3♥       | 3♠    | Pass | 4♠          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♥K. We play low from the dummy.  
 West leads the ♦2 at trick two. We play low from the dummy and East wins with the ♦K. East returns the ♣4.  
 How do we play this hand?

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have five spade tricks, one diamond trick and the ♣A. That totals seven tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defenders already have two tricks. They cannot take more tricks right now.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we can get more tricks in the club suit. Also, we can ruff a heart.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense can get more tricks in the heart suit or, perhaps, with the ♣K.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** we have stretched to bid this game. We have to try to make this hand.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** we can take a club finesse. That is likely to win, considering that West's jump in hearts showed a good heart suit but not much else. That will get us to eight tricks, and a successful heart ruff will make nine. We could ruff a second heart, but if West started with a six-card suit, East will be able to over-ruff.

Giving West six hearts for his bid, taking a club finesse will not get us to ten tricks. We will get only one heart ruff. That means we need three club tricks to make our contract. We have to establish the club suit to make this hand.

That brings us to the heart suit. West should have at least a six-card heart suit for his bid. He might have seven hearts. We need to eliminate East's hearts so that when we lead clubs, he will no longer have any hearts to lead. The ♦A will be our entry. There is always a degree of guessing in these situations. West has a

terrific heart suit and he is not vulnerable. It is likely that he will have only six hearts for his bid. The odds favor winning the ♣A and ruffing a heart. Assuming that East follows suit, we will draw trump and lead the ♣3. The dummy will have the ♦A and all the high clubs except for the ♣K.

If our luck holds, East will win the ♣K and then have to lead either a club or diamond. Either way, we have our ten tricks and a plus score.

Here is the full hand:

|      |              |       |              |
|------|--------------|-------|--------------|
|      |              | North |              |
|      |              | ♠     | 7 5 4        |
|      |              | ♥     | 3            |
|      |              | ♦     | A 7 3        |
|      |              | ♣     | Q J 10 8 6 2 |
| West |              | East  |              |
| ♠    | 8 2          | ♠     | 10 9 6       |
| ♥    | A K J 10 9 8 | ♥     | 5 4          |
| ♦    | Q 6 5 2      | ♦     | K 10 8 4     |
| ♣    | 5            | ♣     | K 9 7 4      |
|      |              | South |              |
|      |              | ♠     | A K Q J 3    |
|      |              | ♥     | Q 7 6 2      |
|      |              | ♦     | J 9          |
|      |              | ♣     | A 3          |

**Final Comments:** Looking at the full hand, we see that East can defeat the contract by returning a diamond. We will lose our entry to the long clubs. Not

every defender plays perfectly. A good declarer must be in a position to take advantage of this sort of mistake.

# Hand 9

Dealer: North  
 Vul: East/West  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ A 9 5 2  
 ♥ ---  
 ♦ A K 8 7 5  
 ♣ 10 7 4 2

South

♠ K Q 4  
 ♥ A K Q 3  
 ♦ 10 6 4  
 ♣ A K 8

| West     | North           | East | South (you)      |
|----------|-----------------|------|------------------|
| ---      | 1♦              | Pass | 1♥               |
| Pass     | 1♠              | Pass | 2♣ <sup>1</sup>  |
| Pass     | 3♣              | Pass | 4NT <sup>2</sup> |
| Pass     | 5♥ <sup>3</sup> | Pass | 5NT              |
| Pass     | 6♦ <sup>4</sup> | Pass | 6NT              |
| All Pass |                 |      |                  |

- 1 Artificial, forcing to game and asking for more information
- 2 1430-style Blackwood, with clubs as the trump suit
- 3 Two of the five Aces, denies the ♣Q

#### 4 Promises the ♦K

West leads the ♣9. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have three spade tricks, three heart tricks, two diamond tricks and two club tricks, for a total of ten.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
None

**Where can we get more tricks?** There are chances of an extra trick in spades, two extra tricks in diamonds and a probable extra trick in the club suit.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders have a probable trick in the diamond suit. They might win another trick if none of our chances for extra tricks succeed.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** we are in a normal contract, so we need twelve tricks for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** we have the ♣10 in the dummy and the ♣8 in our hand. Assuming the ♣9 is an “honest” lead, we have a very good chance for a third club trick by playing the ♣10 right now.

Assuming that we can win a third club trick, we are up to eleven winners. We have a chance at four tricks in the spade suit. That fourth trick plus the third club trick will give us our contract.

Before we try for any extra club or spade winners, we have to consider the diamond suit. Any time the suit divides 3-2 (68%), we will get those two extra tricks.

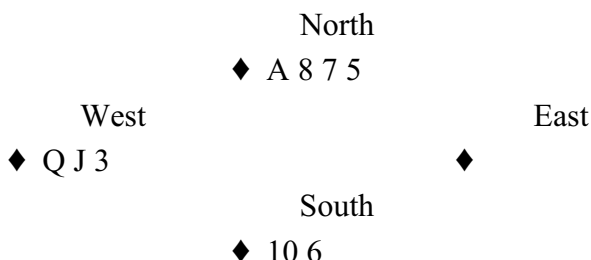
The ♦10 in our hand gives us an extra chance if West has a singleton ♦J or ♦Q (6%). Assume that West plays the ♦J or ♦Q when we lead the ♦4 from our hand. We win with the ♦K and then lead the ♦5 from the dummy towards our hand. If East started with four diamonds, he can win this trick but we will have the four diamond tricks we need to make our contract. Here is the diamond position, assuming that West started with the ♦J:

|      |           |         |
|------|-----------|---------|
|      | North     |         |
|      | ♦ A 8 7 5 |         |
| West |           | East    |
| ♦    |           | ♦ Q 9 3 |
|      | South     |         |
|      | ♦ 10 6    |         |

On the diamond lead from the dummy, East will win. We will play our ♦6. We will win whatever East leads and cash our ♦10. We will then play to the ♠A in the dummy and cash the ♦A and then the ♦8. That gives us four diamond tricks and our contract.

We have another chance in the diamond suit if East has a singleton ♦9, ♦J or ♦Q (8%). Assume that when we lead a small diamond, West plays low. We win the trick in the dummy with the ♦K. Next, assume that East plays the ♦9, ♦J or ♦Q. We will lead the ♦5 from the dummy to our ♦10. East will discard and West will win

this trick. We will win whatever West leads in our hand and finesse West for four diamond tricks and our contract. Here is the position, assuming that East started with the ♦9:



When we see East play the ♦Q, ♦J or ♦9, we continue with a small diamond from the dummy. East will discard. We play our ♦10. West will win this trick, but we can later take a diamond finesse for four tricks in that suit.

Finally, if West started with four diamonds to the ♦Q, ♦J and the ♦9, but makes the mistake of playing one of them when we lead a diamond, we will still make four diamond tricks. We win with the ♦K and lead the ♦5 from the dummy. When East shows out, we play the ♦10 and later finesse West for our four diamond tricks. Our overall chance of success in the diamond suit alone is 83%!

If we have no luck in the diamond suit, we will take the club finesse for a third trick in that suit and then try our luck for a fourth trick in the spade suit. Our overall chance of success is over 90%.

Here is the full hand:

| North |           |      |              |
|-------|-----------|------|--------------|
| ♠     | A 9 5 2   |      |              |
| ♥     | ---       |      |              |
| ♦     | A K 8 7 5 |      |              |
| ♣     | 10 7 4 2  |      |              |
| West  |           | East |              |
| ♠     | J 10 8 7  | ♠    | 6 3          |
| ♥     | 9 7 6     | ♥    | J 10 8 5 4 2 |
| ♦     | Q J 3 2   | ♦    | 9            |
| ♣     | J 9       | ♣    | Q 6 5 3      |
| South |           |      |              |
| ♠     | K Q 4     |      |              |
| ♥     | A K Q 3   |      |              |
| ♦     | 10 6 4    |      |              |
| ♣     | A K 8     |      |              |

**Final Comments:** When we win the club lead and play a diamond to the ♦K, East plays the ♦9. We continue with a low diamond from the dummy. East shows out on the second round of diamonds. We play our ♦10 and claim twelve tricks with three spades, three hearts, four diamonds and two clubs.

# Hand 10

Dealer: North  
 Vul: East/West  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ 7 5 3 2  
 ♥ A J 6  
 ♦ A Q 10 8 6  
 ♣ 7

South

♠ A K 9 8  
 ♥ 9 4 2  
 ♦ K  
 ♣ A Q J 3 2

|          |       |      |             |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| West     | North | East | South (you) |
| ---      | 1♦    | Pass | 1♠          |
| Pass     | 2♠    | Pass | 4♠          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♥5. We win with the ♥A as East plays the ♥7. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have two spades, one heart, three diamonds and one club for a total of seven tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defenders can win two heart tricks.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we might win additional tricks in either clubs or diamonds with a favorable distribution. We could ruff clubs in the dummy or diamonds in our hand.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders will win one trump trick provided the spade suit divides 3-2.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** we need to make the contract and more if there is a favorable distribution of the cards.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** we have a singleton diamond in one hand and a singleton club in the other. The best line of play is probably a crossruff. We have two losing hearts in our hand, but we have two high diamonds on which to discard those losing hearts.

We could make twelve tricks if the spades divide 3-2 and a defender has three diamonds to the ♦J. We draw two rounds of trump, cash the ♦K, ruff a club to get to the dummy, and then run the diamond suit. We have played two spades, one heart, five diamonds and two clubs (♣A and a ruff). There will be three cards left. The last three cards in the dummy will be one trump and two hearts. Our last three cards will be two trumps and one club. We will continue by ruffing a heart and then ruffing a club. The defense will get their trump trick, but nothing else.

The trumps will divide 3-2 68% of the time. The diamonds will divide 4-3 62% of the time, but we need the ♦J to be with the three-card suit. We have a 27% chance of winning five diamond tricks. We could take a ruffing finesse in clubs for an extra trick. However, there is a risk in that choice. If East has the ♣K and the long spade, he can cash his trump and defeat the hand. For practical purposes, the club suit will give us an extra trick only when a defender has two clubs to the ♣K. We cannot afford a defender to over ruff and so we will also need West to have the four-card diamond suit or East to have the high spade. The overall chance of winning twelve tricks is roughly 23%.

The odds of making eleven tricks are extremely good whenever the trumps divide 3-2. We will have two high spade tricks, a heart trick, three diamond tricks and a club trick. We will win a fourth diamond trick whenever the suit divides 4-3 or either defender holds the doubleton ♦J (70%). Even if the spade suit divides 4-1, we are not doomed. The odds of a plus score by (1) cashing two spades, (2) cashing the ♦K, (3) cashing a club, and (4) ruffing a club in the dummy before (5) running the diamonds are more than 50%.

The defenders may give us some information when we cash the first spade. If both defenders follow suit with spot cards (♠6 and ♠4) the odds that the suit will divide 3-2 improves. We may assume that a defender who can play a spot card will do so. If the spade suit divides 4-1, it is likely that the singleton will be an honor (a 3-1 chance). That adds 17% to the possibility of the suit dividing 3-2 (total of 85%). These odds more than justify the risk of going down. Matchpoint bridge awards an overtrick as much as making a contract.

If both defenders follow with spot cards, we should cash the second high spade. If both defenders follow suit to the second spade, we are certain to make our contract and might win as many as twelve tricks. Our next play is to cash the  $\spadesuit K$  and the  $\clubsuit A$ . We ruff a club in the dummy and cash our high diamonds, discarding our small hearts. If all goes well, we will make eleven or even twelve tricks.

If a defender plays an honor, the odds are different. We now subtract that 17% from the 68% chance that the suit will divide 3-2. The odds favor not cashing the other high spade. Instead, we cash the  $\spadesuit K$ , play the  $\clubsuit A$  and ruff a club. Then we cash the diamonds, discarding hearts. We may win eleven tricks if East started with four spades, but ten is more likely.

Here is the full hand:

| North |              |
|-------|--------------|
| ♠     | 7 5 3 2      |
| ♥     | A J 6        |
| ♦     | A Q 10 8 6   |
| ♣     | 7            |
| West  | East         |
| ♠     | Q J 4        |
| ♥     | Q 10 8 5     |
| ♦     | J 7 5 4 3    |
| ♣     | 5            |
| ♠     | 10 6         |
| ♥     | K 7 3        |
| ♦     | 9 2          |
| ♣     | K 10 9 8 6 4 |
| South |              |
| ♠     | A K 9 8      |
| ♥     | 9 4 2        |
| ♦     | K            |
| ♣     | A Q J 3 2    |

**Final Comments:** When we cash the first high spade, both defenders follow with spot cards. We cash the second spade, and both follow suit. Following through on our plan, we cash the ♦K and then the ♣A. We get a surprise when we lead a second club and West discards a heart. We get a second surprise when we cash the ♦A and ♦Q and East shows out. Still, all is well for eleven tricks. We continue with a diamond ruff and a club ruff with the dummy's last trump. West is helpless. If he ruffs a club, we discard a heart loser. If he discards a diamond, our diamond will be good for a discard. If he keeps his diamonds and does not ruff a club, we win four tricks by ruffing with our small trumps.

The defenders are left in command of the field, but we have two spades, four ruffs, a heart, three diamonds and a club for eleven tricks.

# Hand 11

Dealer: East  
 Vul: Both  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ 7 4 3 2  
 ♥ 5  
 ♦ Q 8 5 4  
 ♣ A Q 8 6

South

♠ A K 9  
 ♥ K 7 4  
 ♦ A K 9 3  
 ♣ J 7 3

|          |       |      |             |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| West     | North | East | South (you) |
| ---      | ---   | 3♥   | 3NT         |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♥Q. We play the ♥5 from the dummy and East plays the ♥9. West leads the ♠Q. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have two spade tricks, one heart trick, three diamond tricks and a club trick.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

They will win this trick if we play low. The defenders will be able to win a second heart if we play low.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we can take a club finesse for a second trick in that suit. The diamond suit might be worth a fourth trick. If the spade suit divides 3-3, we could get a fourth trick in that suit. We could also win this heart trick.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** If we win the opening lead with the ♥K, the defenders will be able to run the rest of their heart suit when they get on lead. If we play low, the defenders will win this trick. They can win a second heart trick whenever they wish.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** we need nine tricks for a plus score. That is our goal.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** we have to play low on this lead to have any realistic chance of making this hand. That means we have only six tricks. When we play low, West does not play a second heart. He leads the ♠Q.

We will win this trick. Before that, we must consider the implications of West's shift to a spade. The answer must be that East has no entry. We will win the spade lead and lead the ♣J. We expect West to cover with his ♣K. We win and lead a diamond to our hand for another club lead. East will probably win this trick.

East will continue with a spade. We will win this and take another club finesse. If that wins, we will lead a low diamond from the dummy. We already have three

club tricks, three diamond tricks and two spade tricks. If the diamonds break 3-2, we will have our nine tricks. If they break 4-1, we play a third spade and hope that the spades divide 3-3.

East probably has seven hearts. Give him one diamond and two clubs, and there is every reason to expect spades to divide 3-3.

If we are right, the defenders will be able to win one spade, two hearts and one club. We will have three spade tricks, three diamond tricks and three club tricks.

Here is the full hand:

|      |          |       |               |
|------|----------|-------|---------------|
|      |          | North |               |
|      |          | ♠     | 7 4 3 2       |
|      |          | ♥     | 5             |
|      |          | ♦     | Q 8 5 4       |
|      |          | ♣     | A Q 8 6       |
| West |          | East  |               |
| ♠    | Q J 8    | ♠     | 10 6 5        |
| ♥    | Q 10     | ♥     | A J 9 8 6 3 2 |
| ♦    | J 10 6 2 | ♦     | 7             |
| ♣    | K 9 5 2  | ♣     | 10 4          |
|      |          | South |               |
|      |          | ♠     | A K 9         |
|      |          | ♥     | K 7 4         |
|      |          | ♦     | A K 9 3       |
|      |          | ♣     | J 7 3         |

**Final Comments:** Sometimes, there is only one reasonable way to play a hand. For this hand, given that

East started with seven hearts, that means playing West for length in the club suit and at least two of the three relevant club cards ( $\clubsuit K$ ,  $\clubsuit 10$  and  $\clubsuit 9$ ). We took the club finesses to get a third club trick. Only then do we test the diamond suit to see if we have a fourth trick in that suit. When the diamond suit did not divide 3-2, it meant playing for the spade suit to divide 3-3. We kept the  $\diamond Q$  in the dummy as a late entry to win a fourth diamond trick or a third spade.

# Hand 12

Dealer: South  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ Q 4 3 2  
 ♥ 7 4 3 2  
 ♦ A Q  
 ♣ A 5 3

South

♠ 7  
 ♥ A K J 9 8  
 ♦ K 8 7  
 ♣ 7 6 4 2

|          |                 |      |             |
|----------|-----------------|------|-------------|
| West     | North           | East | South (you) |
| ---      | ---             | ---  | 1♥          |
| Pass     | 3♥ <sup>1</sup> | Pass | 4♥          |
| All Pass |                 |      |             |

1      Invitational raise with four-card trump support

West leads the ♠10. We play the ♠2 from the dummy and East plays the ♠5. We follow suit with the ♠7. West switches to the ♦3. We play the ♦A as East plays the ♦2. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have two hearts, three diamonds and one club for a total of six.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?** None aside from the spade trick they have already won.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we can get more tricks by ruffing clubs in the dummy or by ruffing spades in our hand.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders will get at least one club trick and might get a trump trick.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** we need to make the contract. If possible, we should give ourselves the best chance to make eleven tricks.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** we will make eleven tricks if the hearts divide 2-2. At the same time, we have to ensure ten tricks when the heart suit divides 3-1.

We have three diamond tricks. We will use the third diamond winner to discard a club from the dummy. We plan on ruffing two clubs in the dummy. If the clubs divide 3-3, we need only one ruff.

We have to time the play to maximize our chances of making eleven tricks. We start by leading a heart to our ♥A. Next, we cash the second diamond in the dummy before leading a low club away from our ♣A. The defenders will win this. We may assume they will

continue with a spade lead. We will ruff this and play a club to the dummy's ♣A.

After we win the ♣A, we lead a second heart; this time to our ♥K. If both defenders follow suit, we have eleven tricks. If the hearts divide 3-1, we will have a trump loser if the missing trump is the ♥Q. Let us assume the missing trump is the ♥10. It is time to cash the ♦K and discard the remaining club in the dummy. We now ruff a club in the dummy. If both defenders follow suit, we draw the last trump. If a defender shows out and does not ruff, we will ruff a spade to our hand and ruff the last club in the dummy. After twelve tricks are played (three rounds of spades, two rounds of hearts, three rounds of diamonds, and four rounds of clubs), all we will have left in our hand is a high trump.

Here is the full hand:

|            |             |             |
|------------|-------------|-------------|
|            | North       |             |
|            | ♠ Q 4 3 2   |             |
|            | ♥ 7 4 3 2   |             |
|            | ♦ A Q       |             |
|            | ♣ A 5 3     |             |
| West       |             | East        |
| ♠ 10 9 8   |             | ♠ A K J 6 5 |
| ♥ 10 6 5   |             | ♥ Q         |
| ♦ 10 5 4   |             | ♦ J 9 6 3 2 |
| ♣ K 10 9 8 |             | ♣ Q J       |
|            | South       |             |
|            | ♠ 7         |             |
|            | ♥ A K J 9 8 |             |
|            | ♦ K 8 7     |             |
|            | ♣ 7 6 4 2   |             |

**Final Comments:** It turns out that West has three trumps. He also has the exact distribution we need to make eleven tricks. We have to lose a club trick before cashing the second heart or West would have the chance to lead a third trump. We would not have enough trump in the dummy to ruff our club losers. It turns out that the line of play offering us the best chance for eleven tricks is also the best line of play to make certain we take ten tricks.

# Hand 13

Dealer: West  
 Vul: East/West  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ Q J  
 ♥ J 10 7 6 4  
 ♦ A 10 7 4  
 ♣ K 2

South

♠ A K 10 7 6 3 2  
 ♥ Q  
 ♦ ---  
 ♣ A J 10 8 7

| West     | North | East | South (you) |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| Pass     | 1♥    | 2♦   | 2♠          |
| Pass     | 2NT   | Pass | 4♣          |
| Pass     | 4♠    | Pass | 5♦          |
| Pass     | 5♠    | Pass | 6♠          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♥2. East wins with the ♥A as we play the ♥Q. East continues with the ♠4. We play the ♠2 and win this trick with the ♠J as West follows with the ♠5. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have seven spades, one diamond, and two clubs for a total of ten tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defenders won a heart trick. They cannot take another trick right now.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we could win the tricks we need in either hearts or clubs. We should be able to ruff a club in the dummy.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders might win one club trick if we cannot set up the suit for our twelfth trick.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** we need to make this contract to avoid a horrible score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** we may have bid this hand foolishly, considering the form of scoring. We bid diamonds to show our void. We might have found a grand slam if partner had the ♥A rather than the ♦A. Our bid helped West find the best lead of a heart.

Some players will bid 6♠ without showing their diamond void. The West players at those tables may not know about our diamond hand. They might lead a diamond. Those declarers will discard their heart loser on the ♦A. Those declarers will have two high trumps in the dummy to ruff clubs.

The declarers who get a diamond lead will probably make all 13 tricks. The only thing that could go wrong for them is if one defender holds at least five clubs

including the ♣Q and the ♣9. If one defender has five clubs, we cannot make our slam, unless the other defender has only one spade as well as a singleton club.

It is unfortunate, but we must expect that the pairs who bid slam and get a diamond lead will get a better result. All we can do is find the best line of play to make this hand and hope that some pairs will miss the slam.

We win the spade lead and ruff a heart. Our goal is to learn more about the distribution in that suit. If East discards, we will assume he has length in the club suit. The best line of play at that point is to hope that East started with the ♣Q. We will play to the ♣K and then take a club finesse. Assuming the finesse wins, we will ruff a club with the dummy's last trump. We will finish with a heart ruff to get to our hand and draw trumps.

When we ruff a heart, East follows suit and West plays the ♥9. We look at the defenders' convention card to learn their defensive carding agreements. They do not play anything special, so we may assume that West started with at least three hearts. West probably has the ♥K, considering that East won the first trick with the ♥A.

There is no certainty that the defenders are carding honestly. We are playing a slam contract. We know that East bid diamonds and started with at least three hearts and one spade. Give East six diamonds for his overcall and either a fourth heart or a second spade. He cannot have four clubs. The odds are that East is short in clubs and that West has the club length.

East started with at least eight cards in hearts and diamonds. It is more likely that he has nine or even ten cards in these two suits. The best chance to make this hand is to play the ♣J for a finesse against West's ♣Q. If this wins, we will play a club to the dummy's ♣K and then ruff a diamond. We will lead our low club and ruff it with the dummy's ♠Q.

The alternative line of play is to play a trump to the dummy's ♠Q and then ruff another heart. This will succeed when West starts with three hearts to the ♥K. If West is being clever by playing the ♥9 to hide his fourth heart, we will have to guess which defender has the ♣Q. We may also need the suit to divide 3-3. If West started with four hearts and four clubs, we can no longer make this hand. The odds favor playing West to hold the club length and keeping the spade in the dummy to ruff a club.

Here is the full hand:

| North |                |      |             |
|-------|----------------|------|-------------|
| ♠     | Q J            |      |             |
| ♥     | J 10 7 6 4     |      |             |
| ♦     | A 10 7 4       |      |             |
| ♣     | K 2            |      |             |
| West  |                | East |             |
| ♠     | 9 8            | ♠    | 5 4         |
| ♥     | K 9 3 2        | ♥    | A 8 5       |
| ♦     | 9 6 2          | ♦    | K Q J 8 5 3 |
| ♣     | Q 9 5 3        | ♣    | 6 4         |
| South |                |      |             |
| ♠     | A K 10 7 6 3 2 |      |             |
| ♥     | Q              |      |             |
| ♦     | ---            |      |             |
| ♣     | A J 10 8 7     |      |             |

**Final Comments:** We are doomed to a poor score because we explored the chances of making a grand slam. The pairs that received a diamond lead were able to discard their heart loser and set up the club suit with two ruffs. They will make thirteen tricks.

At matchpoints, there is much to be said for giving up on a grand slam. Do not give more information than is necessary. Bidding 4♣ is the best bid at that point; partner might have great club support and only one spade. Once partner bids 4♠, it makes sense to give up on a grand slam. The less the opposition knows of our hand, the better chance we have for a favorable lead.

If the form of scoring were IMPs, the potential gain for finding a grand slam outweighs the possible loss of an overtrick.

# Hand 14

Dealer: South  
 Vul: North/South  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ K 5 4 3  
 ♥ K 8 6  
 ♦ Q J 8 3  
 ♣ K 3

South

♠ Q 2  
 ♥ A Q 10 7 4  
 ♦ 7 5  
 ♣ A 9 5 2

| West | North | East     | South (you) |
|------|-------|----------|-------------|
| ---  | ---   | ---      | 1♥          |
| Pass | 1♠    | Pass     | 2♣          |
| Pass | 4♥    | All Pass |             |

West leads the ♠J. We play the ♠3, on which East plays the ♠7 (encouraging). We win with the ♠Q. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can we take right now?** we have one spade, five hearts, and two clubs. We may be able to ruff a club. That brings our total to nine.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defenders can win two diamonds and one spade.

**Where can we get more tricks?** we might get another club ruff. We might be able to get a diamond trick.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense may get another trick if we are unable to find our tenth trick.

**How many tricks do we need for a good score?** we need to make this hand.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** At IMPs, we will often stretch to bid a vulnerable game. The potential gain is 10 IMPs, and the potential loss is only 6 IMPs. We stretched to bid this game, so we will need some luck to make it.

There is a 68% chance that hearts will divide 3-2, plus an extra 3% for a singleton ♥J. There is a 63% chance that clubs will divide 4-3, plus a 15% chance that West has the doubleton club when the suit splits 5-2. There is a 75% chance that West has at least one of the two top diamonds.

This hand represents the challenge of establishing our winners in the proper order. We will lead a diamond. The defenders will win, and most likely lead a trump. We must win this in our hand and lead a second diamond. Assume that we have established a diamond trick. The defenders will probably lead a second trump. We will win this cheaply and cash the ♣K and our diamond winner. We will discard a spade so that we can get back to our hand after we ruff our club.

We continue with a club to our ♣A and ruff a club with the dummy's last trump. We continue with a spade ruff to draw the last trump and claim our ten tricks.

Here is the full hand:

|      |      | North |            |
|------|------|-------|------------|
|      |      | ♠     | K 5 4 3    |
|      |      | ♥     | K 9 6      |
|      |      | ♦     | Q J 8 3    |
|      |      | ♣     | K 3        |
| West | East |       |            |
| ♠    | ♠    | A     | 7 6        |
| ♥    | ♥    | J     | 8 2        |
| ♦    | ♦    | A     | 10 4 2     |
| ♣    | ♣    | J     | 10 6       |
|      |      | South |            |
|      |      | ♠     | Q 2        |
|      |      | ♥     | A Q 10 7 4 |
|      |      | ♦     | 7 5        |
|      |      | ♣     | A 9 5 2    |

**Final Comments:** There are some hands where we have extra values. For those hands, we must assume that suits and honors will be poorly placed. The plan for these hands is to find a way to make the contract in spite of the adverse distribution.

This is an unusual hand where we must hope that the distribution and honors are favorably placed. We have a 41% chance of success here. The odds favor bidding stretching to bid this game. To be clear, we are more likely to go down than to make this contract.

# Hand 15

Dealer: North  
 Vul: Both  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ 8 7  
 ♥ Q 9 4  
 ♦ A 10 7 5 3  
 ♣ 10 7 4

South

♠ A 10 2  
 ♥ A 8 5  
 ♦ Q J 8  
 ♣ K J 8 2

|          |       |      |             |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| West     | North | East | South (you) |
| ---      | Pass  | 1♦   | 1NT         |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♠K. We play the ♠7 from the dummy. East plays the ♠6 (encouraging). We play the ♠2. West continues with the ♠3, on which we play the ♠8 from the dummy. East plays the ♠J, and we play the ♠10. East continues with the ♠4. We win the third spade with the ♠A as West contributes the ♠9. It is time to discard from the dummy and plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have one spade trick. We also have a trick in hearts and diamonds.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defenders already have two spade tricks. It looks as though the spades are dividing 4-4, so they have a third spade trick when they get on lead. They also have a club trick.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get more tricks in diamonds and clubs. East probably has the ♦K, so we will get no more than three tricks in that suit. Depending on the layout in clubs, we may get one, two or even three tricks in that suit.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** East opened the bidding and West showed up with the ♠K and ♠Q. There are only fourteen high card points outstanding. East is likely to have most, if not all, of them. We are very likely to lose a diamond trick in addition to a third spade trick and at least one club trick.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this hand.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We are missing the ♥K, ♥J, ♦K, ♣A and ♣Q. It must be right to play East for most of those high-card points. Therefore, we assume that East has the ♦K and will be able to win our diamond lead.

If the spades divide 5-3, East will have no means to put West on lead. Consider the spot cards; West led the ♠3 on the second round of that suit. East led the ♠4 on the

third round and West played the ♠9. West's ♠3 is the lowest spade spot. That is strong evidence that West started with four spades. That means that East will have a fourth spade. It also means that East can put West on lead.

We must assume that East will be able to win a diamond and be able to put West on lead. Let us imagine West's thought process after he wins that fourth round of spades. If East had a strong club suit, he would have led it either after winning the second spade or before leading the fourth round of spades. It must mean that East does not have a strong club suit. Logically, that means that East must want West to lead a heart.

If we discard a heart on the third round of spades, and the spades divide 4-4, West will be able to establish the heart suit for East by leading a heart. So, we must discard a club on the third round of spades.

It is time to take the losing diamond finesse. We hope that East has only three diamonds. If so, we will have four diamond tricks. We will need only one club trick for our contract. The defenders will have three spades, one heart, one diamond and one club.

We lead the ♦Q. West follows suit and we play low from the dummy. As we might expect, East plays low. We continue with the ♦J. West discards the ♣3. We have nothing to gain here by winning this trick, so we play low. If East wins this trick we will have four diamond tricks, so he plays low.

We believe that East started with four spades and know that he has four diamonds. That means his other five cards will be either two hearts and three clubs or three hearts and two clubs.

We need two club tricks to make our contract. We need East to have both the ♣A and the ♣Q for us to have a chance. We continue with a diamond to the ♦A and lead a club. East wins this trick with the ♣A and cashes his ♦K. We discard a low heart, as does West. East now leads the ♠5 to West's ♠Q. We discard a club from both hands on the spade lead.

West leads the ♥3. We know from East's opening bid that he has the ♥K. The best play at this point is to play low from the dummy and force East to play either the ♥10 or ♥J. We win this trick with our ♥A. We have lost five tricks (three spades, one diamond and one club). We have won five tricks (one spade, one heart and three diamonds). Everyone is down to three cards. Here is the position. West's cards are immaterial.

|       |  |       |  |
|-------|--|-------|--|
| North |  |       |  |
| ♠     |  | ♠     |  |
| ♥ Q 9 |  | ♥ K ? |  |
| ♦ 10  |  | ♦     |  |
| ♣     |  | ♣ Q ? |  |
|       |  | East  |  |
|       |  |       |  |
|       |  | South |  |
| ♠     |  | ♠     |  |
| ♥ 8   |  | ♥     |  |
| ♦     |  | ♦     |  |
| ♣ K J |  | ♣     |  |

There are two chances to make this contract; we can lead a heart or cash our ♣K. Leading a heart will succeed when East does not have the ♥J. Leading a club will succeed when East started with two clubs to the ♣A and ♣Q. If East did start with only two clubs, it will not matter who has the ♥J.

Let us assume that East started with three clubs and two hearts. That would give West four spades and five hearts. West is more likely to lead from a five-card heart suit than from a four-card spade suit. Also, his spade honors would be an entry to cash his hearts. Leading either major suit is something of a guess. East could have help in hearts and no help at all in spades. If West has four hearts and four spades, a spade lead is

much more attractive. This would be even more obvious if West's highest heart is the ♥7.

Once we decide that West is more likely to have four cards in both major suits, the better chance is to cash our ♣K.

Here is the full hand:

|           |           | North |            |
|-----------|-----------|-------|------------|
|           |           | ♠     | 8 7        |
|           |           | ♥     | Q 9 4      |
|           |           | ♦     | A 10 7 5 3 |
|           |           | ♣     | 10 7 4     |
| West      | East      |       |            |
| ♠ K Q 9 3 | ♠ J 6 5 4 |       |            |
| ♥ 7 6 3 2 | ♥ K J 10  |       |            |
| ♦ 6       | ♦ K 9 4 2 |       |            |
| ♣ 9 6 5 3 | ♣ A Q     |       |            |
|           |           | South |            |
|           |           | ♠     | A 10 2     |
|           |           | ♥     | A 8 5      |
|           |           | ♦     | Q J 8      |
|           |           | ♣     | K J 8 2    |

**Final Comments:** Considering only East's bidding and defense, we cannot be certain of the correct line of play. We had to consider the implications of West's opening lead to come to the solution. The successful declarer must consider not only the inferences from the bidding and play, but also what was not bid or played. Appreciating the negative inference is often the difference between success and failure.

# Hand 16

Dealer: North  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ K 7 4  
 ♥ J 8 6 4  
 ♦ A J 2  
 ♣ A J 5

South

♠ A 6 5 3 2  
 ♥ 10  
 ♦ K 9 4 3  
 ♣ K 8 7

|      |       |          |                 |
|------|-------|----------|-----------------|
| West | North | East     | South (you)     |
| ---  | 1♣    | Pass     | 1♠              |
| Pass | 1NT   | Pass     | 2♦ <sup>1</sup> |
| Pass | 2♠    | Pass     | 3♠              |
| Pass | 4♠    | All Pass |                 |

- 1 Artificial, forcing for one round and asking for more information (New Minor Forcing)

West leads the ♥K. This wins the opening lead as East plays the ♥5. We play the ♥4 from the dummy and the ♥10 from our hand. West continues with the ♥2. We

play the ♥6 from the dummy and ruff East's ♥A with our ♠2. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have the Ace and King of spades, diamonds and clubs, and the small trump we just used to ruff the second round of hearts for a total of seven tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
None

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can take a finesse in diamonds and clubs, playing West for the Queen of those suits. We might be able to ruff a diamond in the dummy if the suit does not divide 3-3.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense must win a spade trick, and might win a second spade trick if the suit divides 4-1 instead of 3-2. The defense will win a trick in diamonds or clubs if we take a losing finesse in that suit.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** This is a normal contract. We should take the best line of play. That should achieve a good score whether or not we make the contract.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We have already lost a heart trick. We have a certain trump loser. And we have possible finesses to take in both diamonds and clubs. We are at risk of a defender being able to play a third round of trump before we can ruff our long diamond. Timing will be important.

We must consider the possibility that the trumps divide 4-1. Spades will divide 3-2 only 68% of the time. There is a 28% chance the suit will divide 4-1. A 4-1 break in spades does not doom the contract, but we will need a great deal of luck in clubs and diamonds to cope with it.

There is a 36% chance the diamond suit will divide 3-3. If the spade suit divides 3-2 and the diamond suit divides 3-3, we can discard a club from the dummy on the long diamond. In that case, we will not need a club finesse. We will discard a club from the dummy on the long diamond and then ruff a club.

The best plan must be to take a diamond finesse right now. If it succeeds, we plan to cash our two spade winners. Assuming that both defenders follow suit, we will cash our two diamond winners.

If our long diamond proves to be a winner, we will claim eleven tricks. If not, we will ruff the diamond in the dummy. If East can over-ruff, we will fall back on the club finesse for an extra trick. If East does not over-ruff, we will ruff a heart. West led the ♥K. He surely has the ♥Q as well. West will not be able to over-ruff our heart leads. After ruffing a heart, we will continue with the ♣K and then a club to the ♣A. If West ruffs, we will play low. If West plays anything else, we will win this trick with the ♣A and lead the ♥J. If West still has the ♥Q, we can ruff this trick. If West no longer has the ♥Q, we will discard our ♣8.

There is no chance that East will be able to ruff a club on this line of play. Let us assume that East started with three spades and four diamonds. That leaves six other cards. Give him three hearts and three clubs. East had to

follow suit every time. When we cash our top clubs, East is left with a club and a trump when we lead the fourth heart from the dummy. If East ruffs, we discard our losing club. If East discards, we ruff. This maneuver is known as a *coup en passant*. We escape with our trump losers by ruffing. The defender has a trump winner, but that trick was a loser anyway.

Let us assume that East started with four spades and four diamonds. After we ruff our long diamond, we lead a heart from the dummy. East has only five unknown cards. If East discards a club on the third round of hearts, he will have only two clubs left. We will cash our top clubs and concede the balance. If East follows suit on the third round of hearts, he will have just two unknown cards. The best line now is to cash the ♣A and lead the last heart. If East follows suit, we ruff and concede the balance. If East ruffs, our ♣K will eventually take a trick.

If the diamond finesse fails, that defender will not be able to cash a spade winner. We will win his return and cash our two spade winners. We will then cash our diamond winners, just as if the diamond finesse had succeeded.

Here is the full hand:

| North |           |      |         |
|-------|-----------|------|---------|
| ♠     | K 7 4     |      |         |
| ♥     | J 8 6 4   |      |         |
| ♦     | A J 2     |      |         |
| ♣     | A J 5     |      |         |
| West  |           | East |         |
| ♠     | Q 9       | ♠    | J 10 8  |
| ♥     | K Q 9 7 2 | ♥    | A 5 3   |
| ♦     | 10 5      | ♦    | Q 8 7 6 |
| ♣     | 10 6 3 2  | ♣    | Q 9 3   |
| South |           |      |         |
| ♠     | A 6 5 3 2 |      |         |
| ♥     | 10        |      |         |
| ♦     | K 9 4 3   |      |         |
| ♣     | K 8 7     |      |         |

**Final Comments:** There is little risk that West has a singleton diamond. Had that been so, he is likely to have led it on opening lead or at trick two. If he does have a singleton diamond, he will be able to ruff the second round of the suit. However, West probably has the long spade. A diamond ruff would be with a natural trump trick.

The best percentage play in diamonds is to cash our ♦K and then finesse. East might have a singleton diamond, but the chance that it is the Queen is very low (1%). There is a much better chance that East started with four diamonds and three spades. He would be able to win the finesse and give West a diamond ruff. If we cash our

high spades before taking the diamond finesse, East might be able to cash a high trump.

As it turns out, West started with two diamonds to the ♦10. Our diamond finesse failed, but our long diamond is high. When we cash our two top spades and then our diamonds, we can discard a club from the dummy and then ruff our low club with the dummy's long trump.

The first spade to cash is the ♠K. If the defenders play something that suggests a possible 4-1 spade break, we can change course and cash our high diamonds. If a defender ruffs the third diamond, we will win the return and cash our ♠A before ruffing the diamond loser. If the trumps divide 4-1, we will win at least one more trick than the declarers who play two rounds of spades before cashing their diamond winners.

The risk is that the defender having only two spades will be able to ruff the third round of diamonds. There is a 16% chance of that, but this hand is for matchpoints. There is a 28% chance that spades will divide 4-1. If the defenders' cards on the first round suggest the suit will divide 4-1, changing course will be the winning percentage. The goal is to get a better score than the other pairs. We do not always need a plus score to achieve that goal.

# Hand 17

Dealer: South  
 Vul: None  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ 6  
 ♥ A Q 9 7 6 5  
 ♦ A 4  
 ♣ A K 3 2

South

♠ A K J 9 8 7  
 ♥ 10  
 ♦ K 3 2  
 ♣ Q 5 4

| West | North           | East     | South (you) |
|------|-----------------|----------|-------------|
| ---  |                 |          | 1♠          |
| Pass | 2♥ <sup>1</sup> | Pass     | 2♠          |
| Pass | 3♥              | Pass     | 3♠          |
| Pass | 6♠              | All Pass |             |

1 Natural, game forcing

West leads the ♣J. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have eight tricks: two spades, one heart, two diamonds and three clubs.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

None

**Where can I get more tricks?** We will get at least two more spade tricks. We can get another trick with a heart finesse, a diamond ruff or an even break in the club suit.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense might win one or two trump tricks. We might take a losing heart finesse. The club suit might not divide evenly.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We have possibilities in all four suits. We will evaluate each suit and then see which overall plan gives us the best chance. We begin with the spade suit.

There are two lines of play in our trump suit. The first is to finesse East for the ♠Q. The second is to play the ♠A and ♠K.

We have a 20% chance of winning six spade tricks with a finesse:

East has three spades to the ♠Q (18%).

East has the ♠Q and ♠10 doubleton (2%).

We have a 52% chance of winning five spade tricks with a finesse:

West has the ♠Q and the suit divides 3-3 (18%).

East has the ♠Q and the suit divides 4-2 (24%).

West has the ♠Q, the suit divides 4-2, and the ♠10 is doubleton (8%).

East has the ♠Q, the suit divides 5-1, and either the ♠Q or the ♠10 is singleton (2%).

Taking a spade finesse gives us a 72% chance of winning at least five spade tricks.

The second line of play in the spade suit is to cash the ♠A and ♠K. This line of play gives us a 67% chance of winning at least five spade tricks:

The suit divides 3-3 (36%)

The suit divides 4-2 and either defender has a doubleton ♠Q or ♠10 (29%)

The suit divides 5-1 and either defender has a singleton ♠Q or ♠10 (2%).

There is a better chance of winning five spade tricks by taking a finesse in spades. Keeping this in mind, we will consider our chances to win another trick in the side suits. We will first consider the heart suit.

We may win a second heart trick with a finesse. This is a straight 50% chance. On this line of play, we will take a first round finesse in spades. Taking a heart finesse gives us a 46% chance of making our slam:

36% when the heart finesse wins (need five spade tricks)

10% when the heart finesse loses (need six spade tricks)

We may win a second heart trick by cashing the ♥A and ruffing a heart. This will succeed 18% of the time. An advantage to this line of play is that we retain other chances when the ♥K is not a doubleton. This choice will be considered in combination with others.

We may ruff two rounds of hearts. We will win a second heart trick if hearts divide 3-3 (36%) or a defender has the ♥K singleton or doubleton (18%). A danger in this line of play is if a defender has four spades to the ♠Q and four hearts to the ♥K. If we ruff two hearts before leading spades, the defender will defeat our slam by forcing us to ruff a third heart. Choosing this line of play means taking the spade finesse before we play on hearts.

This line of play gives us a 48% chance of success.

28% when ruffing hearts succeeds (need five spade tricks)

20% when ruffing hearts fails (need six spade tricks)

The club suit will give us four tricks if the suit divides 3-3 (36%). We may combine our chances in this suit with the plan to ruff one or two hearts. This line of play poses the same dangers, so we will draw trumps as well.

This line of play improves on ruffing one or two rounds of hearts by adding the chance of the clubs dividing 3-3. We have a 56% chance of success once we include the chance that clubs divide 3-3.

36% when either hearts or clubs succeed (need five spade tricks)

20% when hearts and clubs fail (need six spade tricks)

The last line of play to consider is to ruff the third round of diamonds. If we do, we will have to play the ♠A and ♠K. We will not have a spade to lead for a finesse. There is an 80% chance that the diamond suit will

divide no worse than 5-3. There is a 17% chance it will divide 6-2. However, the defender having two diamonds might have three spades not including the ♠10 (18%) or four spades not including both the ♠Q and ♠10 (29%). In those cases, the defender would be ruffing with their only trump trick. This adds 8% to our chance of success by ruffing a diamond.

We have a 59% chance of making our contract by ruffing a diamond and then playing the ♠A and ♠K.

These are two best lines of play. The first takes a spade finesse, hoping for six trump tricks. If we do not have six spade tricks, we fall back on winning our twelfth trick in hearts or clubs. There is a 56% chance of success on the first line of play. The second ruffs a diamond and then relies on winning five trump tricks. There is a 59% chance of success on the second line of play. As this offers the better chance, it will be our choice.

Here is the full hand:

| North |             |      |          |
|-------|-------------|------|----------|
| ♠     | 6           |      |          |
| ♥     | A Q 9 7 6 5 |      |          |
| ♦     | A 4         |      |          |
| ♣     | A K 3 2     |      |          |
| West  |             | East |          |
| ♠     | Q 3         | ♠    | 10 5 4 2 |
| ♥     | 4 3         | ♥    | K J 8 2  |
| ♦     | J 10 9 6 5  | ♦    | Q 8 7    |
| ♣     | J 10 9 8    | ♣    | 7 6      |
| South |             |      |          |
| ♠     | A K J 9 8 7 |      |          |
| ♥     | 10          |      |          |
| ♦     | K 3 2       |      |          |
| ♣     | Q 5 4       |      |          |

**Final Comments:** Most experienced players will not analyze each line of play in this detail. They know that ruffing a diamond is much more likely to get an extra trick than playing on either hearts or clubs. They know both ways to play the spade suit. They know there is not much to choose between them. They would ruff a diamond and wonder what this fuss is all about.

At matchpoints, we would have to evaluate the possible matchpoint gain for winning thirteen tricks versus winning twelve tricks. This is IMPs. That evaluation is not relevant here.

# Hand 18

Dealer: East  
 Vul: North/South  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ A K 10 2  
 ♥ J 7 3  
 ♦ A 8 3  
 ♣ 10 8 3

South

♠ 6  
 ♥ A K 8 6 5 4 2  
 ♦ K J 7  
 ♣ A 5

| West     | North | East | South (you) |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| ---      | ---   | Pass | 1♥          |
| Pass     | 1♠    | 3♣   | 4♥          |
| Pass     | 5♥    | Pass | 6♥          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♣K. We play the ♣3 from the dummy and win with the ♣A as East plays the ♣9. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We can take two spades, two hearts, two diamonds and one club for a total of seven tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defense can win a club trick.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We have either four or five more heart tricks, depending on how the suit divides. We may be able to win a third diamond trick with a successful finesse.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense can get more tricks in the diamond suit (finesse fails) or the heart suit (West has all three hearts).

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We have a club loser, but it will disappear on our second spade winner. There is no rush to start playing spades. First we should draw trump. When we cash our ♥A, West follows suit. East shows out, playing the ♣2. We have a trump loser. It is time to stop and consider our options.

We can take a diamond finesse at any time. There is no rush to do so, however. First, we will cash our second heart before cashing our two spades to get rid of our club loser. On our top spades, East plays the ♠9 and then the ♠J.

Our next play is to ruff a club. If West over ruffs, it will be with his trump trick. West follows suit to the club. Now, we give West his heart trick.

Assuming that East started with six clubs, West will have to lead either a diamond or spade. A diamond lead will take the finesse for us. On a spade lead we will

play low. We will have a third trick in the spade suit if East has the ♠Q.

We had no real hope for a third spade trick, but East's play on the ♠A and ♠K changed that. Bidding today involves more preemptive bids. In general, a preempt can make it more difficult for the opposition to get to their best contract. However, it can help an observant declarer play a hand much better.

Here is the full hand:

| North |               |      |             |
|-------|---------------|------|-------------|
| ♠     | A K 10 2      |      |             |
| ♥     | J 7 3         |      |             |
| ♦     | A 8 3         |      |             |
| ♣     | 10 8 3        |      |             |
| West  |               | East |             |
| ♠     | 8 7 5 4 3     | ♠    | Q J 9       |
| ♥     | Q 10 9        | ♥    | ---         |
| ♦     | Q 10 9        | ♦    | 6 5 4 2     |
| ♣     | K 6           | ♣    | Q J 9 7 4 2 |
| South |               |      |             |
| ♠     | 6             |      |             |
| ♥     | A K 8 6 5 4 2 |      |             |
| ♦     | K J 7         |      |             |
| ♣     | A 5           |      |             |

**Final Comments:** If we make the reasonable assumption that East started with six clubs and does not have as many as four spades, the contract will make no matter how the spades and diamonds divide. We first play our two high hearts. Then, we play our two high

spades. Now, we ruff a club and then give West his heart trick. West has no club to lead, so he leads a spade. We ruff and cash our remaining hearts.

We have four cards left when we lead our last heart. The dummy will have one spade, one club and the ♦A and ♦8. We lead our last heart and count the spades and clubs. West must discard a diamond to keep his spade winner. We discard our spade. East must discard a diamond to keep his club winner. With three cards left, neither defender will have three diamonds. We cash our ♦A and then our ♦K. Our ♦J will be a winner no matter who started with the ♦Q. This line of play is called a *positional double squeeze*.

# Hand 19

Dealer: South  
 Vul: East/West  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ Q  
 ♥ A Q 8 7  
 ♦ 7 4 3 2  
 ♣ Q 8 6 5

South

♠ 9 8 6 3 2  
 ♥ 6  
 ♦ K  
 ♣ A K J 10 4 3

| West | North | East     | South (you) |
|------|-------|----------|-------------|
| ---  | ---   | ---      | 1♣          |
| 1♦   | 1♥    | Pass     | 1♠          |
| 2♦   | 3♣    | Pass     | 3♠          |
| Pass | 5♣    | All Pass |             |

West leads the ♦A. We play the ♦2 from the dummy and the ♦K from our hand. West shifts to the ♣7. We play the ♣8 from the dummy and win with the ♣10 as East plays the ♣2. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have six club tricks in our hand and the ♥A.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defense can win a spade and a diamond.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can ruff at least two spades in the dummy. There is also the chance of winning a trick with a successful heart finesse.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense may be able to win a spade trick if we cannot ruff three spades in the dummy.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We have to ruff spades in the dummy to have any chance of making this contract. It is possible that we will be able to ruff three spades in the dummy, but we have to assume that whichever defender wins our spade lead will lead a second club.

We will lead a spade towards the ♠Q. Perhaps the defender who wins this trick will not have a second trump to lead. When we lead a spade, East wins the trick and plays a second club.

We can ruff two spades, but we will still have a spade loser. A successful heart finesse will not give us the contract. We will need more.

The auction gives us the key to making this contract. We win the club in our hand and ruff a spade. We ruff a diamond to get back to our hand for a second spade ruff. We ruff another diamond. East discards a heart. Here is the position with five cards left:

|   |         |
|---|---------|
|   | North   |
| ♥ | A Q 8 7 |
| ♦ | 7       |
|   | South   |
| ♠ | 9 8     |
| ♥ | 6       |
| ♣ | A K     |

We could give up a spade for down one, but this is IMPs. We have to try to make the contract. We must hope that East has the long spade and West has the ♥K along with the long diamonds.

We cash a club, discarding a heart from the dummy. On our last club, we watch closely to see if East discards his last diamond. If he keeps his diamond, we discard a diamond from the dummy. Our next play is to take a heart finesse. If the finesse wins and East has the long spade, our third heart will be our eleventh trick.

Here is the full hand:

| North |              |      |            |
|-------|--------------|------|------------|
| ♠     | Q            |      |            |
| ♥     | A Q 8 7      |      |            |
| ♦     | 7 4 3 2      |      |            |
| ♣     | Q 8 6 5      |      |            |
| West  |              | East |            |
| ♠     | A 5 4        | ♠    | K J 10 7   |
| ♥     | K 9 5        | ♥    | J 10 4 3 2 |
| ♦     | A Q J 10 9 5 | ♦    | 8 6        |
| ♣     | 7            | ♣    | 9 2        |
| South |              |      |            |
| ♠     | 9 8 6 3 2    |      |            |
| ♥     | 6            |      |            |
| ♦     | K            |      |            |
| ♣     | A K J 10 4 3 |      |            |

**Final Comments:**     Distributional hands often provide both sides with viable contracts. Here, it takes a spade lead to defeat 4♥.

# Hand 20

Dealer: East  
 Vul: East/West  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ A Q J  
 ♥ A Q  
 ♦ K J 6  
 ♣ A 10 9 8 5

South

♠ K 10 9 8 7 6 5 2  
 ♥ 6 4 3  
 ♦ 4  
 ♣ 3

|      |       |          |             |
|------|-------|----------|-------------|
| West | North | East     | South (you) |
| ---  | ---   | Pass     | 4♠          |
| Pass | 6♠    | All Pass |             |

West leads the ♣K. We win with the ♣A as East plays the ♣4. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have eight spade tricks, a heart and a club.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
 The defense can take one diamond trick.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can take another trick in hearts with a successful finesse. There is also a chance for a second club trick if the suit divides 4-3.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** If the diamond finesse loses, we will go down because the defense will take their diamond trick.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We can take the heart finesse, but there is no rush. We start by ruffing a club. Next a spade to the dummy for a second club ruff. We lead a second spade to the dummy for a third club ruff. This establishes the long club.

There is a 62% chance that clubs divide 4-3. It costs nothing to try, with the heart finesse in reserve. This line improves our chances to 81%.

We are in position to take a heart finesse. If it wins, we take all thirteen tricks. However, there is no reason to take such a risk. We are playing IMPs, not matchpoints. The right play at this point is to play a heart to the ♥A and cash our club. We discard our losing diamond and then concede a heart. Our twelfth trick will come with ruffing our third heart in the dummy.

Here is the full hand:

|             |              | North              |  |
|-------------|--------------|--------------------|--|
|             |              | ♠ A Q J            |  |
|             |              | ♥ A Q              |  |
|             |              | ♦ K J 6            |  |
|             |              | ♣ A 10 9 8 5       |  |
| West        | East         |                    |  |
| ♠ ---       | ♠ 4 3        |                    |  |
| ♥ J 9 8 7 5 | ♥ K 10 2     |                    |  |
| ♦ A 5 3 2   | ♦ Q 10 9 8 7 |                    |  |
| ♣ K Q J 2   | ♣ 7 6 4      |                    |  |
|             |              | South              |  |
|             |              | ♠ K 10 9 8 7 6 5 2 |  |
|             |              | ♥ 6 4 3            |  |
|             |              | ♦ 4                |  |
|             |              | ♣ 3                |  |

**Final Comments:** When there are several ways to make a hand, do not rush headlong into the most obvious. Consider the alternatives. Here, the chance of taking a second club trick is that alternative. Taking the heart finesse on this hand leads to failure.

# Hand 21

Dealer: East  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ Q J 8 6 2  
 ♥ A K J 9 4  
 ♦ 10 4 2  
 ♣ ---

South

♠ A K 10 7 4  
 ♥ 8 6  
 ♦ Q 7  
 ♣ Q J 9 8

|          |       |      |             |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| West     | North | East | South (you) |
| ---      | ---   | 3♣   | 3♠          |
| 4♣       | 5♣    | Pass | 5♠          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♦K. He wins the opening lead as East plays the ♦5. West cashes the ♦A (East plays the ♦9) and then plays a third diamond to East's ♦J. We ruff. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We can take five spades, three ruffs and two hearts, for a total of ten tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defense has already won two diamond tricks.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get a third heart trick if the suit divides 3-3 or 4-2. We can also get a third heart trick if the suit divides 5-1 provided the singleton is the ♥Q. Also, we might be able to draw only one trump and then crossruff for nine trump tricks.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders can get another trick only if we cannot generate a third heart trick.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We need a third heart trick or nine trump tricks to make this hand. The best way to start is to play a heart to the ♥K. Assuming that East follows suit but does not play the ♥Q, we play a spade to our hand. If East follows suit, we are at a crossroads. We can draw a second trump and then lead a heart, or we can lead a heart right now.

The key to the hand is West's raising East's preempt and East play in the diamond suit. West's raise suggests that he has a three-card club suit. East followed suit to West's diamond leads. He played the ♦5 first and the ♦9 second. East would probably have played the ♦9 first if he had four diamonds.

Once we conclude that East started with six clubs and three diamonds, he cannot have a singleton heart. West has at least one spade. Therefore, East cannot have

more than two spades. With at most eleven cards in these three suits, he must have at least two hearts.

The winning line is to draw a second round of trump and then cash our second heart. We then ruff a heart in our hand. A club ruff is followed by a second heart ruff. The dummy will have the remaining trumps and the long heart.

Here is the full hand:

|      |           |       |            |      |             |
|------|-----------|-------|------------|------|-------------|
|      |           | North |            |      |             |
|      |           | ♠     | Q J 8 6 2  |      |             |
|      |           | ♥     | A K J 9 4  |      |             |
|      |           | ♦     | 10 4 2     |      |             |
|      |           | ♣     | ---        |      |             |
| West |           |       |            | East |             |
| ♠    | 3         |       |            | ♠    | 9 5         |
| ♥    | Q 5 3 2   |       |            | ♥    | 10 7        |
| ♦    | A K 8 6 3 |       |            | ♦    | J 9 5       |
| ♣    | 10 7 5    |       |            | ♣    | A K 6 4 3 2 |
|      |           | South |            |      |             |
|      |           | ♠     | A K 10 7 4 |      |             |
|      |           | ♥     | 8 6        |      |             |
|      |           | ♦     | Q 7        |      |             |
|      |           | ♣     | Q J 9 8    |      |             |

**Final Comments:** It is tempting for North to leap to slam, but bidding 5♣ is much safer. If South has a diamond control, he can show that control.

We needed to draw one round of spades before doing anything else so that we could plan our line of play. For

example, if East started with three spades, we would need four heart tricks to make our contract. The odds then favor leading a heart for a finesse of the ♥9, playing West for the ♥Q and ♥10. If East started with three spades, three diamonds and six clubs, he will have only one heart. There are four chances out of six that the heart will be a spot card and not an honor.

# Hand 22

Dealer: East  
 Vul: East/West  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ ---  
 ♥ 8 5 2  
 ♦ A K Q J 10 5  
 ♣ K 10 8 7

South

♠ K Q 10 5 2  
 ♥ A 9  
 ♦ 9 3  
 ♣ A J 9 5

The auction:

| West     | North | East | South (you) |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| ---      | ---   | Pass | 1♠          |
| Pass     | 2♦    | Pass | 3♣          |
| Pass     | 4♣    | Pass | 4♥          |
| Dbl.     | 4♠    | Pass | 6♣          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♥K. We win with our ♥A as East plays the ♥4. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have two club tricks along with our ♥A. We also have six

diamonds, but we must first tackle the trump suit before taking them.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defense can win a heart trick.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get more tricks in the trump suit.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense will win a trump trick unless we correctly guess which defender has the ♣Q.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We are playing matchpoints. Sometimes, just making a contract will not be a good score. At other times, going down one in a contract is a great score. We must guess what the field will do.

This does not look like a normal contract. Most of the South players will not rebid 3♣. They will rebid 2NT over North's 2♦ response. Over South's 2NT rebid, North will rebid either 3NT or 3♦. A 3NT rebid will end the auction. Over North's 3♦ rebid, South will surely rebid 3NT.

Without South's 3♣ rebid, there is no way a pair will find their club fit and bid this slam. Therefore, just making this contract will be a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We have eight trumps, missing the ♣Q. If East has the ♣Q and the club suit divides 3-2, we can win thirteen tricks. That line of play begins with a spade ruff, cashing the ♣K and then a club to our ♣J (finessing East for the

♣Q). We continue with a second spade ruff and then a diamond to our ♦9. We will draw trumps and then run the diamond suit. Our thirteen tricks include four clubs, two spade ruffs, the ♥A and six diamonds.

That line of play would be attractive if we needed thirteen tricks for a good score. However, few pairs will find this slam. So, we just need to make the contract.

We could take a finesse for the ♣Q. We will make the slam if it wins. We will go down if we finesse the wrong defender, losing a club and a heart.

We could cash the ♣A and ♣K, planning to run diamonds if the ♣Q does not fall. If the defender holding the ♣Q has at least two diamonds, we can discard our heart loser before he can ruff.

We first consider the trump finesse line of play. This looks like a simple 50% proposition. That is not strictly true. First, the ♣Q might be a singleton. Second, we have an extra chance of success if we finesse West for the ♣Q.

Suppose that the clubs divide 4-1. We cash the ♣A and then lead a club toward the dummy. If East has four clubs, we will win this trick with the ♣K and start playing diamonds. If East has two or more diamonds, we will be able to over-ruff. We will not have enough trumps to ruff both of the dummy's hearts. We will need a successful ruffing finesse in spades. If West has the ♠A, we can establish one spade trick with a ruffing finesse and then play the remaining diamonds. We will win only five diamond tricks, but get a spade trick in exchange.

The chance of success on this line of play requires the club suit to divide 3-2 and East to have the ♣Q (34%), or to divide 4-1 and the ♣Q to be a singleton (6%). Finally, we will succeed when East starts with four clubs to the ♣Q (11%), at least two diamonds (82%), and West has the ♠A (50%). This third chance, when combined, adds 5%.

The first line of play (finessing East for the ♣Q), offers a net 45% chance of success.

We next consider cashing our ♣A and ♣K. If clubs divide 3-2 and the ♣Q does not fall, we will cash our diamonds. If the defender with the ♣Q has at least two diamonds, we will be able to discard our heart on the third diamond before he can ruff.

This line of play will succeed whenever the club suit divides 3-2 with the ♣Q in the three-card suit (41%), provided the defender with the ♣Q has at least two diamonds (82%). If a defender has either a singleton or doubleton ♣Q (33%), we will not care how the diamonds divide. Finally, by playing the ♣A first we can take advantage of the 5% chance that East started with four clubs to the ♣Q, at least two diamonds and that West has the ♠A.

The second line of play (cashing the ♣A first and the ♣K second), offers a net 72% chance of success. That is a much better line of play.

Here is the full hand:

| North |              |      |           |
|-------|--------------|------|-----------|
| ♠     | ---          |      |           |
| ♥     | 8 5 2        |      |           |
| ♦     | A K Q J 10 5 |      |           |
| ♣     | K 10 8 7     |      |           |
| West  |              | East |           |
| ♠     | 9 7 4        | ♠    | A J 8 6 3 |
| ♥     | K Q J 7 3    | ♥    | 10 6 4    |
| ♦     | 7 2          | ♦    | 8 6 4     |
| ♣     | Q 6 2        | ♣    | 4 3       |
| South |              |      |           |
| ♠     | K Q 10 5 2   |      |           |
| ♥     | A 9          |      |           |
| ♦     | 9 3          |      |           |
| ♣     | A J 9 5      |      |           |

**Final Comments:** This hand illustrates how matchpoints and IMPs can differ. At matchpoints, we had to consider whether the slam was a normal contract and whether the field would bid it. Only then could we decide that our goal was just to make the contract and the best plan to achieve it.

# Hand 23

Dealer: East  
 Vul: Both  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ K 9 8  
 ♥ 10 9 8 6 4  
 ♦ Q 9 3  
 ♣ Q 10

South

♠ A 4 2  
 ♥ A K 2  
 ♦ 4 2  
 ♣ A J 8 5 4

|          |       |      |             |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| West     | North | East | South (you) |
| ---      | ---   | Pass | 1NT         |
| Pass     | 2♦    | Pass | 2♥          |
| Pass     | 2NT   | Pass | 4♥          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♦K. He wins the opening lead as East plays the ♦5. West switches to the ♠10. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We can take two spades, two hearts, and one clubs for a total of five tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defense has already won one diamond trick, and can take a second diamond trick.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get two more heart tricks if the suit divides 3-2, or 4-1 if the singleton is an honor. We can establish a diamond trick by leading toward the ♦Q. We can also take a club finesse.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders are likely to win a heart trick. They might win a club and spade trick, depending on who has the ♣K.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We need the club finesse to succeed, so there is no reason to postpone it. We could win the spade in our hand and play our ♥A and ♥K, but that puts us at risk of going down more than one if the club finesse loses.

The best line is to win the spade lead with the ♠K and lead the ♣Q. East plays the ♣K, and we win with the ♣A. It is time to cash the ♥A and the ♥K. We are hoping that the heart suit divides 3-2. When it does, we are home. We play a low club to the ♣10 in the dummy. If a defender ruffs and plays a spade, we can win with our ♠A. We will then cash a club and discard our spade loser from the dummy. The next play is a diamond from our hand towards the ♦Q.

If both defenders follow suit when we play to the ♣10, we will lead a heart to force the defenders to win their heart trick. We have an entry with the ♠A and three

club winners. The defender who wins this heart lead will have to lead a diamond to stop us from winning eleven tricks.

Here is the full hand:

|      |       |            |
|------|-------|------------|
|      | North |            |
|      | ♠     | K 9 8      |
|      | ♥     | 10 9 8 6 4 |
|      | ♦     | Q 9 3      |
|      | ♣     | Q 10       |
| West |       |            |
|      | ♠     | 10 7       |
|      | ♥     | J 5        |
|      | ♦     | A K J 8    |
|      | ♣     | 9 7 6 3 2  |
|      | East  |            |
|      | ♠     | Q J 6 5 3  |
|      | ♥     | Q 7 3      |
|      | ♦     | 10 7 6 5   |
|      | ♣     | K          |
|      | South |            |
|      | ♠     | A 4 2      |
|      | ♥     | A K 2      |
|      | ♦     | 4 2        |
|      | ♣     | A J 8 5 4  |

**Final Comments:** The dummy has only seven high card points, but it has two ten's and three nine's. These spot cards could be worth two or more tricks in the play, which makes this hand worth the invitation. Notice that the ♣10 proved to be the critical spot that helped us make this contract.

# Hand 24

Dealer: South  
 Vul: North/South  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ A 5 2  
 ♥ A 10 9 3  
 ♦ A Q 7  
 ♣ Q 10 8

South

♠ K 6 4  
 ♥ K 7 4  
 ♦ K 10 5 2  
 ♣ A K 6

|      |       |          |             |
|------|-------|----------|-------------|
| West | North | East     | South (you) |
| ---  | ---   | ---      | 1NT         |
| Pass | 6NT   | All Pass |             |

West leads the ♠J. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We can take two spades, two hearts, three diamonds and three clubs for a total of ten tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
 None

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get another trick in hearts and diamonds.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** We have to give up a heart trick to get a third heart trick. If we cannot get a third heart trick or a fourth diamond trick, the defender will win another trick because we have no other place to get more tricks.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** The diamond suit can wait. We need to figure out the best way to tackle the heart suit for a third trick. There are two reasonable lines of play. The first is to cash the ♥A and the ♥K. This line of play will succeed whenever the heart suit divides 3-3 (36%). If the heart suit divides 4-2 (48%), it will succeed when either the ♥Q or ♥J is with the doubleton (18 chances out of 30, or 29%). If the heart suit divides 5-1 (15%), we will succeed if either defender has a singleton honor (4 chances out of 12, or 5%). If the heart suit divides 6-0 (1%), we will succeed if it is West who holds the six-card suit.

The odds of success for cashing the ♥A and ♥K total 71%.

The other line of play is to cash the ♥K and play a second heart, putting in the ♥9 if West plays low. We will later return to our hand and lead another heart. If West plays a low heart again, we will put in the ♥10. This line of play will succeed whenever the hearts divide 3-3 unless East has both heart honors (16 chances out of 20, or 29%). It will succeed whenever

West has the long hearts (32%). It will also succeed when East has the long hearts but West has a heart honor (22%).

The odds of success for cashing the ♥K and then finessing total 83%. Assuming we win a third heart trick on this line of play, we will make our contract if we can take four diamond tricks. We will cash our ♦A and ♦Q later and then decide whether to play for the diamonds to divide 3-3 or 4-2 (if the ♦J does not fall).

Here is the full hand:

|      |          |       |          |
|------|----------|-------|----------|
|      |          | North |          |
|      |          | ♠     | A 5 2    |
|      |          | ♥     | A 10 9 3 |
|      |          | ♦     | A Q 7    |
|      |          | ♣     | Q 10 8   |
|      |          |       |          |
| West |          | East  |          |
| ♠    | J 10 9 7 | ♠     | Q 8 3    |
| ♥    | Q J 8 5  | ♥     | 6 2      |
| ♦    | J 3      | ♦     | 9 8 6 4  |
| ♣    | J 9 5    | ♣     | 7 4 3 2  |
|      |          |       |          |
|      |          | South |          |
|      |          | ♠     | K 6 4    |
|      |          | ♥     | K 7 4    |
|      |          | ♦     | K 10 5 2 |
|      |          | ♣     | A K 6    |

**Final Comments:** North might have looked for a heart fit on the way to slam. However, North has no ruffing value at all. It is often better in these cases to “bid when you think you can make.” A defender will

sometimes give a trick away on the opening lead when the auction provides no information. That is much less likely on a scientific auction that perfectly describes both hands

# Hand 25

Dealer: West  
 Vul: Both  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ A J 5  
 ♥ 6 5 4  
 ♦ A 8 7 5  
 ♣ 10 9 3

South

♠ K Q 8  
 ♥ A K Q 8  
 ♦ 6  
 ♣ K Q J 7 4

| West | North | East | South (you) |
|------|-------|------|-------------|
| Pass | Pass  | 2♦   | Dbl.        |
| Pass | 2NT   | Pass | 3♣          |
| Pass | 3♦    | Pass | 3♥          |
| Pass | 3♠    | Pass | 6♣          |

All Pass

West leads the ♦2. We win with the ♦A as West plays the ♦K. When we lead the ♣10 from the dummy, West plays the ♣A. We play low as East contributes the ♣2. West tries the ♦Q. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have three spades, three hearts, one diamond and four clubs for a total of eleven tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?** The defenders already won a club trick. There are no other tricks they can take right now.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We might win a fourth heart trick if the suit divides 3-3. There is no realistic chance for another trick.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders might win a heart trick if the suit does not divide 3-3.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** The first question is whether to ruff the ♦Q lead with the ♣J or the ♣7. West opened 2♦. If he started with seven solid diamonds and the ♣A, he would not open at the two-level. Therefore, West started with five diamonds and it is safe to ruff with our ♣7.

We could draw trump and hope that hearts will divide 3-3. That is a 36% chance. We can improve on this by drawing only a second round of trump and then testing the heart suit. If the same hand has at least three trumps and at least four hearts, we will be able to ruff our long heart with the dummy's trump. A rough calculation is that the same hand will hold the long cards in both hands about 20% of the time.

The best chance is to play a second round of trumps and then play three rounds of hearts. If the hearts divide 3-3, draw the remaining enemy trumps and claim. If the hearts divide 4-2 (or worse), ruff the last heart in the dummy and then return to hand with a spade to draw the remaining trumps and claim.

Here is the full hand:

|      |          |       |            |
|------|----------|-------|------------|
|      |          | North |            |
|      |          | ♠     | A J 5      |
|      |          | ♥     | 6 5 4      |
|      |          | ♦     | A 8 7 5    |
|      |          | ♣     | 10 9 3     |
| West |          | East  |            |
| ♠    | 10 9 6   | ♠     | 7 4 3 2    |
| ♥    | J 10 3 2 | ♥     | 9 7        |
| ♦    | 9 4 2    | ♦     | K Q J 10 3 |
| ♣    | 6 5 2    | ♣     | A 8        |
|      |          | South |            |
|      |          | ♠     | K Q 8      |
|      |          | ♥     | A K Q 8    |
|      |          | ♦     | 6          |
|      |          | ♣     | K Q J 7 4  |

**Final Comments:** There are excellent reasons for players to open at the two-level with good five-card suits. The obvious reason is to get a favorable lead when defending a hand. There is some pre-emptive value also. Most partnerships have a very detailed convention card for when they open the bidding. Few have a detailed convention card for when the opposition preempts.

# Hand 26

Dealer: East  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North  
 ♠ A J 7 6 5 4  
 ♥ K Q J  
 ♦ J 10 3  
 ♣ 2

South  
 ♠ ---  
 ♥ A 9 7 2  
 ♦ Q 7 6 5 4 2  
 ♣ Q J 4

|          |       |      |             |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| West     | North | East | South (you) |
| ---      | ---   | 3♣   | Pass        |
| Pass     | 3♠    | Pass | 4♦          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♣3. We play the ♣2 from the dummy. East wins this trick with his ♣K and returns the ♦9. We play low as West plays his ♦K, ♦A and then his ♦8. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have a spade, four hearts and four diamonds for a total of nine tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defenders already have three tricks. They can take the ♣A as soon as they are on lead.

**Where can I get more tricks?** The only suit where we might take another trick is spades.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense cannot take more than their ♣A.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We may already have a good score, but making this contract will be a better score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** The only way we can get another trick is by setting up the long spades in the dummy. That means ruffing spades in our hand. The only entries we have for ruffing spades are the heart honors.

We start by winning the third diamond in the dummy and then cashing our ♠A, discarding a club from our hand. We ruff a spade and then play a heart to the dummy. When we ruff a second spade, we watch to see if both defenders follow suit. If they do, we play a second heart to the dummy and ruff a third spade. This will set up the two long spades in the dummy. Here is the position:

North

♠ J 7

♥ K

South

♥ A 9

♣ Q

We have ruffed out all of the defenders' spades, so we lead our ♥9 to the ♥K and claim ten tricks.

If either defender showed out on the third round of spades (our second spade ruff), we would have to give up our plan to establish the spades. We still have a trump in our hand, so we will cash the hearts in the dummy. After we ruff a spade, we will cash our ♥A and lose a club trick for down one.

Here is the full hand:

| North |             |      |              |
|-------|-------------|------|--------------|
| ♠     | A J 7 6 5 4 |      |              |
| ♥     | K Q J       |      |              |
| ♦     | J 10 3      |      |              |
| ♣     | 2           |      |              |
| West  |             | East |              |
| ♠     | K 9 8       | ♠    | Q 10 3 2     |
| ♥     | 10 6 5 3    | ♥    | 8 4          |
| ♦     | A K 8       | ♦    | 9            |
| ♣     | 9 6 3       | ♣    | A K 10 8 7 5 |
| South |             |      |              |
| ♠     | ---         |      |              |
| ♥     | A 9 7 2     |      |              |
| ♦     | Q 7 6 5 4 2 |      |              |
| ♣     | Q J 4       |      |              |

**Final Comments:** It may look like South took a real chance by bidding 4♦. There is no guarantee, but the odds are that either diamonds or hearts will be a better contract. Consider that North bid only 3♠. He may have only six spades for this bid. His suit might not be strong enough opposite a void. If North had seven strong spades, he might have bid 4♠.

If North has only six spades, he probably has a second suit elsewhere. Whether that second suit is diamonds or hearts, we will be in better shape than playing in a spade contract. If he has no second suit, he still figures to have enough diamond support for that to be a more playable trump suit.

In a diamond contract, the key to making ten tricks is recognizing the possibility of establishing the spade suit. After that, we only had to be sure we had the entries to establish and then cash those winners.

# Hand 27

Dealer: East  
 Vul: None  
 Form: IMPs

North  
 ♠ K J 8 5  
 ♥ A K 8 7 3  
 ♦ 9 6 2  
 ♣ Q

South  
 ♠ Q 9 6  
 ♥ Q 10 6  
 ♦ A K  
 ♣ A K 8 3 2

| West     | North | East | South (you) |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| ---      | ---   | Pass | 1♣          |
| Pass     | 1♥    | Pass | 2NT         |
| Pass     | 3♠    | Pass | 3NT         |
| Pass     | 4NT   | Pass | 6NT         |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♦4. We play the ♦2 from the dummy and win with our ♦K as East follows suit with the ♦J. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We can win three hearts, two diamonds and three clubs.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
The ♠A.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get more tricks in the spade and heart suits. There are two certain tricks available in the spade suit. If the heart suit breaks, we will get two additional heart tricks for our contract.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders cannot develop a trick on their own. They will get additional tricks if we do not make our contract.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We need four more tricks to make our contract. We can get two of those four tricks right now by establishing our spade tricks. It must be right to lead a spade toward the dummy right now. When we do, East wins this trick and leads the ♦3. We win with the ♦K as West plays the ♦5.

We need at least a fourth trick in the heart suit to make this hand, but there is no rush. If the heart suit is dividing 3-2 (68% chance), it will divide 3-2 later. There is no harm at this point in leading a club to the dummy's ♣Q and then a spade to our ♠Q.

When we lead a spade from the dummy, East discards the ♦Q. This marks West with the ♠10. We now need only four heart tricks for our contract. We start by cashing the ♣A and ♣K, discarding our ♦9 and ♥3. Both defenders follow suit. They started with seven clubs, so that leaves only one club outstanding.

The next move is to lead the ♠9 to finesse West for the ♠10. West gains nothing by playing his ♠10 (we have the ♠8), so he plays low. East discards the ♦8 on this trick.

We play a low heart to our ♥A. Both defenders follow suit. It is time to cash the ♠J. The only card we are looking for is the ♣J (the only club left outstanding). We discard a club from our hand.

If we do not see the ♣J, we play the ♥3 to our ♥Q. If the heart suit breaks, we make our contract. If it does not, we go down.

Here is the full hand:

|      |            |       |           |
|------|------------|-------|-----------|
|      |            | North |           |
|      |            | ♠     | K J 8 5   |
|      |            | ♥     | A K 8 7 3 |
|      |            | ♦     | 9 6 2     |
|      |            | ♣     | Q         |
| West |            | East  |           |
| ♠    | 10 7 4 3 2 | ♠     | A         |
| ♥    | 5          | ♥     | J 9 4 2   |
| ♦    | 10 7 5 4   | ♦     | Q J 8 3   |
| ♣    | 10 6 4     | ♣     | J 9 7 5   |
|      |            | South |           |
|      |            | ♠     | Q 9 6     |
|      |            | ♥     | Q 10 6    |
|      |            | ♦     | A K       |
|      |            | ♣     | A K 8 3 2 |

**Final Comments:** This hand brings up a recurring theme. When we have a key suit and can win every trick but the last, it often pays to delay playing that suit. A defender who is forced to find a discard may be squeezed, allowing us to win that last trick.

We needed at least four heart tricks to make this hand. It made sense to play spades first; we had to lose a spade trick. We had to know whether we needed four or five heart tricks. Once we knew we had three spade tricks, we could take advantage of the chance that a defender had four hearts and four clubs.

If we did not get three spade tricks, we would lead a heart to our ♥Q. We will make the hand if the hearts divide 3-2 or either defender has a singleton ♥J.

# Hand 28

Dealer: South  
 Vul: East/West  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ Q 7 4 3  
 ♥ ---  
 ♦ A K Q 10 3 2  
 ♣ 7 5 2

South

♠ K  
 ♥ A J 10 9 4 2  
 ♦ 6 4  
 ♣ A K J 9

| West | North | East | South (you) |
|------|-------|------|-------------|
| ---  | ---   | ---  | 1♥          |
| Pass | 2♦    | Pass | 2♥          |
| Pass | 2♠    | Pass | 3NT         |

West leads the ♠6. We play low from the dummy. East wins with the ♠A as we play our ♠K. East returns the ♠9. We discard our ♥2 as West plays the ♠10. We play another low spade from the dummy. West continues with the ♠J. We win as East discards the ♣2. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have one spade, one heart, three diamonds and two clubs.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defense has already won two spade tricks. They cannot take any tricks right now.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get as many as three more tricks in the diamond suit. We can get one or two extra tricks in the club suit.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders can get another trick only if we give them a chance to get on lead.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We need nine tricks to make our contract. We already have seven. The easiest way to be sure to get the two extra tricks we need to make our contract is to come to our hand with a club and then lead a diamond to the  $\spadesuit 10$ . Unless West has five diamonds, this will guarantee our contract.

The diamond suit will divide 3-2 68% of the time. It will divide 4-1 with East having the length 22% of the time. By taking this safety play, we give up an overtrick about two times in five. However, we make our contract one time in five when failing to take that safety play results in going down. Not vulnerable, we lose one IMP two times for the one time in five we gain ten IMPs.

Here is the full hand:

| North |              |      |         |
|-------|--------------|------|---------|
| ♠     | Q 7 4 3      |      |         |
| ♥     | ---          |      |         |
| ♦     | A K Q 10 3 2 |      |         |
| ♣     | 7 5 2        |      |         |
| West  |              | East |         |
| ♠     | J 10 8 6 5 2 | ♠    | A 9     |
| ♥     | Q 8 6        | ♥    | K 7 5 3 |
| ♦     | 8            | ♦    | J 9 7 5 |
| ♣     | Q 4 3        | ♣    | 10 8 6  |
| South |              |      |         |
| ♠     | K            |      |         |
| ♥     | A J 10 9 4 2 |      |         |
| ♦     | 6 4          |      |         |
| ♣     | A K J 9      |      |         |

**Final Comments:** Playing matchpoints, most declarers would go down. 3NT is a normal contract; most pairs would be in that game. Let us assume that every pair wins the third spade and plays the three top diamonds. Slightly less than four times in five, these pairs will get a plus 430. The fifth time, these pairs will go down.

Taking the safety play will get a plus 400 when East has the ♦J. This will happen a little more than half of the time because West has six spades to East's doubleton.

When East has the ♦J, we will get a plus 400. We will lose a matchpoint when East starts with three or fewer diamonds. We will win a matchpoint when East starts

with four diamonds. There is a 68% chance that diamonds divide 3-2. This means that 34% of the time, East will have the ♦J. There is an 11% chance that East has four diamonds with the ♦J. We are much more likely to make an extra trick by playing diamonds from the top.

# Hand 29

Dealer: South  
 Vul: East/West  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ Q 7 3  
 ♥ 9 8 6  
 ♦ A 4  
 ♣ J 9 8 4 3

South

♠ 10 5 4  
 ♥ A J 10 5 4 3  
 ♦ K 10 8 6  
 ♣ ---

|          |       |      |             |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| West     | North | East | South (you) |
| ---      | ---   | ---  | 3♥          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♣K. We ruff with our ♥3 as East plays the ♣7. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We can take one heart and two diamonds to go with the club we just ruffed.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defense can take at least two spades and possibly three spades.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can ruff one or two diamonds in the dummy.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense will get at least one heart trick.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We may have a good result because we stole the bid, so going down one should be a good score. It would be even better to make this hand.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We will ruff two diamonds in the dummy. The ruffs should be timed to make sure we can ruff both diamonds. If we cash our ♥A before ruffing a diamond, East might be able to over ruff and play a third trump. Therefore, we must ruff a diamond before playing any trumps.

Before we begin, let us count our possible tricks. If we are lucky, one defender will have a singleton ♥K or ♥Q. That will give us a chance for five heart tricks. If we are able to ruff both diamonds in the dummy, we can take advantage of the ♥9. If a defender does over ruff the ♥9, he will be doing with a trump trick.

Aside from our heart honors, we have three small hearts. We may be able to ruff both diamonds, but we must be sure to limit our heart losers. The solution is to ruff the clubs with our small hearts before we ruff the long diamond.

The plan, then, is to play a diamond to the ♦A. We will then ruff a club. We follow that with the ♦K and a diamond ruff. We take our third club ruff with our last small trump. Finally, we ruff our last diamond with the ♥9. If a defender played either the ♥K or ♥Q under our ♥A, we will make this contract for a great score.

Here is the full hand:

|      |         |       |              |
|------|---------|-------|--------------|
|      |         | North |              |
|      |         | ♠     | Q 7 3        |
|      |         | ♥     | 9 8 6        |
|      |         | ♦     | A 4          |
|      |         | ♣     | J 9 8 4 3    |
| West |         | East  |              |
| ♠    | A 9 2   | ♠     | K J 8 6      |
| ♥    | Q 7 2   | ♥     | K            |
| ♦    | Q 7 3 2 | ♦     | J 9 5        |
| ♣    | K Q 2   | ♣     | A 10 7 6 5   |
|      |         | South |              |
|      |         | ♠     | 10 5 4       |
|      |         | ♥     | A J 10 5 4 3 |
|      |         | ♦     | K 10 8 6     |
|      |         | ♣     | ---          |

**Final Comments:** Players preempt for various reasons, most often to cause problems for the opposition. This hand is a classic example of why players preempt so often in today's game. Here, East-West have 25 high card points between them. The position of the cards allows them to make 3NT. The lucky break in the heart suit allows us to make this contract.

# Hand 30

Dealer: East  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ 6 2  
 ♥ K 9 8 6 2  
 ♦ A K 7 4  
 ♣ Q 9 6

South

♠ A J 8  
 ♥ A Q J 10 5  
 ♦ 5 2  
 ♣ A 10 5

| West | North            | East     | South (you)     |
|------|------------------|----------|-----------------|
| ---  | ---              | Pass     | 1♥              |
| Pass | 2NT <sup>1</sup> | Pass     | 3♥ <sup>2</sup> |
| Pass | 4♦ <sup>3</sup>  | Pass     | 4♠ <sup>4</sup> |
| Pass | 5♥ <sup>5</sup>  | All Pass |                 |

1 Game forcing heart raise, at least four-card support

2 No singleton, but extra values

3 Promises the ♦A

4 Promises the ♠A

5 Nothing else to show

West leads the ♠4. We play low from the dummy. East plays the ♠Q and we win with the ♠A. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have one spade, five hearts, two diamonds and one club. Also, we can ruff a diamond for a total of ten tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
The defense can take a spade trick.

**Where can I get more tricks?** The club suit is the only place where we can get another trick.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense should get at least one club trick.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We have to make this contract.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We need a club trick, but there is no guaranteed play to get two tricks in the suit. We could lead the ♣Q from the dummy. We will win a second trick in the suit if East holds either the ♣K or the ♣J. We will lose two tricks if West holds both cards. Still, this play offers a 76% chance of success.

There is a better way. First, we draw trumps. Second, we cash our diamonds and ruff a diamond. Third, we lead a spade. The defender who wins this trick cannot lead a club without giving us a second club trick. Therefore, the defense will continue with another spade.

We ruff the spade in the dummy. We lead the ♣Q from the dummy. Unless East plays the ♣K, we play low.

West will win this trick and be end played. If he leads a club, he takes the club finesse for us. If he leads anything else, he gives us a ruff and discard. This line of play offers a 100% chance of success.

Here is the full hand:

|      |           |       |            |
|------|-----------|-------|------------|
|      |           | North |            |
|      |           | ♠     | 6 2        |
|      |           | ♥     | K 9 8 6 2  |
|      |           | ♦     | A K 7      |
|      |           | ♣     | Q 9 6      |
| West |           | East  |            |
| ♠    | K 10 5 4  | ♠     | Q 9 7 3    |
| ♥    | 7         | ♥     | 4 3        |
| ♦    | 8 4 3     | ♦     | Q J 10 9 6 |
| ♣    | K J 8 7 3 | ♣     | 4 2        |
|      |           | South |            |
|      |           | ♠     | A J 8      |
|      |           | ♥     | A Q J 10 5 |
|      |           | ♦     | 5 2        |
|      |           | ♣     | A 10 5     |

**Final Comments:** This hand reminds me of the Beatles song, *With a Little Help from Our Friends*. This hand is an example. We eliminate the spades and diamonds from our hands. We then lead a club from the dummy. The defense has to play clubs for us so there will be no guess. With a little help from our friends, we can guarantee making this contract.

# Hand 31

Dealer: North  
 Vul: North/South  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ Q 8 7 3 2  
 ♥ J 10 8 5  
 ♦ A  
 ♣ Q 6 3

South

♠ ---  
 ♥ A K 9 7 6 2  
 ♦ J 9 8  
 ♣ K J 9 4

| West     | North           | East | South (you)     |
|----------|-----------------|------|-----------------|
| ---      | Pass            | Pass | 1♥              |
| Dbl.     | 2♠ <sup>1</sup> | Pass | 3♣ <sup>2</sup> |
| Pass     | 4♦ <sup>3</sup> | Pass | 4♠ <sup>4</sup> |
| Pass     | 5♦ <sup>5</sup> | Pass | 6♥              |
| All Pass |                 |      |                 |

- 1 Natural, shows a five-card spade suit with four-card heart support and at least limit raise values
- 2 Game try or might be the start of a slam try
- 3 Shortness in the diamond suit

- 4 First round control of spades, confirms that 3♣ was the start of a slam try
- 5 First round control of diamonds

West leads the ♥3. We play the ♥J from the dummy as East plays the ♥4. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have six heart tricks and one diamond.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
The defense can get the ♣A.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can ruff two diamonds in the dummy and establish two club tricks.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense will get another trick if we cannot establish our twelfth trick.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We are in a slam contract on 21 high-card points. We may be the only pair to be in this slam. We need to make it for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We have an easy road to eleven tricks: six heart tricks, a diamond and two diamond ruffs, and two clubs once we knock out the ♣A. The twelfth trick is the problem. We might win a third club trick, but West's double suggests length in that suit. In any event, there is a 36% chance that the club suit will divide 3-3 plus a 16% chance that the ♣10 will be a doubleton.

Having a 52% chance to make a slam is not bad, but it is always wise to look for any other chance. That chance lies with the spade suit. We are missing eight spades. There is a 33% chance that the suit will divide 4-4. However, the actual bridge odds might be higher considering that West doubled. If West had five spades, he might have overcalled that suit.

We will need five entries to the dummy to take advantage of a 4-4 division in the spade suit. We just got one of those entries, so the first thing we have to do is ruff a spade. Assuming that West started with the ♣A, the ♣Q will be an entry. We have three other entries with the ♦A and two diamond ruffs. We have enough entries to take advantage of a 4-4 spade division. There is no way to be sure, but there is no harm in trying.

After we ruff a spade, we draw the last trump. Next, we lead the ♣K from our hand. On the outside chance that East holds the ♣A, he might be persuaded to take this trick. West wins this trick and returns a diamond. We win and ruff a second spade. Here is the position:

North

♠ Q 8 7

♥ 10 8

♦

♣ Q 6

South

♠ ---

♥ A 9

♦ J 9

♣ J 9 4

We are in our hand. We ruff a diamond and follow that with a third spade ruff. Next, we ruff our last diamond and follow that with our fourth spade ruff. If the spades divide 4-4 or the ♠A and ♠K are played, we have our slam. Either way, we will play a club to the ♣Q.

We will make this slam if the spades divide 4-4 (33%), West holds only three spades to the ♠A and ♠K (4%), the clubs divide 3-3 (36%), either defender has a doubleton ♣10 (16%), or one defender holds a high spade and four clubs that include the ♣10. Combining these possibilities gives us a 71% chance to make this slam. That is almost a one-in-five possibility of making this contract, because we took advantage of that extra chance.

Here is the full hand:

| North |             |      |           |
|-------|-------------|------|-----------|
| ♠     | Q 8 7 3 2   |      |           |
| ♥     | J 10 8 5    |      |           |
| ♦     | A           |      |           |
| ♣     | Q 6 3       |      |           |
| West  |             | East |           |
| ♠     | A K 10 6    | ♠    | J 9 5 4   |
| ♥     | 3           | ♥    | Q 4       |
| ♦     | Q 10 6 5    | ♦    | K 7 4 3.2 |
| ♣     | A 10 7 5    | ♣    | 8 2       |
| South |             |      |           |
| ♠     | ---         |      |           |
| ♥     | A K 9 7 6 2 |      |           |
| ♦     | J 9 8       |      |           |
| ♣     | K J 9 4     |      |           |

**Final Comments:** West cannot be faulted for his trump lead. I believe that just about every defender would lead a trump given the auction. However, that lead provided the extra entry we needed to make this hand. This hand is another example of why finding the winning opening lead is more an art than a science.

# Hand 32

Dealer: North  
 Vul: East/West  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ 9 7 6 4  
 ♥ 4 3  
 ♦ A 7 3  
 ♣ A K 8 4

South

♠ K Q 10 2  
 ♥ ---  
 ♦ K Q 8  
 ♣ Q 10 7 5 3 2

|          |       |      |             |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| West     | North | East | South (you) |
| ---      | 1♣    | Pass | 1♠          |
| 2♥       | 2♠    | 4♥   | 4♠          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♥A. We ruff with our ♠2 as East plays the ♥10. We play a diamond to the ♦A and lead a spade to our ♠K. West plays the ♠3. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have three diamonds and six clubs to go with our spade trick.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defenders can take the ♠A.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can ruff another heart in our hand. The only other tricks we can get are in the spade suit by avoiding too many trump losers.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense might get another spade trick.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this hand for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We have no losers in the minor suits. We have no heart losers. Everything looks easy.

This is the time to say STOP! The contract looks like an easy ten or eleven tricks. All we need for the contract to be safe is for spades to divide 3-2. The defenders will never win more than two spade tricks plus, only maybe, a heart trick.

This is IMPs. When playing in a contract that looks too easy, it is time to ask what might go wrong. The answer is that there could be a problem if West started with four spades to the Ace and Jack. If we play a second spade, West will cash a third spade and then start playing hearts. We can ruff, but West will have the last trump and a bunch of heart tricks to cash.

The safest line of play is to concede three spade tricks. Just start playing the club winners. If we start playing the club winners, a defender will be able to ruff eventually, but will not be able to cash any heart tricks.

We will ruff the heart return and continue playing clubs. When we run out of clubs, we will play our diamonds. The only tricks the defense will get are the three remaining spades.

Here is the full hand:

|               |              | North |              |
|---------------|--------------|-------|--------------|
|               |              | ♠     | 9 7 6 4      |
|               |              | ♥     | 4 3          |
|               |              | ♦     | A 7 3        |
|               |              | ♣     | A K 8 4      |
| West          | East         |       |              |
| ♠ A J 5 3     | ♠ 8          |       |              |
| ♥ A Q J 8 6 5 | ♥ K 10 9 7 2 |       |              |
| ♦ J 4         | ♦ 10 9 6 5 2 |       |              |
| ♣ 6           | ♣ J 9        |       |              |
|               |              | South |              |
|               |              | ♠     | K Q 10 2     |
|               |              | ♥     | ---          |
|               |              | ♦     | K Q 8        |
|               |              | ♣     | Q 10 7 5 3 2 |

**Final Comments:** When this hand came up, West foolishly doubled. That made it unnecessary to spend an entry to lead a spade from our hand at trick two. West did his best by refusing to take his ♠A. South abandoned the spade suit and ran his minor suit winners. All West could get for his trouble was three spade tricks and a minus score.

# Hand 33

Dealer: West  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ A 8 7 6 5  
 ♥ J 7 5 4  
 ♦ A 8 3  
 ♣ 5

South

♠ K 3  
 ♥ A Q 10 9 8  
 ♦ 7 6 4  
 ♣ J 8 3

|      |       |      |             |
|------|-------|------|-------------|
| West | North | East | South (you) |
| Pass | Pass  | 1♣   | 1♥          |
| 2♣   | 4♥    | Pass | All Pass    |

West leads the ♣A. We follow suit with the ♣5 in the dummy and the ♣3 in our hand as East plays the ♣2. West shifts to the ♦2. We win with the ♦A as East plays the ♦5 and we play the ♦4. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We can take two spades, one heart and one diamond.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defenders can take two diamond tricks.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can take the heart finesse and ruff two clubs. We might be able to win some spade tricks as well.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense will get a heart trick if our finesse fails. They will also get any remaining tricks after we take all the tricks we are able to win.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We are in a really good contract. A passed hand opposite a simple overcall usually will not belong in game. Making the contract is likely to be a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We are in the dummy. It must be right to take the heart finesse at this time. If it succeeds, we will be safe for our contract.

We take the diamond finesse by leading the ♥J from the dummy. East plays the ♥K and we win with the ♥A. We continue with a second heart. The defenders both follow suit. We are now safe for the contract.

We could ruff a club and return to our hand with a spade to ruff a second club. However, we are playing matchpoints. An overtrick can make the difference between a good and a great score. The spade suit is a possible source of extra tricks.

There is a 36% chance of the spades dividing 3-3, and a 48% chance their dividing 4-2. It costs nothing to cash the ♠K and ♠A and then ruff a spade. If the suit divides

3-3, we will take twelve tricks. If it divides 4-2, we will ruff a club and then ruff a spade to set up the long spade for eleven tricks.

Here is the full hand:

|      |          |       |            |
|------|----------|-------|------------|
|      |          | North |            |
|      |          | ♠     | A 8 7 6 5  |
|      |          | ♥     | J 7 5 4    |
|      |          | ♦     | A 8 3      |
|      |          | ♣     | 5          |
| West |          | East  |            |
| ♠    | J 9 2    | ♠     | Q 10 4     |
| ♥    | 3 2      | ♥     | K 6        |
| ♦    | Q 10 9 2 | ♦     | K J 5      |
| ♣    | A 9 7 4  | ♣     | K Q 10 6 2 |
|      |          | South |            |
|      |          | ♠     | K 3        |
|      |          | ♥     | A Q 10 9 8 |
|      |          | ♦     | 7 6 4      |
|      |          | ♣     | J 8 3      |

**Final Comments:** West made a completely normal but unfortunate choice in leading his ♣A. A diamond lead would limit us to eleven tricks. In fact, we will win those eleven tricks only if we kept our ♥J in the dummy for a late entry to cash the long spades. Leading a low heart to finesse East for the ♥K will succeed only when East has no more than two hearts. Also, that sequence requires the spade suit to divide 3-3 to gain that extra trick.

# Hand 34

Dealer: East  
 Vul: North/South  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ J 7 5 4  
 ♥ J 7 3  
 ♦ 10 6  
 ♣ A 6 5 2

South

♠ A K 10 3 2  
 ♥ 5  
 ♦ K Q 9 3  
 ♣ K 10 4

| West | North | East     | South (you)       |
|------|-------|----------|-------------------|
| ---  | ---   | Pass     | 1♠                |
| 4♥   | Pass  | Pass     | Dbl. <sup>1</sup> |
| Pass | 4♠    | All Pass |                   |

- 1 A reopening take-out double. This is semi-forced when North's double would be a "negative double" at this level. South's suit is not strong enough to bid again without positive support from North.

West leads the ♥A. We follow suit with the ♥3 in the dummy and the ♥5 in our hand as East plays the ♥4.

West continues with the ♥K. We ruff with our ♠2 as East plays the ♥6 and we play the ♥7 from the dummy. When we cash our ♠A, West follows suit with the ♠8 and East with the ♠6 as we play the ♠4 from the dummy. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have two spade tricks plus our heart ruff and two club tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
The defense can win a diamond trick.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get at least one diamond trick by forcing out the ♦A. There is a chance of a third club trick. We should be able to get at least one and possibly two more spade tricks with a successful guess in that suit.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders will get a spade trick if we fail to pick up the ♠Q. Also, this could be one of those hands where all we have left are losers. We cannot know at this time if this is one of those hands, but if it is, the defenders will win the rest after we run out of winners.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We have lost a heart, face a certain diamond loser and a virtually certain club loser. We have just one entry to the dummy. It will help the defenders to establish their club winner if we use our club entry. We could try to ruff two diamonds in the dummy. However, we might not have enough trumps if spades divide 3-1.

We have all played hands like this. Too many possibilities make it hard to plan a line of play. We have to start somewhere. The best place is with the trump suit.

We have nine trumps missing the ♠Q. In general, four missing trumps will divide 2-2 40% and 3-1 50% of the time. That does not take into account the fact that West has at least six hearts. Also, we may infer that West does not have a singleton club or diamond. He may have led a singleton if he had one.

Once we decide that West has at least six hearts with at least two diamonds and two clubs, the odds swing strongly toward East having the spade length. We will use our entry to take a spade finesse.

If East has three spades to the ♠Q, we might not be able to ruff two diamonds in the dummy. If West started with four diamonds, East will be able to ruff the fourth round of that suit. We have no entries to lead past East's ♦A twice. We need our club entry to finesse East for the ♠Q.

Our diamond suit includes the ♦10 and ♦9. If we let the defenders win their ♦A and ♦J, we will have two diamond winners. We can use those winners to discard two clubs from the dummy and then ruff our losing club. We will need only one trump in the dummy for that plan to succeed.

We have our plan, constructed one suit at a time. We now must decide which suit to play first. If we play a club first, the defense might be able to establish their club trick before we can discard our clubs from dummy.

The solution is to lead our ♦K right now. The defense will win this trick. If they play another heart, we will ruff. It is time to cross to the ♣A and take our spade finesse. Assuming the spade suit divides 3-1, as expected, we will draw the last trump and lead a diamond to the ♦10.

The defense will win this trick, but we are safe for our contract. We will win five spades in our hand, two diamonds, two clubs and a club ruff in the dummy.

Here is the full hand:

|                |  |           |  |
|----------------|--|-----------|--|
| North          |  |           |  |
| ♠ J 7 5 4      |  |           |  |
| ♥ J 7 3        |  |           |  |
| ♦ 10 6         |  |           |  |
| ♣ A 6 5 2      |  |           |  |
| West           |  | East      |  |
| ♠ 8            |  | ♠ Q 9 6   |  |
| ♥ A K Q 10 9 2 |  | ♥ 8 6 4   |  |
| ♦ A J 8 7      |  | ♦ 5 4 2   |  |
| ♣ 8 3          |  | ♣ Q J 9 7 |  |
| South          |  |           |  |
| ♠ A K 10 3 2   |  |           |  |
| ♥ 5            |  |           |  |
| ♦ K Q 9 3      |  |           |  |
| ♣ K 10 4       |  |           |  |

**Final Comments:** These days, more players preempt with strong hands. The strong preempt happens more often when their partner passes. East could have had a weak or strong hand. When East did not try for a

ruff, we can infer that he had few trumps with which to ruff.

# Hand 35

Dealer: North  
 Vul: North/South  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ A Q J 4  
 ♥ 8 7 4  
 ♦ 9 5  
 ♣ A K 10 2

South

♠ K 8 6 5  
 ♥ J  
 ♦ A Q J 4  
 ♣ J 6 5 4

|      |       |          |             |
|------|-------|----------|-------------|
| West | North | East     | South (you) |
| ---  | 1♣    | Pass     | 1♠          |
| 4♥   | 4♠    | All Pass |             |

West leads the ♥A. We follow suit with the ♥4 in the dummy and the ♥J in our hand as East plays the ♥9. West continues with the ♥K. We ruff with our ♠5 as East plays the ♥6 and we play the ♥7 from the dummy. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have four spade tricks plus our heart ruff. We also have a diamond and two clubs.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

None.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get more tricks with a successful finesse in either minor suit. We should also be able to ruff a second heart.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders will get another trick if our minor suit finesse fails.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** It looks as though we are in a fairly normal contract. We should win at least ten tricks. If the spade suit divides 3-2 and a minor suit finesse wins, we will have eleven winners. It seems we have to make eleven tricks for a good score. It might be possible to win twelve tricks if everything goes well, so we should give ourselves a chance for that.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We do not know how the spades will divide. They could be 3-2, but the preempt could mean a 4-1 division. We are missing the  $\spadesuit K$  and the  $\clubsuit Q$ . We do not have enough information to know which defender has these cards. We must plan for the worst to minimize the chance of bad things happening.

We can always ruff a heart in our hand. If we do and spades divide 4-1, we cannot afford to take a diamond finesse. South might win this trick and be able to run his heart suit. If we take a losing club finesse, East will not be able to damage us with heart leads.

The best plan may be to take a diamond finesse before we draw trumps and before we ruff the dummy's last heart in our hand. So, we cross to the dummy with a club and take a diamond finesse. We should play the ♦Q on this finesse. It makes it less likely that West will realize we have the ♦J so that he does not duck this lead. The finesse wins with East playing the ♦2 and West the ♦3.

After the diamond finesse wins, we lead a low spade to the dummy's ♠J. West plays the ♠9 and East plays the ♠2 on the spade lead. Next, we ruff the last heart. East discards the ♦6 as we ruff. We lead our ♠K. West follows suit with the ♠10, so we overtake with the ♠A in the dummy and draw East's last trump with the ♠Q. Here is the position:

| North    |
|----------|
| ♠ 4      |
| ♥        |
| ♦ 9      |
| ♣ A 10 2 |
| South    |
| ♠        |
| ♥        |
| ♦ A J 4  |
| ♣ J 6    |

We know that West started with seven hearts because East showed out on the third round of that suit. We know that West started with two spades and also has at

least one diamond and one club. We cash the last spade and discard our ♣J (so we can lead a low club to the ♣10, if needed). East discards the ♣9 and West discards another heart. We now take a second diamond finesse. West follows suit with the ♦10. When we cash our ♦A, West discards another heart. We discard the ♣2 from the dummy as East follows suit with the ♦K.

We have a complete count of West's distribution. He started with two spades, seven hearts and two diamonds. He has to have exactly two clubs. East discarded a club on our last spade. Therefore, we play a club to the ♣K and claim twelve tricks.

Here is the full hand:

|                  |            |             |
|------------------|------------|-------------|
|                  | North      |             |
|                  | ♠ A Q J 4  |             |
|                  | ♥ 8 7 4    |             |
|                  | ♦ 9 5      |             |
|                  | ♣ A K 10 2 |             |
| West             |            | East        |
| ♠ 10 9           |            | ♠ 7 3 2     |
| ♥ A K Q 10 5 3 2 |            | ♥ 9 6       |
| ♦ 10 3           |            | ♦ K 8 7 6 2 |
| ♣ 7 3            |            | ♣ Q 9 8     |
|                  | South      |             |
|                  | ♠ K 8 6 5  |             |
|                  | ♥ J        |             |
|                  | ♦ A Q J 4  |             |
|                  | ♣ J 6 5 4  |             |

**Final Comments:** Players preempt because it causes problems. North could not be certain that bidding 4♠ would be a winning choice. Had North passed, South would have taken some action. However, his choice is uncertain. Even if North-South bid a game, it is not certain it would be in spades. South might have bid 5♣. That game makes, but would be a poor matchpoint score.

The cost for preempting is that sometimes the bid will help a declarer map out a hand. It might push a pair into a game or slam they would not otherwise bid, and make it. It might also keep a pair out of an otherwise normal contract that does not make because of the unusual distribution. The successful player will take maximum advantage each time a preempt may help him.

# Hand 36

Dealer: East  
 Vul: East/West  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ Q 8 7 3 2  
 ♥ 10 8 7  
 ♦ 9 8 5  
 ♣ K 8

South

♠ J 10  
 ♥ K Q J 9 4  
 ♦ A K 3  
 ♣ A 10 2

| West     | North | East | South (you) |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| ---      | ---   | 1♦   | Dbl         |
| 1♠       | Pass  | 2♣   | 2♥          |
| Pass     | 3♥    | Pass | 4♥          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♠A. We follow suit with the ♠2 in the dummy and the ♠10 in our hand as East plays the ♠6. West continues with the ♦10. We play the ♦5 from the dummy. East plays the ♦6 as we win with the ♦K. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have two diamond tricks and two club tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
The defense already has one spade trick and will win another. They also have the ♥A.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can ruff a club in the dummy and may get a spade trick. Our heart suit is solid other than the Ace, so we will get four heart tricks.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders may get a diamond trick.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We have three inescapable losers. We can ruff our club loser in the dummy, but the only way we can avoid a diamond loser is to establish a spade winner for a discard.

We intend to ruff a club at some point, but that has to wait until we establish our spade winner. If we ruff a club right away, the defense will be able to lead trumps. We might not have a late entry to the ♠Q.

We could lead another spade right now. If we do, West will win and lead a second diamond. That will establish a diamond winner for East. East opened the bidding, so we may presume he has the ♥A. If we lead a spade first, East will have an entry to cash his diamond winner. Therefore, we will have to lead a heart first.

We lead the ♥4. West plays the ♥2. We play the ♥7 from the dummy and East wins with the ♥A. East leads the ♦Q. We win with our ♦A as West plays the ♦7 and the dummy plays the ♦8.

East bid diamonds and clubs. He can have has a maximum of only ten high-card points. If we give East those ten high-card points, he will be the only defender with a guard in either minor suit. Just to be safe, we will play a second heart before leading a spade. West will win this trick. He has to lead a third heart to stop us from ruffing a club.

We win the heart return and cash all our hearts. We have four cards left, one diamond and three clubs. The dummy's last four cards include two spades and two clubs. We play a club to the ♣K and cash our ♠Q. The last two cards in the dummy are a spade and a club. The last three cards in our hand, with East to play, are a diamond and two clubs. East has a high diamond and two clubs. If East discards his diamond, our ♦3 becomes our tenth trick. If East discards his club, our ♣10 becomes our tenth trick.

Here is the full hand:

| North |           |      |             |
|-------|-----------|------|-------------|
| ♠     | Q 8 7 3 2 |      |             |
| ♥     | 10 8 7    |      |             |
| ♦     | 9 8 5     |      |             |
| ♣     | K 8       |      |             |
| West  |           | East |             |
| ♠     | A K 9 5 4 | ♠    | 6           |
| ♥     | 6 5 3 2   | ♥    | A           |
| ♦     | 10 7      | ♦    | Q J 6 4 2   |
| ♣     | 6 4       | ♣    | Q J 9 7 5 3 |
| South |           |      |             |
| ♠     | J 10      |      |             |
| ♥     | K Q J 9 4 |      |             |
| ♦     | A K 3     |      |             |
| ♣     | A 10 2    |      |             |

**Final Comments:** There is an alternate line of play for this hand. We could lead a second spade after winning East's diamond return. That succeeds here because East has only one trump. Suppose, however, that East started with one spade and two hearts. East will ruff this trick no matter what West plays and cash his diamond.

# Hand 37

Dealer: North  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ Q 10 9 3  
 ♥ K J 3  
 ♦ A K 10  
 ♣ 8 7 4

South

♠ A 7 6 4 2  
 ♥ 9 6 4  
 ♦ 8 5 2  
 ♣ Q 2

|      |                 |          |             |
|------|-----------------|----------|-------------|
| West | North           | East     | South (you) |
| ---  | 1♣ <sup>1</sup> | Pass     | 1♠          |
| Dbl. | 2♠ <sup>2</sup> | All Pass |             |

- 1 By agreement, opens 1♣ with 3-3 in the minor suits
- 2 Promises four-card support

West leads the ♦Q. We play the ♦K as East plays the ♦3 and we play the ♦2. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have one spade trick and two diamond tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defense can take one heart and two club tricks.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can finesse West for the ♦J. We can try for one or two heart tricks by leading hearts toward the dummy. We should get at least two more spade tricks, and maybe even four if the spade suit cooperates.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders might get a second or third trick in hearts plus one or two spade tricks.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** It looks as if East-West have no contract they can make. We have excellent defensive prospects. We probably have three diamond tricks and at least one spade trick. We could have two heart tricks. Finally, East-West will have to guess the location of the ♣Q. Considering my opening 1♣ bid, they are likely to misguess. The defenders did the right thing by passing. We have to make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We need three entries to our hand for finesses in hearts and diamonds. We have the ♠A and we can ruff a club. The only other possibility is to lead the ♠3 to our ♠7.

West has the ♦Q and ♦J. He probably does not have the ♣A and ♣K, or he would have led that suit instead. If we assume that West has the ♥A and ♥Q, we have two heart tricks. We may also assume that East has at least one spade honor. Otherwise, West might have continued to compete.

The first order of business is to lose our club tricks. We will eliminate the clubs from both hands. Our intention is to eliminate clubs as a safe exit once we tackle the spade suit. When we lead a club, the defense continues with the suit. We ruff in our hand with the ♠2. We now lead a diamond to the ♦10.

The best line of play at this point is to lead the ♠Q. West might have the ♠J, in which case we will have no spade loser. East plays the ♠K. We win with our ♠A as West plays the ♠8. We lead a heart to the ♥J as West plays low. It wins, and we continue with the ♠10.

East plays the ♠J. If he leads a heart, it takes that finesse for us. If he leads a diamond, we win and lead a low spade to our ♠7. That draws trump. We are in our hand for the third time. A second heart lead establishes the ♥K for our eighth trick.

East could have allowed our ♠10 to win. That would deny us a third entry to our hand. If East does that, we will cash our ♦A before playing a third spade. East will be end played into leading a heart for us.

Here is the full hand:

| North |           |      |          |
|-------|-----------|------|----------|
| ♠     | Q 10 9 3  |      |          |
| ♥     | K J 3     |      |          |
| ♦     | A K 10    |      |          |
| ♣     | 8 7 4     |      |          |
| West  |           | East |          |
| ♠     | 8         | ♠    | K J 5    |
| ♥     | A Q 10 7  | ♥    | 8 5 2    |
| ♦     | Q J 9 7   | ♦    | 6 4 3    |
| ♣     | A 9 6 5   | ♣    | K J 10 3 |
| South |           |      |          |
| ♠     | A 7 6 4 2 |      |          |
| ♥     | 9 6 4     |      |          |
| ♦     | 8 5 2     |      |          |
| ♣     | Q 2       |      |          |

**Final Comments:** It is interesting that if the ♠5 and ♠8 were switched, we could not make this hand. Spot cards are important. On this hand, we had to keep track of the spade spot cards. We will not often have to track spot cards in more than one suit. Usually, it is sufficient just to count the number of cards played in each suit.

# Hand 38

Dealer: East  
 Vul: Both  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ 10 3  
 ♥ K 10 8 7 5  
 ♦ Q  
 ♣ K Q 8 6 4

South

♠ A K Q J 9 2  
 ♥ 9 2  
 ♦ A J  
 ♣ J 9 5

|          |                   |      |             |
|----------|-------------------|------|-------------|
| West     | North             | East | South (you) |
| ---      | ---               | 1♦   | 1♠          |
| 4♦       | Dbl. <sup>1</sup> | Pass | 4♠          |
| All Pass |                   |      |             |

1 Values to compete in the other suits.

West leads the ♦10. We play the ♦Q as East plays the ♦K and we win with the ♦A. We draw trumps in three rounds, with West following suit while East discards the ♦2 on the third spade. We discard a heart on the third spade. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have six spade tricks and two diamond tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defense can take the ♥A and the ♣A.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get at least two club tricks and perhaps more if the ♣A is played on the first or second round of that suit.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense might get a second heart trick if we lead the suit and East has the ♥A.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We are safe for the contract, so we should set eleven tricks as our goal for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** There is a good chance that East has the ♥A. He opened the bidding. We should start by leading the ♣9 to the ♣K. We do this in case East started with a singleton ♣A. That way, we can cash our ♣J and finesse West for the ♣10.

When we lead a club, West plays the ♣7 and East plays the ♣3. We continue with a low club toward our ♣J. East thinks a little, and then plays the ♣10. West follows with the ♣2.

If we lead a third club, East will win and lead a diamond. We would rather put East on lead when he has no diamonds left to play, or make him discard all his hearts except the ♥A. We can win every trick at this point except for the last two. We start by cashing our

spades. We will come down to four cards. Here is the position, with West being irrelevant:

|       |      |       |     |
|-------|------|-------|-----|
| North |      |       |     |
| ♠     |      |       |     |
| ♥     | K 10 |       |     |
| ♦     |      |       |     |
| ♣     | Q 8  |       |     |
|       |      | East  |     |
|       |      | ♠     |     |
|       |      | ♥     | A ? |
|       |      | ♦     | x ? |
|       |      | ♣     | A   |
|       |      | South |     |
|       |      | ♠     |     |
|       |      | ♥     | 9 2 |
|       |      | ♦     | J   |
|       |      | ♣     | 5   |

We know that East has the ♥A and the ♣A. He has two other cards. One will be a small diamond. The other will be either a diamond or a heart.

We must be careful to count East's distribution. If he kept two diamonds, we have to lead a heart and play low from the dummy. East will win with his ♥A. We will win a heart trick to go along with six spades, two diamonds and two clubs.

If East kept two hearts, we have to cash our ♦J and discard a club from the dummy. We then lead a club to East's ♣A. At trick twelve, East will be on lead holding

the ♥A and a small heart. He will have to lead a heart to the dummy's ♥K after cashing his heart.

We must study East's discards. He opened 1♦, so he should not have more than four hearts. If East discards three hearts, we may be fairly certain that leading a heart will be the right move.

If East discards only two hearts, we will have to guess his distribution. However, a clue may be found in West's preemptive raise to the four-level. West is likely to have at least six diamonds for his raise. Most pairs require a five-card suit to open with a major suit. That means East needs only a four-card diamond suit to open 1♦. If we assume that West started with six diamonds, it means that East has only four diamonds. If he discards two diamonds and two hearts, he will have only one diamond left. We will cash our ♦J, discarding a club and lead a club. East will win and give us a heart trick.

Here is the full hand:

| North |              |      |         |
|-------|--------------|------|---------|
| ♠     | 10 3         |      |         |
| ♥     | K 10 8 7 5   |      |         |
| ♦     | Q            |      |         |
| ♣     | K Q 8 6 4    |      |         |
| West  |              | East |         |
| ♠     | 7 6 4        | ♠    | 8 5     |
| ♥     | Q J          | ♥    | A 6 4 3 |
| ♦     | 10 9 8 7 6 3 | ♦    | K 5 4 2 |
| ♣     | 7 2          | ♣    | A 10 3  |
| South |              |      |         |
| ♠     | A K Q J 9 2  |      |         |
| ♥     | 9 2          |      |         |
| ♦     | A J          |      |         |
| ♣     | J 9 5        |      |         |

**Final Comments:** West might have ended all suspense at trick one by leading the ♥Q. In any event, it is unclear that would be the best lead. No one will find the winning lead every time. Good declarers find a way to take advantage of these opportunities.

# Hand 39

Dealer: West  
 Vul: None  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ A K Q 7 2  
 ♥ J 8 2  
 ♦ 9 6 3  
 ♣ J 7

South

♠ J  
 ♥ K 6 5 4  
 ♦ K Q 8 4  
 ♣ A Q 10 9

| West | North | East     | South (you) |
|------|-------|----------|-------------|
| Pass | Pass  | Pass     | 1♦          |
| Pass | 1♠    | Pass     | 2♣          |
| Pass | 2♦    | Pass     | 2NT         |
| Pass | 3NT   | All Pass |             |

West leads the ♠5. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We can take three spades and a club.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
 The defenders can take the ♥A and the ♦A.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get more tricks with a successful club finesse, leading a high diamond to force out the ♦A, leading hearts and hoping that West started with the ♥A and ♥Q, or playing low on the spade lead and hoping to get to the dummy to cash our remaining spades.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense can get more tricks if we misguess a suit or if the distribution is such that we cannot get an extra trick in that suit.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We have twenty-six high-card points. This is a normal game contract. We need to make it for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** The opening lead gave us nothing. It forces us to plan the play in all four suits with very little information to guide us. We have no certain entry other than in spades. Using that entry will reduce our potential tricks. We will need a plan that uses the few resources we have in the dummy to help us win those extra tricks.

We must consider which suit might offer us an extra trick even if we lead it from our own hand. The heart suit is too weak. If we lead it, the defenders might be able to take four tricks in that suit alone. The club suit is strong, but the defenders cannot lead it without giving us an entry to the dummy or four club tricks outright.

That leaves the diamond suit. We have the King, Queen, Nine and Eight. If we lead the King and then the Queen, we might find the Jack or Ten doubleton (29%).

It might be that the diamond suit will divide 3-3 (36%). In either case, we will have two tricks in that suit.

We play low from the dummy and win in hand with the ♠J. When we lead the ♦K, West plays the ♦5 and East the ♦A.

If East plays a heart, he helps us establish the heart suit. If East plays a club, he gives us a certain entry to the dummy. We will also be certain of winning at least three club tricks. So, East returns a diamond. We win with our ♦Q as West plays the ♦J. We play our ♦4 to the ♦9. West discards the ♣2 as East wins with the ♦10. We have established our second diamond trick. East plays a fourth diamond, putting us back on lead. West discards the ♣8, and we discard the ♠7.

We have lost two diamond tricks. We can lead a club and hope that West started with the ♣K. If so, our ♣J will be an entry to cash our spade winners. However, West discarded the ♣2 on the third round of diamonds. This suggests that West does not have a club honor. If East has the ♣K, he will play that card on our ♣J and return a club. We will then be certain of losing two heart tricks no matter who has the heart honors.

It looks as though we must hope that West has both the ♥A and ♥Q. If so, the ♥J will be an entry to the dummy. West's discards make it clear that East has the ♣K. So, we lead a small heart and hope that West has both heart honors.

West wins this trick with his ♥Q, but he is now helpless. We have two diamond tricks. The ♥J will be an entry to the dummy. We will use that entry to win

four spade tricks, a heart, two diamonds and take a club finesse for our contract.

It does not help West to keep a club for an exit card. If West leads a club, we will play our ♣J. East would have to play the ♣K on our ♣J to prevent us from gaining an entry to the dummy. That gives us four club tricks to go with our two diamonds and spade. We will keep the second club in the dummy and lead another heart. If West does not take his ♥A, we will make ten tricks. If he does take his ♥A, we will use the ♥J to take sufficient spade tricks to make our contract.

Here is the full hand:

|      |            |       |           |
|------|------------|-------|-----------|
|      |            | North |           |
|      |            | ♠     | A K Q 7 2 |
|      |            | ♥     | J 8 2     |
|      |            | ♦     | 9 6 3     |
|      |            | ♣     | J 7       |
| West |            | East  |           |
| ♠    | 10 9 6 5 3 | ♠     | 8 4       |
| ♥    | A Q 7 3    | ♥     | 10 9      |
| ♦    | J 5        | ♦     | A 10 7 2  |
| ♣    | 8 2        | ♣     | K 6 5 4 3 |
|      |            | South |           |
|      |            | ♠     | J         |
|      |            | ♥     | K 6 5 4   |
|      |            | ♦     | K Q 8 4   |
|      |            | ♣     | A Q 10 9  |

**Final Comments:** We chose to attack the diamonds because the decent spot cards in the suit gave us a

chance for an extra trick. Both the ♣J and the ♥J provided us with a threatened entry to the dummy. We had to keep both threats active to succeed. We do not necessarily gain a trick when the opposition leads a spade, heart or club. We gain a vital entry. *Zugzwang*, in chess, means the obligation to move is a serious disadvantage. This hand demonstrates that principle in bridge.

# Hand 40

Dealer: East  
 Vul: Both  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ J 9 7  
 ♥ K 10 5 2  
 ♦ 10  
 ♣ K Q 9 6 3

South

♠ Q 8  
 ♥ A Q 9 7 6  
 ♦ 8 7  
 ♣ A J 4 2

|      |       |          |             |
|------|-------|----------|-------------|
| West | North | East     | South (you) |
| ---  | ---   | 2♠       | 3♥          |
| Pass | 4♥    | All Pass |             |

West leads the ♠K. We play the ♠7 from the dummy as East encourages with the ♠10. We play the ♠8. West continues with the ♠2. We play the ♠9 from the dummy. East wins with the ♠A as we play the ♠Q. East plays the ♠6. We ruff with our ♥A. West plays the ♦6 as we play the ♠J from the dummy. We cash our ♥Q. West plays the ♥4 and East the ♥3. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have three heart and five club tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?** The defense has two spade tricks so far and will win a diamond trick.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get two more heart tricks by successfully guessing which defender has the ♥J.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense will get a heart trick if we misguess that suit, but that is their only possibility.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this hand for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** The only question on this hand is how best to play the heart suit. We know that West started with at least two hearts and East with at least one. If West has the ♥J, we must finesse him for it. If East has the ♥J, we must play the ♥K to drop it.

The clue is in imagining the defenders' diamond distribution. There is an excellent chance that East started with at least four diamonds. Otherwise, West will have at least seven diamonds. Once we give East ten cards between his spades and diamonds, the odds strongly favor playing West for the ♥J.

Here is the full hand:

| North |             |      |              |
|-------|-------------|------|--------------|
| ♠     | J 9 7       |      |              |
| ♥     | K 10 5 2    |      |              |
| ♦     | 10          |      |              |
| ♣     | K Q 9 6 3   |      |              |
| West  |             | East |              |
| ♠     | K 2         | ♠    | A 10 6 5 4 3 |
| ♥     | J 8 4       | ♥    | 3            |
| ♦     | A J 6 5 3 2 | ♦    | K Q 9 4      |
| ♣     | 8 5         | ♣    | 10 7         |
| South |             |      |              |
| ♠     | Q 8         |      |              |
| ♥     | A Q 9 7 6   |      |              |
| ♦     | 8 7         |      |              |
| ♣     | A J 4 2     |      |              |

**Final Comments:** It is true that East could have had two hearts and one club. In that case, East might have led a club to West hoping he had the ♣A and could give him a ruff. In that case, the defense would fail to defeat our contract.

# Hand 41

Dealer: South  
 Vul: North-South  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ 8 5 4  
 ♥ K Q 10 7 6  
 ♦ A 10  
 ♣ Q J 3

South

♠ K 7 3  
 ♥ A 5  
 ♦ K Q J 9 2  
 ♣ A 9 4

| West              | North             | East            | South (you)     |
|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
|                   |                   |                 | 1NT             |
| Dbl. <sup>1</sup> | Pass <sup>2</sup> | 2♣ <sup>3</sup> | 2♦ <sup>4</sup> |
| Pass              | 3NT               | All Pass        |                 |

- 1 Shows a four-card major suit with a longer minor suit.
- 2 Waiting. Any bid would show an offensively oriented hand. To pass now and double later is for penalties.
- 3 Preference for a minor suit contract.
- 4 Strong diamond suit and a maximum hand.

West leads the ♣5. We play the ♣Q from the dummy. East plays the ♣10 as we play the ♣4. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have three hearts, five diamonds and two clubs right now for a total of ten tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
The defenders can take a spade trick.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We may get more tricks in the heart suit or with our ♠K.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders will get more tricks if we give up a heart or lead to our ♠K and West has the ♠A.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We have ten tricks in a normal contract, and we received a favorable opening lead. We have a reasonable score, but eleven tricks would be much better.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** Considering his bidding, West is likely to have the ♠A and the ♣K. That being the case, we might be able to put some pressure on West by running our diamond suit. However, it does no harm to play our three top hearts first, discarding a spade from our hand. If the hearts divide, we will have twelve tricks. That will match the best scores in the field.

We test the hearts first. We have to find three discards from the dummy on our diamonds. If the heart suit does not give us five tricks, we can discard one spade and two hearts.

We cash three hearts, discarding a spade from our hand. West shows out on the third heart, also discarding a spade. It is time to cash our diamonds. West shows out on the third diamond.

We have a near-perfect count of West's distribution. He has either five spades and four clubs or four spades and five clubs. We will look very closely at his discards on our diamonds. We saw a spade discard on the third heart. His next three discards are two clubs and another spade. On the last diamond, East discarded the ♠9.

It is unlikely that West would reduce his club holding to a singleton ♣K. However, he might discard down to a singleton ♠A. He discarded only two spades, so that is unlikely. Also, West's bidding suggests that he has a second spade honor. We have not yet seen that spade honor.

The best play at this point is to cash our ♣A. If West has only the ♣K left, he will play it and we have our eleventh trick. If West does not play the ♣K, we will lead our last club. West will be able to cash his ♠A, but he will then have to give us our ♠K for eleven tricks and a good score.

Here is the full hand:

| North |            |      |         |
|-------|------------|------|---------|
| ♠     | 8 5 4      |      |         |
| ♥     | K Q 10 7 6 |      |         |
| ♦     | A 10       |      |         |
| ♣     | Q J 3      |      |         |
| West  |            | East |         |
| ♠     | A Q 6 2    | ♠    | J 10 9  |
| ♥     | 8 4        | ♥    | J 9 3 2 |
| ♦     | 6 4        | ♦    | 8 7 5 3 |
| ♣     | K 8 7 5 2  | ♣    | 10 6    |
| South |            |      |         |
| ♠     | K 7 3      |      |         |
| ♥     | A 5        |      |         |
| ♦     | K Q J 9 2  |      |         |
| ♣     | A 9 4      |      |         |

**Final Comments:** A good declarer listens to the bidding. Here, West's double gave us an easy-to-follow roadmap to a good score. A pass can be just as telling on the right hand. When this hand was played, the declarer thought he could run the hearts by finessing West for the ♥J. He wanted to keep the ♦A for an entry, so he did not cash the diamonds first. The result was that he went down.

# Hand 42

Dealer: West  
 Vul: None  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ A 5 3  
 ♥ A K Q 2  
 ♦ A K 6 5  
 ♣ 9 2

South

♠ 10 4  
 ♥ 10 5 4 3  
 ♦ Q J 9  
 ♣ A K 10 4

|      |                 |                   |                 |
|------|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| West | North           | East              | South (you)     |
| 2♠   | Dbl.            | Pass              | 3♥ <sup>1</sup> |
| Pass | 3♠ <sup>2</sup> | Dbl. <sup>3</sup> | 4♣ <sup>4</sup> |
| Pass | 6♥              | All Pass          |                 |

- 1 Promises values, usually eight or more high-card points
- 2 Promises the ♠A and slam interest.
- 3 A spade honor, asking partner to lead this suit.
- 4 Promises the ♣A, and cooperation in the slam try.

West leads the ♠8. We play the ♠A as East plays the ♠2 and we play the ♠4. We play the ♥A and ♥K. West follows with the ♥7 on the first round, but discards the ♣8 on the second heart. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We already have one spade and two heart tricks. We can win another heart, four diamonds and two clubs for a total of ten tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?** The defenders can win one spade trick.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get more tricks by ruffing clubs in the dummy and spades in our hand.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders must win a heart trick. They will get another trick if we cannot find our twelfth trick first.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We have a certain trump loser. We have to find a way to get rid of our spade loser, and the only chance there is to run the diamond suit and hope that East has at least three diamonds. If so, we can discard our losing spade on the fourth diamond winner.

Let us assume we can discard our spade on the long diamond. Everyone will have six cards left. We will have two trumps and four clubs in our hand. The dummy will have two trumps, two spades and two clubs. We will have two club winners and the dummy

will have the high trump. If East has to follow suit to all four diamonds, we will win the first seven tricks. We will need five of the last six. If East is able to ruff the fourth diamond, he will presumably lead his last trump to reduce our possible ruffs. We will need all the remaining tricks in that case.

We start cashing our diamond winners. West shows out on the second diamond, which means East started with five diamonds. He will have to follow suit. It is time to count the distribution of the hand.

We know that East started with four hearts and five diamonds. That leaves him with four cards between his spades and clubs. He did not play an honor on West's spade lead, so he has either two or three spades.

If West started with three spades, he will have only one club. He might have raised East's preempt with that holding. More important, we cannot make this contract if East started with three spades and one club. Let us assume we cashed a club before running the diamond suit. Here is the position with the dummy on lead. We assume East started with only one club. West's hand is irrelevant:

|       |     |       |        |
|-------|-----|-------|--------|
| North |     |       |        |
| ♠     | 5 3 |       |        |
| ♥     | Q 2 |       |        |
| ♦     |     |       |        |
| ♣     | 9   |       |        |
|       |     | East  |        |
|       |     | ♠     | x ?    |
|       |     | ♥     | J 9    |
|       |     | ♦     | 10     |
|       |     | ♣     | ?      |
|       |     |       |        |
|       |     | South |        |
|       |     | ♠     |        |
|       |     | ♥     | 10 5   |
|       |     | ♦     |        |
|       |     | ♣     | K 10 4 |

If we lead a club, East will not ruff. He will either follow suit or discard a spade. We will be in our hand. We will have to ruff a club with the dummy's ♥Q and not the ♥2. Ruffing with our ♥2 would allow East to ruff with his ♥9 and lead his last trump. We can lead a spade and ruff it, but we will be in our hand at that point. We will have a heart and a club. East will have the ♥J and ♥9, both of which will be winners.

We have no choice but to hope that East started with two spades and two clubs. In that case, we will ruff a spade before cashing our last club winner. We will next ruff a club with the ♥Q. Now, the lead is in the dummy. The last two cards in the dummy are a losing spade and a losing trump. The last two cards in our hand are the

♥10 and a losing club. East has only the ♥J and ♥9. When we lead the spade, East must ruff. If that ruff is with the ♥9, we will win this trick by playing our ♥10. If East ruffs with the ♥J, we will discard our losing club and win the last trick with our ♥10.

Here is the full hand:

|      |      | North       |            |
|------|------|-------------|------------|
|      |      | ♠           | A 5 3      |
|      |      | ♥           | A K Q 2    |
|      |      | ♦           | A K 6 5    |
|      |      | ♣           | 9 2        |
| West | East |             |            |
| ♠    | ♠    | K J 9 8 7 6 | Q 2        |
| ♥    | ♥    | 7           | J 9 8 6    |
| ♦    | ♦    | 4           | 10 8 7 3 2 |
| ♣    | ♣    | Q 8 7 6 3   | J 5        |
|      |      | South       |            |
|      |      | ♠           | 10 4       |
|      |      | ♥           | 10 5 4 3   |
|      |      | ♦           | Q J 9      |
|      |      | ♣           | A K 10 4   |

**Final Comments:** Many hands involve a form of “backward engineering.” We must decide which tricks we must win to have any chance of success. Then we must determine which hand we are to lead from at the critical moment. Finally, we have to decide the best sequence of cards we will play.

# Hand 43

Dealer: South  
 Vul: East-West  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ 4 3  
 ♥ 6 5  
 ♦ 9 7 6 5  
 ♣ A J 8 7 3

South

♠ A 9 8 7 6  
 ♥ K J 10 9  
 ♦ A  
 ♣ 10 9 5

|      |       |          |             |
|------|-------|----------|-------------|
| West | North | East     | South (you) |
| ---  | ---   | ---      | 1♠          |
| Pass | 1NT   | Dbl.     | 2♥          |
| Pass | 2♠    | All Pass |             |

West leads the ♦J. We play the ♦5 from the dummy as East encourages with the ♦8. We win with our ♦A. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have three Aces.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defenders can win the ♥A.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get more tricks in hearts by leading the suit from the dummy. We can lead clubs to finesse East for a club honor.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders will win at least two spade tricks, and more if the spade suit does not divide 3-3. They might win a second heart trick, depending on who holds the ♥A and ♥Q. They will win one club trick, assuming that West has a club honor. If East has both club honors, they will win two club tricks.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** The defenders have a diamond fit. They are likely to lose a spade, two hearts, a diamond and a club. Because the diamond suit will not break 3-2 for them, they could easily lose another trick. They have more high card points than we do, so there is a reasonable chance that some pairs will compete to the three-level. They could go down, so we need to make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** Because we want to make the contract, we may as well assume that spades will divide 3-3 and clubs divide 3-2. The defenders have twenty-three high-card points between them. If the spade suit divided 4-2, they might have doubled. If East started with four clubs, West would probably have led a club.

We start by leading a small spade from our hand. The defenders will win and will probably continue with a

diamond. We ruff and continue with the ♠A and another spade. We discard a diamond from the dummy. Both defenders follow suit. East continues with a third round of diamonds. We may as well ruff this with our last trump.

It is time to establish some club tricks. We lead the ♣9. It makes no difference to us, but West is a little less likely to play an honor on the ♣9 than on the ♣10. West plays low, and we play low. East wins and cashes a diamond trick. We discard a heart from our hand and a heart from the dummy.

Let us assume that East switches to a low heart. So far, we have seen East show up with the King and Queen of both spades and diamonds, plus the ♣K. He is not very likely to have the ♥A, so our best chance of a plus score is to play East for the ♥Q. In real life, East cashes the ♥A and continues with a small heart. We win with our ♥K. We lead the ♣10 for a second finesse. When it wins, we have eight tricks (three spades, one heart, one diamond and three clubs).

Here is the full hand:

| North |           |      |         |
|-------|-----------|------|---------|
| ♠     | 4 3       |      |         |
| ♥     | 6 5       |      |         |
| ♦     | 9 7 6 5   |      |         |
| ♣     | A J 8 7 3 |      |         |
| West  |           | East |         |
| ♠     | J 10 2    | ♠    | K Q 5   |
| ♥     | 7 4 3     | ♥    | A Q 8 2 |
| ♦     | J 10 4 2  | ♦    | K Q 8 3 |
| ♣     | Q 6 2     | ♣    | K 4     |
| South |           |      |         |
| ♠     | A 9 8 7 6 |      |         |
| ♥     | K J 10 9  |      |         |
| ♦     | A         |      |         |
| ♣     | 10 9 5    |      |         |

**Final Comments:** There are hands where the only real chance is to hope for the best. This is one of those hands. We gain a trick by drawing trump even though it gives up a diamond trick. Otherwise, we would have no chance of winning three (maybe four) club tricks. Always remember to play the entire hand, and not just one suit.

# Hand 44

Dealer: North  
 Vul: East-West  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ A K  
 ♥ K 3  
 ♦ Q J 10 7 4  
 ♣ A 10 3 2

South

♠ 9 8 6 3  
 ♥ Q 9 8  
 ♦ A K 9  
 ♣ 9 6 5

|      |       |          |             |
|------|-------|----------|-------------|
| West | North | East     | South (you) |
| ---  | 1NT   | Pass     | 2♣          |
| Dbl. | Rdbl. | All Pass |             |

West leads the ♦3. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have two spades, the ♣A and the entire diamond suit. How many exactly is hard to determine right now because West may be able to trump some of them.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
 The defenders can win the ♥A.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get another trick in the club suit because the dummy has the ♣10.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders could win a number of club tricks.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need only make this contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** Unless West can get five trump tricks, we should make this contract. Our first task must be to win in hand and lead a small club. West probably has all three club honors. He will play one of those honors. We win this trick with the ♣A. If East follows suit, we are safe for our contract. We lead a club from the dummy to our ♣9. This will force West to use a second club honor.

When East follows suit a second time, we are safe for at least nine tricks. If West leads a second diamond, we have a great chance of taking ten tricks. We win the second diamond in our hand and lead a third club towards the dummy. West will win this trick, but he cannot stop us from drawing his last trump. We will win two club tricks, five diamond tricks, one heart trick and two spade tricks.

If West switches to a spade, we will not have the time to draw his trumps and establish a heart trick. Still, it does no harm to lead a diamond to our hand and lead a third round of clubs. West can win this trick and lead a second spade, but we will win, draw his last trump and run our diamonds. That will net us nine tricks.

Finally, if West switches to a heart, we will play the ♥K. If that wins the trick, we will lead a diamond to our hand. West might ruff this trick, but we will still win nine tricks (losing a heart and three clubs). If West does not ruff, we will use our diamond entry to lead a club toward the dummy. That will give us ten tricks. If East has the ♥A, we will win the heart return and lead diamonds. West may win a third trump trick, but we will still have nine tricks.

Here is the full hand:

|           |            | North |            |
|-----------|------------|-------|------------|
|           |            | ♠     | A K        |
|           |            | ♥     | K 3        |
|           |            | ♦     | Q J 10 7 4 |
|           |            | ♣     | A 10 3 2   |
| West      | East       |       |            |
| ♠ 10 5 4  | ♠ Q J 7 2  |       |            |
| ♥ A 7 5 4 | ♥ J 10 6 2 |       |            |
| ♦ 3 2     | ♦ 8 6 5    |       |            |
| ♣ K Q J 7 | ♣ 8 4      |       |            |
|           |            | South |            |
|           |            | ♠     | 9 8 6 3    |
|           |            | ♥     | Q 9 8      |
|           |            | ♦     | A K 9      |
|           |            | ♣     | 9 6 5      |

**Final Comments:** We cannot fault West for his double. Playing matchpoints, where every trick could be crucial, a club lead could be the difference between a good score and a bad one. No bid is without risk,

however, and a good pair must be able to punish such bids when possible.

At IMPs, a double with only a four-card suit has a much greater downside precisely because of what happened on this hand. A contract of 2♣, redoubled, making four, gives us 960. A contract of 3NT, making four, will give North-South at the other table a mere 430. That is plus 11 IMPs. Making only nine tricks in 2♣, redoubled, is worth 760 and plus 8 IMPs.

# Hand 45

Dealer: East  
 Vul: North-South  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ A Q 5 4  
 ♥ Q 2  
 ♦ Q J 10 7  
 ♣ 6 4 3

South

♠ K 9  
 ♥ J 9 7 6  
 ♦ A 4  
 ♣ A Q J 10 5

|                 |       |          |             |
|-----------------|-------|----------|-------------|
| West            | North | East     | South (you) |
| ---             | ---   | Pass     | 1NT         |
| 2♠ <sup>1</sup> | Dbl.  | Pass     | 3♣          |
| Pass            | 3NT   | All Pass |             |

1 Shows a spade suit with a long minor suit.

West leads the ♦6. We play the ♦Q from the dummy.  
 East plays the ♦2 as we play the ♦4. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We can win three spades, two diamonds and one club.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defense can win two heart tricks.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get more tricks in the club suit.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense can win a club trick if West has the ♣K. If the defense leads a second diamond, it will set up a diamond trick.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We are certain to make the contract. If West has the ♣K and leads a second diamond, we are unlikely to make more than nine tricks. We should set ten tricks as our goal.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** Some hands offer several choices for a line of play. This is not one of those hands. We have to lead clubs, and now is as good a time as any.

There is a chance that West has a singleton ♣K, but that is unlikely. West could have both high hearts and the ♦K. It is possible that some players in the West chair will not bid over our 1NT opening bid. All those players will take a club finesse.

We will also take a club finesse, but we should play our ♣Q. We cannot know West's precise holding at this time. He might not have a clear picture of our hand. We have a better chance for a defensive mistake if we hide our ♣J.

When we lead a club, East plays the ♣2. We play our ♣Q and West wins with the ♣K. He switches to the ♠J.

We play low from the dummy and win with our ♠K when East plays the ♠8.

We now have four club tricks ready to cash. Before doing that, we should consider the position. It appears that West has a heart honor, long spades and the ♦K.

Here is the hand at this stage:

|            |            |
|------------|------------|
|            | North      |
|            | ♠ A Q 5    |
|            | ♥ Q 2      |
|            | ♦ J 10 7   |
|            | ♣ 6 4      |
| West       |            |
| ♠ J 10 x x |            |
| ♥ A(K) ?   |            |
| ♦ K 9 8 ?  |            |
| ♣ ?        |            |
|            | South      |
|            | ♠ 9        |
|            | ♥ J 9 7 6  |
|            | ♦ A        |
|            | ♣ A J 10 5 |

After we cash our clubs, we will have six cards left in the dummy and in our hand. With two discards to go, we will have three spades, two hearts and three diamonds. West started with five spades and at least four diamonds. He must keep at least three spades to stop us from cashing our spade winners. That leaves three other cards.

West now has three choices of what to keep. He can keep two diamonds and either a high or a low heart. His other choice is to keep two hearts and one diamond. His first discard is a spade. It is very likely he started with five spades. We will watch for his next discard.

West knows that we have the  $\spadesuit$ A. It is very likely he will keep two diamonds and only one heart. His second discard will probably be either a low heart or a low diamond. Either way, we will discard a heart from the dummy. Our second discard will depend on what West discards.

Here is the position:

|                         |                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------|
|                         | North                 |
|                         | $\spadesuit$ A Q 5    |
|                         | $\heartsuit$ Q        |
|                         | $\diamondsuit$ J 10 7 |
|                         | $\clubsuit$           |
| West                    |                       |
| $\spadesuit$ J 10 x     |                       |
| $\heartsuit$ (A or K) ? |                       |
| $\diamondsuit$ K x ?    |                       |
| $\clubsuit$             |                       |
|                         | South                 |
|                         | $\spadesuit$ 9        |
|                         | $\heartsuit$ J 9 7 6  |
|                         | $\diamondsuit$ A      |
|                         | $\clubsuit$ 5         |

If West discards a second spade, we will keep our long spade in the dummy and win four spades, four clubs and two diamonds for ten tricks.

If West discards a heart or a diamond, we will discard a spade from the dummy. We will cash our  $\spadesuit A$  before playing a spade to the dummy. We have a high spade, the  $\heartsuit Q$ , and two diamonds. We will lead a diamond, discarding a low heart from our hand.

Assuming that West kept at least two diamonds before we cashed our  $\spadesuit A$ , he will win this trick. He will lead a high heart, but he is known to have no more hearts. If his high heart wins this trick, he will have to lead a spade to the dummy. We will win three spades, three diamonds and four clubs. If East is able to overtake West's high heart, he will have to lead a heart to our  $\heartsuit J-9$ . We will win two spades, two hearts, two diamonds and four clubs.

Here is the full hand:

| North |            |      |            |
|-------|------------|------|------------|
| ♠     | A Q 5 4    |      |            |
| ♥     | Q 2        |      |            |
| ♦     | Q J 10 7   |      |            |
| ♣     | 6 4 3      |      |            |
| West  |            | East |            |
| ♠     | J 10 7 6 2 | ♠    | 8 3        |
| ♥     | A 5        | ♥    | K 10 8 4 3 |
| ♦     | K 9 8 6    | ♦    | 5 3 2      |
| ♣     | K 8        | ♣    | 9 7 2      |
| South |            |      |            |
| ♠     | K 9        |      |            |
| ♥     | J 9 7 6    |      |            |
| ♦     | A 4        |      |            |
| ♣     | A Q J 10 5 |      |            |

**Final Comments:** The defenders lost this hand on the opening lead. Still, it is hard to blame West. North's double suggested defending the hand. A spade lead could easily concede an extra trick.

West can be blamed for bidding on this hand. As with most distributional hands, it gave away too much information. A good declarer would know that running the club suit will force West to weaken his hand. In this case, that meant eliminating any chance for two heart tricks.

# Hand 46

Dealer: East  
 Vul: Both  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ 9 7 3 2  
 ♥ Q 10 7 6  
 ♦ 9 7 4  
 ♣ 9 3

South

♠ A J  
 ♥ K 9 5 3 2  
 ♦ K 3  
 ♣ K 10 7 5

|      |                 |          |             |
|------|-----------------|----------|-------------|
| West | North           | East     | South (you) |
| ---  | ---             | 1♦       | 1♥          |
| Dbl. | 3♥ <sup>1</sup> | All Pass |             |

1      Preemptive, with at least four-card support

West leads the ♠K. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have only the ♠A.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
 The defense has the ♠Q and three Aces.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get more tricks in the heart suit and our minor suit Kings. We may be able to ruff one or two clubs in the dummy.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense will get a second trick in a minor suit if West has the ace in that suit. They might get a second heart trick, depending on the distribution.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We might have a reasonable score for going down one. It looks as though the defense can win at least nine tricks in a diamond contract. To have a good score, we need to make this contract.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** Our first step on this hand is to see how we might come to nine tricks. We have four certain losers. We must hope that East has both minor suit Aces. That will give us two tricks with our minor suit Kings. We will have to ruff two clubs in the dummy, which requires the heart suit to divide 2-2. Finally, we need an entry to the dummy so that we can lead through East's presumed ♣A to our ♣K.

Our only possible entry is in the heart suit. If West started with the ♥A, we have that entry by leading to the ♥Q. That will not work if East has the ♥A. If we lead to the ♥Q, East will win with his ♥A and return either a heart or a spade. Unless the ♥J is a singleton, we cannot get to the dummy except by playing a third round of hearts. That will leave us without enough trumps in the dummy to take care of our two small clubs.

Before leading a heart, we should give West a chance to help us. We win this trick with our ♠A and return the ♠J. East first plays the ♠4 and then the ♠6. West continues with the ♦Q. East wins this trick with his ♦A and returns the ♦6. We win this trick with our ♦K as West plays the ♦2.

West's shift to a diamond does not really help us. We still have to get to the dummy to lead a club and not draw more than two rounds of trumps in the meanwhile. However, it does help us to count West's high card points. He has five points in spades (♠K-Q) and three points in diamonds (♦Q-J). If he had the ♥A as well, he probably would have bid after partner's preemptive raise.

We can no longer delay in leading trumps. Given that East is more likely to have the ♥A, our only hope is to play a heart to the ♥10. We have to hope that West started with two hearts, including the ♥J.

Here is the full hand:

| North |           |      |          |
|-------|-----------|------|----------|
| ♠     | 9 7 3 2   |      |          |
| ♥     | Q 10 7 6  |      |          |
| ♦     | 9 7 4     |      |          |
| ♣     | 9 3       |      |          |
| West  |           | East |          |
| ♠     | K Q 10 5  | ♠    | 8 6 4    |
| ♥     | J 8       | ♥    | A 4      |
| ♦     | Q J 6 2   | ♦    | A 10 8 5 |
| ♣     | Q 4 2     | ♣    | A J 8 6  |
| South |           |      |          |
| ♠     | A J       |      |          |
| ♥     | K 9 5 3 2 |      |          |
| ♦     | K 3       |      |          |
| ♣     | K 10 7 5  |      |          |

**Final Comments:** It would not help West to play the ♠10 on the third trick. It would set up the ♠9 as a winner. We would no longer need two trumps in the dummy; only a 2-2 trump break. North's 3♥ bid may be criticized, and rightfully so. We did not have quite enough to bid game, and the favorable layout of the cards allowed us to escape with a plus score.

# Hand 47

Dealer: South  
 Vul: North-South  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ A K 8 4 2  
 ♥ K 9  
 ♦ Q 4  
 ♣ K Q 10 3

South

♠ 5  
 ♥ A 8 7 6  
 ♦ A K 9 8  
 ♣ J 9 5 4

| West | North           | East     | South (you)      |
|------|-----------------|----------|------------------|
| ---  | ---             | ---      | 1♦               |
| Pass | 1♠              | Pass     | 2♣               |
| Pass | 2♥ <sup>1</sup> | Pass     | 3♥ <sup>2</sup>  |
| Pass | 4♣ <sup>3</sup> | Pass     | 4♦ <sup>4</sup>  |
| Pass | 4♠ <sup>4</sup> | Pass     | 4NT <sup>5</sup> |
| Pass | 6♣              | All Pass |                  |

- 1 Artificial, forcing to game
- 2 Four-card heart support; probably a hand with either 1-4-4-4 or 0-4-5-4 distribution
- 3 Club support and a slam try
- 4 Cue bids, showing the Ace of the suit bid

5      Willing to stop in game

West leads the ♦5. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have two spades, two hearts, and three diamonds for a total of seven tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
The defense will win the ♣A.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We will get at least three club tricks. We can get more tricks by ruffing spades in our hand or hearts and diamonds in the dummy.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense can get more tricks by a ruff with one of their club spot cards.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We need to make this contract.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** The only way we can win more tricks is by ruffing. We can do this by taking the ruffs in one hand only and then drawing trump, or by a crossruff.

If we choose a crossruff, we will cash our winners before starting our ruffs. We could win seven tricks in the side suits. On this line of play, we will need at least five club tricks.

Our club suit is pretty strong, but it is not a solid suit. Our first spade ruff (after cashing both top spades) will

be with the ♣4. If West started with only two spades, he will be able to over ruff. The spades will divide 4-3 only 62% of the time. West will be able to over ruff the third round of spades 19% of the time.

We will have to ruff either a diamond or a heart with the ♣3. East will have a doubleton in that suit 19% of the time.

The odds are better if we take two spade ruffs in our hand. We will cash one spade before ruffing with our ♣4, West will be able to over ruff that only 3% of the time. Our second spade ruff will be with the ♣9. An over ruff would be with the ♣A

We are going to ruff two spades in our hand, but we first consider the best way to draw trump. We will need to conserve our entries to the dummy.

If we start ruffing spades right away, we run the risk that a defender will hold four or more spades and the ♣A. He could lead that fourth spade. The other defender might be able to ruff it. We also have to guard against a defender holding four trumps.

The best plan is to win the diamond lead in our hand and lead the ♣J. We want a defender to win this trick. Then we are assured of making our contract. We will win any return and ruff two spades in our hand. The first ruff is with our ♣4 and the second with our ♣9. We have four entries to the dummy (counting the ♠A). We will use them to reach dummy for the spade ruffs and to draw trump.

If our ♣J wins, we will stop playing clubs. A second club lead would give the defense a chance to win and play a third club. Instead, we will play a spade to the ♠A and ruff a low spade with our ♣4. We will then lead to the ♦Q and ruff a second low spade with our ♣9. It is time to lead our last club. Unless a defender has two clubs to the ♣A and four or more spades, we are safe for our contract.

There is a greater chance the defense will get a spade ruff if we take two spade ruffs before we play a trump. Suppose that a defender holds the ♣A along with four spades. He could win the first club and lead his fourth spade. The other defender might be able to win a trump unless we kept a high club in our hand. If we use that high club to ruff the fourth round of spades, we will go down if the clubs divide 4-1. Playing a club before taking the spade ruffs lets us play a second round of clubs before a defender can win the ♣A. We will know the club distribution.

We have no fear of a diamond ruff. If West led a singleton diamond, East would surely win the first club and give West a diamond ruff. If West started with five diamonds and the ♣A, we cannot lose a second club trick. If both defenders follow to the second club, we can ruff the diamond lead high and draw the last trump. If trumps prove to be 4-1, we will know who has the remaining trumps. We will win any lead, get to the dummy, and draw trumps.

Here is the full hand:

| North |           |      |            |
|-------|-----------|------|------------|
| ♠     | A K 8 4 2 |      |            |
| ♥     | K 9       |      |            |
| ♦     | Q 4       |      |            |
| ♣     | K Q 10 3  |      |            |
| West  |           | East |            |
| ♠     | J 10      | ♠    | Q 9 7 6 3  |
| ♥     | J 5 4 3 2 | ♥    | Q 10       |
| ♦     | 5 2       | ♦    | J 10 7 6 3 |
| ♣     | 8 7 6 2   | ♣    | A          |
| South |           |      |            |
| ♠     | 5         |      |            |
| ♥     | A 8 7 6   |      |            |
| ♦     | A K 9 8   |      |            |
| ♣     | J 9 5 4   |      |            |

**Final Comments:** If we had better club spots, a crossruff would be the best choice. Change the 5-4-3 of clubs to the 8-7-6, and the crossruff would be the right line of play. Assuming that the ruffs can be taken in either hand, it is often best to take those ruffs in the hand with fewer entries. It is easier to reach the other hand to give the ruff as well as later, when it is time to draw trump.

# Hand 48

Dealer: South  
 Vul: North-South  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ A 10 9 7 4 3 2  
 ♥ 6  
 ♦ A 7 3 2  
 ♣ 6

South

♠ K 6  
 ♥ Q 8 3 2  
 ♦ K Q 8 5  
 ♣ A J 9

|          |       |      |             |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| West     | North | East | South (you) |
| ---      | ---   | ---  | 1NT         |
| Pass     | 4♥    | Pass | 4♠          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

Opening Lead: ♥10

East wins with the ♥A as we play the ♥2. East returns the ♣5. We win with the ♣A as West plays the ♣4. When we cash the ♠K, West plays the ♥3. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have two spades, three diamonds and one club.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
None.

**Where can I get more tricks?** The spade suit should give us at least four more tricks, and we have a great chance for a fourth diamond trick.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense will get two spade tricks. They can get a diamond trick if that suits breaks badly.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** This is a normal contract. Every pair will encounter the same trump break. Our goal is to avoid losing a diamond trick.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We have two spade losers, which means our contract is at risk if the diamond suit breaks 4-1. There was only a 5% chance the spade suit would divide this way. There is a 68% chance of the diamond suit dividing 3-2, but that is before we take the spade suit into account. We know six cards in East's hand (one heart, one club and four spades). We know only three cards in West's hand (two hearts and one club).

The odds of how a suit divides change when one hand has fewer unknown cards than the other. As an example, consider how two cards might divide. We might think there is a 50% chance of both cards being in the same hand and a 50% chance that each hand will have one card. The actual odds that two cards will

divide 1-1 is 52%. The reason is that a hand will start with exactly 13 cards. If we give the East hand a card, it will have only 12 open spots available. The West hand will still have 13 open spots available. Thirteen out of twenty-five is 52%.

There is a 59% chance (10 of 17) that the next unknown card will be in the West hand. If West gets that card, there is a 56% chance (9 of 16) that the second card will be with West. If West gets that card as well, there is a 53% chance (8 of 15) that the third card will be with West. Once we get to the fourth unknown card, the odds even out. If we give that card to East, there is a 54% chance (7 of 13) that the fifth card will be with West.

The point is that we must plan for the real chance that West started with four diamonds. If the diamond suit divides 3-2, it will still divide 3-2 later. West led a heart to East's ♥A. If East had the ♥K as well, he would have played the ♥K on that first trick. We will assume that West started with the ♥K along with his diamonds. If so, he might be squeezed. Our plan is to take all our spade winners before playing any diamonds. We have to lose two spade tricks before we can run the rest of the spades. So, our first step is to lead a spade and play the ♠9. West wins and plays the ♦J.

We must keep a late entry to our hand so that we can get to our ♥Q in case West discards his ♥K. That late entry must be in diamonds. We also need the ♦A to get to our fourth diamond in case West discards a diamond. We have to win in our hand and ruff a club. We then lead the ♠A and another spade. We discard the ♣J and ♥3. East wins this trick. If he leads another diamond,

the suit will divide 3-2 and we have a fourth diamond trick and our contract.

East wins his second spade trick and leads a club. We ruff in the dummy, and cash our remaining spades. With three tricks to play, we will have the ♥Q, ♦Q and ♦8. The dummy's last three cards will be the ♦A, ♦7 and ♦3. If we are correct that West has the ♥K, he will not be able to keep that card plus three diamonds.

Here is the full hand:

|              |           | North |                |
|--------------|-----------|-------|----------------|
|              |           | ♠     | A 10 9 7 4 3 2 |
|              |           | ♥     | 6              |
|              |           | ♦     | A 7 3 2        |
|              |           | ♣     | 6              |
| West         | East      |       |                |
| ♠ ---        | ♠ Q J 8 5 |       |                |
| ♥ K 10 9 5   | ♥ A J 7 4 |       |                |
| ♦ 10 9 6 4   | ♦ J       |       |                |
| ♣ K 10 4 3 2 | ♣ Q 8 7 5 |       |                |
|              |           | South |                |
|              |           | ♠     | K 6            |
|              |           | ♥     | Q 8 3 2        |
|              |           | ♦     | K Q 8 5        |
|              |           | ♣     | A J 9          |

**Final Comments:** As we anticipated, the diamond suit divided 4-1. When West led a heart, East had to play his ♥A. This meant that only West could stop our ♥Q from being a winner. Curiously, the defense can prevail on either a club or heart lead.

On a club lead, East will defeat our contract by leading a club each time he wins a spade. After the third round of clubs, we will not have a club left with which to threaten West. Both defenders can protect the heart suit, so we cannot isolate a heart threat against West.

On a heart lead, East will defeat our contract by leading a heart each time he wins a spade. After the fourth round of hearts, we will not have a heart left with which to threaten West. Both defenders can protect the club suit, so we cannot isolate a club threat against West.

Do not fault East's defense. Returning a heart would turn out badly if West had the ♣A and South had the ♥K. The club loser in the dummy would disappear and we would make an impossible contract. Either hand would be consistent with South's opening bid.

The lesson for this hand is to show patience. There was no hurry to find out about the diamond suit. By running the spade suit, we put West in the unhappy position of being forced to discard either his ♥K or his diamond guard.

# Hand 49

Dealer: West  
 Vul: East/West  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ 4 2  
 ♥ A J 7 6 4  
 ♦ A K 9 4 3  
 ♣ K

South

♠ 5  
 ♥ 9 5  
 ♦ 8 7 5 2  
 ♣ A J 10 9 8 2

|      |                 |          |             |
|------|-----------------|----------|-------------|
| West | North           | East     | South (you) |
| 1♠   | 2♠ <sup>1</sup> | 3♠       | 4♦          |
| Pass | 5♦              | All Pass |             |

1 Shows hearts and diamonds

West leads the ♠A. We follow suit as East plays the ♠Q. West continues with the ♠K. We ruff. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have a heart, two diamonds and a club along with the spade ruff.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**

The defenders have a spade trick. They have no more tricks right now.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get more tricks in hearts or clubs. We will get two or three more tricks in the diamond suit.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders will get another trick if we take a losing finesse in hearts or clubs. We have a trump loser if the diamonds divide 3-1.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We should have at least four tricks defending a spade contract. Our teammates might bid too much and go down, maybe doubled. We need to make the contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** There are two reasonable lines of play. The first starts with a heart finesse and the second with drawing trump.

The heart finesse line of play starts with the finesse. If it wins, we cash one trump and then ruff a heart.

The play is more complicated if the heart finesse loses. If East does not play a club, we win the return and draw trump. We hope the diamonds divide 2-2. If so, we may take a ruffing finesse in clubs or cash the ♣K and then ruff a heart. The ruffing finesse in clubs is a 50% proposition. Ruffing a heart succeeds if the hearts divide 3-3 (36%) or the ♣Q is singleton (2%) or doubleton (16%). The net odds for the heart break plus the ♣Q falling is 48%.

We have fewer choices if East plays a club after a losing heart finesse. Our best chance now is to win in the dummy and draw trumps. After that, we will ruff a heart. If the suit divides 3-3 or if the ♣Q is a doubleton, we will make the contract.

The drawing trump line of play starts with two rounds of trump. If the diamonds divide evenly, we take a ruffing finesse in clubs. If the diamonds break 3-1, we overtake the ♣K with our ♣A to take a heart finesse. This succeeds if the hearts divide 3-3 and the ♥K is onside.

The diamond suit cannot divide 4-0. A defender with two certain trump tricks would double. The diamonds will break 2-2 about 45% of the time. They will break 3-1 about 55% of the time.

The heart finesse will win half the time. If it wins, we make the contract unless West started with two hearts and three diamonds. If it fails, we need the diamonds to divide 2-2 and the hearts to divide 3-3 to make the contract. Our overall chance for success is 55%.

The second line of play is to draw trump first. If they divide 2-2, we overtake the ♣K with our ♣A and take a ruffing finesse for twelve tricks. If the diamonds divide 3-1, we overtake the ♣K with our ♣A and take the heart finesse.

The diamonds will break evenly 45% of the time. If they do, we make the contract. If the diamonds divide 3-1, we need the heart finesse and the suit to divide 3-3. Our overall chance for success is 55%.

Let us consider the bidding. The defenders are not vulnerable. They have a ten-card spade fit, but stopped bidding at the three-level. This suggests that their hands are not distributional. A defender holding a singleton diamond might bid more. A defender holding a certain diamond trick might double.

The bidding suggests that the diamonds are better than a 45% chance to divide 2-2. That makes drawing trumps the better choice.

We ruff the spade and cash two diamonds. When the diamonds divide 2-2, we take the ruffing finesse in clubs. West has the ♣Q, so we make twelve tricks.

Here is the full hand:

| North |              |      |          |
|-------|--------------|------|----------|
| ♠     | 4 2          |      |          |
| ♥     | A Q 7 6 4    |      |          |
| ♦     | A K 9 4 3    |      |          |
| ♣     | K            |      |          |
| West  |              | East |          |
| ♠     | A K 8 7 6 3  | ♠    | Q J 10 9 |
| ♥     | 3 2          | ♥    | K J 10 8 |
| ♦     | Q 7          | ♦    | J 10     |
| ♣     | Q 7 6        | ♣    | 5 4 3    |
| South |              |      |          |
| ♠     | 5            |      |          |
| ♥     | 9 5          |      |          |
| ♦     | 8 7 5 2      |      |          |
| ♣     | A J 10 9 8 2 |      |          |

**Final Comments:** Percentages are not the only basis for choosing a line of play. The bidding can be just as important. East-West told us in the bidding that their hands were not particularly distributional. A good declarer will use that information.

# Hand 50

Dealer: North  
 Vul: None  
 Form: IMPs

North

♠ K 7  
 ♥ 10 9 8  
 ♦ A J 7  
 ♣ Q J 8 6 5

South

♠ A Q 8 4 2  
 ♥ A 6 5 2  
 ♦ 10 5 3  
 ♣ 7

| West     | North | East | South (you) |
|----------|-------|------|-------------|
| ---      | 1♣    | Pass | 1♠          |
| Pass     | 1NT   | Pass | 2♥          |
| All Pass |       |      |             |

West leads the ♣A. The defenders lead the Ace from an Ace-King combination. We follow suit as East plays the ♣2. West continues with the ♦4. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We can take three spades (if they divide 3-3), a heart and a diamond.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
 The defenders already have a club trick. They cannot take any more tricks right now.

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get more tricks in any of the four suits. We can ruff clubs, take two diamond finesses, draw trumps (hope for 3-3 break) or run spades.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defense will get at least two heart tricks, more likely three. They can get a diamond trick if we play low on West's lead.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** We are not in the best contract. A 2♠ contract would be our best spot. We cannot fault partner for passing our 2♥ rebid; he has a super-minimum opening bid. Doubtless, he passed to stop us from bidding more. Our goal is to make this hand. It would be easy for the opposition to bid too much. Our teammates might have a plus score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We probably have three heart losers, so we must plan for losing only one other trick in the side suits.

We could play the ♦A and cash our spades, discarding diamonds. This might work if the spades divide 3-3. We could play four rounds of spades, discarding both diamonds in the dummy. The defense will have to use a trump, which might weaken their holding. We might then have only two trump losers.

The problem with this plan is that we have two losing diamonds left in our hand. We also have a second club loser. We can ruff clubs in our hand and diamonds in the dummy. Our trumps might not be good enough for that crossruff to succeed.

Another plan is to let the defense win this trick. We will have to limit our trump losers to three and we cannot afford to lose a second club trick. In this plan, we will use our spade and diamond entries to ruff clubs. Our goal is to ruff out the ♣K.

The second plan is simpler in that the goal is easier to reach; we eliminate our club loser. We have sufficient entries in spades and diamonds, so that is the choice. We play low from the dummy. East wins with the ♦K and returns a club. We ruff and note that West plays the ♣10. We lead a diamond to the dummy ♦J. We play the ♦2. This probably means that West started with a five-card diamond suit. The ♦J wins, and we continue with a second club ruff. When West follows with the ♣K, we continue with the ♥A and a second heart. When both defenders follow suit, we are home unless West started with four hearts.

Let us assume that West has two or three hearts to go with his five diamonds. He can win this trick and give East a diamond ruff. However, West cannot get back on lead to cash any diamonds. East will play a club or a spade. We will win either lead in the dummy. We play high clubs and discard low spades from our hand. If West has three hearts, he can ruff a club. However, we have a heart in the dummy to ruff a diamond and claim eight tricks.

If West has four hearts, he must be able to win the second heart to have any chance to defeat the contract. If East wins this trick, he has to return a spade or club. We win either suit in the dummy and play high clubs. West can ruff and draw our last trump, but we have a high diamond to win the next trick and claim.

Only if West has four hearts including two honors and wins the second heart will we go down. West can draw the dummy's last trump and establish his long diamonds. We will lose three hearts, three diamonds and one club. In that case, the spades will divide 5-1 and it will be virtually impossible to bid to a making contract.

Here is the full hand:

|      |           |       |           |      |         |
|------|-----------|-------|-----------|------|---------|
|      |           | North |           |      |         |
|      |           | ♠     | K 7       |      |         |
|      |           | ♥     | 10 9 8    |      |         |
|      |           | ♦     | A J 7     |      |         |
|      |           | ♣     | Q J 8 6 5 |      |         |
| West |           |       |           | East |         |
| ♠    | 9 5 3     |       |           | ♠    | J 10 6  |
| ♥    | J 4       |       |           | ♥    | K Q 7 3 |
| ♦    | Q 9 6 4 2 |       |           | ♦    | K 8     |
| ♣    | A K 10    |       |           | ♣    | 9 4 3 2 |
|      |           | South |           |      |         |
|      |           | ♠     | A Q 8 4 2 |      |         |
|      |           | ♥     | A 6 5 2   |      |         |
|      |           | ♦     | 10 5 3    |      |         |
|      |           | ♣     | 7         |      |         |

**Final Comments:** The defenders made it a little easier for us with a club return. Also, West did not have to follow suit with his ♦2 on the second diamond. That helped us count the distribution. Good defenders give their partners accurate information to help them. Good declarers watch these signals; they help us, too.

# Hand 51

Dealer: West  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ 9 4 3  
 ♥ K Q 9 8 4 2  
 ♦ 9 8 6  
 ♣ 5

South

♠ A Q 8 6  
 ♥ A 7 6 5  
 ♦ A K  
 ♣ A 10 6

| West     | North           | East | South (you)      |
|----------|-----------------|------|------------------|
| Pass     | Pass            | Pass | 2NT <sup>1</sup> |
| Pass     | 4♦ <sup>2</sup> | Pass | 4♠ <sup>3</sup>  |
| Pass     | 5♣ <sup>4</sup> | Pass | 6♥               |
| All Pass |                 |      |                  |

- 1 Balanced hand with 20-22 high card points
- 2 Transfer, showing at least a five-card heart suit
- 3 Shows four-card heart support, a super-maximum hand and the ♠A
- 4 Shows a club control and cooperation in the slam try

West leads the ♥J. We win with the ♥K as East plays the ♥3. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We have six heart tricks, one spade trick, two diamond tricks, plus a diamond ruff in our hand, and one club trick. We start with eleven tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
None

**Where can I get more tricks?** Our only chance for more tricks is in the spade suit.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders can get more tricks if we take a losing finesse.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** The contract is fairly normal, so we need to make the contract for a good score.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We will have to take a spade finesse. There are two possible finesses. The first is a straightforward finesse of the ♠Q. The second is to lead to the ♠8. That will gain a trick when East holds the ♠J-10, no matter who holds the ♠K.

We have a 100% chance of making this hand if we eliminate the minor suits before playing any spades. We need to ruff the minor suits in the right order to be in dummy when we lead a spade.

First, we draw the remaining trump. We have to ruff one diamond in our hand and two clubs in the dummy.

So, we start by cashing all three minor suit winners. Then, we ruff a club in dummy and a diamond in our hand. We ruff our last club in the dummy and then lead a spade towards our hand.

If West plays the ♠K we have our twelve tricks in hand. If West plays low, do not play the ♠Q; play the ♠8, instead. If West plays the ♠10 or ♠J, play the ♠Q. East will be on lead and can either lead a spade up to dummy (a second spade trick) or give us a ruff and discard (an eighth trump trick). Finally, if East plays the ♠K, we win this trick.

Here is the full hand:

|      |          |       |             |
|------|----------|-------|-------------|
|      |          | North |             |
|      |          | ♠     | 9 4 3       |
|      |          | ♥     | K Q 9 8 4 2 |
|      |          | ♦     | 9 8 6       |
|      |          | ♣     | 5           |
| West |          | East  |             |
| ♠    | K J 7 5  | ♠     | 10 2        |
| ♥    | J        | ♥     | 10 3        |
| ♦    | 10 7 3 2 | ♦     | Q J 5 4     |
| ♣    | Q 4 3 2  | ♣     | K J 9 8 7   |
|      |          | South |             |
|      |          | ♠     | A Q 8 6     |
|      |          | ♥     | A 7 6 5     |
|      |          | ♦     | A K         |
|      |          | ♣     | A 10 6      |

**Final Comments:** South's 4♠ bid made the slam possible. North had to have some values and a six-card suit for his four-level transfer. South's hand is worth much more than 21 high card points. He has four trumps, four Aces and a doubleton diamond. His hand is worth more than 24 points in support of a heart contract.

# Hand 52

Dealer: South  
 Vul: None  
 Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ A Q 5 4  
 ♥ 10 9 8 4  
 ♦ K 8 2  
 ♣ 5 2

South

♠ 10 6  
 ♥ A 5 3 2  
 ♦ A 7 4  
 ♣ A K Q 6

|      |       |          |             |
|------|-------|----------|-------------|
| West | North | East     | South (you) |
| ---  | ---   | ---      | 1NT         |
| Pass | 2♣    | Pass     | 2♥          |
| Pass | 4♥    | All Pass |             |

West leads the ♦Q. East will play the ♦3. Plan the play.

**How many tricks can I take right now?** We can take one spade, one heart, two diamonds and three clubs for a total of seven tricks.

**How many tricks can the defense take right now?**  
 None

**Where can I get more tricks?** We can get an eighth trick with a successful spade finesse. We can ruff two spades in our hand or one diamond and one club in the dummy.

**Where can the defense get more tricks?** The defenders will get at least two heart tricks. If the heart suit divides 4-1, they will get a third heart trick. They will get a spade trick if East has the ♠K.

**How many tricks do I need for a good score?** This is a normal contract. We need to make at least ten tricks for a good score. On favorable breaks, we will need to make eleven tricks.

**What is the best way to play the hand?** We will take the spade finesse. We plan to lose a heart trick and then win our ♥A on the second round. If the hearts divide 3-2 (a 68% chance), the defenders will be left with only one heart. We can then crossruff the hand. We cannot afford to let the defense play a third heart. That would limit us to one ruff and put our contract at risk of going down.

We are playing matchpoints, so we must consider how to safeguard our contract while giving us a chance to make eleven tricks. We start with two decisions; in which hand to win the opening lead and whether to lead a heart or a spade at trick two.

There is some risk in leading a heart at trick two. The defense might be able to play a second heart. If they do and the spade finesse loses, they might be able to play a third heart. It is safer to take the spade finesse first. We need to be in our hand to take the spade finesse.

We can win the diamond lead with our  $\spadesuit A$  or the  $\spadesuit K$ . If we win with the  $\spadesuit K$ , we will lead a club to our  $\clubsuit A$ . Winning with the  $\spadesuit K$  is better. We plan to ruff spades in our hand and minor suit cards in the dummy. The dummy's hearts are much stronger than ours. If the defenders' hearts divide 3-2, it will make no difference which hand takes the first ruff. If the defenders' hearts divide 4-1, it is better that they have to deal with the relatively stronger heart spot cards in the dummy instead of our weak spot cards.

We win the diamond with the  $\spadesuit K$  and play a club to our  $\clubsuit A$ . We take the spade finesse. It wins, so we lead the  $\heartsuit 10$  and play low from our hand when East plays low. West wins and leads the  $\spadesuit J$ . We win this with the  $\spadesuit A$  as East plays the  $\spadesuit 5$ .

It is tempting to play a second heart. All will be well if hearts divide 3-2, but we will be in trouble if they divide 4-1. East played the  $\spadesuit 3$  first and then the  $\spadesuit 5$  on the diamond leads. The suit is dividing 4-3. There is a 62% chance that the club suit will divide 4-3.

We have two choices at this point. We could cash our  $\heartsuit A$  right now. If the suit divides 3-2, we claim eleven tricks. If the suit divides 4-1, the defender holding the high trumps might be able to ruff in and draw a third round of trumps.

The other choice is to lead two more rounds of clubs and discard our losing diamond from the dummy. We will ruff our diamond, cash our  $\spadesuit A$  and then lead a heart to our  $\heartsuit A$ . We will have two hearts and one club left in our hand. The dummy will have two spades and one heart. We will lead our fourth club and ruff it. If no

one ruffs the third club, we will make eleven tricks if hearts divide 3-2 and ten tricks if the hearts divide 4-1.

The second line of play will win only ten tricks if the defender with two clubs has two hearts. Otherwise, it offers a better chance of making the contract and only a slightly smaller risk of losing an overtrick.

We cash three clubs, discarding the diamond from the dummy. Both defenders follow suit. We ruff a diamond in the dummy. As expected, both defenders follow suit. We cash our ♠A, with East playing the ♠7 and West the ♠K.

We continue by leading a heart. East shows out on this trick, so we win with our ♥A and lead the fourth club. West will get three heart tricks, but that is all.

Here is the full hand:

| North |          |      |           |
|-------|----------|------|-----------|
| ♠     | A Q 5 4  |      |           |
| ♥     | 10 9 8 4 |      |           |
| ♦     | K 8 2    |      |           |
| ♣     | 5 2      |      |           |
| West  |          | East |           |
| ♠     | K 2      | ♠    | J 9 8 7 3 |
| ♥     | K Q J 7  | ♥    | 6         |
| ♦     | Q J 10 9 | ♦    | 6 5 3     |
| ♣     | 7 4 3    | ♣    | J 10 9 8  |
| South |          |      |           |
| ♠     | 10 6     |      |           |
| ♥     | A 5 3 2  |      |           |
| ♦     | A 7 4    |      |           |
| ♣     | A K Q 6  |      |           |

**Final comments:** If we cash our ♥A before taking the diamond ruff, we will go down. West will over ruff our trump when we lead a third spade and cash a heart winner. We will be left with an inescapable spade loser and go down one.

We will go down if we win the opening lead in our hand. We take the winning spade finesse and lead the ♥10. West defeats the contract by winning this trick and continuing with a high heart. We no longer have the entries needed to ruff a diamond and a club in the dummy. When we ruff the third round of spades, West will over ruff and cash a trump. Once again, we will be left with an inescapable spade loser and go down one.

This hand illustrates the difference between matchpoints and IMPs. At IMPs, we would take the safest line of play for ten tricks. We win the diamond lead in our hand and finesse the ♠Q. When the finesse wins, we ruff the third spade. West over ruffs and leads another diamond. We win this and play a heart to our ♥A. We then cash our high clubs and discard the diamond in the dummy. A ruff in the dummy followed by spade ruff guarantees ten tricks. Our only possible losers are three trump tricks.

## DO YOU WANT TO PLAY THE HAND BETTER THAN YOU DO NOW?

Too many players have trouble deciding how to set about a contract as declarer. Do they worry about losers or winners? Do they draw trumps or not? Should they be guarding against bad breaks? There are so many things to think about, it's easy to get sidetracked. In this book, you will learn about the right questions to ask yourself as declarer when dummy appears. In each of the 52 example hands, the author goes through the same six questions, and shows you how to arrive at answers that will help you develop the best plan for the hand. The examples range from relatively simple to fairly complex, but gradually you will learn to answer the questions for yourself and then use the information to play the hand to best effect.

Everyone who reads this book and applies what they have learned will become a better declarer.



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