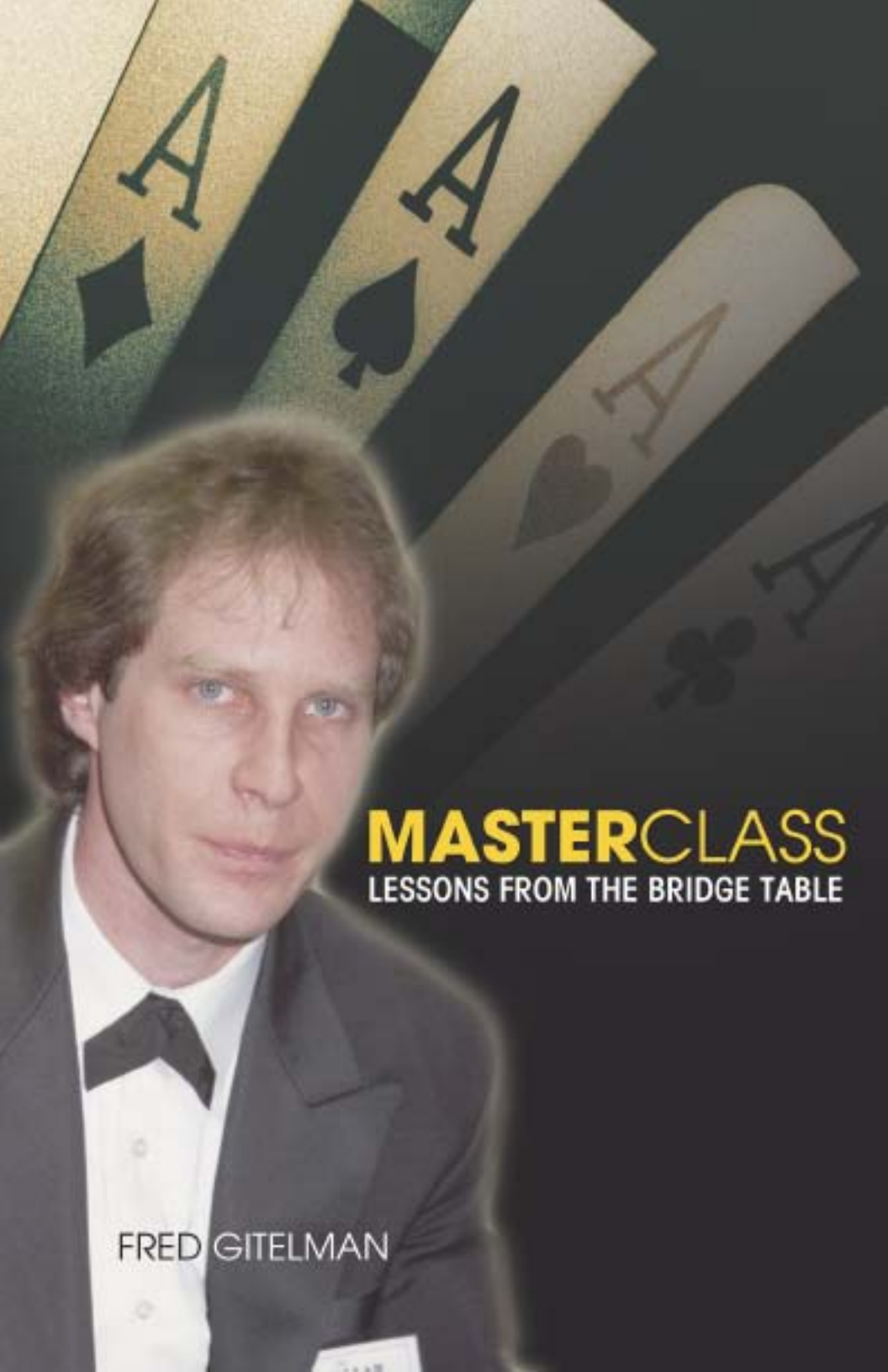
MASTERCLASS
LESSONS FROM THE BRIDGE TABLE
FRED GITELMAN

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MASTERCLASS

LESSONS FROM THE BRIDGE TABLE

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FOREWORD

I was born in Toronto, Canada in 1965 and spent the first 37 years of my life (as well as my first 20 years as a bridge player) living in that city. I owe a lot of my success as a bridge player to the fact that several of Canada's leading players took an interest in me when I was a young player. Four great Canadian stars, the late Ted Horning, Eric Kokish, George Mittelman, and Joey Silver deserve particular mention for being my mentors, partners, and friends. I am happy that some of my proudest and most successful moments as a bridge player came in major tournaments where Ted, Eric, George, and Joey were my partners and/or teammates.

Fred Gitelman
June 2005

INTRODUCTION

The deals that appear in this book are taken from *The Deal of the Week*, a weekly bridge column for advanced players that appeared for 393 consecutive weeks on my website (www.bridgebase.com) from September 1996 through March 2004.

One of the main purposes of this feature was to try to show the world that computer software and the Internet were effective and entertaining media for presenting bridge. As such, when my friend Ray Lee of Master Point Press first approached me about publishing a book based on *The Deal of the Week*, I was not sure if this was a good idea — I was concerned that the material I had written for publication on the Internet would lose something if it were translated to the medium of paper. Ray assured me that he and his colleagues were up to the challenge and I therefore gave him the go-ahead to create what would eventually become the book you are now reading.

I must say that I am impressed by the results and my thanks go out to Ray and his team for making it possible for bridge players to enjoy the material from *The Deal of the Week* in bed, in the bathtub, and in the many other places in which a book is more convenient than a computer!

My partner in business, life and sometimes bridge, Sheri Winestock, also deserves a great deal of credit for making this book possible. She was the person who did the original editing for all 393 *Deals of the Week*. She also made sure that I had a new column ready to be posted on our website every Sunday night for almost eight years. Given that things like spelling, grammar, and knowing the day of the week are not among my strongest skills, these contributions were very important!

Finally I would like to thank all the great players (many of them my friends and/or heroes) whose brilliant plays can be found in these pages. A few of the people I write about are not

famous players, but they were kind enough to email me hands that represented some of their proudest moments at the bridge table.

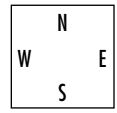
If there is a persistent theme to the deals that appear in this book, it is the near infinite variety of what is possible in this great game of ours. During the 20 years and more I have been a bridge player, I have learned something new every time I have played. I fully expect this process to continue for as long as I play bridge. I made an effort to explore new themes in card play (and occasionally in defense and bidding) in each and every *Deal of the Week*. I am therefore hopeful that even the best players and most serious students out there will be able to learn from and enjoy the deals that appear in this book.

AVOIDING GUESSWORK

I prefer to play relatively simple and natural bidding systems, but one time at an ACBL Regional tournament I tried something new. My partner at the time was Marc Jacobus, who is now a neighbor of mine in Las Vegas, and we were playing a strong 1♣ system loosely based on Precision. The whole thing was Marc's idea and I have to admit I was skeptical when he first suggested we use a non-natural bidding system. But the fact of the matter is that I learned a great deal in a very short period of time. I found myself in new situations facing new bidding problems I had never had to consider before. I have Marc Jacobus to thank for this.

That being said, the strong 1♣ bidding system that Marc and I were playing had no impact on the bidding of this deal from the same tournament.

♠ A 10 4
♥ A 10 9 6
♦ Q
♣ J 10 6 5 4



♠ K J 2
♥ K J 8 7
♦ K 5 2
♣ A 7 3

Neither vul.

West	**Marc**	**East**	**Fred**
			1NT
pass	2♣	pass	2♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

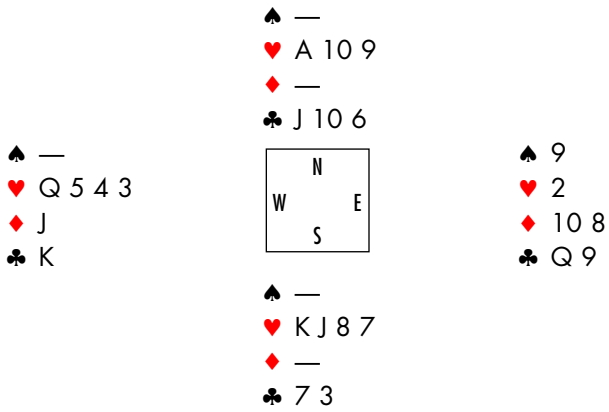
West's opening lead was the ♦3 (the defenders were using fourth-best leads). Marc put down a lovely dummy, but, alas, our hands

did not fit very well. I looked to be a favorite to make 4♥, but it was not hard to imagine that I might go down. East took the first trick with the ♦A and returned the ♠3 (also fourth best). I played low from my hand and, when West followed with a small spot card, I won the trick with dummy's ♠10.

Think about how you would play as declarer before reading on. East's spade shift certainly didn't hurt me, but it didn't give much away either — I had more than one possible way to avoid losing a spade trick. It looked like I would have to either guess the position of the ♥Q or guess how to play clubs for one loser (if that was even possible).

Fortunately, I found a nice line that largely eliminated the need for guessing: I continued with a strange finesse of the ♠J. I was certain that East held the ♠Q (West probably would have played that card on the last trick if he had it) so I was sure there was no way this finesse was going to lose.

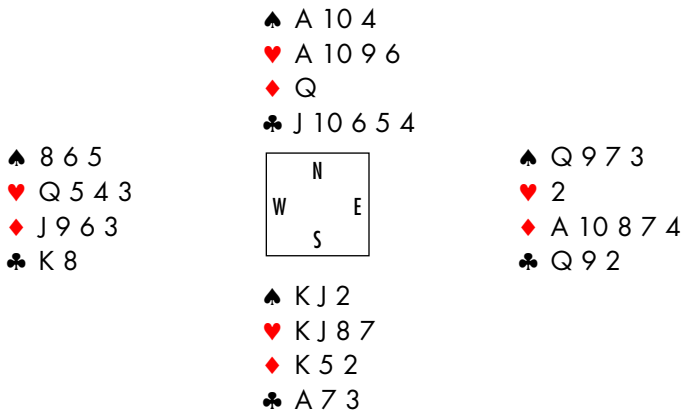
It may not be immediately obvious what the spade finesse had to gain. Actually, I suspected it had nothing to gain since East's return of the ♠3 at Trick 2 suggested that he been dealt a three- or four-card spade suit and it was unlikely that East would falsecard. In case East had five spades, however, I thought it would be a good idea to discard a spade from dummy on my ♦K. This made it safe for me to lead a third round of spades without having to worry about West ruffing in. As I had expected, this was not necessary. West followed to the third round of spades and I pitched a club from dummy. I then ruffed my last diamond in dummy before playing a club to my ♣A and exiting in clubs. These were the cards that remained after I played the ace of clubs:



West won the trick with his ♣K. If he had returned a diamond, my club loser would have vanished, so he played a trump instead, which I won. I surrendered a club to East who now took his turn to be endplayed, and I was able to claim the rest of the tricks. The position of the ♥Q never came into play.

Suppose West had dropped his ♣K under my ♣A (a card I suppose I should have cashed earlier to make it harder for West to unblock). There are a couple of ways this might have worked for the defense. For one thing, I might simply have cashed the ♥A and ♥K next, guaranteeing the contract against a 3-2 break in hearts; that would have been fatal here, as hearts were actually 4-1. If instead I chose to continue with a second round of clubs, East would have won with the ♣Q and given his partner a club ruff. West would then have been forced to lead a diamond, which I would have ruffed, and I would have been left to guess the location of the ♥Q (or the location of the ♠9 to give me a count in the heart suit). Would I have guessed right? I have no idea and I am glad I didn't have to!

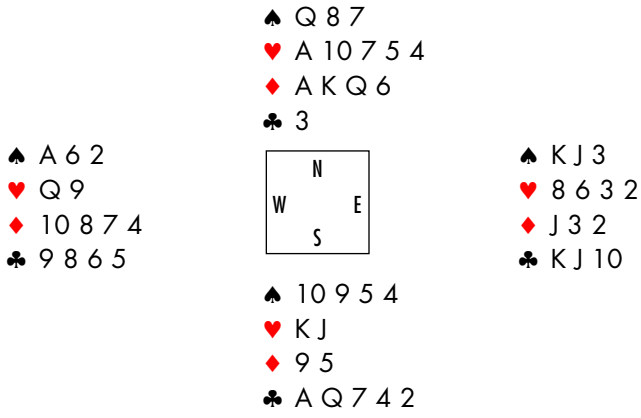
The whole deal:



LINES OF COMMUNICATION

I played this interesting deal at an ACBL Regional tournament in Costa Mesa, California, where I partnered both Billy Miller and Alan Sontag. I have sung the praises of Billy Miller in the past and, as usual, we had a great deal of fun (and success!) playing together. This was the first time, however, that I had ever played with Alan Sontag. It was an experience I will never forget, as Alan is easily the fastest expert player I have ever seen perform. I would not have thought it possible for someone to play as quickly and effectively as Alan is somehow able to do. With two world championships to his credit, along with numerous national and international titles, there's no doubt of Alan's ability. His long-time partner Peter Weichsel says Alan would be an even better player if he stopped to think occasionally, but that's awfully hard to believe!

The way that Alan treats his partners and opponents is also worth mentioning. There are few professional players out there whose personalities are as energetic and conducive to good times as Alan's. It is hard to imagine anyone not enjoying themselves at a bridge table with him, regardless of the results. He absolutely loves playing bridge and this is clear, both from his level of play and his demeanor.

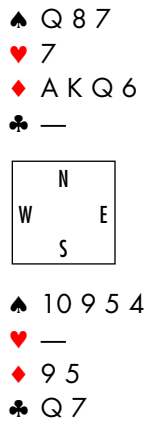


West	North	East	Fred
	1♥	pass	1♠
pass	2♦	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

With the opponents silent, I became declarer in 3NT, and West's opening lead was the ♣9. East followed suit with the ♣K and I won with my ♣A. Think about how you would play this deal as declarer before reading on.

I had already won a club trick and I still had the ♣Q. Dummy's three diamond winners brought my total up to five tricks. Barring a really bad heart break, it looked like I would be able to win at least four tricks in that suit. Establishing enough winners for my contract rated to be easy, but there was still a danger — can you see it?

The best play for four tricks in the heart suit is to start by cashing the ♥K. Suppose that both defenders follow small and that the ♥J continuation is covered by West's ♥Q. Dummy's ♥A wins the trick as East follows. On the third round of hearts, West discards a club and the fourth round of hearts is won by East.



Everything is fine if East returns a club at this point, but a diamond return (before or after one or more rounds of spades) will leave declarer with only eight tricks. Declarer will never win a trick with his ♣Q and his contract will fail. Do you see how I was able to avoid this danger?

Instead of leading the ♥K at Trick 2, I led the ♥J. West covered with the ♥Q and I allowed him to hold the trick. By retaining the ♥K as an entry to my hand, the threat of a diamond return by the

defense was neutralized. When a diamond came back (no other defense is any better), I was able to win in dummy, cross to the ♥K, cash the ♣Q and win the next five tricks in dummy.

Alan Sontag

Leading the ♥J on the first round of the suit (and ducking when West played the ♥Q) was necessary in order for me to win nine tricks against the actual layout.

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

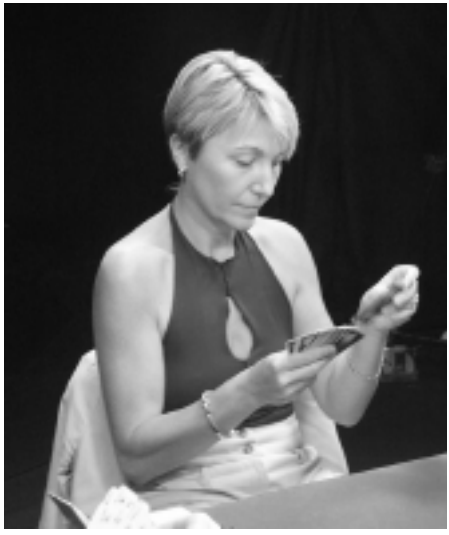
As the cards lie, the hand cannot be defeated on this line of play. However, if East's four hearts include the ♥Q, he can actually defeat the contract by making the difficult play of allowing my ♥J to hold. Similarly, if West was dealt four hearts to the ♥Q, he must duck my ♥J for the defense to prevail.

NO LOSING FINESSES

The first IOC Grand Prix Women's event took place in 1999 in Lausanne, Switzerland. The European team, made up of Sabine Auken-Daniela von Arnim (Germany), Véronique Bessis-Catherine D'Ovidio (France), Pat Davies-Nicola Smith (Great Britain) and Bep Vriend-Marijke van der Pas (The Netherlands), defeated the United States 278-210 over 128 boards.

This deal features Sabine Auken as declarer. Sabine's careful technique and accurate card reading enabled her to make a 3NT contract in which most of the field went down. The deal has been rotated to make South the declarer.

Many consider Sabine and Daniela to be the strongest women's pair in the world today. Sabine, who lives in Denmark, is currently ranked #2 in the world among women players, and her numerous trophies include two Venice Cup gold medals. She is a fine technical declarer, as you are about to see.



Sabine Auken

♠ A J 10 9 7
♥ 7 6
♦ K 9 8
♣ 9 7 2

♠ 6 4
♥ A K J 9 5
♦ A 4 3
♣ A 4 3

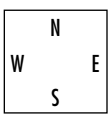
Neither vul.

West	Daniela	East	Sabine
	pass	pass	1♣*
pass	1♠	pass	2♥
pass	2♠	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

West led the ♦5 (fourth best) to East's ♦Q and Sabine's ♦A. Sabine went after spades, finessing into East. East might have done better to shift to clubs, but she returned the ♦10, ducked by Sabine in dummy. When East belatedly got around to playing clubs, Sabine ducked the ♣K. She then wisely won the second round of clubs and took a successful spade finesse. Her next move was to cash the ♠A, but East's discard was a disappointment. These were the remaining cards:

♠ J 7
♥ 7 6
♦ K
♣ 9

♠ K
♥ Q 2
♦ J 7 6
♣ —

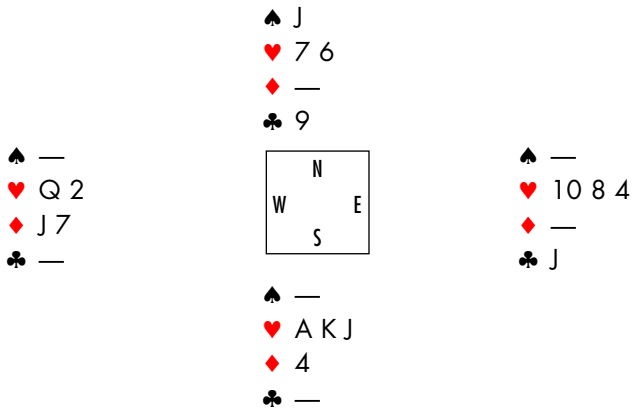


♠ —
♥ 10 8 4 3
♦ —
♣ J 10

♠ —
♥ A K J 9 5
♦ 4
♣ —

Since West was known to have four spades, five diamonds, and at least two clubs, Sabine correctly inferred that the heart suit was

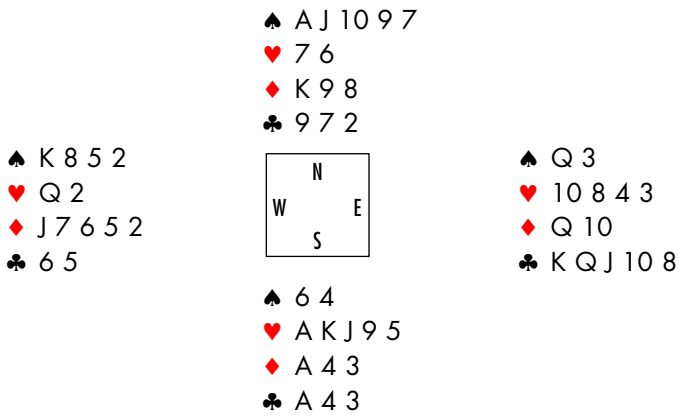
unlikely to run. There was also a good chance that West was out of clubs. Sabine therefore developed another spade trick by driving out West's ♠K. West could do no better than to return a diamond and Sabine won with dummy's ♦K.



Now, on the play of North's last spade East had to keep a club guard and so came down to a doubleton heart. In the three-card ending, Sabine knew there was no point in taking the heart finesse as one of East's last three cards was known to be a club. She knew to cash the ♥A and ♥K and made her last trick with the ♥J.

Towards the end of the deal Sabine knew she was going to make her contract, but she was pleased, nonetheless, to see the ♥Q appear on her left — perhaps her careful play would earn the European team a swing. And so it proved to be. Nicely played, Sabine.

This was the full deal:



ADVENTURES IN CARD PLAY

Norway's Geir Helgemo is widely considered to be one of the world's best players. He moved rapidly from the Junior ranks in the early 90s to playing in world-class events — and winning many of them. On his recent visits to North America he has collected several national titles, and it is surely only a matter of time before he adds a WBF gold medal to the bronze and silver ones he already owns. His brilliant exploits as declarer have appeared in many publications over the years. This deal is yet another Helgemo masterpiece; I would like to thank my friend Geo Tislevoll for bringing it to my attention.

When this deal took place, Geir was playing in a practice match with New York investment banker Jimmy Cayne, who has been winning major ACBL events for over 30 years.

♠ A K 10 4 2
♥ 9 7 4
♦ A 2
♣ 10 7 2

♠ 3
♥ A J 10 8 6
♦ 8 7 6
♣ A K 6 5

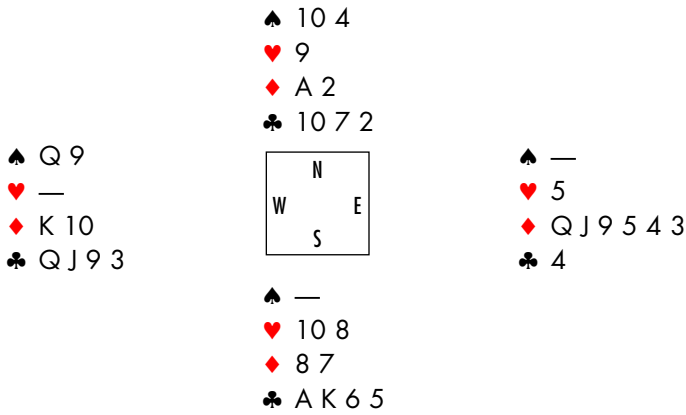
West	Jimmy	East	Geir
			1♥
pass	1♠	2♦	pass
pass	3♦	pass	3♥
pass	4♥		

Geir Helgemo

West did very well to lead a trump, making it unlikely that Geir would be allowed to ruff a diamond (or a club) in dummy. East produced the ♥Q and Geir won with his ♥A. Think about how you would play this hand as declarer before reading on.

Geir decided that his best chance for a tenth trick was to try to establish a spade winner in dummy. He therefore played a spade to the ♠A and cashed the ♠K for a diamond discard, East following with the ♠J. Geir led a third round of spades, on which East discarded the ♣8, and Geir ruffed in his hand. How would you play from here?

Geir continued by leading the ♥J. West followed with the ♥2 and East won the trick with his ♥K. East returned the last outstanding trump and Geir played the ♥8. West gave a lot of thought as to what he should discard on this trick.

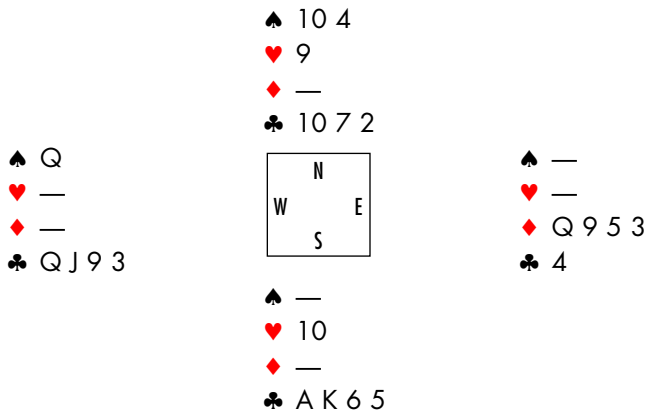


West could not afford to discard a club or Geir would lose only one trick in that suit. If he discarded a spade, then declarer, after winning the trick with dummy's ♥9, would be able to set up his tenth winner in spades (with the ♦A remaining as an entry). West realized that he had to pitch a diamond, but he saw that discarding the ♦10 would be fatal. Can you see why?

If West discarded the ♦10, Geir, after winning the trick in dummy, would be left with several winning options. He could, for example, duck a diamond to West's now singleton ♦K, thereby endplaying West to give up a trick with his forced black-suit return. West foresaw this possibility and found the best defense of discarding his ♦K on the third round of trumps.

West had managed (at least temporarily) to avoid being endplayed, but Geir was still able to get home. He started by ducking a diamond trick, which East had to win to keep his partner off the endplay. If East had returned a club at this point, Geir would have ducked the trick to West, forcing him to give up a trick by leading away from either his remaining club honor or the ♠Q. East therefore returned a diamond to dummy's ♦A.

West could not afford to part with a club, but a spade discard looked safe since dummy's last entry was about to be removed.

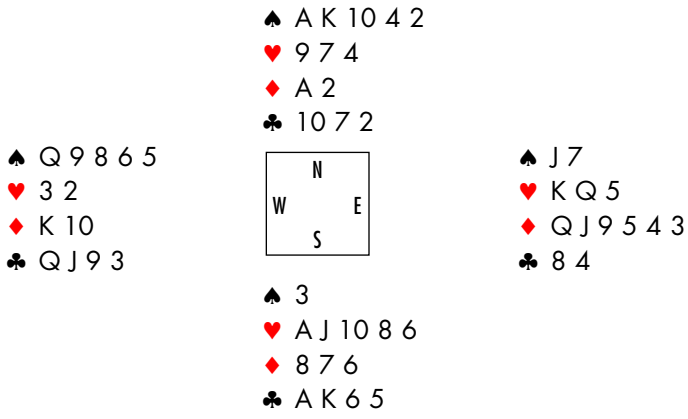


Geir demonstrated that West's spade discard was not as safe as it had looked. He ruffed a spade with his last trump to remove West's remaining card in that suit, meanwhile setting up what appeared to be a useless spade winner in dummy.

Well, it turned out that the spade winner was actually quite useful — in fact, it was what the great bridge-play theorist, Geza

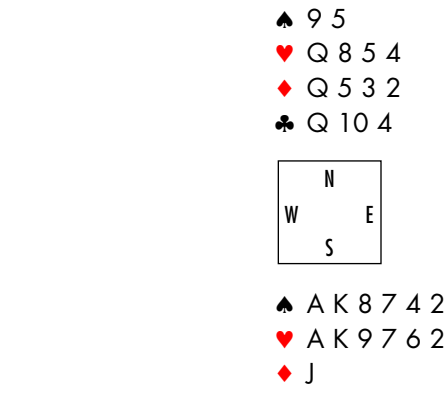
Ottlik, might have called a 'menace on the moon'. Geir showed this to be the case by exiting with a low club to West. West then had to lead a club; if he exited with a low club, Geir could win the trick with dummy's ♣10. Seeing this, West exited with his remaining club honor, thinking Geir would have to win the trick in his hand and that the resulting blockage in clubs would prevent declarer from winning the last two tricks in that suit. However, Geir did not need to win the last two tricks in clubs. He could win Trick 12 with dummy's ♣10 and Trick 13 with dummy's so-called 'useless' ♠10! Wow!

The full deal:



TRICK QUESTION

This deal is an unusual declarer play problem that was originally shown to me by Ben Zeidenberg of Toronto, who was one of Canada's top Junior players in the mid 1990s. Steve Mackay, who represented Canada in the 2004 Istanbul Olympiad, showed it to him, but I don't know where Steve saw it.

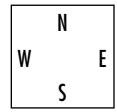


E-W vul.

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
pass	pass	5♣	6♣
pass	6♦	pass	6♥
all pass			

Trick 1 seems easy. The ♣J lead is covered by the ♣Q and ♣K and ruffed in the South hand. It seems natural to draw one round of trumps before starting on spades. Suppose you then play a heart to dummy's ♥Q. East discards a club, revealing the 3-0 trump break — not a big surprise on this auction. It's time to turn your attention to spades. East discards on the second round of spades, leaving West with two high spades. Now a spade is ruffed in dummy to reach this position:

♠ —
♥ 8 5
♦ Q 5 3 2
♣ 10 4



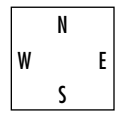
♠ 8 7 4
♥ A K 9 7
♦ J
♣ —

You can get back to your hand in hearts and establish the spade suit with another ruff in dummy. You now have the problem of getting back to your hand to draw the last trump. Ruffing a club could be dangerous — if East started with nine clubs, West will score an overruff. You therefore play a diamond from dummy, hoping that West will have to win the trick.

Bad news: East was, in fact, dealt nine clubs.

♠ —
♥ 8 5
♦ Q 5 3 2
♣ 10 4

♠ Q
♥ J 10
♦ A 10 9 8 6
♣ —

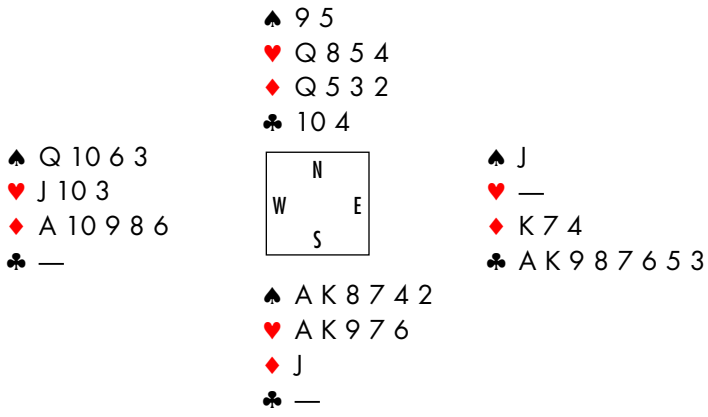


♠ —
♥ —
♦ K 7 4
♣ A 9 8 7 6

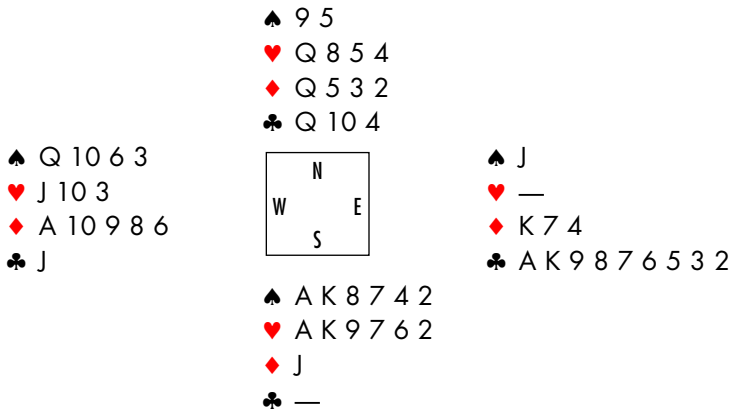
♠ 8 7 4
♥ A K 9 7
♦ J
♣ —

Worse news is to come: East was also dealt a top diamond honor and he is wide awake, hopping up with the ♦K to win the trick. A club return by East will now promote a heart trick in West's hand, defeating the slam.

Let's go back to Trick 2 where we have just ruffed West's club opening lead. Can you see where we went wrong?



That was a trick question. By Trick 2, it is already too late. The fatal mistake came at Trick 1. It is impossible to make 6♥ from this point even looking at all four hands.

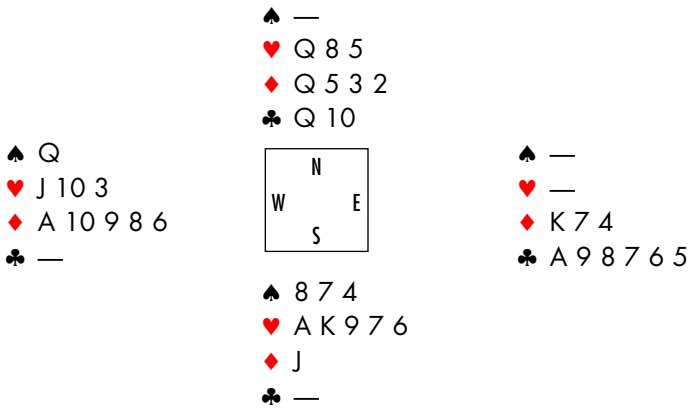


We have now backed up to Trick 1. There are two key plays that must be made. First, you have to play dummy's ♣4 to the first trick. Assuming East then makes the natural looking play of a low club, your second move is to discard your singleton diamond, allowing West to hold the trick.

The play will continue as before, the difference being that you will be able to use safe diamond ruffs as entries to your hand. Your diamond discard is an example of a Scissors Coup, aptly named since this play cuts the defenders' diamond communications. As a result, East is prevented from gaining the lead to play a club for a trump promotion.

But perhaps East will have the last laugh if he overtakes his partner's ♣J at Trick 1. You are forced to ruff now as a second round of clubs from East would end things quickly. Is it all over, or can you still make your slam?

You can still get home but you must be careful. You should start by cashing a high trump in your hand (other play sequences also work on the given lie of the cards). The top spades are cashed next and a spade is ruffed in dummy.

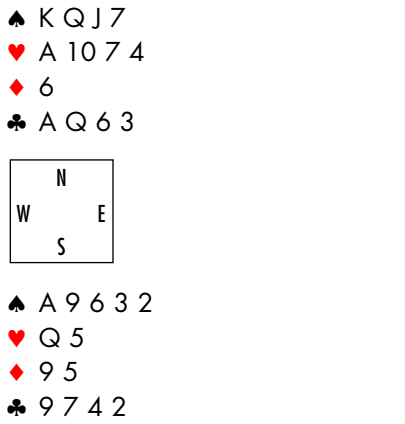


A club is led from dummy, forcing East to cover (otherwise, you would pitch your diamond). You must be careful to ruff high, intentionally promoting a trump trick for West.

You ruff another spade in dummy, establishing the suit. Now dummy's club winner can be cashed for a diamond discard (cashing the ♥Q first is also fine). West is welcome to ruff this trick, as it will be the only trick the defense will take.

TRUMP MANAGEMENT

The deal was played by Rome's Federico Primavera in the Italian Mixed Teams Championships. Federico is not only one of the top young bridge stars in Italy, he is also an accomplished developer of software and websites. Although these days his interests lie more in that direction than in tournament play, you can see from this deal why he can list a European Youth Teams title among his triumphs:

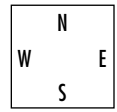


Neither vul.

West	North	East	Federico
	1♣	1♦	1♠
3♦	4♠	all pass	

West's opening lead of the ♦Q held the first trick and East contributed the ♦2, a suit-preference signal for clubs by partnership agreement given the singleton diamond in dummy. West duly switched to the ♣8. Federico ducked in dummy and East won with the ♣10. East returned the ♠8 and Federico had to decide how to handle this trick.

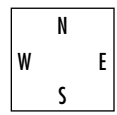
♠ K Q J 7
♥ A 10 7 4
♦ —
♣ A Q 6



♠ A 9 6 3 2
♥ Q 5
♦ 9
♣ 9 7 4

Federico wisely played the ♠9 from his hand. This proved to be a necessary play, as we will see shortly. West covered with the ♠10 (ducking would not have helped) and Federico won the trick in dummy. Federico continued with the ♠K and East discarded a diamond. Federico made another good (and necessary) decision to overtake dummy's ♠K with his ♠A. These were the cards that remained:

♠ Q 7
♥ A 10 7 4
♦ —
♣ A Q 6



♠ 6 3 2
♥ Q 5
♦ 9
♣ 9 7 4

Federico continued down the only winning path by ruffing his remaining diamond in dummy, eliminating that suit. He continued by cashing the ♣A, both defenders following. Federico's next move surrendered a club trick to the defense. East won with the ♣K as West discarded a diamond, leaving these cards:

♠ Q
♥ A 10 7 4
♦ —
♣ Q

♠ 6 3 2
♥ Q 5
♦ —
♣ 9

East, who was on lead, was out of spades and clubs. A diamond return would allow Federico to discard his heart loser while ruffing in dummy and then the ♠6 could later be used to draw the last trump. East did his best by returning a heart and presenting Federico with a guess for his contract.

Federico had overcome many hurdles to get to this point and he was not about to stumble at the end. He correctly played the ♥5 from his hand. This proved to be a good move as you can see by looking at the remaining cards.

♠ Q
♥ A 10 7 4
♦ —
♣ Q

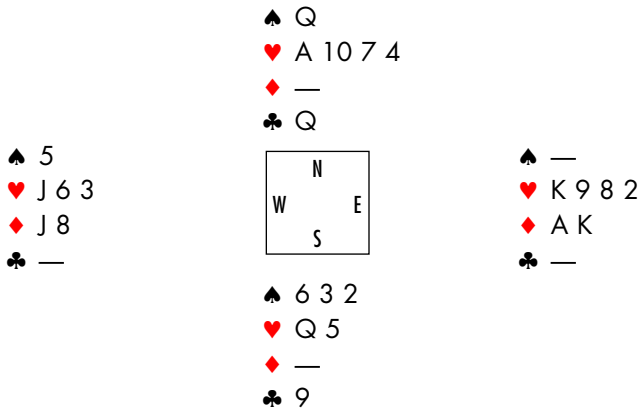
♠ 5
♥ K 6 3
♦ J 8
♣ —

♠ —
♥ J 9 8 2
♦ A K
♣ —

♠ 6 3 2
♥ Q 5
♦ —
♣ 9

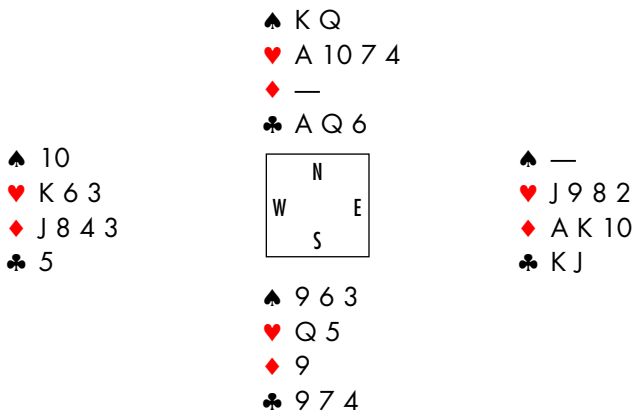
Federico's heart loser was slated to disappear, regardless of which card West played. West actually chose to play the ♥K and Federico won the trick with dummy's ♥A. Stating that he would draw the outstanding trump, he claimed his contract.

Federico's winning guess in hearts was not really a guess. The ♥K and ♥J have now been reversed and we are back at the point where Federico has exited in clubs to East's ♣K:

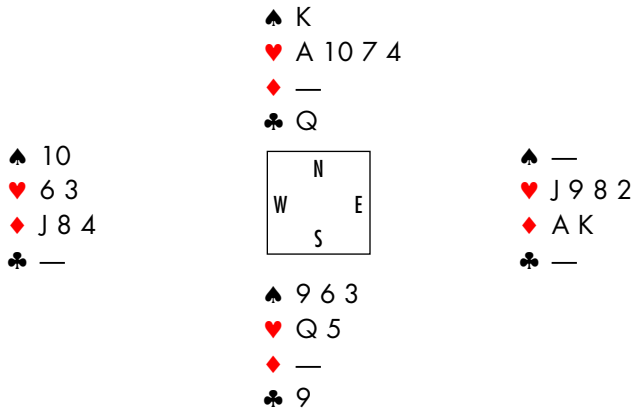


If East had been dealt the ♥K, as here, West would surely have ruffed his partner's winner on the third round of clubs. A heart lead from West's side of the table would then establish the setting trick in hearts for the defense.

Now's let's go back even further and see why it was necessary for Federico to play the ♠9 from his hand when East returned the ♠8 at Trick 3. If Federico had played a low spade instead of the ♠9 to win the trick in dummy, the contract would have failed. (Note that winning with the ♠A produces the same result.) Here's why: suppose Federico wins the second round of spades with the ♠A as before (nothing else is better), leaving this layout:



As before, South's remaining diamond is ruffed in dummy. The ♣A is cashed and a club trick is surrendered to East's ♣K. Now, watch the clever play that West makes. He throws away the ♥K!

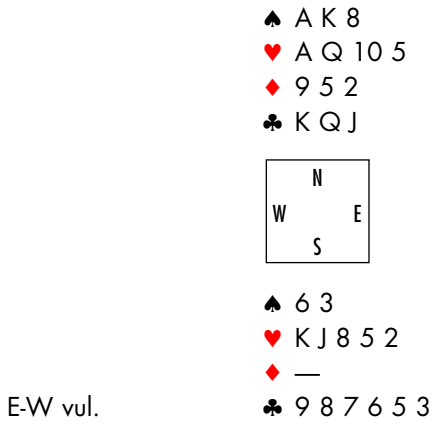


East can now defeat the contract by returning a diamond. This return gives up a ruff and discard that takes care of South's heart loser. The defense will come out on top, however, as West's ♠10 will be promoted into the setting trick after dummy ruffs with the ♠K. Compare this with the line declarer actually took, of playing the ♠9 at Trick 2: if West does not cover, South is left in his hand and can ruff his diamond, so he has to squander that vital ♠10.

Nice work by our friend Federico to avoid all the pitfalls in this deal!

MATCHPOINT TECHNIQUE

This deal is a declarer play problem based on a real deal from a matchpoint game. Most of the North-South pairs played in either 4♥ or 5♥ and made either ten or eleven tricks. However, twelve tricks were possible on the actual layout. See how many tricks you would have won.



E-W vul.

West	North	East	South
1♦	dbl	1♠	4♥
all pass			

What is the correct call on the South hand? 2♣? 2♥? 3♣? 3♥? 4♥? Pass? The correct answer is, 'I have no idea.' This is a very difficult bidding problem, as both hand evaluation and tactics must be considered. Just about anything could work, depending on the other three hands (and the other three players). Suppose you choose to bid 4♥ and this becomes the final contract.

West's opening lead is the ♦K. When dummy comes down your first thought is that you have missed a laydown slam. Of course, 4♥ is not in any danger, but at matchpoints you would like to win as many tricks as possible. At first glance it appears that the only

possible loser is the ♣A. Is there anything more to it than that? Watch what could happen if you play without thinking ahead.

After the closed hand is forced to ruff at Trick 1, suppose you play a trump to dummy at Trick 2. Both defenders follow (it is unlikely there are any voids due to the lack of further bidding by the opponents). East follows to the second round of trumps, but West discards a diamond. How many tricks do you think you will win now?

♠ A K 8
♥ Q 10
♦ 9 5
♣ K Q J

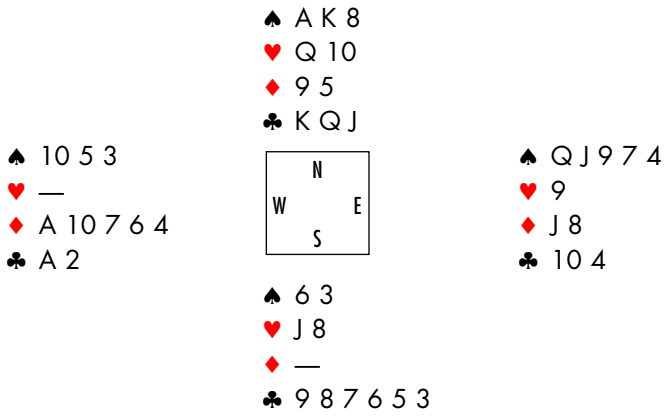
♠ 6 3
♥ J 8
♦ —
♣ 9 8 7 6 5 3

The best you can do now is to win eleven tricks; in fact, you have to be careful in order to win that many. When this deal was originally played, several declarers erred by playing a third round of trumps and wound up with only ten tricks. A high club from dummy comes next to knock out the ♣A. The defense, however, continues diamonds, forcing declarer to play his last trump. The blockage in clubs now makes it impossible to cash South's long suit. Dummy is left on lead with inescapable losers in spades and diamonds.

♠ A K 8
♥ Q
♦ 9
♣ Q J

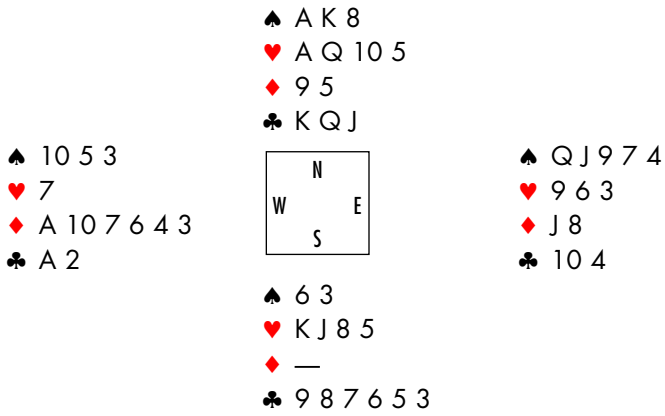
♠ 6 3
♥ —
♦ —
♣ 9 8 7 6 5

Here are the remaining cards at the point where South discovers the 3-1 trump break:

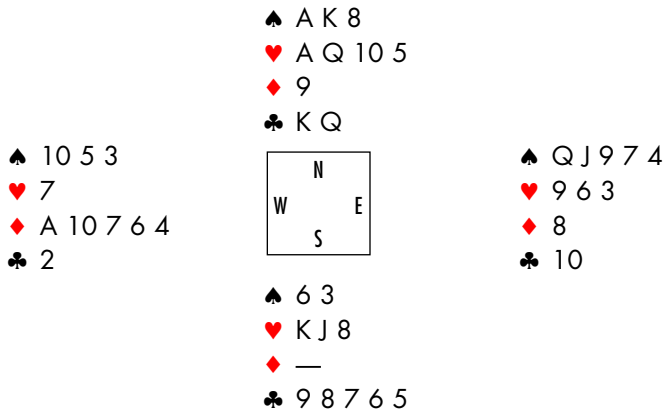


In order to win eleven tricks from here, South must play on clubs before drawing the last trump. (South can also win eleven tricks by using dummy's two spade entries to take ruffs before playing clubs.) After winning with the ♣A, West will play another diamond, forcing the South hand. South can now play on clubs, allowing East to ruff the third round. (Note that if East was dealt a singleton club, he could ruff the second club and play a diamond, holding South to ten tricks.) At this point, South still has a trump left and the club suit is unblocked. He can claim the rest of the tricks, making 4♥ with an overtrick.

Okay, so eleven tricks were not that hard. We are now back at Trick 2, having been forced to ruff a diamond at Trick 1. Can you see how twelve tricks can be made?



In order to take twelve tricks on the actual layout, South can afford to play one round of trumps at most, but then he must play on clubs. I think that ideally the club suit should be played at once; then, even if West has three clubs to the ace, he may have trouble figuring out that he can give his partner a club ruff. When the clubs are 2-2, as in our layout, West will win with the ♣A and force the South hand in diamonds, but South will easily take the rest of the tricks by drawing trumps. Although the 3-1 trump break and club blockage make it impossible for South to enjoy his long clubs, he can still come to twelve tricks with the help of a dummy reversal.



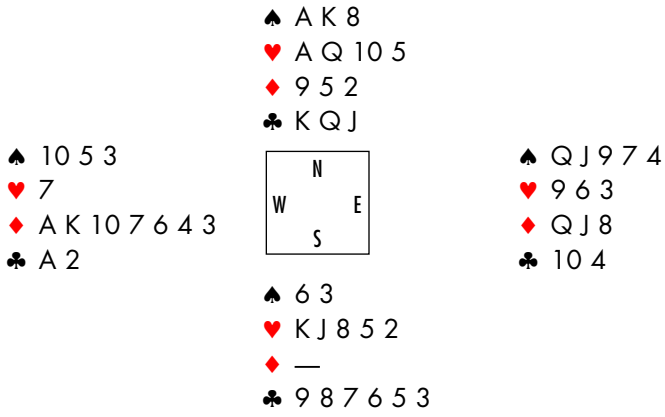
A spade is played to dummy and dummy's last diamond is ruffed in the closed hand. South crosses again in spades and ruffs dummy's spade loser, completing the dummy reversal.

South can now lead the ♥K and overtake with the ♥A to draw the rest of East's trumps (declarer can be pretty confident at this point that hearts are not 4-0). The danger of cashing the ♥K and then crossing in clubs is that East might have been dealt a singleton club. He would then be able to score a ruff. When both defenders follow to the first round of trumps, you can claim twelve tricks and expect a good matchpoint score.

Playing on clubs at Trick 2 only loses to playing on hearts (ignoring some unlikely distributions) when hearts are 2-2, clubs are 3-1 and the opponents figure out that they can get a ruff. On this layout, South can come to twelve tricks simply by drawing trumps before playing clubs. Playing on clubs first will gain whenever (a) trumps are 3-1 *and* clubs are 2-2 or (b) clubs are 3-1 and the defenders fail to take their ruff immediately.

I like the club play at Trick 2, and on this particular day, this play wins all the matchpoints.

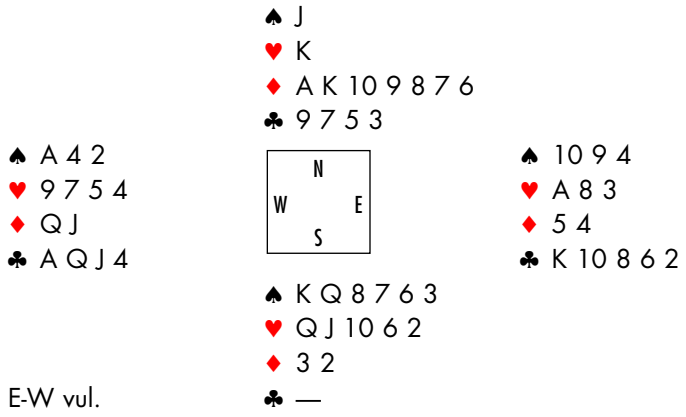
The full deal:



STERLING PLAY

The twenty-fifth anniversary of the Bermuda Bowl was fittingly played in Bermuda in 1975. This tournament included one of the most exciting and dramatic World Championship finals ever played, as Italy overcame a 78-IMP halftime deficit to defeat the United States by 25 IMPs over the 96-board final.

This deal helped contribute to Italy's amazing comeback. It was played by Giorgio Belladonna who, along with partner Benito Garozzo, formed one of greatest partnerships in the history of bridge. Their opponents, Americans Billy Eisenberg and Eddie Kantar, also deserve to be listed among the top pairs in history.



Kantar	**Garozzo**	**Eisenberg**	**Belladonna**
	1♦	pass	1♠
dbl	2♦	3♣	3♥
pass	4♦	pass	4♠

Giorgio Belladonna

The final contract was 4♠ by Belladonna (South). At the other table, Hamman-Wolff, North-South for the United States, reasonably played in 3♦ by North. Wolff as declarer wound up taking twelve tricks for +170 against less than perfect defense. Belladonna would win six IMPs for Italy if he could bring home 4♠, but would lose five IMPs if 4♠ failed.

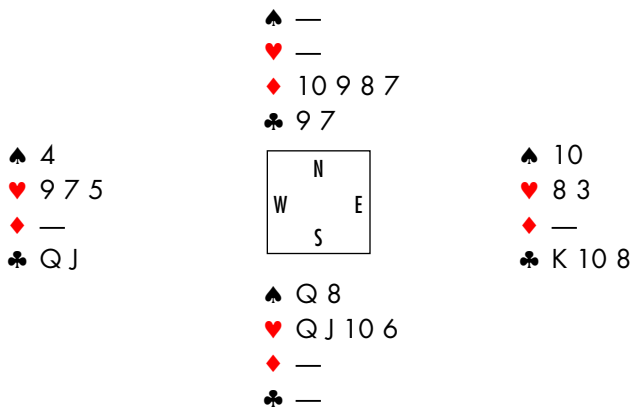
Kantar found the best lead of a club, forcing Belladonna to ruff at Trick 1. Belladonna started on hearts, and Eisenberg won with his ♥A — it would not have helped him to duck. Eisenberg realized that a club return would be futile (more on this soon) so he tried the effect of a diamond return, hoping to cut Belladonna off from dummy. Belladonna continued with the ♠J from dummy and Kantar did well to duck this trick. Belladonna continued by ruffing a club in his hand. The ♠K was played, driving out Kantar's ♠A.

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

Eddie Kantar

Kantar continued his good defense by playing another diamond to put Belladonna back in dummy. From our point of view it is easy to see that, given the 3-3 spade break, Belladonna could get home comfortably by ruffing a club in his hand to draw the remaining trumps. Belladonna, however, who had lost only two tricks, did not know spades were 3-3. He therefore played another diamond (discarding a heart) in an attempt to make his contract if spades were in fact 4-2. Eisenberg discarded a heart and it looked obvious to Kantar to ruff this trick with his remaining small trump. Kantar returned a club, forcing Belladonna to ruff again. Belladonna was now able to draw Eisenberg's last trump and claim the rest of the tricks.

That was a well-played deal by Belladonna, but did you see the chance the defense missed? We are now back at the point where Belladonna led a winning diamond from dummy in order to discard a heart from his hand:



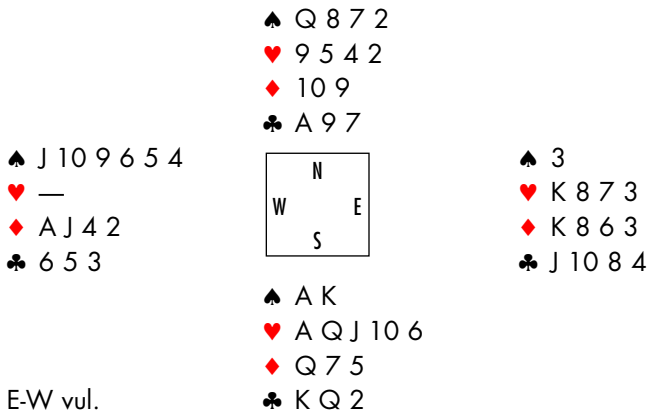
Kantar made the natural-looking play of ruffing with the ♠4, but suppose that he had instead decided to discard on this trick. Belladonna might well conclude from this play that the spades were breaking 4-2. If so, he would continue playing dummy's diamonds so as to discard hearts from his hand. Eisenberg would then have a chance to discard his last heart. If Belladonna also discarded, Kantar would be able to win this trick by ruffing. Kantar could then give his partner a heart ruff to defeat the contract.

This was really the only chance for the defense. If, for example, Eisenberg had returned a club (instead of a diamond) after winning with the ♥A (or if Eisenberg had ducked the ♥A), Belladonna would not have been as seriously challenged. Belladonna would have ruffed Eisenberg's hypothetical club return and used his two diamond entries to ruff two more clubs in his hand. Belladonna would then continue by cashing two hearts. Declarer would have eight tricks by that point and he could guarantee two more by ruffing the next round of hearts with dummy's ♠J.

Billy Eisenberg

SQUEEZING OUT AN ENTRY

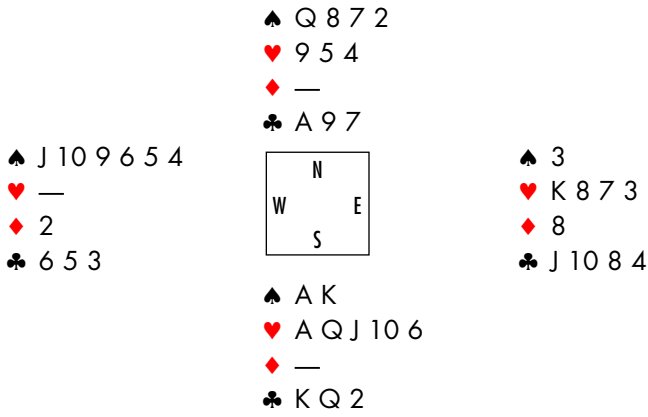
This deal was played in the Toowong Bridge Club in Brisbane, Australia. I would like to extend my thanks to Bill Haughie for sending me this deal and to Graham Holiday and Doug Meyer for originally spotting and analyzing it.



E-W vul.

West	North	East	South
			2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

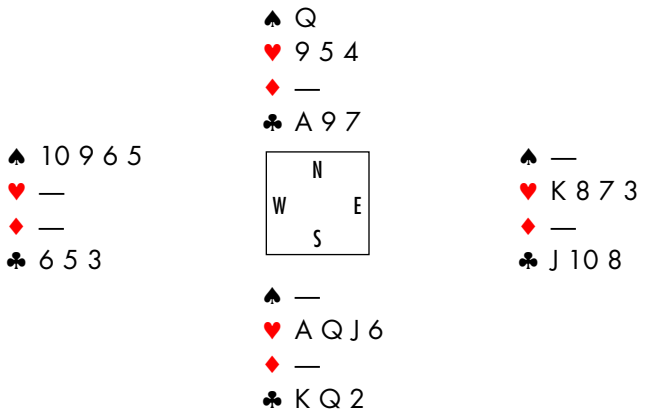
It turns out that 4♥ is an easy make for North-South despite the bad breaks in spades and hearts. Even after North's questionable decision not to use Stayman, declarer would not have much trouble making 3NT if West were to make the natural lead of a spade. Suppose, however, that West leads a small diamond instead and the defense continues to play four rounds of that suit. Now declarer has a problem. What looked like an easy deal all of the sudden becomes difficult when the South hand is squeezed in three suits on the fourth round of diamonds. Here is the layout as the fourth diamond is led:



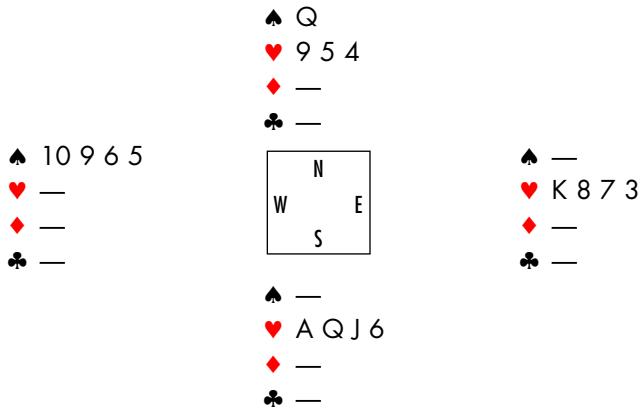
There are two ways that declarer can get home from this point. Can you see them? I suggest that you experiment by laying out the cards and trying different alternatives.

In order to make the contract from this point, either a middle heart or a club must be discarded from the South hand. If the ♥6 is discarded from the South hand instead, the hearts will become blocked, making it impossible for declarer to take more than a single finesse in that suit.

Suppose first that South discards a middle heart and East returns a spade (as good as anything). Declarer wins and unblocks his other top spade, leaving this position:

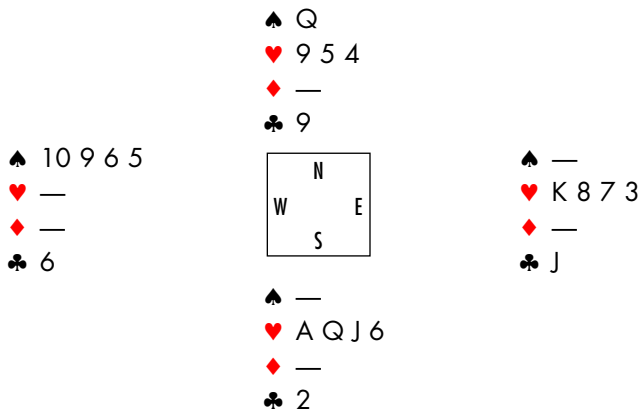


Suppose South now cashes the ♣K and ♣Q before playing the ♣2 to dummy's ♣A. (It would not help to lead the ♣2 to dummy's ace before cashing the king and queen.)



When dummy's ♠Q is cashed (East would cover with the ♥K if the ♥9 were led instead), the South hand is caught in a one-suit squeeze! If the ♥6 is discarded, the hearts will be blocked, leaving declarer able to take only one finesse in that suit. If instead the ♥Q or ♥J is pitched from the South hand, East can cover dummy's ♥9 when it is led and build the setting trick in hearts.

In order to avert the one-suit squeeze against South's hearts, declarer must make the strange play of overtaking one of South's club honors with dummy's ♣A on either the first or second round of clubs!

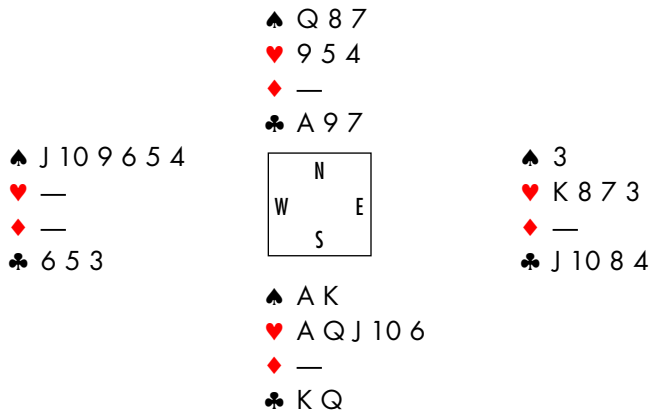


Now, when dummy's ♠Q is cashed, East will be the one that will be squeezed. If East discards a heart, South can throw his club loser and take four heart tricks by starting the suit with dummy's ♥9. If instead East discards his ♣J (the winner that declarer kindly set up for him), declarer can discard the ♥6 from hand. Declarer

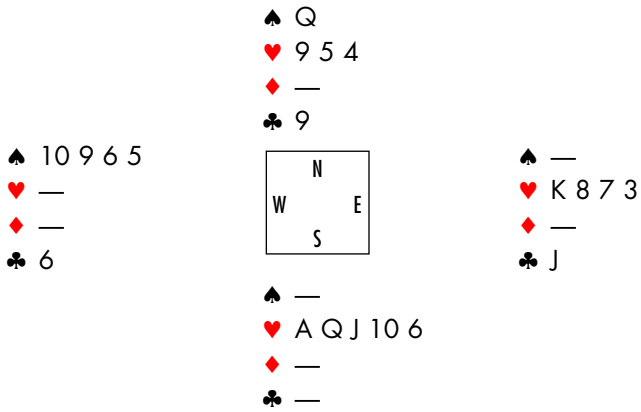
can now take a heart finesse, reenter the dummy in clubs and finesse again in hearts.

The end position shown above is known as an entry squeeze. Entry squeezes are among the many exotic card play themes that were analyzed by Hugh Kelsey and Geza Otlik in their classic book on (very) advanced technique, *Adventures in Card Play*. The entry squeeze gets its name from its unusual result of only gaining an entry rather than an immediate trick. However, the entry can later be used to produce an extra trick. The entry squeeze was necessary on this deal in order to counter the threat of a one-suit squeeze in hearts.

The other solution to this deal is not quite as elegant, but it is still interesting. We have seen how declarer can succeed after discarding a middle heart on the fourth round of diamonds, but he can also make 3NT if he discards any of his clubs. Suppose South discards the ♣2.



South wins East's spade return and unblocks his other top spade as before. Declarer must now cash a high club from the closed hand and then overtake his remaining club winner with dummy's ♣A.



If declarer cashes the ♠Q now, his hearts will be one-suit squeezed as before and the contract will fail. The ♥9 must first be led through East (who cannot afford to cover). It will then be safe to lead dummy's ♠Q. East is caught in a simple squeeze on this trick. A club discard will establish dummy's ♣9 as a winner and a heart discard will allow declarer to run that suit. This squeeze allows declarer to get back the trick he had to give up when he overtook one of his club winners in dummy.

Chip Martel

Christian Mari

This deal took place at the 2000 World Championships in the first round-robin match of the Bermuda Bowl and Venice Cup. The deal has been rotated to make South the declarer.

At least two declarers found the winning line of play in 4♥: America's Chip Martel and France's Christian Mari. Both Chip and Christian have been among the best players in the world for the past twenty years. Mari has won two World Olympiad teams events, while Martel, in 1982 the youngest player ever to win the World Open Pairs, has since gone on to collect three Bermuda Bowl gold medals. Card by card, they played this deal the same way.

♠ 10 9 8 7 4
♥ A Q
♦ A J 8 6 5
♣ 2

♠ Q 3
♥ K J 10 9 4 3
♦ 4
♣ K J 10 9

Both vul.

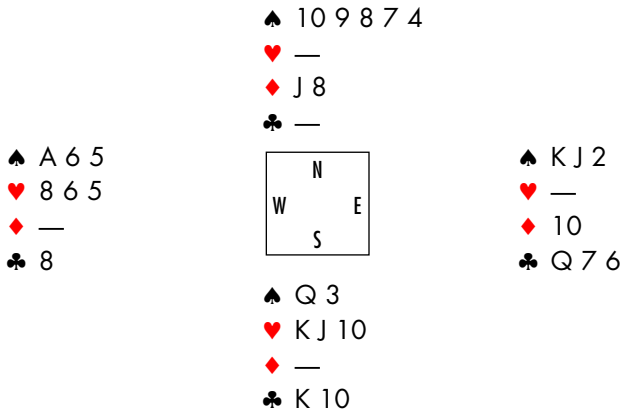
West	North	East	South
	1♠	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

West led the ♦K and declarer won with the ♦A in dummy. He then led a club and when East followed low, South correctly guessed to play the ♣J, forcing West's ♣A. West shifted to a trump in an effort to cut down declarer's club ruffs. Can you see how Chip and Christian both made 4♥ from this point?

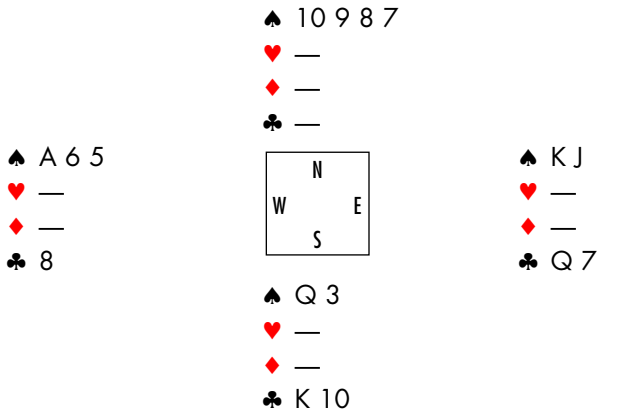
♠ 10 9 8 7 4
♥ A Q
♦ J 8 6 5
♣ —

♠ Q 3
♥ K J 10 9 4 3
♦ —
♣ K 10 9

Declarer won this trick in dummy with the ♥Q and ruffed a diamond in the closed hand. He continued by ruffing a club in dummy and another diamond in his hand, bringing down West's ♦Q.



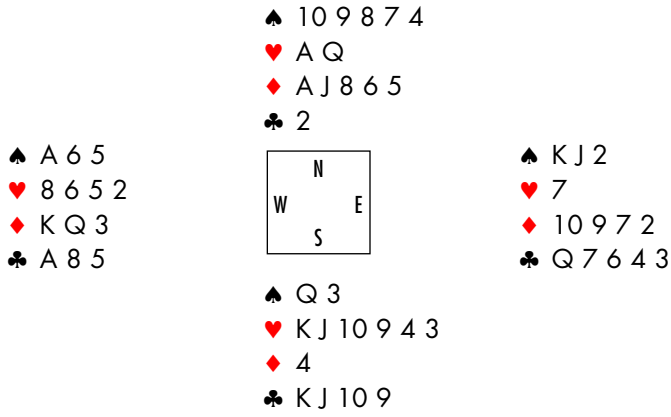
He then drew all three of West's remaining trumps. East was squeezed on the last heart in an unusual way — this position is known as a winkle. Needing to keep both of his clubs, he therefore had to discard a spade (it didn't matter which one).



In the position shown above, declarer exited with a small spade from his hand, leaving the defense with no answer. East actually won with the ♠J and led the ♠K. West could not afford to overtake with the ♠A so he allowed his partner to win the trick. Now East was left on lead at Trick 12, endplayed into giving declarer the last two tricks in clubs.

Nicely played, Chip and Christian!

The full deal:



RISK AND REWARD

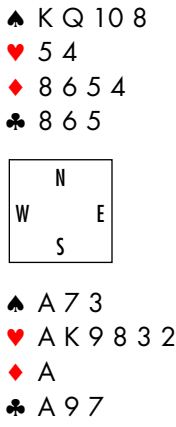
Warren Buffett

This deal was played by Warren Buffett in an online IMP game. Warren Buffett is well known as the Chairman of Berkshire Hathaway Corporation and is arguably the most successful investor of all time. It is less well known that Warren is an avid and highly-skilled bridge player. He is a fine card player with excellent table presence, which somehow seems to be in effect even over the Internet.

Warren was playing with World Champion Sharon Osberg, a longtime friend and bridge partner. Their opponents were Microsoft founder Bill Gates and myself. Warren and Bill are close friends who share a passion for the game of bridge. Bill has been playing bridge for only a couple of years, but he has displayed a remarkable natural talent for the game and has been learning and improving at an amazing rate.

One of the big news items at the 2002 Montreal World Championship was that Bill and Sharon played in the World Mixed Pairs. Bill held a press conference (about bridge) in Montreal, which took place in a large room full of cameras and reporters. I had never seen anything like this at a bridge tournament, as the media tends to ignore even the biggest bridge tournaments.

The deal has been rotated to make South the declarer.



Fred	Sharon	Bill	Warren
	pass	pass	2♥
pass	2NT	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

Warren opened a strong 2♥ in third position and Sharon's 2NT was an artificial negative. Warren limited his hand with a non-forcing 3♥ and Sharon took the push to game. The final contract was 4♥.

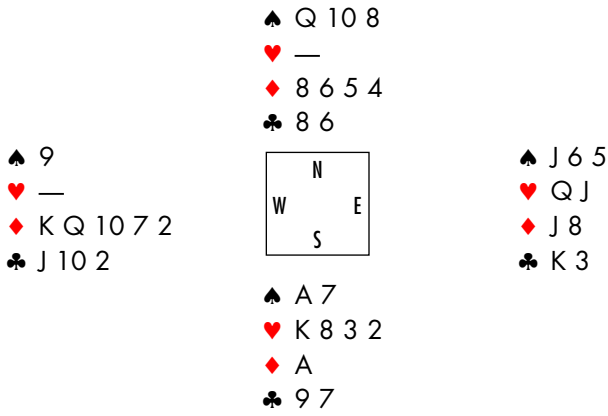
My opening lead was the ♣Q and Sharon put down a modest but useful dummy. Think about how you would play as declarer before reading on.

My opening lead found Warren's weakness, but his contract was still a big favorite to make. If two club tricks had to be lost, then Warren could not afford to lose two trump tricks as well — that was only likely to be a problem if trumps broke 4-1.

After winning the first trick with the ♣A (there was no good reason to duck), Warren laid down a high trump and noted my ♥10 with interest. He was now at a crossroads. The most obvious

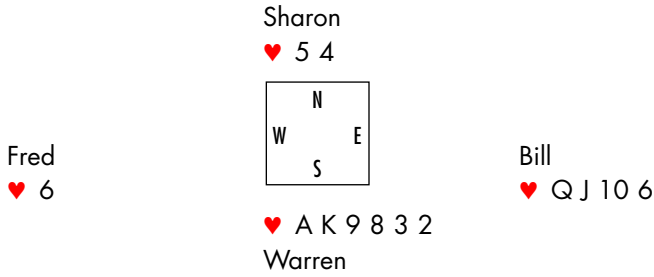
line was to cash the other high heart. If both defenders followed, the contract was assured; if trumps proved to be 4-1, the contract would still make as long as spades were 3-3 (as well as on a few other spade layouts). Warren found a way to give himself a better chance against a 4-1 trump break.

He crossed to dummy in spades to lead a trump towards his hand. Bill followed smoothly with a low heart and Warren wisely countered with the ♥9. Warren's careful safety play proved to be a necessary precaution as these were the remaining cards:



Bill had indeed been dealt four hearts and Warren had found the only sequence of plays by which he could make his contract. I discarded a diamond on this trick and Warren knew he was home. He was now playing for an overtrick. He cashed the ♥K and went after spades. When I discarded on the third round of spades, Warren knew that ten tricks were the limit and he also knew that the 'obvious' line would not have succeeded. Warren won the trick in dummy and claimed ten tricks to make his contract.

Warren's line of play would have failed if the hearts had been distributed like this:

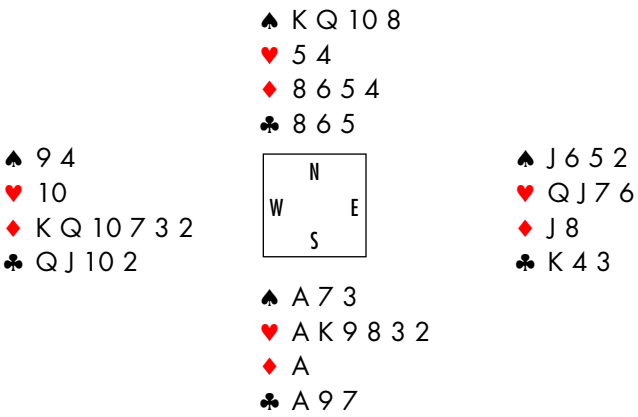


On this layout, the only way to make 4♥ is to take a first-round trump finesse, planning to cross to dummy to play hearts again if Bill plays an honor on the first round. This first-round heart finesse is clearly inferior to Warren's line. There are only two small singleton hearts that West can have — the ♥7 and the ♥6. Meanwhile, Warren's line of play succeeds against three singleton heart honors with West — the ♥Q, the ♥J and the ♥10.

The first-round heart finesse has even worse consequences, as it exposes declarer to all sorts of dangerous defensive ruffing and trump-promotion possibilities. Warren's line of play, however, is not without its dangers. Suppose that I had held five spades and the doubleton ♥Q-10 or ♥J-10. In that case, the 'obvious' line of cashing the top hearts easily makes the contract, while Warren's line will fail. I can drop a heart honor under Warren's ♥A as before. After playing a spade to dummy, Warren will finesse in trumps, guarding against Bill having started with four hearts. Warren's safety play will be cruelly punished on this layout as I will be able to win the second round of trumps and give Bill a spade ruff to defeat the contract.

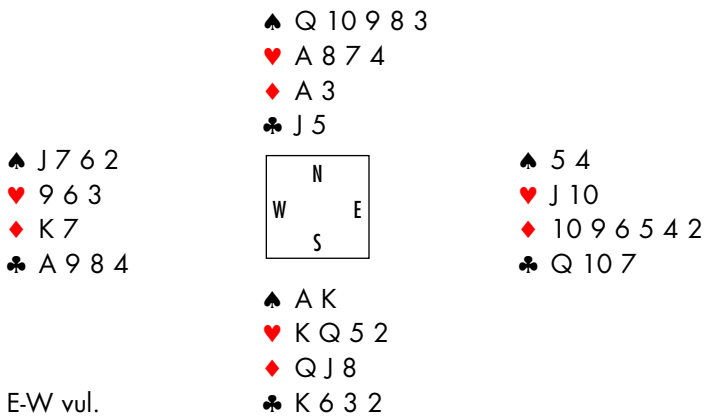
Warren has a deep understanding of concepts like risk, equity, and insurance — concepts that are central to bridge as well as to investing. Warren's line of play was not without risk, but he correctly judged that the odds were in his favor. My computer tells me that Warren's line of play is clearly best on this deal. Hats off to him!

The full deal:



A SLY SEVEN

This deal took place in the thirteenth round-robin match of the 2001 Orbis Bermuda Bowl. It caused a lot of excitement on Vugraph where Americans Zia Mahmood and Michael Rosenberg faced Bulgarians Ivan Nanev and Vladimir Mihov. The previous year, the unheralded Bulgarians had finished just out of the play-offs in the Bermuda Bowl, surprising many. Zia and Rosenberg, one of the world's best-known pairs, were certainly not going to take them lightly this time around. The deal has been rotated to make South the declarer.



West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Nanev	Michael	Mihov	Zia
		pass	1♣
pass	1♠	pass	2NT
pass	3♣	pass	3♥
pass	4♦	pass	4♠
pass	5♥	pass	6♥
all pass			

Zia, South, opened 1♣ in second position and rebid 2NT over Michael's 1♠ response. Michael's 3♣ was Checkback Stayman and

Zia showed his four-card heart suit. Michael's 4♦ was a cuebid in support of hearts and Zia cooperated with a 4♠ cuebid. Michael, having bid out his hand, settled for 5♥, but Zia went on to slam on the strength of his major-suit holdings.

As was clear when dummy arrived, 6♥ was not a very good contract. In order to have a chance, Zia needed trumps to be 3-2 and even then there would still be a lot of work to do. Zia's first problem came at Trick 1 when Nanev found the interesting lead of the ♦7!

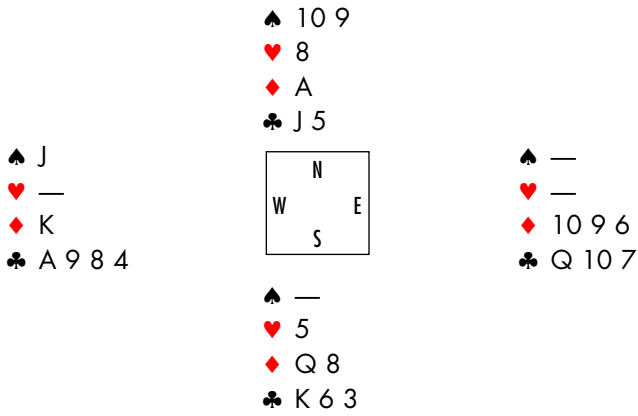
Zia Mahmood

Zia passed the first test by playing low from dummy. Winning with the ♦A might have been necessary if Mihov had been dealt both the ♦K and the ♣A and if the spades were worth five tricks. There were at least two good reasons for Zia to come up with the winning decision here.

1. Ducking the first trick was clearly the percentage play. This line needed the ♦K onside and something good to happen in either clubs or spades, whereas playing the ♦A required something good to happen in both clubs and spades.
2. If Mihov had been dealt the ♦K, he might have doubled Rosenberg's 4♦ cuebid.

Zia was pleased to see Mihov follow with a low diamond. Zia then falsecarded by winning with the ♦J and continued by cashing the top hearts in his hand and unblocking the ♠A and ♠K. He drew

the last trump with dummy's ♥A and cashed the ♠Q. Mihov discarded a diamond as Zia pitched a club, reaching this position:



Although Zia could establish the spades with a ruff in his hand, he would still need to build another minor-suit trick. From Zia's point of view, it appeared that the club suit offered the only real chance. If Mihov had been dealt the ♣A, Zia could make his contract simply by leading up to his ♣K.

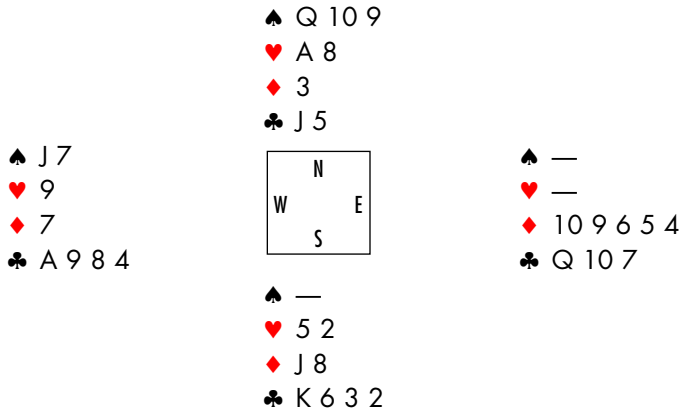
Little did Zia know that he could cash the ♦A at this point and make his contract. If he did so, Nanev's ♦K would fall under the ♦A and Zia's ♦Q would be the twelfth trick. However, he recognized a problem with this line. In the much more likely event that the ♦K was still protected, he would be left with no play for his contract. He therefore ruffed a spade in his hand, deciding to put his faith in the club suit.

Next came a diamond to the ♦A and Zia was not at all pleased to see Nanev follow with the ♦K! Zia tried to sneak the ♣J through, but of course Mihov covered with the ♣Q and Zia's ♣K was taken by Nanev with the ♣A. Zia claimed one down, conceding a club trick to the defense.

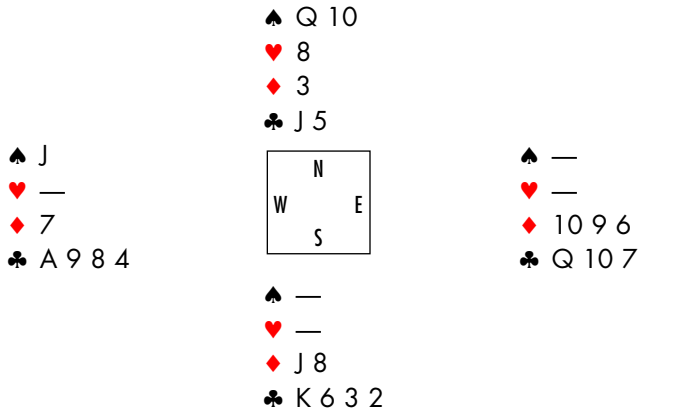
Obviously 6♥ can be made after the unusual lead of the ♦7. Suppose Nanov had led a trump instead. Six hearts can still be made but now it takes an unusual type of squeeze without the count in order to succeed. Can you see it? Believe it or not, dummy's ♣J is the key to the whole hand!

The first few tricks could go several ways without affecting the outcome. Declarer must, however, win the first heart trick in the closed hand. Suppose he continues by cashing South's other high

heart before unblocking the ♠A and ♠K. Declarer must now play the ♦Q or ♦J. West must cover with the ♦K and dummy's ♦A will win the trick.



A spade is ruffed in the closed hand, establishing the suit. The last trump is then drawn with dummy's ♥A.

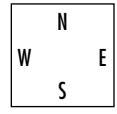


East will be squeezed in an unusual way on the run of dummy's major-suit winners. Dummy's last winner will force East to surrender. A diamond discard will allow declarer to win two more tricks in that suit. East therefore pitches a club, baring his ♣Q, and declarer counters with a diamond pitch from hand. A club is led from dummy to the ♣Q, ♣K and ♣A. Declarer can then claim the last two tricks with his ♦J and dummy's ♣J.

MELTING POT

I am proud to report that this deal was played by my partner, Brad Moss, in an early-round Spingold match at the 2002 ACBL Summer Nationals held in Washington DC. Brad, my regular partner these days, comes from perhaps the most successful bridge family in the USA — possibly the world. His mother, Gail Greenberg, is a multiple world champion; his father, Mike, has won national titles and has come second in the Rosenblum teams, while his brother Andrew is no slouch either. Gail's daughter Jill Blanchard is also a world champion and is married to Bobby Levin, another WBF gold medallist. Brad and I haven't won a world championship yet, but we have collected some national titles and have done well in international pairs events.

♠ K 7 6 3
♥ A Q 9 4
♦ 5 3
♣ K 8 7



♠ 4 2
♥ K 7 3 2
♦ A K Q
♣ A J 5 3

Neither vul.

West	Fred	East	Brad
	1♣	pass	1♥
pass	2♥	pass	3♣
3♦	pass	pass	3NT
pass	4♥	dbl	all pass

I opened 1♣ as North and Brad, South, responded 1♥ with his promising hand. I raised him to 2♥. We sometimes raise here on hands with three-card support, but I estimate that in our style, my 2♥ delivers a fourth trump about 80% of the time. Brad continued with 3♣, a natural and forcing bid in our partnership, and now West came to life with 3♦. What was going on? How was it that West could not bid over 1♥ but was willing to bid 3♦ now, without the ♦AKQ? West couldn't have a lot in the way of high cards so he had to have a lot of shape. Brad felt reasonably certain that West had been dealt a very distributional two-suiter with spades and diamonds.

Is that what West's 3♦ should show? I have no idea as I cannot imagine having a hand I would want to bid that way — I would always act immediately with any hand I was willing to commit to the three-level. Moreover, I do not believe in torturing partners to figure out what kind of hand I have for an 'impossible' sequence like West's pass followed by 3♦. Anyway, 3♦ was passed around to Brad. My pass suggested that I had a minimum hand without 'offensive orientation'. I would have bid 3♥ if I had a minimum hand with good offense, while if I had been dealt a maximum hand, I would have bid something other than 3♥ over West's 3♦.

Brad's mass of high cards suggested that 3NT would be easy. His weak hearts combined with a likely bad break in that suit suggested that even 4♥ might be in danger. However, I corrected 3NT to 4♥ and East doubled. Brad thought about running to 4NT (he also thought about redoubling), but in the end he just stood his ground and 4♥ doubled was the final contract.

Brad Moss

The opening lead was the ♠Q and my dummy contained the balanced minimum that Brad had expected. I am sure that Brad was wishing I had passed 3NT, but it was hard for me to do that. I was not looking at the ♦ AKQ and I did not know that Brad had 17 HCP. Still, it seemed like something funny was going on and I gave some serious consideration to passing 3NT.

Fortunately, I had a very good non-hand-related reason to bid 4♥: we were winning the match by quite a bit and the opponents were running out of boards. I expected that they would play in 4♥ at the other table and I did not want to create a swing.

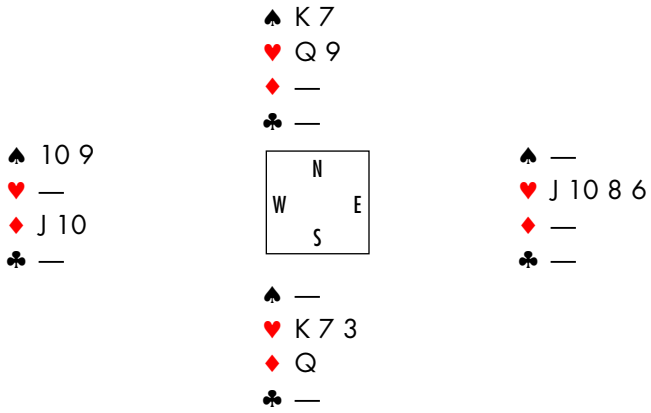
Brad played a low spade from dummy — a play that turned out to be critical — and West's ♠Q won the first trick. West continued with the ♠J. Brad called for another low spade from dummy and East played the ♠A. The ♠A play confirmed Brad's suspicions about the nature of West's hand: he had been dealt five spades and at least six diamonds.

East's ♦9 return was won in the closed hand. Brad was nearly certain that hearts were 5-0, but he could afford to play a round of that suit to be sure. He was satisfied when West discarded a diamond.

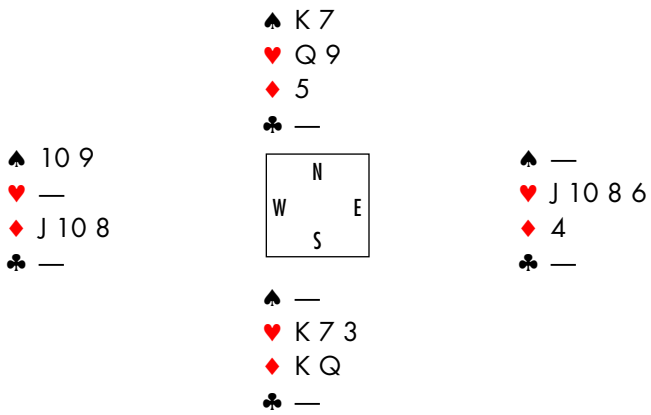
After winning the trick in dummy, Brad paused for thought. You should do that too. Think about how you would continue as declarer before reading on.

Brad had lost two tricks already and it appeared that East had two certain trump tricks. Watch how Brad found a way to make East's two trump winners melt into one.

Brad cashed dummy's ♣K and successfully finessed against East's ♣Q. Then he cashed the ♣A and another diamond, a key play, before ruffing his last club in dummy while East followed helplessly.

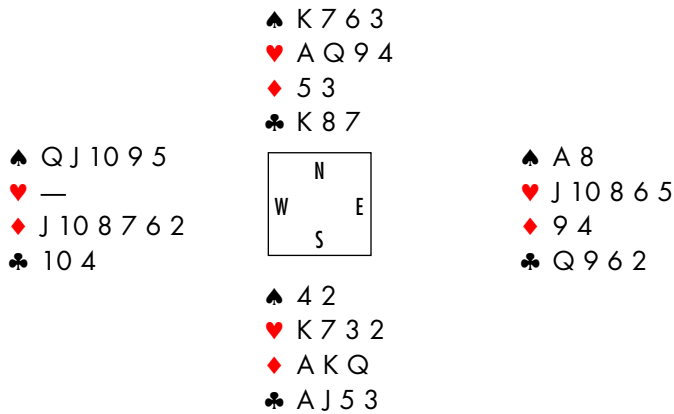


Brad now led a spade from dummy and East did the best he could by ruffing with the ♥8. Brad declined to overruff with the ♥K, which would have been fatal, instead choosing to discard his last diamond, which allowed East to win the trick. Down to just trumps, East had to lead the suit. Leading the ♥6 would allow dummy's ♥9 to win the trick so East had to play back the ♥J or ♥10, and Brad won the trick in dummy. He now had the luxury of being able to lead either dummy's ♠K or ♥9 to the twelfth trick. In either case, East's trump holding would be picked up. Brad claimed his contract for +590. Well played, partner!



To see the importance of cashing a second round of diamonds before ruffing the fourth club in dummy, watch what would have happened if Brad had neglected to make this play. The key position is diagrammed at the bottom of page 60. After first ruffing a club in dummy, the best Brad could have done was to lead the ♠K from dummy. A ruff by East with the ♥8 would then have defeated the contract. Overruffing with the ♥K would have been futile and discarding a diamond would have been no better. East would have been left with a safe exit card in diamonds — proving why it was important to cash a second round of diamonds earlier in the play. After winning the trick, there would be no way to prevent East from winning the setting trick in trumps.

The full deal:



THE POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING

This deal is a declarer play problem based on a real deal that took place at the 2000 ACBL North American Championships in Cincinnati, Ohio. However, before you get to play this deal you have to bid it. You are South. Both sides are vulnerable and you are dealt the following unimpressive collection of cards:

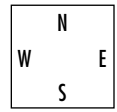
♠ 10 8 6 3 2 ♥ 7 2 ♦ 8 3 2 ♣ 10 5 4

West deals and opens 1♥. Your partner doubles for takeout and East's 3♥ is a preemptive raise. This is passed around to your partner who doubles again. You try 3♠, which is converted to 4♣ by your partner. What call would you make next?

You should bid 4♠. Your partner has shown a very powerful hand with long clubs but without four spades. He is very likely to have three spades, however. If your partner did not have three spades, he would have just bid 4♣ instead of doubling again at his second turn.

You may not make 4♣ or 4♠ — in any case, you are going to have to play it well — but if the partnership is fated to be at the four-level, you might as well be in a contract that offers a game bonus if it succeeds.

♠ A 9 5
♥ 8
♦ A K Q 10
♣ A K 9 6 3

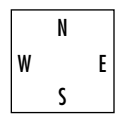


♠ 10 8 6 3 2
♥ 7 2
♦ 8 3 2
♣ 10 5 4

West	North	East	South
1♥	dbl	3♥	pass
pass	dbl	pass	3♠
pass	4♣	pass	4♠
all pass			

West's opening lead is the ♥A and dummy puts down about what you would expect. Your contract actually has a reasonable play. Well bid by you! West wins the first trick and does well to continue the ♥K, forcing dummy to ruff. You cash the ♠A, under which West drops an ominous ♠K. Undaunted, you play a second round of trumps, but East wins the ♠J as West discards a heart. Trouble. East continues hearts, forcing you to ruff as you discard a club from dummy.

♠ —
♥ —
♦ A K Q 10
♣ A K 9 6

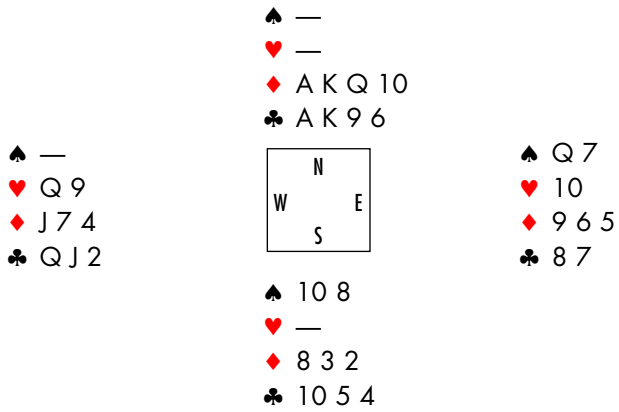


♠ 10 8
♥ —
♦ 8 3 2
♣ 10 5 4

Think about how you would continue as declarer before reading on.

Playing another round of trumps is not going to work. East will win with the ♠Q and force you again in hearts. East will then be left with the only outstanding trump and you will go down at least one trick. The only hope is to play minor-suit winners through East in an attempt to neutralize his small trump. Can you think of a layout of the East-West cards that will make this play feasible?

At first glance it appears that the best chance is to play East for 4-4-3-2 distribution with two small clubs, and it looks like you can get home on this layout with the help of the double finesse in clubs. Suppose you play a club towards dummy now as West splits his honors:



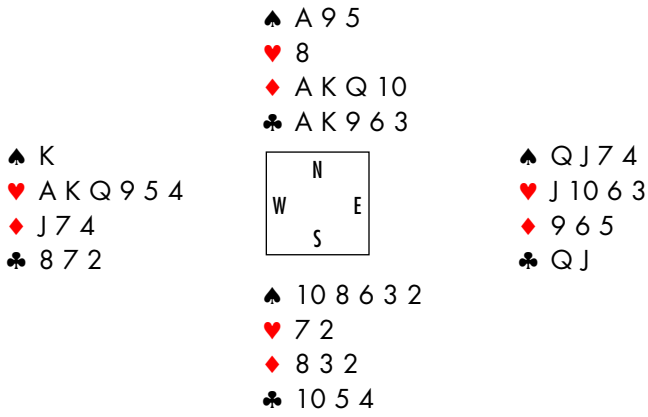
Four rounds of diamonds come next. When you play dummy's last diamond, if East ruffs with his small trump, you can overruff. You can now finesse against West's remaining club honor and hold the defense to just one more trick. This looks like a good plan, but there is a fly in the ointment. Can you see what it is?

If, when dummy's last diamond is played, East discards a club instead of ruffing, the contract will go down. Dummy will be down to just clubs and East will be able to ruff the ♣K low for the setting trick. The contract cannot be made on this layout as long as West splits his club honors the first time the suit is played.

In order for 4♠ to succeed, one of the defenders must have been dealt a ♣QJ doubleton. Therefore, it is correct to start with a club to dummy in order to discover which defender was dealt the ♣QJ doubleton. When this deal was originally played, it was East who was dealt the critical club holding. Although you can cash three diamonds now, dummy's other club honor must be cashed

before the last diamond is played, which will then finish off East. Whether East discards his heart on the diamond or ruffs high you can discard your remaining club and lose just one trump trick at the end. If East chooses to ruff low you can overruff and play your last club to ensure a tenth trick.

If West was dealt the ♣QJ doubleton, the contract can be made in a similar manner. West will follow with a club honor on the first round of the suit. You should then play two more rounds of clubs followed by two rounds of diamonds. The play of dummy's last club will hold East to just his ♠Q as before.



THE ONLY WAY

Bridge is intrinsically a fascinating game, and its challenge and beauty are built-in, not derived from the arena where a particular deal happens to occur. Unlike most of the deals in this book so far, this one didn't come up in a world championship or some other high-level competition. Frank Ayer, a resident of Calgary, Canada, played it in the Open Pairs event of a Regional tournament in Helena, Montana, and thought it interesting enough to send to me. His partner when the deal was played was Lenze Walker of Helena.

♠ A K J 8 6
♥ 9 6
♦ K 7
N-S vul. ♣ A Q J 8

West	**Lenze**	**East**	**Frank**
			1♠
pass	1NT[1]	dbl	?

1. Forcing.

How would you continue the above auction?

Personally, I would have redoubled to show a strong hand and invite a penalty double from my partner. West would probably have bid 2♥ or 2♦ and, if my partner could not double that, I would have bid 3♣ at my next opportunity. If East had passed over 1NT, Frank's hand was just about strong enough for a game-forcing jump shift to 3♣. East's takeout double makes the South hand even stronger since if any minor-suit finesses are required, they now rate to be working.

However, there is a strong case to be made for a changed meaning of 3♣ once East makes a takeout double. The reason for this is that hands with a lot of high cards can redouble in this auction. The implication is that a jump shift now should show at least

5-5 with two good suits, but that this call should be invitational (as opposed to forcing, which it would have been if East had passed).

Frank chose neither 3♣ nor my choice of redouble. He decided to go low with 2♣ in the hope of finding out more information. He also thought that his 2♣ might cause the opponents to misjudge the auction and commit some kind of indiscretion as a result. Lenze rebid 3♠ to show a three-card limit raise and Frank went on to 4♠, which became the final contract.

♠ Q 4 3
♥ A Q J 10 5 2
♦ 8 5
♣ 5 4

♠ A K J 8 6
♥ 9 6
♦ K 7
♣ A Q J 8

N-S vul.

West	Lenze	East	Frank
			1♠
pass	1NT	dbl	2♣
pass	3♠	pass	4♠

West's opening lead was the ♥7. Think about how you would play this hand as declarer before reading on. Keep in mind that you are playing matchpoints so overtricks are important — especially since it appears that any declarers who play in hearts will probably find a way to take eleven tricks.

Frank started well by refusing to take the heart finesse. The bidding placed the ♥K with East. Frank knew that there was a good chance that the ♥7 was a singleton. He also knew that if this were the case, the defense would score a ruff if he finessed at Trick 1. Not wanting to waste one of his few dummy entries, Frank took a club finesse at Trick 2, which, as expected, was a success. Then declarer returned to dummy with the ♠Q in order to repeat the club finesse before ruffing his ♣8 in dummy.

♠ 4
♥ Q J 10 5 2
♦ 8 5
♣ —

♠ A K J 8
♥ 9
♦ K 7
♣ A

Given that Frank was in dummy for the last time, it looked like this was a good opportunity to lead a diamond toward his ♦K, but he rejected this play for two reasons. Firstly, he knew that East could hop up with the ♦A and play back a club, thereby allowing his partner to ruff in front of dummy. Secondly, Frank saw a way to hold his diamond losers to one without having to play the suit himself.

Frank drew the rest of West's trumps in three rounds and then cashed the ♣A to remove East's last card in that suit. This was the position:

♠ —
♥ Q J 10
♦ 8
♣ —

♠ —
♥ —
♦ 10 9 4 3
♣ —

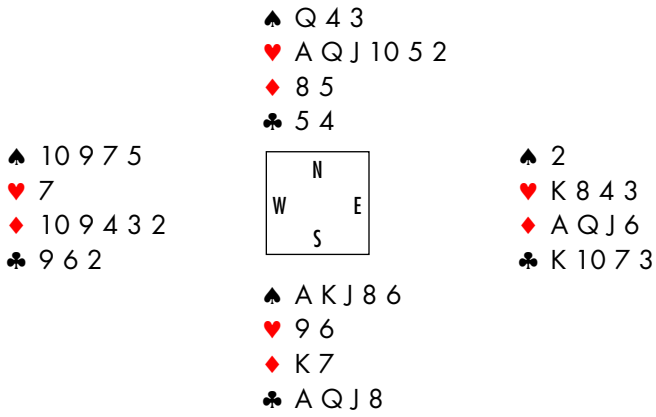
♠ —
♥ K
♦ A Q J
♣ —

♠ 8
♥ 9
♦ K 7
♣ —

Now Frank exited in hearts to endplay East with the ♥K. East was down to all diamonds so he had to give Frank a trick with the ♦K.

It would not have helped East to hold on to a heart anyway since dummy's remaining cards in that suit were high. East actually cashed the ♦A and Frank claimed his contract with a well-deserved overtrick. It turns out that there is only one way for declarer to come to eleven tricks after a heart opening lead on this deal. Frank found the exact sequence that was required. Well done, Frank, and thanks for sharing this deal with me.

The full deal:



SLAM DUNK

The 50th Anniversary Bermuda Bowl, the World Bridge Teams Championship, was held in January 2001 at the Southampton Princess Hotel in Bermuda. The event takes its name from the island, which hosted the first such tournament. Poland were fancied to be serious contenders for a gold medal, and in the quarter-final they built up a commanding 31-IMP lead over USA II. This deal was the start of one of the most dramatic late comebacks in recent memory.

The deals in this book so far have usually featured a well-played hand. This one, however, was all about the bidding. Watch how Americans Zia Mahmood and Michael Rosenberg conducted a beautiful auction to reach a good slam that is very hard to bid.

♠ 10 9 8
♥ A K 10 7
♦ Q 10 6 2
♣ J 5

♠ A K Q 7 4 2
♥ 5 4 3
♦ —
♣ A K 8 7

West	Michael	East	Zia
1♦	pass	pass	2♦
dbl	3♣	pass	4♠
pass	5♠	pass	6♣
pass	6♥	pass	6♠
all pass			

Michael Rosenberg

West's 1♦ opening bid was passed around to Zia as South. We, seeing both hands, are able to tell that 6♠ is an excellent contract, but getting there is very difficult. It is rare to bid to slam after the opponents open the bidding at the one-level, partly because balancing auctions are among the hardest in bridge.

What call could Zia make over 1♦? He did not have any systemic way to describe his powerful hand so he improvised. His choice of 2♦ was a Michaels cuebid suggesting a good hand with at least five cards in both major suits! As you can see, Zia did not exactly have the major-suit length that his 2♦ bid promised. He had a plan, however, and it worked brilliantly. After West doubled to suggest strong diamonds, Michael's 3♣ was, by agreement, a game try in hearts.

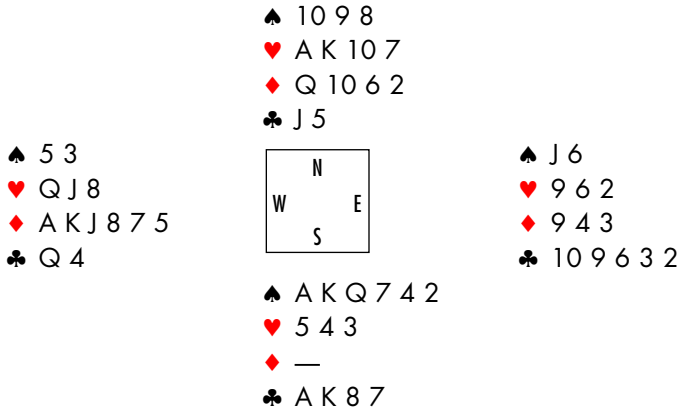
Zia continued with a jump to 4♠, suggesting a very powerful hand with long strong spades. Zia's plan had come together well, but it was now up to Michael to play his part. Zia's sequence had directed his partner's attention to the majors — in other words, hearts. This convinced Michael that his heart cards were golden and his trumps were also very strong in the context of the auction. Michael came through by raising Zia to 5♠. (When the sporting label *Nike* did their *Be Like Mike* campaign, I argued that for bridge players, it was Rosenberg, not Jordan, that they were referring to!)

Zia accepted Michael's slam try, cuebidding 6♣ on the way. Michael tried for the grand slam by bidding 6♥; if he had known the state of the match, he probably would have bid the grand slam himself. Zia judged that there had been enough bidding and signed off in 6♠, which became the final contract.

West led the ♦K, ruffed by Zia in the closed hand. Zia cashed a top spade and, when West did not split his honors, he continued with a successful finesse of the ♥10. He then cashed the ♣A and ♣K, ruffed a club in dummy, ruffed a diamond back to his hand and ruffed his last club in dummy. After returning to his hand with another diamond ruff, he was able to claim the rest of the tricks, stating that he would draw the outstanding trumps.

The Polish North-South pair at the other table also won all thirteen tricks in spades, but they were only in 4♠. USA II won 13 IMPs on this board and it proved the turning point. They went on to win the match by 4 IMPs to advance to the semifinals.

The full deal:



READING THE AUCTION

In the last few years, Gert-Jan Paulissen and his partner, Bart Nab, have established themselves as one of the very best pairs in The Netherlands. That says a great deal because, although The Netherlands is a small country in terms of area and population, it is one of the premier bridge-playing nations in the world. The Dutch take their bridge very seriously and their country has produced many fine partnerships and individual stars — not to mention more than one world title.

Each year, twelve of the best pairs in The Netherlands are invited to play in the Modalfa Top 12 tournament. Gert-Jan and Bart won the 2002 Modalfa by a large margin and this deal was one of the reasons for their success. I would like to thank Jeroen Bruggeman for sending me this deal.

Bart Nab

♠ J
♥ Q 8 3 2
♦ A K J 7 6
♣ Q 7 3

♠ A 2
♥ A 7 5
♦ Q 10 5 4 3 2
♣ A 5

Both vul.

West	Bart	East	Gert-Jan
1♠	dbl	4♠	6♦

West's opening lead was the ♠K. Bart's dummy contained the singleton spade that Gert-Jan had expected and a suitable trump holding (to say the least!). Still, Bart's holdings in hearts and clubs were somewhat disappointing. Gert-Jan needed to restrict his losers to only one trick between these suits in order to make his slam. After winning the first trick with the ♠A, Gert-Jan ruffed his remaining spade in dummy and returned to his hand in trumps, both defenders following.

♠ —
♥ Q 8 3 2
♦ A K J
♣ Q 7 3

♠ —
♥ A 7 5
♦ Q 5 4 3 2
♣ A 5

Think about how you would continue as declarer before reading on. I suspect that if you gave this problem to a group of experts, almost all of them would continue by cashing the ♥A and then

leading a heart toward dummy's ♥Q. West's opening bid marks him with the ♥K and if that suit is divided 3-3, then the rest will be easy, as dummy's fourth heart will provide a parking place for declarer's club loser.

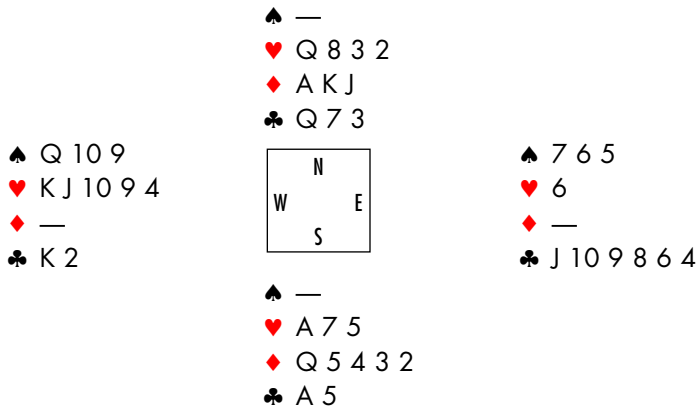
The line of play just described will also lead to success if West was dealt a doubleton ♥K. West will win with his ♥K, but he will be endplayed. A club lead away from the ♣K (another card that West must have had for his opening bid) will allow declarer to win a trick with dummy's ♣Q and a spade return will yield a ruff and discard.

Playing the ♥A and another heart at the critical point looks attractive, but Gert-Jan found a good reason to reject this line of play. Do you know why Gert-Jan suspected that this line would fail and can you see the alternative that he found?

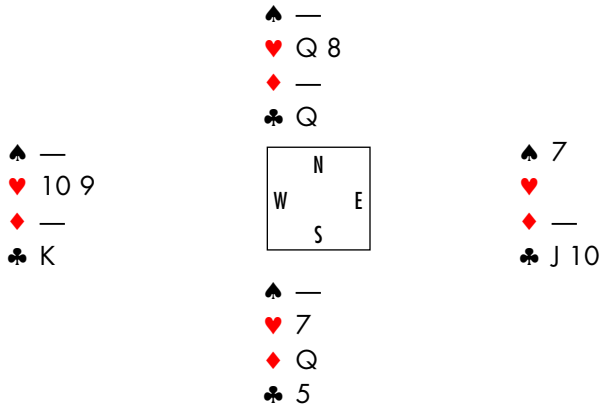
Gert-Jan realized that the 'normal' line would work only if East started with either 5-4-1-3 or 5-3-1-4 distribution. Given that East was vulnerable, that he was playing IMPs and that he apparently had no aces, kings or queens, Gert-Jan thought that it unlikely that East would jump all the way to 4♠ unless he had been dealt a more extreme distribution than that.

Gert-Jan deserves a lot of credit for drawing this inference, especially since he happened to be correct! You can now see the actual layout of the East-West cards at this point in the hand. Note that East had started with a 5-1-1-6 hand, making his 4♠ bid more than reasonable.

Gert-Jan Paulissen



Gert-Jan continued by leading a low heart from his hand (without cashing the ♥A first). West had to go up with the ♥K or else Gert-Jan would win dummy's ♥Q and set up the ♣Q to take care of his other heart loser. West's only safe exit was in hearts. Gert-Jan won with the ♥A in his hand and played a string of diamonds. Before he cashed his last diamond, Gert-Jan played the ♣A to clarify the position, a play that was not necessary from a technical point of view.



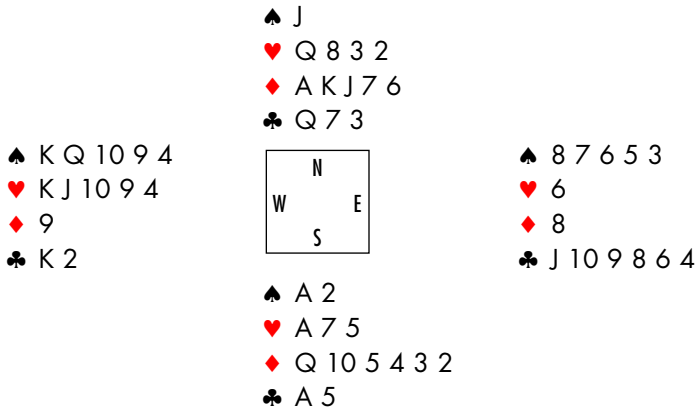
The last diamond squeezed West in hearts and clubs. Whichever suit West discarded would establish Gert-Jan's twelfth trick in dummy. Gert-Jan claimed the rest of the tricks for a very pretty +1370.

If Gert-Jan had cashed the ♥A before leading a heart toward dummy, West would have won with the ♥K and returned a heart to dummy's ♥Q. From there, it would have been impossible to make the contract. West would still be the only defender with

guards in hearts and clubs, but the entry position in those suits would not be appropriate for any squeeze ending.

Gert-Jan's play would also have succeeded if hearts were 3-3 all along. Although he would have gone down if West had been holding ♥K-x, Gert-Jan thought that it was unlikely that East would bid 4♠ with only 5-4-1-3 distribution. East's actual 5-1-1-6 shape was less likely from a mathematical point of view, but more likely from a bridge point of view.

The full deal:



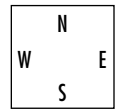
MATCHPOINT PUZZLE

This deal took place in the final session of the World Open Pairs during the 2002 World Championships in Montreal, Canada. The World Open Pairs is a grueling thirteen-session event that takes place over six days. The field, which starts out at around 250 pairs, is cut roughly in half after four qualifying sessions and then cut down again to 72 pairs after a four-session semifinal. The field in the five-session final includes many of the world's best players and partnerships.

Bridge does not get any tougher than the finals of the World Open Pairs. My partner, Brad Moss, and I flirted with the lead during the first two sessions but we dropped down to eighteenth going into the fifth and last session of this event. Although Brad and I were dealt a ton of luck, we made some costly errors in the last session and achieved some ridiculous results by trying too hard to get good boards. If we had taken full advantage of our luck, we might have finished as high as third place. As it was, when the smoke cleared, we were in fourteenth place.

This deal was one of our triumphs from that final session of the World Open Pairs. I was declarer, and the deal has been rotated to make me South.

♠ Q 10 9 7 2
♥ 4
♦ A Q 10 8 4
♣ A 5



♠ 4
♥ K J 10 9 8 6 3
♦ 5
E-W vul. ♣ K 7 6 2

West	Brad	East	Fred
		1♦	4♥
all pass			

West's opening lead was the ♦3. The opponents were using third- and fifth-best leads, but they would lead the high card from three small in this situation. West's diamond holding was therefore likely to be from either ♦ KJ3, ♦ Kx3, ♦ Jx3, ♦ 32, or a singleton ♦3. Think about how you would play as declarer before reading on.

There were 19 HCP between my hand and dummy. That left 21 HCP for the opponents and East surely had the majority of these given his opening bid. It seemed likely to me that East had been dealt a balanced 12-14 HCP hand. If he held a stronger hand (or an unbalanced hand), my 4♥ overcall might not have ended the auction.

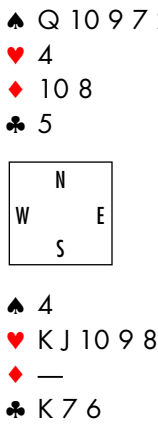
If I was right about the general nature of East's hand, West had to have some high cards and it was definitely possible that he had been dealt the ♦K. If this was the case then finessing the ♦Q at Trick 1 would likely lead to ten tricks. I could then discard one of my losers on the ♦A and try to ruff a club loser in dummy. I would then be in a position to make my contract, losing only two trump tricks and a club trick at the end.

Finessing the ♦Q at Trick 1 is certainly the simplest route to ten tricks on this deal. It may also be the best percentage play even though East is a big favorite to hold the ♦K, having opened the bidding and rating to have four diamonds to West's three.

At the table, however, I was unwilling to finesse the ♦Q at Trick 1. Both the bidding and my table feel suggested that East had the ♦K and, playing matchpoints, I really did not want to go down two tricks (which would be the likely result if East won with the ♦K and returned a trump).

I considered finessing the ♦10 at Trick 1 as well, but even if the ♦10 forced the ♦K, a trump return by East would leave me in rather poor shape. What I was looking for was a line of play that would result in at least nine tricks (and possibly ten) when the ♦K was with East. Eventually I saw it.

I won with dummy's ♦A at Trick 1 and ruffed a diamond in my hand, both defenders following small. After crossing to the ♣A in dummy, I led the ♦Q through East. East covered with the ♦K and I ruffed. (If East had not played the ♦K, then I would have discarded a loser.) I was pleased to see West follow with the ♦J. So far everything was going according to plan.



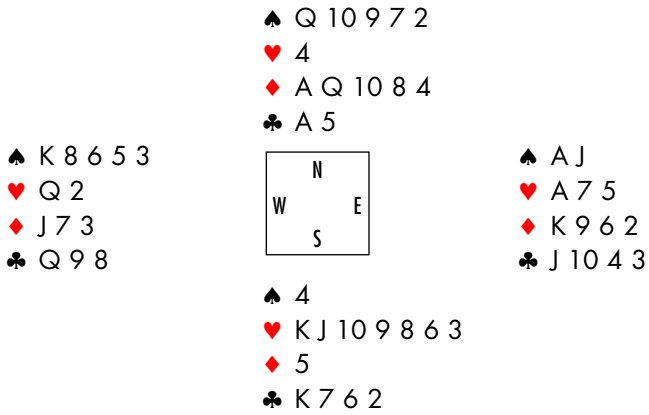
I continued by cashing the ♣K and ruffed a club with dummy's singleton trump. When both defenders followed, I needed only one more piece of good luck to make my ambitious contract!

I played dummy's winning ♦10 and discarded my spade loser as West ruffed with the ♥2. West returned a spade to East's ♠A and I ruffed in hand.

The moment of truth had come. I led the ♥K out of my hand and I was more than a little pleased to see West follow with the ♥Q. East won with the ♥A and cashed a club trick, but I claimed the balance to make my contract.

Note that when I discarded my spade loser on dummy's ♦10, the alternative line of discarding my club loser would not have worked. West would have ruffed as before and then led a spade to his partner, while I would have been forced to follow. East would then have been able to play his last club to promote his partner's ♥Q into the setting trick.

The full deal:



REDOUBLE IF YOU WILL

Redoubled contracts are some of the most exciting moments in bridge. The rewards are great, and the penalties severe. Perhaps for this reason, most players are somewhat wary of redoubling when they get doubled. This deal involves a redoubled contract played on Bridge Base Online by the partnership of Daniel Korbel and Susie Harbour. Daniel and Susie, who both live and play in Toronto, are two of Canada's young Junior stars. Apparently they do like to redouble so be careful when you play against them!

♠ A K Q J 8 2
♥ A
♦ J 3
♣ K 6 5 4

♠ —
♥ K J 10 9
♦ A K Q 7 6
♣ J 10 7 3

Neither vul.

West	Susie	East	Daniel
		pass	1♦
pass	1♠	pass	2♣
pass	4NT	pass	5♣
dbl	redbl	all pass	

Daniel opened 1♦ as South in second position. Susie responded 1♠ and Daniel rebid 2♣. Susie's next bid was 4NT, Roman Keycard Blackwood for clubs, and Daniel's 5♣ bid showed one or four of the five keycards (the four aces and the ♣K). Apparently West did not care (or did not realize) that his opponents were trying for slam in clubs. He doubled 5♣ and Susie redoubled! So 5♣ redoubled was the final contract.

West led the ♥8 and Susie proudly put down her dummy. After winning the first trick with dummy's ♥A, Daniel crossed to his hand in diamonds in order to lead the ♣J through West. West took the ♣A and East followed with the ♣2. West got out in diamonds and Daniel won the trick with dummy's ♦J. This was now the position:

♠ A K Q J 8 2
♥ —
♦ —
♣ K 6 5

N
W E
S

♠ —
♥ K J 10
♦ K Q 7
♣ 10 7 3

Daniel correctly decided that West rated to have the three remaining trumps given his double of 5♣. Daniel, a strong technical player, knew that his only chance was to strip all of West's side-suit cards and reach a three-card ending in which West was down to just the ♣ Q98.

He cashed a spade for a diamond discard, pitched a heart on the second round of spades and ruffed a third round of spades in his hand as West helplessly followed suit. So far so good! Daniel continued by cashing another round of diamonds — again West had to follow — and then played the ♥K, arriving at this position:

♠ Q
♥ —
♦ —
♣ K 6 5

♠ —
♥ 4
♦ —
♣ Q 9 8

N
W E
S

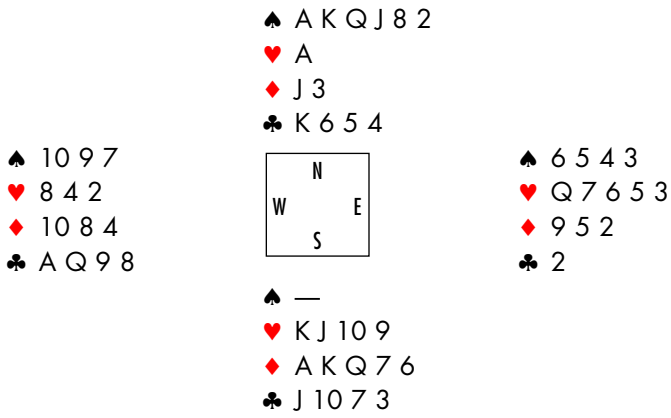
♠ 6
♥ Q 7 6
♦ —
♣ —

♠ —
♥ J
♦ Q
♣ 10 7

When Daniel ruffed his remaining heart loser in dummy, he found that he had reached the three-card ending for which he had been aiming. Daniel led dummy's last spade and discarded his remaining diamond as West was forced to ruff.

Although West led back his remaining small club, Daniel played low from dummy and won the trick with his ♣10. Daniel claimed the last trick with dummy's ♣K. He made his redoubled contract for a cool +800. Good job, Daniel!

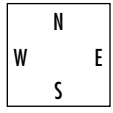
The full deal:



AID FROM THE ENEMY

I had the pleasure of playing with Roger Bates of Phoenix as my partner a couple of years ago. Roger is a professional player who has won eleven ACBL National events during the past 25 years or so. Also, he was a member of the American team that won the Rosenblum Cup World Championship in 1994, and he took a bronze medal in the World Open Pairs in 1978, among other international successes. This, however, was not such an illustrious occasion: it was a Sectional tournament in Las Vegas. That didn't detract from the quality of Roger's play, however.

♠ K J
♥ 7 6 5 3
♦ Q J 10 8 2
♣ 7 3



♠ 7 4 2
♥ A K 4
♦ A K
♣ K Q J 8 4

N-S vul.

West	**Fred**	**East**	**Roger**
			2NT
pass	3♣	pass	3♦
pass	3NT	all pass	

West's opening lead was the ♥2 (fourth best) and when Roger called for a low heart from dummy, East produced the ♥Q. Think about how you would play this hand as declarer before reading on.

Roger won the first trick in his hand and led the ♦K in an attempt to get his opponents to give each other count in that suit. Both defenders followed with small diamonds and since neither of them knew the position of the ♦A, Roger reasonably concluded that the diamonds were 3-3. If you are wondering about the relevance of the diamond count, you will have to wait and see!

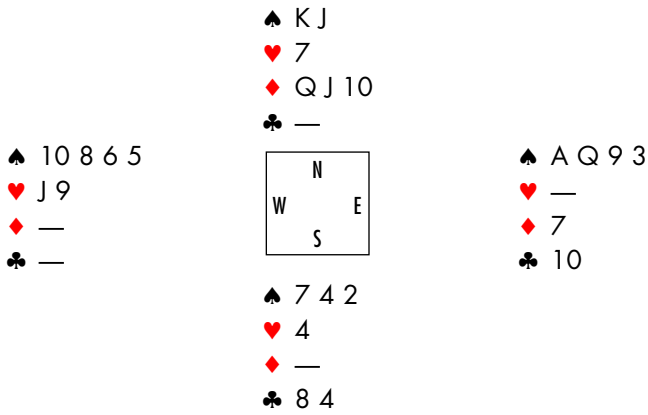
Roger cashed the ♦A next as both defenders followed up the line. He continued by leading the ♣K out of his hand and East won with the ♣A, returning the ♥10. Roger won this trick and tried the clubs from the top. Both defenders followed small to the second round of clubs, but on the third round West discarded a diamond. This is what Roger could see at this point:

♠ K J
♥ 7
♦ Q J 10
♣ —

♠ 7 4 2
♥ 4
♦ —
♣ 8 4

Roger had won six tricks already, but to come anywhere close to the nine tricks he needed, he was going to have to get to dummy's diamonds — presumably by using the spade suit to provide an entry. There were a couple of ways he might accomplish this. He could lead a spade toward dummy and play West for the ♠A. If West took his ♠A, he could cash two heart tricks (the third and fourth winners for the defense), but Roger would be able to win the balance of the tricks to make his contract. West could do better by ducking his ♠A. Roger would then have to guess to put up dummy's ♠K in order to come to nine tricks. However, I guarantee that Roger would have played East for the ♠A.

Why would I being willing to offer a guarantee on what looks like a pure guess? After all, dummy's ♠J would be the winning play if West had the ♠Q and East the ♠A. The reason is that, as Roger demonstrated, when East has the ♠A there is no need to play on the spade suit at all. You can get the defenders to do this for you. Roger had good reasons (which we will see soon) to play East for the ♠A. This was actual layout at this point:

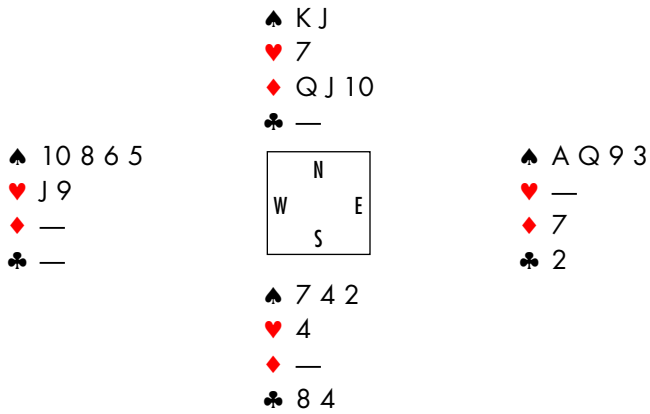


It did not matter that East actually had the ♠Q as well as the ♠A. Trying to guess the spades would not have been a success on this layout! Instead of playing on spades, Roger exited in clubs to East, leaving him endplayed. A spade lead would let Roger win a spade trick in dummy and end up with an overtrick. East did the best he could do by playing a diamond to dummy's stranded suit. Roger claimed two more diamond tricks for his contract, and East won the last two tricks with his ♠A and ♠Q.

Now for the big question: how did Roger know to exit in clubs, essentially playing East for the ♠A instead of West? Well, Roger knew that West had led from a four-card heart suit headed by the ♥J. He also knew that West started with three diamonds (from his count signal) and two clubs. Therefore West had been dealt four cards in spades. If West had been dealt the ♠A, he might well have led that suit instead of a heart. Since West actually led a heart, Roger inferred that the ♠A was more likely to be on his right, making his choice to exit in clubs the indicated play.

That was certainly a good decision by Roger, but did you see how the defense could have come out on top? Look at what

would have happened if East had played his ♣10 and ♣9 under Roger's ♣Q and ♣J! Here's the position that would have occurred:

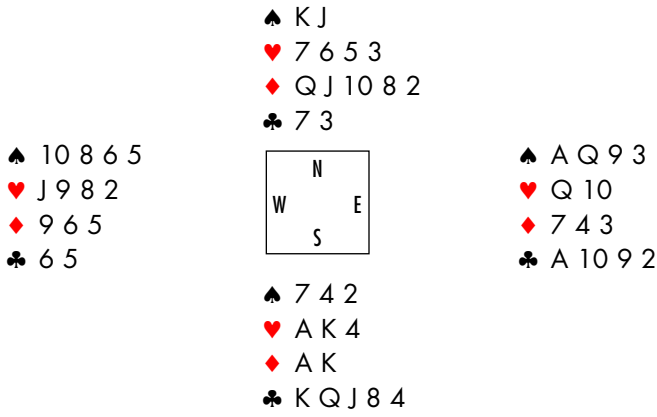


Roger would not be able to throw East in with the ♣2! The best option would be to cash his remaining club winners. Roger would be up to eight tricks, but on the actual layout of the spades, there would be no way for him to come to a ninth winner.

East's play of throwing away his sure club winner is known as a 'gambit' — a term borrowed from chess. A gambit involves deliberately getting rid of a winner in order to gain two or more tricks. You don't see plays like this very often at the table.

Roger Bates

The full deal:



EYE ON THE BALL

I play a lot of bridge, and every session I can learn something more about this amazing game. A deal doesn't have be the critical moment that decides a world title to be interesting: this next one arose at an ACBL Regional in December 2003 in Reno, Nevada. Try your declarer play skills along with me:

♠ A 5
♥ 4 3 2
♦ 4 3 2
♣ A 10 9 8 7

♠ K Q 6 4 3 2
♥ 6
♦ A K 6
♣ K Q J

N-S vul.

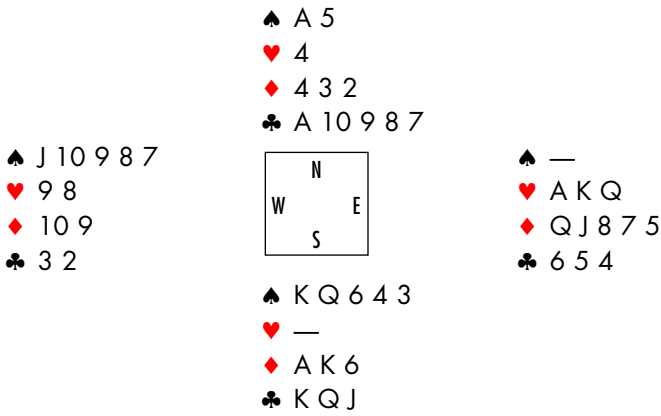
West	North	East	South
pass	pass	1♥	dbl
3♥	pass	4♥	4♠
all pass			

West's opening lead is the ♥J and your partner's dummy is a disappointment as usual. What is not usual is that this disappointing dummy is too good (you are used to dummies that take no tricks). All you need is a 3-2 trump break to make 6♠, and 6♣ is almost laydown.

You mechanically call for a small heart from dummy, but what you are really thinking is whether or not your partner should have bid 4♣ over 3♥.

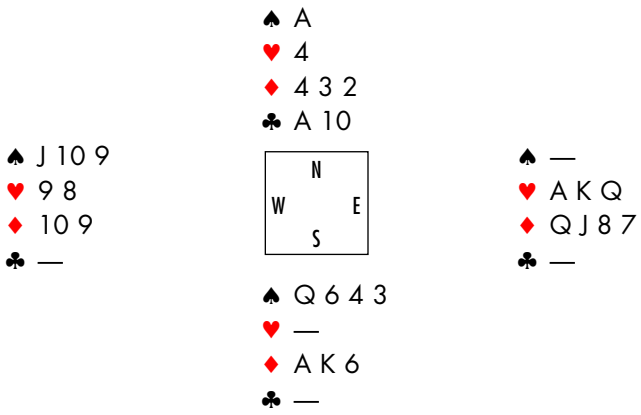
Meanwhile, West's ♥J holds the first trick and you ruff his heart continuation in your hand. Naturally, you now play a spade to dummy's ♠A, but East discards. As West has only two clubs to go with his five spades, there is no way to make 4♠.

The good news is that 6♣ would not have made either... Stop thinking about clubs! If you hadn't been thinking so much about alternative contracts and alternative bids when the play started you could have made 4♠. Do you see how you should have played after ruffing the second round of hearts? This was the position:



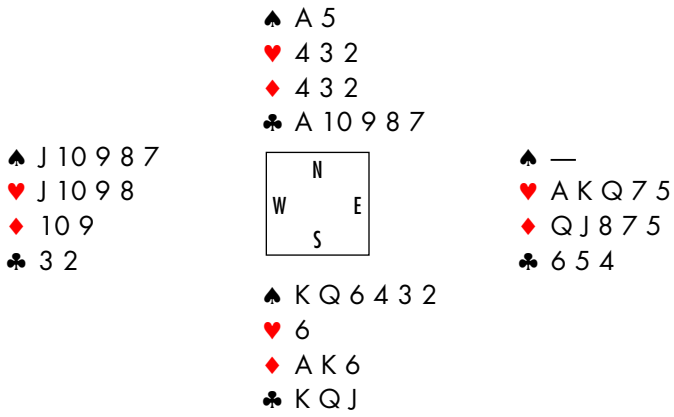
The correct play is to win the first round of trumps with an honor in your hand (instead of playing a spade to dummy's ♠A).

If both defenders follow, the rest will be easy, but when East discards you start on clubs. The third round of clubs is ruffed by West, but you can ruff his heart return (no defense is any better) and cross to that all-important ♠A entry that you squandered earlier.



You can then lead a winning club from dummy on which to discard your diamond loser as West takes a second ruff (with his second natural trump trick). West leads yet another heart, which you ruff with your last small spade. Your last big spade can then be used to draw West's remaining trump and your ♦ AK make for a stylish claim at the end. This isn't such a hard deal if you think about it. Did you take your eye off the ball? I admit I was trying to distract you!

The full deal:



SETTING UP YOUR SQUEEZE

Michel Lebel

This deal is one of those rare masterpieces in which the winning play for declarer is far from obvious even with all four hands in view, yet it is possible for a great player to find the path to success at the table. It turned out that the actual declarer, Michel Lebel, was indeed a great player. Lebel is Romanian-born, but achieved bridge fame representing France. His career includes two World Teams championships, two European championships, and numerous French national titles. He is well known in France as the author of a number of best-selling books on the game.

This deal took place a few years ago in an exhibition match where Lebel was playing with Michel Perron, another of France's all-time greats. Société Générale, a French bank, sponsored a series of these matches in which the French National Team faced various local teams in an effort to help promote bridge in various parts of that country. Société Générale did a fine job in promoting these events, as there were usually more than seven hundred people watching Vugraph at the playing site.

This particular match was against a team from Bordeaux that included Patrice Piganeau, who reported this beautiful deal to me. The deal has been rotated to make South the declarer.

♠ A 9 6
♥ 6 4 3 2
♦ A 10 5 3
♣ A 3

♠ Q 8
♥ A
♦ Q 8 6 2
♣ K Q J 10 7 6

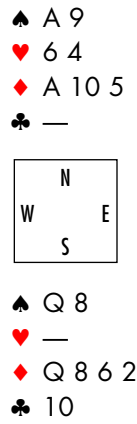
West	Perron	East	Lebel
			1♣
2♦	2♠	4♥	4♥
pass	4♠	pass	5♣
pass	6♣	all pass	

Michel Lebel, South, opened 1♣. West overcalled 2♦, which, as is common in France, was an artificial bid showing at least 5-5 in the majors. Most North American experts would bid 2♣ (a Michaels cuebid) instead of 2♦ with such a hand, but the French prefer to use the 2♣ overcall of a 1♣ opening as natural. I am not exactly sure what Michel Perron, North, meant with his 2♠ bid. Apparently it was some kind of a cuebid, but you can see that Perron did not have much of a fit for his partner's club suit. In any case, East bid 3♥ and Lebel cuebid 4♥, apparently suggesting a good playing hand for clubs and a heart control. Perron returned the cuebid with 4♠. Lebel (who had already done a fine job of describing his hand) had nothing more to say so he signed off in 5♣. Perron raised to 6♣, which became the final contract.

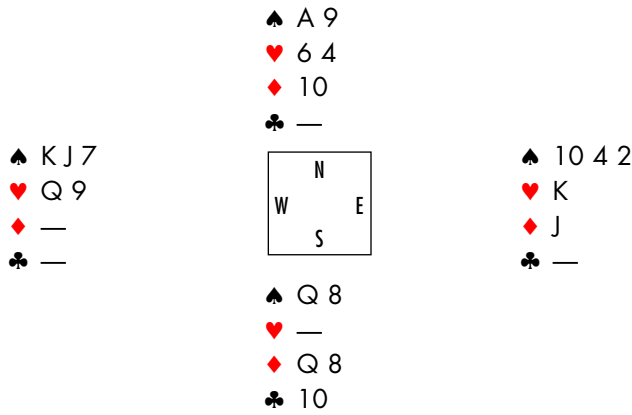
The opening lead was the ♥10. I can't imagine Lebel liked his contract very much. It appeared that there was a certain loser in spades and at least one loser in diamonds. Of course, Lebel did not give up. He thought of a (not unlikely) layout of the East-West cards that would allow him to make his slam.

After winning the first trick with the ♥A in his hand, Lebel crossed to the ♣A and found the necessary play of ruffing a heart in his hand. He then proceeded to draw the rest of the outstanding trumps. West discarded a spade on the second round of

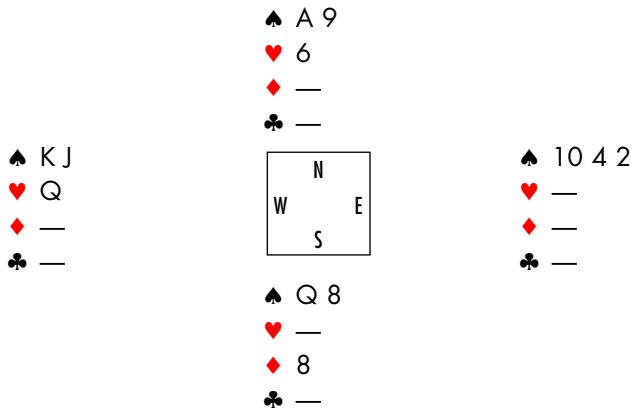
trumps, another spade on the third round and a heart on the fourth round.



Lebel continued by leading a diamond to dummy's ♦A, followed by a second diamond toward his hand. When East followed with the ♦9, declarer made the excellent decision of withholding his ♦Q. This clever play — clever because the contract cannot be made if the ♦K was dealt to East — was rewarded when West won with the ♦K. This was the position:



Notice that West was now endplayed in an unusual way. If West had exited in spades, Lebel would have ducked in dummy and won the trick with his ♠Q, thereby avoiding a spade loser. West therefore chose to get out in hearts, but that decision only served to postpone his fate. Lebel ruffed with his last trump and finished the diamonds.



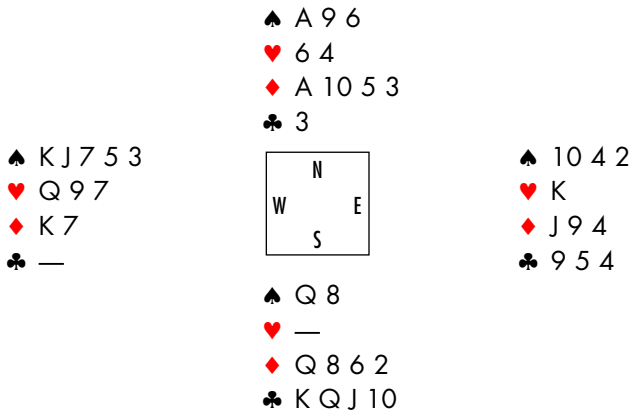
On the last round of diamonds, West was squeezed in the majors. He knew that a heart discard would establish dummy's remaining heart as a winner so he discarded a spade in the hope that his partner and not declarer had been dealt the ♠Q. Lebel discarded dummy's last heart and dropped West's now singleton ♠K to establish his ♠Q as a winner.

One of the things I really like about this deal is how well Lebel timed the hand to ruff exactly the right number of hearts (one) in his hand. He eventually forced West to allow him to ruff a second heart. This had the effect of removing the last heart from East's hand, thereby isolating the heart guard in the West hand, which was necessary in order for the squeeze to operate.

If Lebel had ruffed a second heart before throwing West on lead, then West would have been in a position to remove dummy's last heart. If he had not ruffed any hearts at all, then East would have been left with a heart guard in the ending. In either case, there would have been no squeeze and Lebel's contract would have failed. This is certainly one of the best-played hands that I have come across in the last few years.

Did you notice that Lebel gave the defense a chance to defeat his slam? This is not to suggest that the winning defense is realistic, but I think you will agree that it is interesting nonetheless!

Everything went smoothly for the first few tricks, but when Lebel drew a second round of trumps at Trick 4, he gave West a chance to defeat the contract. West could have discarded the ♦K!

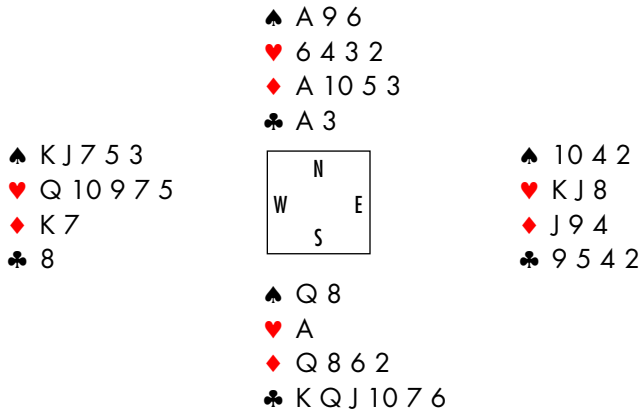


As a result of this play, East could have later won a diamond trick for the defense. A subsequent spade lead from his side of the table would have broken up the squeeze against his partner. In order to make his contract legitimately, Lebel would have had to play a diamond to the ♦A after drawing only one round of trumps. He could then have exited by ducking a diamond to West in order to endplay him as before.

Suppose that West had played the ♦K on the first round of the suit in an attempt to get out of his own way. Lebel would have to counter by ducking in dummy to make sure that West won the diamond trick for the defense. Although West would have been left with a safe diamond exit, Lebel could have won with dummy's ♦A, ruffed a heart and later squeezed West in the majors.

Michel Perron

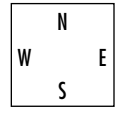
The full deal:



THE CUTTING EDGE

If you're not a Canadian, you won't be familiar with the annual CNTC tournament: the Canadian National Team Championships. That's because it isn't an open event — you have to be Canadian to play in it. It is used by the Canadian Bridge Federation to select its teams for world championships. While not offering the same depth of field as the US Team Trials, the CNTC always includes some good teams, and the bridge in the final stages is usually excellent. This deal came up in the 2001 CNTC Final. You are South. How would you play this hand?

♠ A K 8 6
♥ K 10 4
♦ K Q 2
♣ 8 6 3



♠ 5
♥ J 9 8 7 6 5
♦ A 4
♣ Q 9 5 4

Neither vul.

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

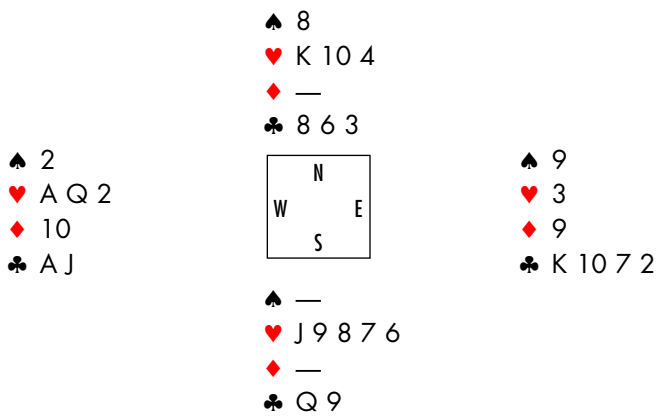
West's opening lead is the ♠Q. You are lucky to have escaped a club lead, but you must play well to take advantage of this. Think about how you would play as declarer before reading on.

Dummy's spades and diamonds will provide discards for two of your club losers. With only two club losers remaining, the contract will succeed unless you lose two trump tricks. The normal play with this combination is to finesse West for the ♥Q. The good news is that, given West's 1NT opening bid and his choice of opening leads, it is almost certain that he was dealt the ♥Q.

Between your hand and the dummy there are 22 HCP accounted for. That leaves 18 HCP for East-West. As such, it is possible that East could have the ♥Q as there would still be 16 HCP left over for West.

If you take into account West's opening lead, however, it becomes even more likely that he was dealt the ♥Q. The fact that West did not lead a top club strongly suggests that East was dealt the ♣K, leaving West with the remaining 15 HCP. So you know that West was dealt the ♥Q and you should focus your efforts on not losing a trick to that card.

Your first priority is to win the opening lead in dummy and get rid of two of your club losers using dummy's spade and diamond winners. At this point it seems normal to ruff a spade back to your hand in order to lead a trump toward dummy (with the intention of finessing West for the ♥Q).

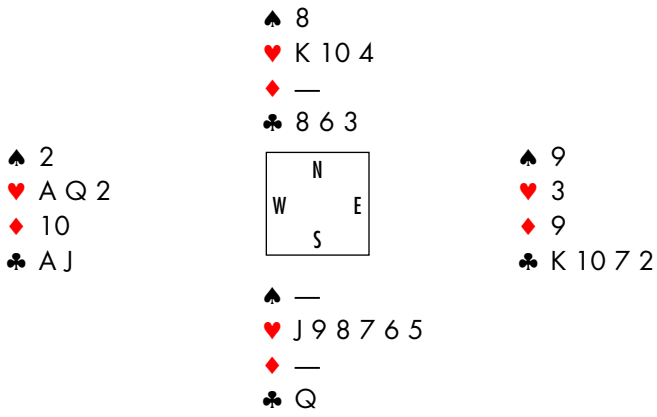


If the remaining East-West cards are distributed as above, however, this line will fail. In the diagram, West will win with the ♥A and cash the ♣A. Now West will continue with a club to East's ♣K, and

East will play a third round of clubs. West will be able to overruff you with the ♥Q to take the setting trick for the defense.

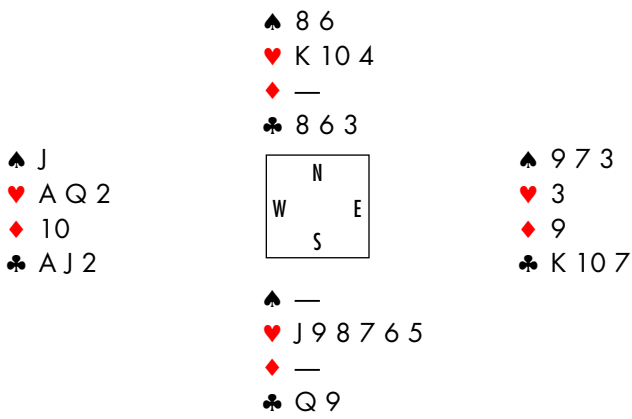
Let's go back to the point at which you ruffed a spade back to your hand in order to lead a trump toward dummy. Can you see how you could have prevented West from scoring a trick with the ♥Q?

It is correct to lead a spade from the dummy, but instead of ruffing this trick, you should discard another one of your club losers. For those of you who appreciate nomenclature, I think this play is an unusual form of the Scissors Coup (perhaps 'without the count'!). Suppose the defense, after winning an unexpected spade trick, plays two rounds of clubs (nothing else is better).



You can ruff the second round of clubs and lead a trump toward the dummy. Regardless of how West plays, your only remaining loser will be the ♥A. Suppose West wins with the ♥A (if he ducks you can win the trick cheaply and lead a second trump toward the dummy). West can do no better than to get out a spade, which you can ruff in your hand. You can now finesse against West's ♥Q, draw West's last trump with dummy's ♥K and claim the rest of the tricks.

The recommended line has a great deal to gain and, as a practical matter, cannot cost (on the assumption that East-West are 'normal' players). It is true, however, that you might go down by playing this way when clubs are 3-3 (as, in that case, there was never any danger of an overruff). Suppose that West was dealt 3-3-4-3 distribution instead of 4-3-4-2, this will be the position after you take your club pitches:

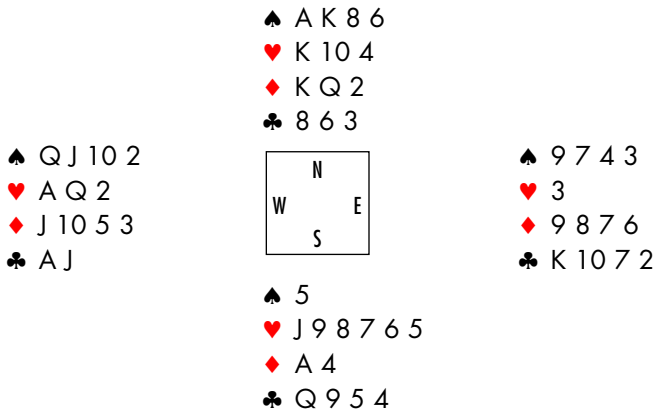


First of all, it must be said that this layout is not very likely since East (who was dealt five spades) almost certainly would not have passed his partner's 1NT opening. Still, my recommended line will fail on this layout. After you discard a club on the third round of spades, West can lead a low club to East's ♣K. Now a spade lead from East will allow West to overruff you with the ♥Q to defeat the contract.

Note, however, that the 'normal' line of ruffing the third round of spades in your hand (and then playing a trump towards dummy) will fail on this layout as well. West will win with the ♥A. (If he ducks, you can get home by winning dummy's ♥10 and discarding a club on the fourth round of spades.) The defense will then cash two rounds of clubs, ending in the East hand. A spade lead from East will then again promote West's ♥Q.

In real life it is a near certainty that spades are not 3-5 (as East would have signed off in 2♠ over 1NT if he had been dealt five cards in that suit). It is still interesting to note, however, that the only way to make the contract on this layout is to lead a club from dummy at the critical point! West can win the club and return a spade, setting up his promotion, but instead of ruffing, you throw your last club away. If East could win the spade trick, the defense would still prevail, but he cannot, and there is no way to his hand for that killing final spade lead through you.

The full deal:



THE AGONY OF DEFEAT

My team, made up of myself and partner Brad Moss, along with Björn Fallenius, Roy Welland, Howard Weinstein and Steve Garner, disappointingly failed to qualify for the knockout phase of the Rosenblum Cup at the World Championships in Montreal in 2002. The field for this event consisted of approximately one hundred and fifty teams divided into groups of ten. Each group played a complete round robin of twenty-board matches. The top four teams in each group qualified for the knockout phase.

We got off to a great start, winning 25 Victory Points (the maximum) in both of our first two matches. We were in great form and there was no doubt in my mind at that point that we would finish in the top four. Unfortunately, things did not go as expected. We suffered a small loss in the third match before undergoing devastating defeats in each of the next three matches.

Fred Gitelman

We were in serious trouble going into the last three matches. Not only was our team sitting far from the last qualifying spot, but we also had the best three teams in our group to play. We responded well with two big wins in matches 7 and 8 and it appeared that even a small win in the last match (against a very strong team from Poland) would make us favorites to advance to the knockouts.

When we compared scores after the last match of the round robin, we found that we had lost the match by 3 IMPs, failing to qualify for the knockouts by a single victory point! Any one of the players on our team could have made the difference by making better decisions on any of several deals during the course of the round robin.

This deal was the most painful for me, as it came near the end of the final match.

♠ A K
♥ 6 3
♦ A Q J 9 2
♣ A 8 6 3

♠ 10 9 3 2
♥ K 9 5 4 2
♦ 7 3
♣ 7 5

Neither vul.

West	Brad	East	Fred
	1♦	1♠	pass
1NT	dbl	2♣	2♥
all pass			

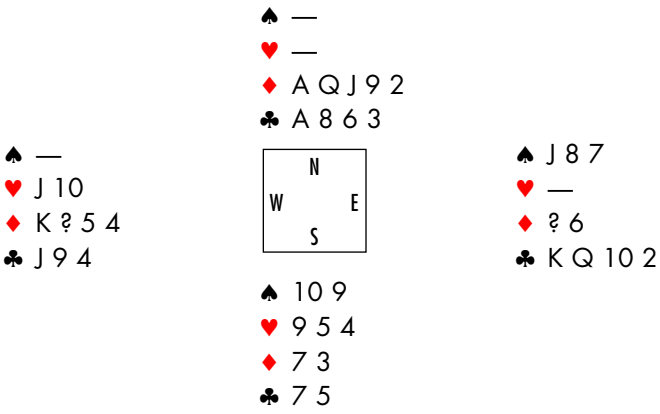
West's opening lead was the ♠Q and although Brad put down a strong hand as dummy, his hand was not very suitable for playing in hearts. Still, 2♥ was far from hopeless, especially considering that West was marked with the ♦K for his 1NT bid and there was a good chance that the ♥A was with East.

I won the first trick in dummy and got off to a good start by leading a trump towards my hand. East won with the ♥A and

returned his lowest spade, a suit-preference signal for clubs, which West ruffed. Ignoring his partner's signal — which proved to be a smart move — West returned the ♥Q. East discarded a spade and I won with my ♥K. Think about how you would continue as declarer before reading on.

One of the first things you should have thought about was the distribution of the defenders' hands. You know that East began with six spades and one heart based on the play so far. East bid 2♣ over Brad's double so he must have at least four cards in that suit.

If East were dealt five clubs (giving him 6-1-1-5 distribution), he probably would not have sold out to 2♥. It is therefore very likely that East was dealt a 6-1-2-4 hand. West certainly has the ♦K for his 1NT bid. In fact, you can be nearly certain that the remaining cards are very similar to what you see below.



The location of one very important card, the ♦10, was still uncertain. I proceeded to lose a trick to that card by taking a strange finesse of the ♦9 at Trick 5. This was not a success!

After winning with the ♦10, East cashed the ♠J and returned the ♣K. I had lost four tricks already and there was no way for me to avoid the loss of three more tricks (two trumps and a club). I was down two in my 2♥ contract for –100 — not a good result.

Obviously I had been hoping for the ♦10 to be with West. Look at how nicely my finesse of the ♦9 would have worked if whoever shuffled this hand had placed the ♦10 where it belonged! If my finesse of the ♦9 had won, I would have continued by cashing the ♦A and then giving West a trick with the ♦K as I discard-

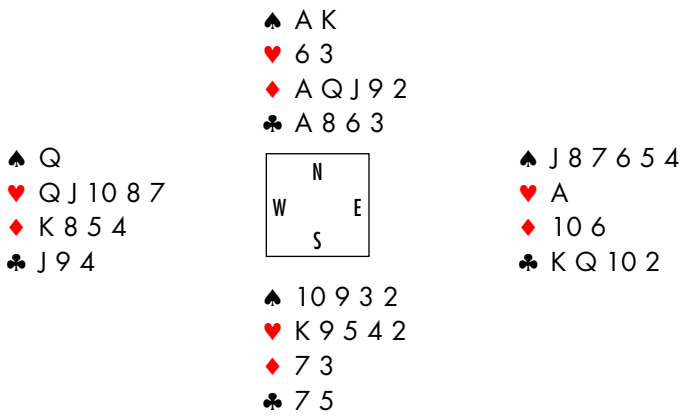
ed one of my black-suit losers. West's best defense would be to refrain from cashing both of his trump winners and to return a club to dummy's ♣A instead. I could counter by cashing a diamond for another discard, as West would be forced to follow. My last black-suit loser would go on the fifth round of diamonds. West would still score two trump tricks, but I would make my contract.

As the ♦10 was dealt to East, however, the winning play was to finesse either the ♦Q or the ♦J (playing the ♦A on the first round of the suit would also work in this case), and that's where my decision cost me the contract.

The reason that I chose to play West for the ♦10 was mathematical in nature. I knew that West had started with four diamonds, including the ♦K. That meant that he had three small diamonds, any one of which could have been the ♦10. East, on the other hand, was known to have a doubleton in diamonds so he had only two cards that could have been the ♦10.

The odds were therefore 3 to 2 that the ♦10 was on my left and this made my first-round finesse of the ♦9 the correct percentage play. On the actual deal, the percentage play did not work because the ♦10 was on my right. Our team was consequently eliminated from the 2002 Rosenblum Cup. If I had made 2♥ on this deal we would have qualified for the knockout stage!

The full deal:



REVERSE GEAR

The original form of our game was rubber bridge, not duplicate, and you can still find places to play it, often for high stakes. Perhaps the best-known rubber bridge club in the world is TGR's in London, where world-class players can be found on a regular basis. The Regal St. Clair Bridge Club in Toronto is perhaps not as renowned, but it also has seen its share of top players, including all-time great Sami Kehela, who can still be found there in the afternoons. This is a declarer play problem based on a deal that was originally played at the Regal. Thanks to George Mittelman for sharing it.

♠ 8 4 3
♥ 7 5
♦ K 9 8 2
♣ A J 9 8

♠ K 10 7 5 2
♥ A J 4
♦ 5
♣ K 10 4 3

E-W vul.

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♠	all pass	

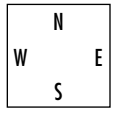
West's opening lead is the ♦Q. You play small from dummy and West wins the first trick. West accurately shifts to the ♠Q, overtaken by East with the ♠A. East returns a spade and you win with the ♠K as West follows with the ♠9. It seems safe to assume that West has the ♠J. Think about how you would play before reading on.

It is likely that the defense will succeed in preventing you from ruffing one of your heart losers in dummy. At first glance it appears that you will have to find the ♣Q in order to make your contract. There is a two-way finesse available in clubs: which defender should you play for the ♣Q?

If you had to guess which defender was dealt the ♣Q, you would probably play East for that card. West is known to have more spades than East and the information about the other suits is neutral. This is not a deal for guessing, however. The contract is assured if you play clubs properly.

Start with a low club from the South hand. When West follows small, play the ♣8 or ♣9 from dummy (the ♣10 to dummy's ♣J is just as good). The nice thing about this finesse is that you don't mind losing it. East, who is out of trumps, will return a heart, but you can win with the ♥A.

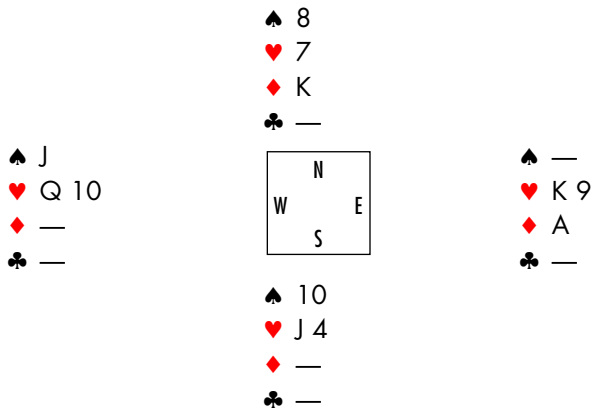
♠ 8
♥ 7
♦ K 9 8
♣ A J 9



♠ 10 7 5
♥ J 4
♦ —
♣ K 10 4

There are now three entries to dummy in clubs. They can be used to ruff dummy's diamonds in the closed hand. If West ruffs in at any time (or overruffs), you will be able to ruff your heart loser in dummy after all. There is nothing he can do to stop you from making your contract.

For example, you can start by overtaking your ♣K with dummy's ♣A. A diamond is ruffed in the South hand and the ♣10 is overtaken with dummy's ♣J as West discards (ruffing would make your task easier). Another diamond is ruffed by South and the last round of clubs is won in dummy.



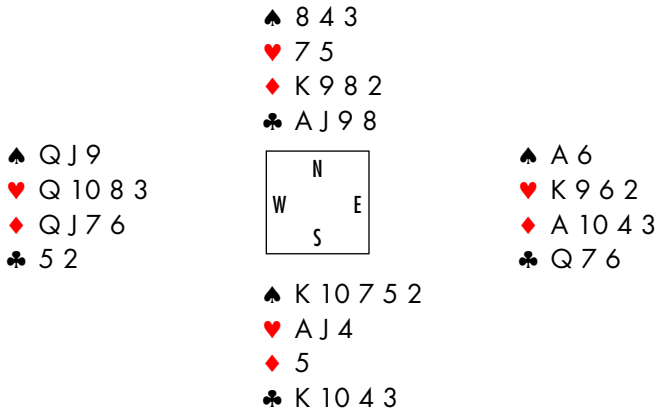
When dummy's last diamond is ruffed, West is stuck. If he discards, you will have your eighth trick in the bag. If West chooses to overruff, the result is the same: dummy's last trump will now score a trick. With seven tricks in and a trump trick to come, you can claim your contract.

If a tricky East is dealt four clubs to the ♣Q, he might try the effect of ducking the first round of clubs. If you then assume that West has the ♣Q and continue playing clubs, you will fail. You should take advantage of being in dummy and ruff a diamond in your hand. After that, play another low club from your hand with the intention of finessing again if West follows. The contract is guaranteed by playing in this way, even against a very devious East.

This deal is a slightly unusual example of a dummy reversal. A dummy reversal involves ruffing in the long trump hand in order to establish the short trump hand. It is difficult to spot the possibility of a dummy reversal on this deal due to the weakness of dummy's trump holding.

By handling the club suit correctly, you will either avoid losing a club trick, or, if a club trick must be lost, enough entries will remain to allow you to complete the dummy reversal.

The full deal:



A BETTER LINE

One of the reasons that our online bridge site, Bridge Base Online, is so popular is that many famous players have become regulars on the site. It is almost always possible to log in and kibitz at a table where various world-class players are doing what they do best.

This deal was played at such a table. Indeed, all four players were well-known experts. I have omitted their names from this account because, although declarer played most of his cards with great skill, he did make a clear error at one point in the play. See if you can spot the mistake that was made.

♠ K 9 3
♥ 5
♦ J 9 8 4
♣ K J 9 8 5

♠ A 10 8 2
♥ 6 2
♦ A K 6 5
♣ A 10 3

West	North	East	South
		pass	1NT
3♥	dbl	4♥	4♠
all pass			

West, a disciplined bidder who was certain to hold a seven-card suit for her 3♥ overcall, selected the ♥4 as her opening lead. Hmm, that's a strange-looking heart. East won the first trick with the ♥A and, after great thought, returned the ♥10, which declarer ruffed in dummy. Think about how you would play this hand as declarer before reading on.

The actual declarer got off to a good start by leading the ♣9 from dummy and passing it. He was not surprised when West ruffed — her strange heart lead had suggested that something unusual was going on.

West chose to return a third round of hearts, further threatening declarer's trump control. Declarer ruffed in dummy and discarded a diamond from his hand. He continued by cashing the ♠K, both defenders following small. A diamond to the South hand also produced small cards from both defenders.

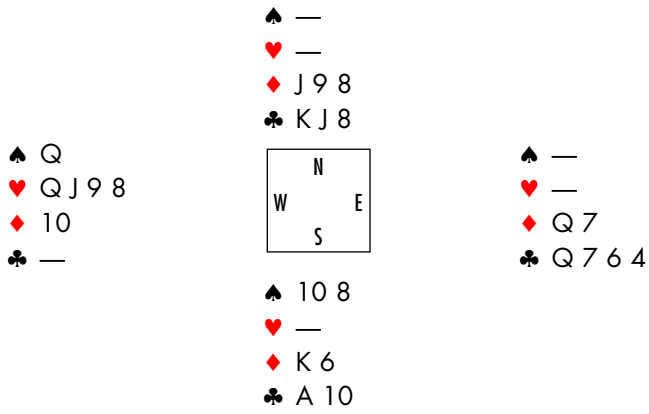
Declarer cashed the ♠A next and discarded a club from dummy. East followed with the ♠J. How would you continue to play as declarer from here?

♠ —
♥ —
♦ J 9 8
♣ K J 8

N
W E
S

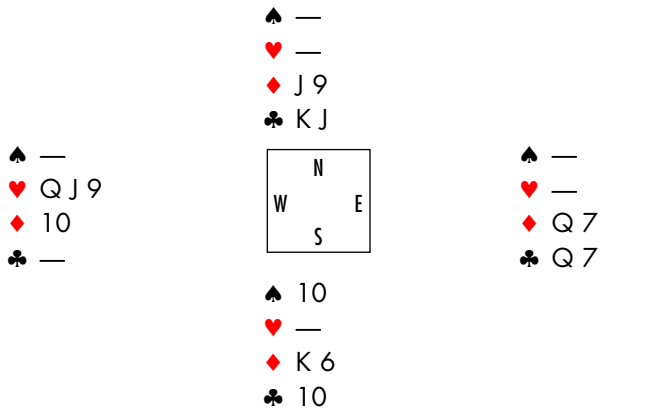
♠ 10 8
♥ —
♦ K 6
♣ A 10

Okay, now I'll let you see the remaining East-West cards. The ♠Q was the only outstanding trump, but declarer did not know which defender had been dealt that card.



Even after the next trick, having made the fine play of leading the ♣A which West declined to ruff, declarer still could not place the elusive ♠Q. He didn't have long to wait. He exited in spades and West won with the ♠Q, a diamond being discarded from dummy.

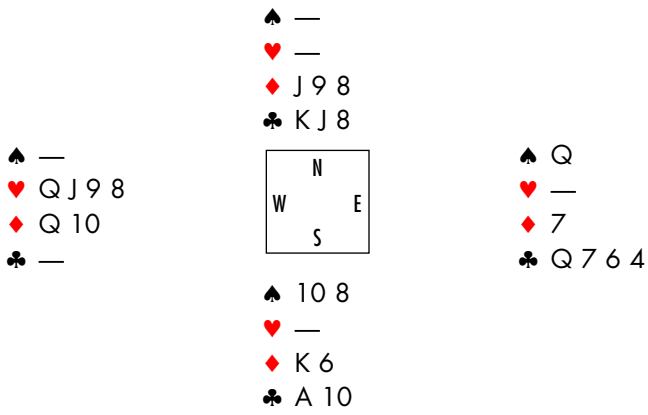
If West had returned a diamond then declarer's task would have been easy. As you can see, it is always possible for declarer to play the diamond suit himself without losing a trick, but doing so involves a guess. Declarer was now in a position where it was not necessary for him to guess anything.



West found the best defense of leading back yet another heart. A diamond was pitched from dummy and East, who had to retain her club guard, was squeezed down to a singleton diamond. By then, South had gained a complete count on the hand and he knew

that the diamonds would run. He ruffed to win the trick and claimed the rest.

While declarer certainly deserves credit for making his contract without having to guess the diamonds, his line of play left some room for improvement. His mistake came at the point where he played a spade to West's ♠Q: he should have cashed his remaining high diamond before exiting in spades. On the actual layout, West would have been forced to return a heart and East would have been squeezed as before.

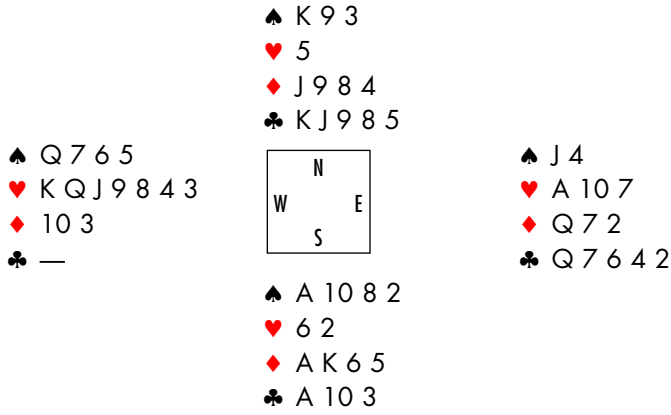


The recommended play of cashing a second round of diamonds before leading the third round of spades gains on this layout (where East has the remaining trumps and West was dealt the guarded ♦Q). Here the ♦K strips East's last safe exit card and then a spade to East's ♠Q will force her to lead away from the ♣Q.

If the East-West cards had actually been distributed this way, then declarer's actual line would have failed. East would have won the third round of spades with the ♠Q and got out of her own way by leading a diamond. There would have been no way for declarer to avoid a diamond loser and his contract would have failed.

Cashing the ♦K in the previous position actually guarantees the contract as long as West was dealt a seven-card heart suit. There is no possible distribution in which one of the defenders was dealt both the ♠Q and three diamonds to the ♦Q. West's hand would have to be 4-7-3-0 (14 cards) or 3-7-2-0 (12 cards) for the recommended play to cost. That makes it a pretty good play!

The full deal:

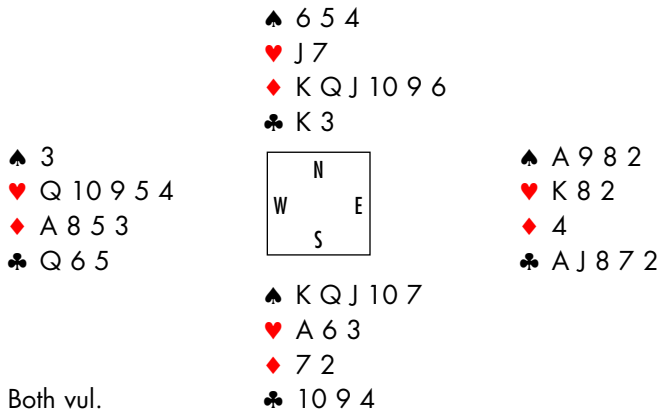


HAMMAN HAS THE LAST LAUGH

This deal took place in Philadelphia during the 2003 Vanderbilt Cup. It comes from a match between the team that I was playing on and the top-seeded Nickell team (Nick Nickell, Dick Freeman, Bob Hamman, Paul Soloway, Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell). This group of players is certainly the most successful American team since the Aces, and indeed one of the top teams in the world over the last decade or so. With National titles galore, and more than one World Championship, only the redoubtable Italians can challenge their record. My partner on this occasion was Christal Henner and our opponents were Bob Hamman and Paul Soloway. The Nickell team won this match and went on to win the 2003 Vanderbilt.

Most of these deals start out with only one partnership's hands in view, but this deal does not really lend itself to that type of presentation. This one is more of a story than a bridge problem.

Bob Hamman



Christal	**Paul**	**Fred**	**Bob**
	1♦	dbl	1♠
2♥	pass	pass	2♠
all pass			

Paul Soloway, North, opened 1♦ despite holding only 10 HCP. I am sure that Paul would have preferred to open with a weak two-bid in diamonds, but he and Bob play a strong 1♣ system; they did not have a weak 2♦ available, since in their system 2♦ is used to show a different type of hand. In addition, light opening bids are safer when playing a strong 1♣ system.

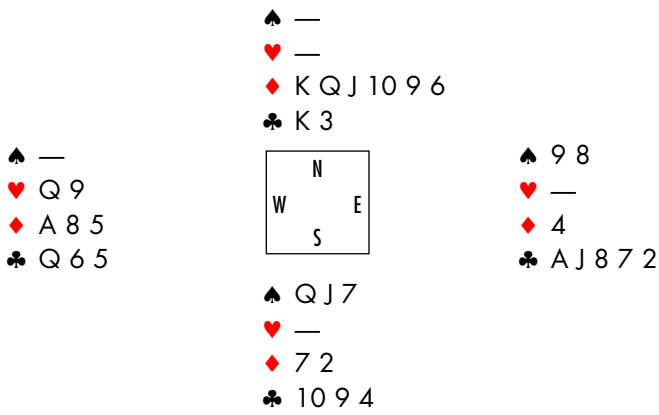
As East, I made a takeout double and Bob Hamman, South, bid 1♠. Many inexperienced players would automatically redouble with Bob's hand due to its point value. However, Bob's forcing 1♠ call is clearly correct — Bob wanted to get his great suit into play and a redouble followed by a new suit bid would have been forcing, as well as an overbid.

Christal competed with 2♥, although I think I would have jumped to 3♥ in her place. This was passed around to Bob, who rebid a practical 2♠, which became the final contract. Of course, 2♠ had no chance at all on the actual layout of the East-West cards, but some elegant card play by Bob (and some less than perfect defense by us) allowed declarer to get out for down one.

Christal selected the ♥10 as her opening lead and Bob made a good play by calling for the ♥J from dummy. He knew he was going to have to lose a heart trick. By playing dummy's ♥J and ducking my cover with the ♥K, he ensured that I would be the one to win the defense's heart trick, thus protecting dummy's ♣K.

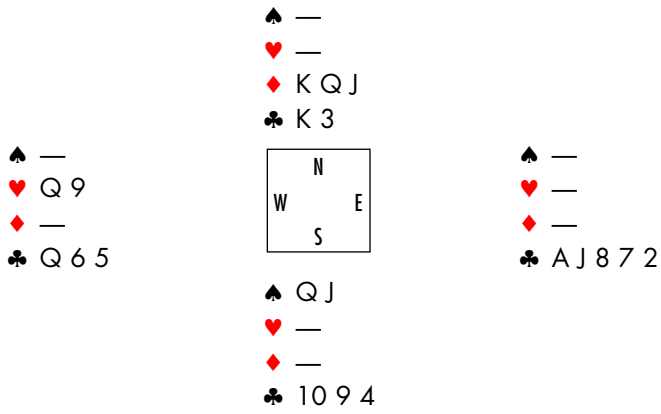
I was left on lead with what I thought was a difficult defensive problem. I was quite sure that Christal had the ♦A and I gave some serious consideration to returning my singleton diamond in an effort to get a diamond ruff. I rejected that line of defense as I did not want to set up dummy's diamonds. I also held the ♠A and I knew I would get another chance to try for a ruff.

I also gave serious consideration to exiting passively in hearts. It turns out that either a heart or a diamond return by me, and subsequent accurate defense, would have resulted in Bob being held to six tricks. However, at the table I chose to make the questionable play of leading back the ♠2. This seemed like a good idea at the time, but it didn't work out that way! Bob won my spade shift in his hand with the ♠K, cashed the ♥A and ruffed his remaining heart in dummy. When Bob came off dummy with a trump, I flew in with the ♠A and Bob made the farsighted (and far from obvious) play of unblocking an honor from his hand.



Can you see why Bob chose to 'waste' his ♠10 on the previous trick? I returned my singleton diamond to Christal's ♦A and it would have been best for the defense if she had played back a club at this point. However, the position of the ♣J was not clear to Christal and she took the sure path to defeating the contract by returning a diamond for me to ruff.

Pleased with how the defense had gone, I exited with my remaining trump (the ♠8). My pleasure was very short-lived. In about a tenth of a second, Bob followed with the ♠7, allowing my ♠8 to win the trick!



I was endplayed into giving dummy a trick (and an entry) with the ♣K. Instead of losing three club tricks, Bob's trump gambit resulted in him losing one club trick and one unnecessary trump trick — obviously a very good trade for Bob! I cashed the ♣A and conceded the rest of the tricks. Bob had managed to go only one down in 2♠ — a good result as Christal would have taken at least nine tricks in a heart contract. At the other table, Bob's teammates did play in a heart partial with our cards and took ten tricks. The Nickell team thus won 2 IMPs on this deal.

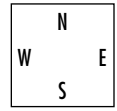
At the point where Bob ducked my ♠8, he let out a very characteristic chortle. It did not take me long to realize that my decision to return the ♠2 at Trick 2 was indeed a mistake. Perhaps returning any trump at that point was wrong, but playing the ♠9 or the ♠8 instead would have resulted in another trick for the defense. If I had retained my ♠2, not even the great Bob Hamman would have been able to duck a trick to that card!

A HAND FOR THE SQUEEZE MEISTER

This deal took place in the ninth round-robin match between Canada and Denmark in the 2003 World Youth Team Championship. Vince Demuy as declarer was playing with Gavin Wolpert for Canada. At the time it was played, no one outside Canada knew much about this pair, although Gavin's older brother Darren had represented Canada on more than one occasion. That was all to change a year later when they knocked out several high seeds on their way to losing the Spingold final to the Nickell team. Now Gavin and Vince are looked on as one of North America's most promising pairs for the future.

The deal has been rotated to make South the declarer.

♠ A Q 7 4
♥ Q 10 8 5
♦ Q 9 5
♣ 7 5



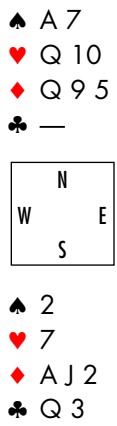
♠ 6 3 2
♥ K 7
♦ A J 2
♣ A Q 10 9 3

West	Gavin	East	Vince
		pass	1NT
pass	2♣	pass	2♦
pass	3NT	all pass	

West started with the ♠5. (The opponents were playing second- and fourth-best leads, playing the middle card from a three-card suit and low from a four-card suit.)

What is really interesting about this deal is the endgame that Vince reached. He chose to duck in dummy and allowed East's ♠9 to win the first trick. After considerable thought, East returned the ♣6 and Vince's ♣10 was taken by West with the ♣J. When West came back with the ♠8, Vince tried the ♠Q from dummy, but East won with the ♠K — not a great start for declarer! Prospects improved when East returned the ♣K, won by Vince with the ♣A.

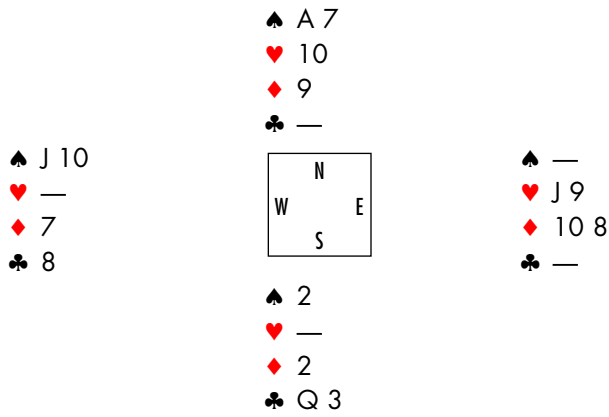
When Vince tried the effect of playing the ♥K from hand, West won the trick with the ♥A. It was now West's turn to go into the tank. When he emerged, he put the ♣4 on the table. Vince discarded a heart from dummy; East pitched a heart as well and Vince won the trick.



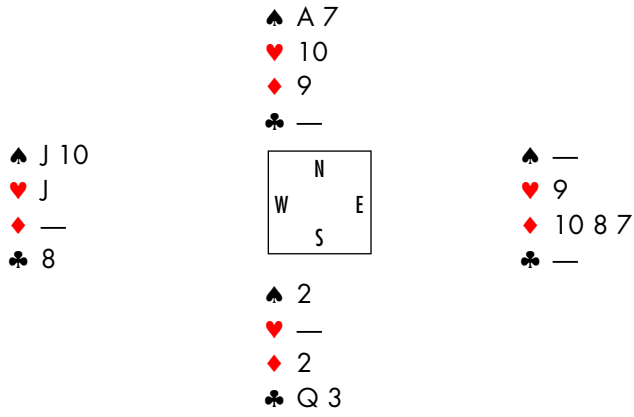
Apparently, West still had two spades left, but if this was the case then the diamond finesse rated to be working. West would surely have cleared the spades instead of returning a club if he had been dealt the ♦K. Consequently, Vince, who needed all seven of the remaining tricks, had six winners and a finesse against the ♥J as his most obvious source for the game-going trick.

Vince realized, however, that if the heart finesse was working, there was no reason to take it. Instead, he could give himself an extra chance to make his contract by not finessing in hearts. He continued with a heart to dummy's ♥Q and led the ♦Q from dummy. East covered with the ♦K and Vince won with his ♦A.

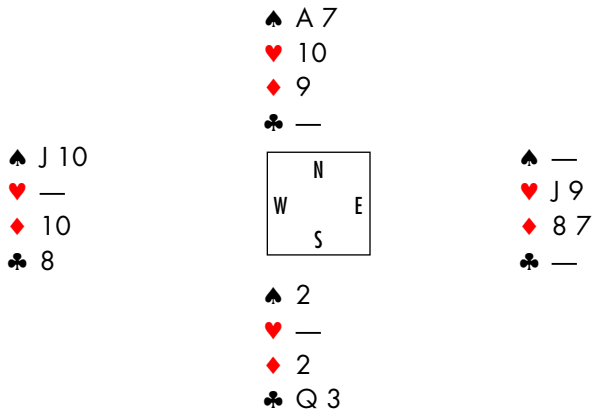
Vince then cashed his ♦J. When both defenders followed small, Vince knew that his extra chance had not materialized. He soldiered on by finishing the clubs. At the table West followed suit to this trick and showed Vince his hand. He knew enough about the deal to know that there was no longer any way for Vince to make his contract.



Suppose that instead of a third small diamond, West was dealt the ♥J (meaning that the heart finesse would have worked all along):

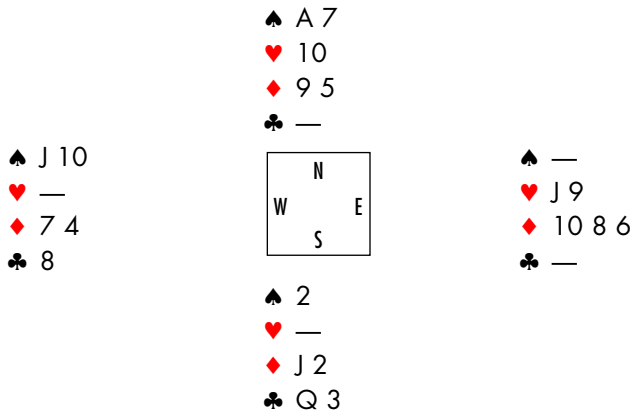


Vince would then have to guess what to discard from dummy. If he chose to pitch a diamond, then Vince's last club would squeeze West in the majors.

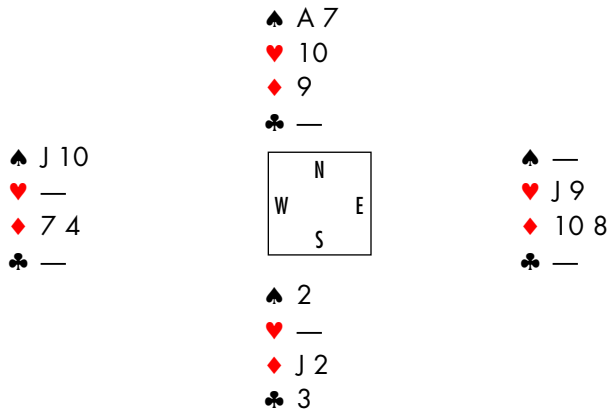


Instead of playing West for the ♥J, Vince could choose to play West for the ♦10 by discarding the ♥10 from dummy on the second-last club. As before, Vince's last club would squeeze West — this time between spades and diamonds instead of spades and hearts. As both the ♥J and ♦10 had been dealt to East, Vince had no chance to make his contract in this four-card ending.

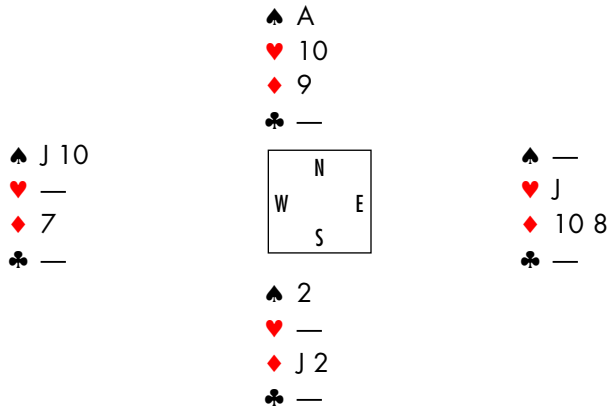
Vince had played the hand well and in fact had come very close to making 3NT. Did you notice how he could have succeeded and where he went wrong?



Let's back up to the point where Vince cashed his ♦J. This play turned out to be fatal, but on a different lie of the cards it would have been necessary to spare Vince a nasty guess. If instead Vince had cashed another round of clubs, discarding a diamond from dummy, he would have kept the ball in play.



On Vince's last club, West would have to keep both of his spades and he would pitch down to a singleton diamond. Vince could then afford to pitch the ♠7 from dummy and a spade to dummy's ♠A would squeeze East in hearts and diamonds.



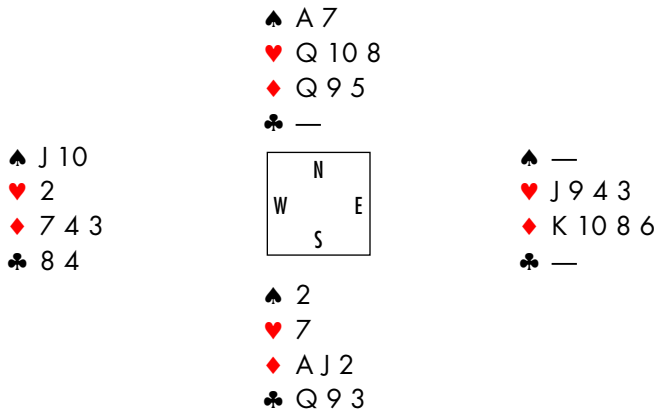
East would come down to one diamond, just like his partner. A diamond to the ♦J would take care of both of the defenders' remaining diamonds and Vince would win a glorious Trick 13 with his ♦2!

The four-card ending that was reached with the hypothetical line of play just described is technically known as a non-simultaneous double squeeze. This squeeze operates anytime East has the ♥J, irrespective of the position of the ♦10.

While it is true that East was a favorite to hold the ♥J as West was known to have length in both clubs and spades, it is difficult to determine if the line of play just described is better than the one

that Vince actually took. I am not going to try! While it is not too difficult to calculate the odds of the double squeeze line working, the odds of success for Vince's line is much harder to judge. It depends partly on how well Vince would have guessed in the endgame — assuming there had been a winning guess to make.

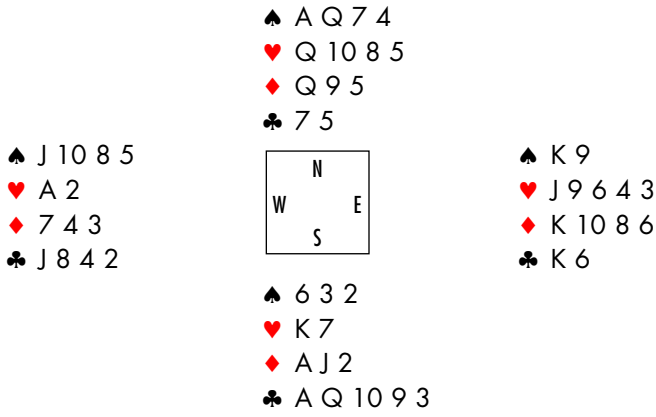
I am almost ready to put this deal to bed, but before I do let's think about the defense for a moment. East-West did almost everything right, but they could have left Vince without recourse. Do you see how the defense could have ensured the defeat of 3NT?



At the point where West led a club, a spade instead would have sealed declarer's fate by destroying the double squeeze. A diamond return (less likely in practice) would ruin the double squeeze in a different way.

Vince Demuy

The full deal:



DON'T SPEAK TOO SOON...

We have already encountered Sabine Auken and her partner, Daniela von Arnim, arguably the world's strongest women's partnership. Sabine Auken played this deal in the seventh round-robin match of the Venice Cup at the 2003 World Bridge Championships in Monte Carlo. Every segment of the 2003 World Championships was broadcast live on Bridge Base Online via Vugraph. I predicted the breaking of several records during these broadcasts, but the numbers we experienced were beyond my expectations. Now it is routine to log in and be able to watch world and national championships almost every day on the Net; this was one of the first such occasions where it was possible.

This deal has been rotated to make South the declarer.

♠ Q J 8 7 4 3
♥ A 9 6
♦ K
♣ J 10 5

♠ 6
♥ K 5 4 2
♦ A J 10 6 4 2
♣ A 2

E-W vul.

West	**Daniela**	**East**	**Sabine**
	1♠	pass	2♣
dbl	2♦	pass	2NT
pass	3♠	pass	3NT
all pass			

Daniela opened 1♠ and Sabine, South, responded 2♣, an artificial game force in their partnership. After West doubled (showing clubs), Sabine and Daniela continued with a series of artificial bids, ending in 3NT with Sabine as declarer.

West's opening lead was the ♣Q (showing the ♣K) and the dummy Daniela laid down was not a thing of beauty. While 11 HCP and a six-card major are usually enough for me to open the bidding at the one-level, I would have passed with Daniela's hand, especially given that she was vulnerable against not. If I had the ♠10 (or maybe even the ♠9) I would have opened with a weak 2♠, but singleton kings give me the creeps when I have a marginal opening bid. However, regardless of my own style in this area, Sabine and Daniela are very aggressive when it comes to opening the bidding. For them the North hand is a clear 1♠ opening and, indeed, I would have been surprised to see Daniela do anything else.

Meanwhile, the Vugraph commentators, both online and at the playing site, were wondering why it was taking Sabine so long to play on what look like a relatively uncomplicated hand. What was she thinking about? How would you play this deal as declarer? Think about your answer before reading on.

Daniela von Arnim

After winning with the ♣A, it is clear to go after diamonds. If Sabine's hand had another entry, it would be clear to unblock the ♦K on the first round of the suit, return to the closed hand and play diamonds from the top to drive out the ♦Q. On the actual deal, however, Sabine would run out of hand entries and she would need the ♦Q to be doubleton in order to make her contract.

If you are a serious student of the game then you have probably already spotted a better chance in the diamond suit itself. Five diamond tricks can be won whenever that suit is 3-3 by cashing the ♦A on the first round of the suit (eating dummy's ♦K). Declarer then drives out the ♦Q and eventually scores four more diamond tricks, two hearts and another club to make 3NT.

Easy, right? Not so fast — you have just made a false claim! Yes, 3NT would indeed be easy from here if West set up a trick for you in clubs when he won his diamond trick, but what would you do if West led back a heart instead?

First of all, you would have to win with the ♥K in your hand in order to preserve dummy's ♥A as an entry to the clubs. Then, since you would be in your hand for the last time, you would have to run the diamonds. The 3-3 break is good news, but there is some bad news just around the corner. You are going to have to make four more discards from dummy. You can spare another two spades and you can also afford to pitch a heart, but when you lead your last diamond winner, dummy will be squeezed in three suits.

♠ Q J 8
♥ A
♦ —
♣ J 10

♠ 6
♥ 5 4 2
♦ 2
♣ 2

No matter what you discard, accurate defense will defeat the contract. Of course, Sabine Auken knew that the *a priori* odds of a

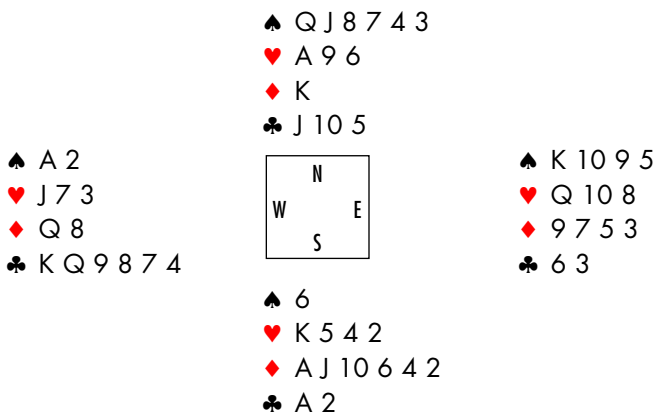
3-3 diamond break were about 36%. She also knew that *a priori*, the ♦Q would be doubleton about 16% of the time (one third of the 48% for 4-2 breaks). No doubt Sabine also had at least a rough idea of the degree to which West's known club length impacted the *a priori* odds.

Yes, Sabine is good at math, but more impressively, she realized that math had nothing to do with this deal. Despite the fact that a 3-3 diamond break was more likely than a doubleton ♦Q, Sabine saw the impending suicide squeeze and knew that her contract could not be made against best defense on the layout shown above.

Sabine therefore decided to play for the ♦Q to be doubleton. I was impressed that Sabine figured this out more quickly than our Vugraph commentators (even though they could see all 52 cards), but I was even more impressed when she ducked a heart at Trick 2!

This play was designed to result in one less undertrick if hearts were 3-3 and the ♦Q was not friendly enough to be doubleton. East returned a club to West's ♣K and West cleared the clubs by leading a suit preference ♣9 to dummy's ♣J. Sabine then unblocked the ♦K and cashed dummy's ♥A, crossing back to the ♥K in her hand. The 3-3 heart break meant that Sabine's remaining heart was a winner. When the ♦Q fell under the ♦A, Sabine claimed her contract with two overtricks.

The full deal:



HYPOTHETICAL SLAM

Bridge is a curious game — it cuts across all the otherwise impenetrable barriers in society. Go to a bridge tournament, and you'll soon discover that no one cares who you are outside the game. All the usual issues of race, color, religion, financial success, and so forth, disappear, and only one thing matters: can you play cards? So bridge can afford you opportunities to get to know people who in the normal course of events would never cross your path. As an example, this deal took place at Microsoft founder Bill Gates' house in Seattle, Washington. I was Bill's partner, playing against investment guru Warren Buffett and World Championship gold medallist Sharon Osberg.

Bill Gates

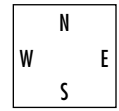
Holding

♠ K Q 7 4 ♥ K Q 2 ♦ — ♣ K Q J 9 8 5

I made a bid that was (perhaps deservedly) unlucky: I opened 1♣ as South. Warren overcalled 1♠; Bill bid 2♦ and Sharon passed. This set up a nasty bidding problem for me. I wanted to be in game, but 3♣ (and 2NT) would be non-forcing. I could have cue-bid 2♠ or bid a non-suit with 2♥, but I was concerned about the complications that might follow from these actions.

My choice, an admittedly sick 3NT, didn't rate to result in any complications; in fact, it rated to end the auction. I was concerned, however, about missing slam. In retrospect, perhaps I should have bid 4♣ with the intention of playing in either 5♣ or 6♣, depending on how the auction continued. On the actual deal, Bill would likely have jumped to 6♣, which would have been the final contract. So here is the auction we might have had:

♠ A 2
♥ A 6 5 3
♦ K Q 9 5 4
♣ 10 7



♠ K Q 7 4
♥ K Q 2
♦ —
♣ K Q J 9 8 5

Warren	Bill	Sharon	Fred
			1♣
1♠	2♦	pass	4♣
pass	6♣	all pass	

Warren would have probably led the ♠J. He almost certainly had both missing aces given his overcall. However, Warren has been around long enough to know not to put all of his eggs in one basket by leading an ace after an auction like the one we had. Assume that Warren has the ♦A and the ♣A and then think about how you would play as declarer before reading on.

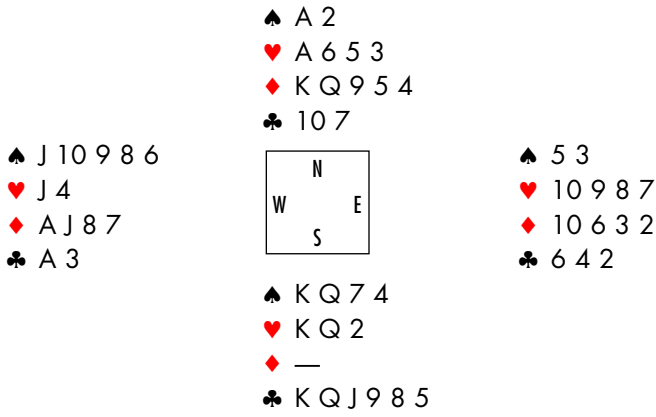
Sharon Osberg

First things first. You had better hope that spades are 5-2. If Warren has six spades then there is nothing you can do to prevent him from winning with the ♣A and giving his partner a spade ruff. There is, however, a line of play that depends upon little more than spades being 5-2. Do you see what it is?

I believe that the correct line of play is to win the first trick with dummy's ♠A, play a spade to your hand and ruff your spade loser in dummy. It would be a mistake to try to draw trumps now. If you did then Warren would win with the ♣A and give Sharon a spade ruff for the setting trick. You can prevent this by ruffing your remaining (winning) spade in dummy. You are going to have to cross to your hand twice. Whether you should do this in hearts once or with two diamond ruffs is a subject I will not discuss fully. Suppose you ruff a diamond next, ruff your spade winner in dummy and return to your hand in hearts (you might prefer to ruff another diamond if Sharon discards hearts when you ruff your spades in dummy). You are then in a position to drive out the ♣A and, barring any miserable breaks, you will have no trouble taking the rest of the tricks.

What a neat hand that would have been — had it happened!

The full deal:



HARD TO SEE

This is a lovely play problem that was sent to me by Piotr Klimowicz. He hails originally from Poland and is now one of Canada's leading players.

♠ K 6 5
♥ 3
♦ A J 7 6 5
♣ K 10 3 2

♠ A Q 4 3 2
♥ A Q 6 5 4
♦ K 3
♣ 7

In this deal, suppose you are declarer in 4♠ and West's opening lead is the ♠10. Your mission is to find a one hundred percent line to make your contract under the assumption that neither defender has a singleton or void in any suit. See if you can successfully complete your mission before reading on.

Assuming that trumps break 3-2 and none of the side suits split horribly, you have five spade tricks, the ♥A and a ruff in dummy, and two diamond winners for a total of nine tricks. Your tenth winner could come from diamonds, clubs or hearts via the ♥Q, a long heart, or a second heart ruff in dummy.

Piotr Klimowicz found an elegant line of play that lands the contract regardless of the layout of the missing cards (under the assumption that neither defender has a singleton or void in any suit). His line starts with winning the first trick with dummy's ♠K, playing a heart to the ♥A, ruffing a heart in dummy and then drawing trumps. This leaves you in this position:

♠ —
♥ —
♦ A J 7 6
♣ K 10 3 2

N
W E
S

♠ 4 3
♥ Q 6 5
♦ K 3
♣ 7

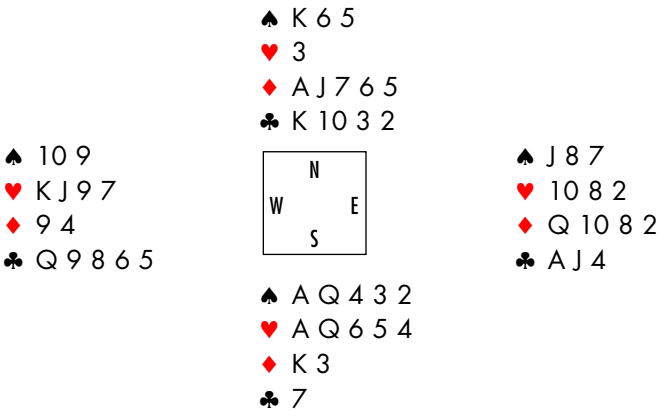
The next trick is critical. Declarer must cash the ♦K before leading a club toward dummy. If West plays the ♣A, then dummy's ♣K will be your tenth winner. Otherwise, you should cover whatever card he plays as cheaply as possible. Suppose East wins dummy's ♣10 with his ♣J. What do you think he should play back now?

In fact, it doesn't matter what East's hand is or which suit he leads back now. Obviously a diamond return into the ♦AJ is not a good idea. You could ruff the ♣A return, setting up dummy's ♣K, while if East returns a low club you can discard a heart. West is welcome to win with the ♣A if he has it — the ♣K will now represent your game-going trick. East must therefore return a heart to cause you difficulty. You must play the ♥Q from your hand in case East was dealt five hearts to the ♥K. West can win with the ♥K but now there is only one more heart missing. West's best defense is to force you in clubs, but you can surrender a heart trick to the

defense. With a long heart suit established, you can claim the rest of the tricks.

The solution to this problem is not complex from a technical point of view (at least compared to others in this book), but the solution is counterintuitive for some reason. Try giving this problem to an expert player you know. I bet he or she will have a harder time with it than you might expect!

Here's the full deal:



SACRIFICING YOUR HONOR

Matthew and Pamela Granovetter both have a strong connection with my hometown, Toronto. Matthew grew up in New York state, and used to come to our tournaments, while Pamela lived in Toronto for several years. While both are expert-level players, they are perhaps best known as the publishers of *Bridge Today* magazine and as the authors of numerous books and magazine columns. Matthew's *I Shot My Bridge Partner* remains one of the funniest books ever written about the game, while retaining a strong instructional element.

Matthew Granovetter

Having relocated to Israel some years ago, the Granovetters aren't seen as frequently at North American tournaments these days, but you will often spot them playing online, which is where this deal occurred:

♠ K Q 6 5
♥ 9
♦ A J 9 6 2
♣ K J 2

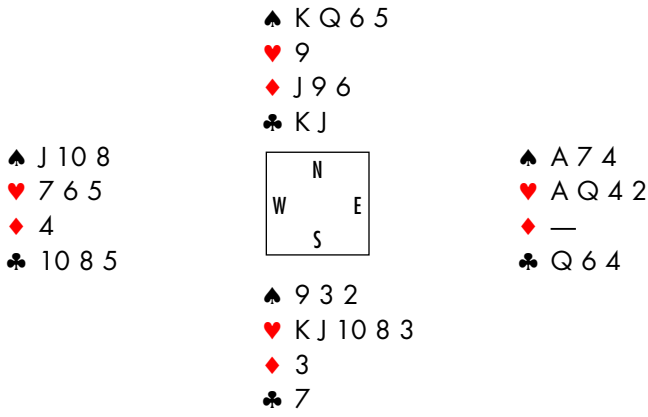
♠ 9 3 2
♥ K J 10 8 3
♦ Q 10 3
♣ A 7

West	Pamela	East	Matthew
	1♦	dbl	1♥
pass	1♠	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

West's opening lead was the ♣3. Think about how you would play as declarer before reading on.

Matthew got off to a good start when he played the ♣2 from dummy at Trick 1. Since East's takeout double made him a favorite to hold the ♣Q, Matthew knew that East was going to gain the lead sooner or later. However, the fact that Matthew had retained the ♣ KJ in dummy would make it costly for East to play clubs again. East inserted the ♣9 and Matthew won with his ♣A. He led the ♦10 to the next trick.

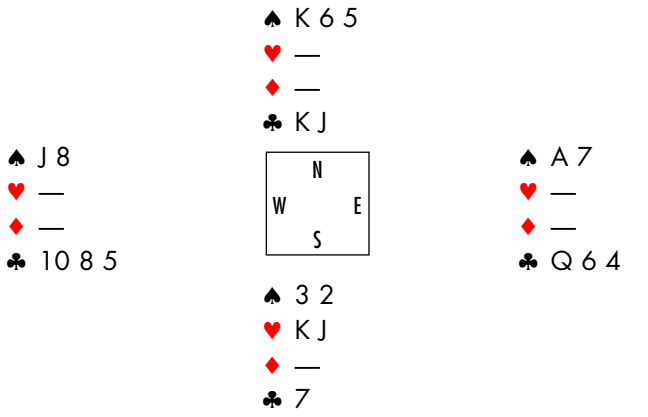
Afterwards, some unknown correspondent named Eddie Kantar suggested that the ♦Q would have been a better card to play. West would be more likely to cover the ♦Q than the ♦10 and a cover would be most welcome given the lack of entries to the closed hand. In the actual play, the ♦10 won the trick and when Matthew continued with the ♦Q from his hand, West covered with the ♦K. Matthew won with dummy's ♦A and East followed, leaving this position:



Matthew had won three tricks already and he still had three winners in diamonds as well as the ♣K to go. Developing an eighth trick in spades would not be difficult and East's takeout double marked him with the ♥A.

Matthew's main problem was that he did not have an entry to his own hand. Although he could set up the ♥K as a winner, he would not be able to get to it. So instead of playing a heart now, he chose to run dummy's diamonds, realizing that he did not have to depend on the heart suit to provide his ninth winner. East pitched low hearts on the third and fourth rounds of diamonds.

When dummy's last diamond was played, East pitched the ♥Q (he could not have discarded more effectively). Matthew exited in hearts; East won with the ♥A and found the best defense of a low spade return. When Matthew tried the ♠9 from his hand, West covered with the ♠10 and the trick was won in dummy. You can see the cards that remained now:

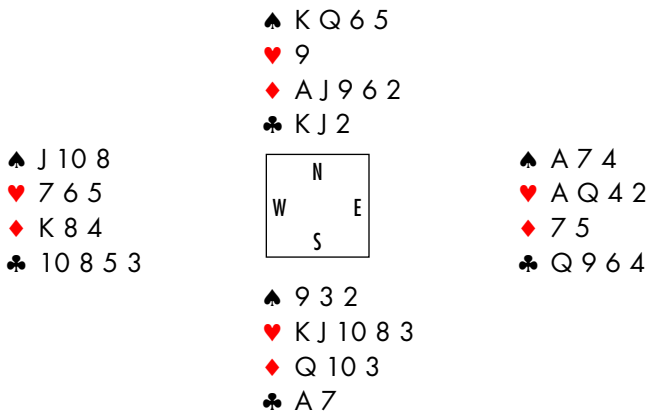


There are other play sequences that would have led to nine tricks, but there was only one way for Matthew to make his contract from here. He had to lead the remaining spade honor from dummy — and he did!

East won with the ♠A, but he could do no better than to lead a spade to his partner.

When West then returned a club perforce, Matthew had what was truly a 'free' finesse for an overtrick. (A club finesse at Trick 1 would not have been free, as the contract would have failed if Matthew had tried it.) At this stage, Matthew didn't care if East could win with the ♣Q as both dummy and his own hand were high. Even if East had two spades to cash when he won Matthew's ♠K exit with the ♠A, he would still have to lead a club into dummy's ♣KJ when he was done with his spades. Only if Matthew had led a low spade from the dummy in the endgame could East have escaped by ducking and letting West win the trick. A club through dummy's ♣KJ would then have doomed the contract.

The full deal:



PLAYING IN NOTRUMP MEANS NEVER HAVING TO SAY YOU'RE SORRY

This deal was played by my wife, Sheri Winestock, in the second qualifying session of the 1999 nationally-rated Women's Board-A-Match Teams tournament. Unless you play these National events, there isn't a lot of opportunity to practice this form of the game. Basically, it's a team game where each board is simply scored as a win, a tie or a loss, instead of being converted to IMPs. Any score difference, even as little as 10 points, is a win or loss. Think of it as matchpoints on a 1 top! On this occasion, Sheri was playing with Chicago's Judy Wadas. Sheri and Judy conducted an intelligent, completely natural auction, which unfortunately landed them in a dicey contact. Sheri read the cards well, however, and showed good technique to make her contract and win the board for her team.

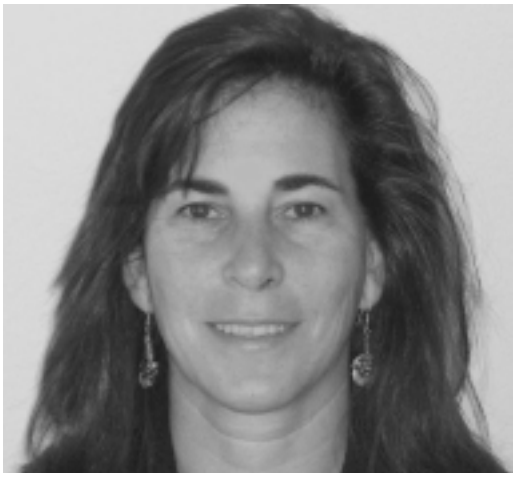
♠ K Q 8 2
♥ 2
♦ A K 5 2
♣ A 10 7 5

♠ 9 5 3
♥ A 10 5 4
♦ J 10 8
♣ K 9 3

N-S vul.

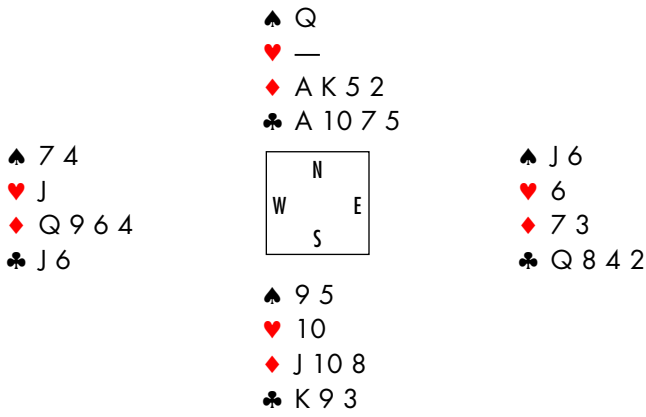
West	Judy	East	Sheri
	1♦	pass	1♥
pass	1♠	pass	1NT
pass	2♣	pass	2♦
pass	2NT	all pass	

The final contract of 2NT was not a thing of beauty, but I like Sheri and Judy's auction. The temptation to play in notrump at board-a-match (or matchpoints) can often be hard to resist.



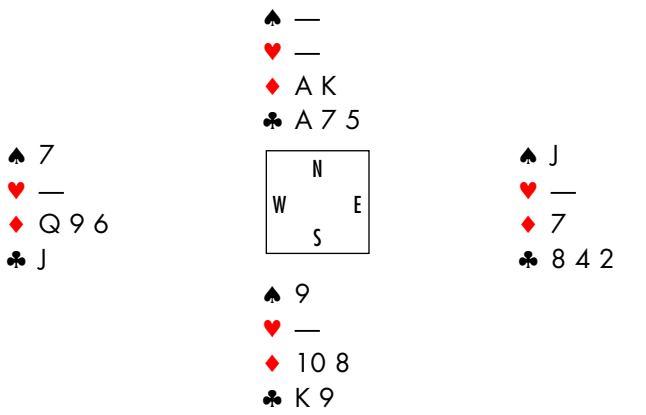
Sheri Winestock

Sheri allowed West's opening lead of the ♥K to win the trick and East discouraged. West continued with the ♥Q, giving Sheri a problem as to what she should discard from dummy. Sheri chose to discard a spade and ducked again in her hand. West shifted to the ♠10, although a low spade would have been better. Sheri covered with dummy's ♠K and East won with the ♠A. East returned a heart to Sheri's ♥A and she discarded another spade from dummy. This was the position now:



Sheri continued by leading the ♦J and passing it when West chose not to cover. Sheri was unsure about the heart distribution and wanted to play on clubs without giving West a chance to gain the lead. She therefore tried a club to dummy's ♣10 and East's ♣Q.

East played her remaining heart, won by West, and Sheri judged well to pitch a diamond from dummy. West exited in spades to dummy's ♠Q (nothing else is better).

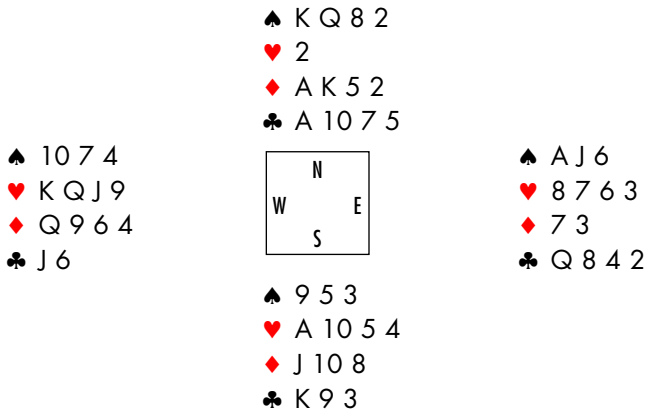


Looking at all the cards, we can see that Sheri could have played a club to her ♣K now, dropping West's ♣J. The ♣9 would then represent her eighth trick. However, this play will fail whenever East was dealt the ♣J instead of West (in that case, a finesse of the ♣9 will work instead). Sheri found a nice way to avoid a guess in clubs. She finished dummy's diamonds, squeezing East in spades and clubs.

East had no answer when dummy's last diamond winner was played. East pitched a spade, hoping that her partner had been dealt the ♠9 (you can now see why West should have switched to a low spade and not the ♠10 at Trick 3).

It was Sheri, however, who was holding the ♠9 and she was able to claim the last three tricks along with her contract. Nicely played, Sheri!

The full deal:



OPEN BOOK

One Thursday I received a long distance phone call from an excited bridge professional: Marc Jacobus (Marc and I both live in Las Vegas, but he had spent most of the week playing bridge in Los Angeles). 'I have a great play problem for you!' said Marc. Not surprisingly, he was correct.

I have met a handful of bridge players who rival Marc in terms of kindness, but I have met only two other world-class players who rival Marc in terms of speed of play. They would be Alan Sontag, whom I played with in a recent tournament and who was mentioned in a previous deal, and Grant Baze. I like to think that eventually I might learn to play as well as these guys play, but I know that I have absolutely no hope of playing both as well as they do and as quickly as they do at the same time!

This deal is the play problem that Marc told me about.

'Suppose you hold

♠ A K J 4 2 ♥ 6 ♦ A Q 7 5 ♣ A K J

and open 1♠ as South and West overcalls 2NT, showing exactly five hearts and five clubs,' said Marc.

'What kind of convention is that?' I asked.

Marc's answer wasn't appropriate for a family publication and for the purposes of the declarer play problem you are about to see, his answer is not really relevant.

'Your partner passes and East bids 3♥. You try double, and when your partner bids 3♠, you take a shot at 4♠. Everyone passes and now you have to play the hand.

♠ 7 6 3
♥ 10 8 5
♦ J 10 2
♣ 9 7 6 3

♠ A K J 4 2
♥ 6
♦ A Q 7 5
♣ A K J

West	North	East	South
			1♠
2NT[1]	pass	3♥	dbl
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

1. 5 hearts and 5 clubs.

West's lead of the ♥A wins the first trick. He continues with the ♥K, which you ruff. I have to run — call me back when you've figured out the answer,' said Marc.

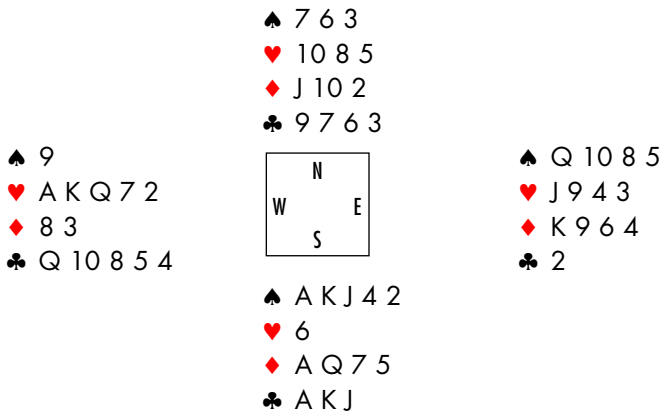
Marc's faith in my analytical skills was touching, but misplaced as it turns out. It didn't take me long to call him back with what I thought was the correct answer. Think about how you would play as declarer before you read the rest of this story.

When I called Marc back, I said something like this: 'I have lost one trick already and, given the bidding, it is almost certain that I will have to lose a club trick. A diamond loser is also inevitable, as I have no way to get to dummy to finesse in that suit. It appears that this problem boils down to avoiding a loser in the trump suit.' Marc continued to listen as I continued to misanalyze. 'Finessing against the queen third of spades with East is not going to work.

It's true that I can force an entry to dummy in diamonds, but after I win the (say) club return, West will ruff the second round of diamonds (since my assumption about the spade suit leaves West with 2-5-1-5 distribution).

'No, I cannot make my contract if East has the guarded ♠Q,' I continued. 'My only chance is to lay down the ♠A and ♠K in the hope that West was dealt a doubleton ♠Q. If that doesn't work, then I will either need West to have a singleton ♦K or East to have a singleton ♣Q.' That was the end of my analysis. I awaited Marc's congratulations for coming up with the correct solution.

It was not forthcoming. Instead I received a question. 'What is the most likely layout of the trump suit?' Marc asked. That was not a hard one. West's singleton is more likely to be in spades than in diamonds (because East-West started with six diamonds and only five spades) and East is a big favorite to have been dealt the ♠Q. So this is the likely layout:

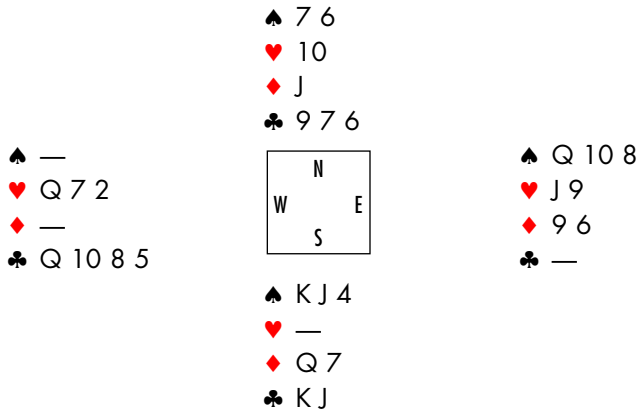


'But you cannot make 4♠ if you have to lose a trump trick,' I claimed for the second time in five minutes.

'You're wrong about that,' countered Marc. Although the truth of Marc's contention was not immediately obvious to me, it became clear that he was correct when he explained his line of play. Can you see how 4♠ can be made against the layout of the East-West cards shown above?

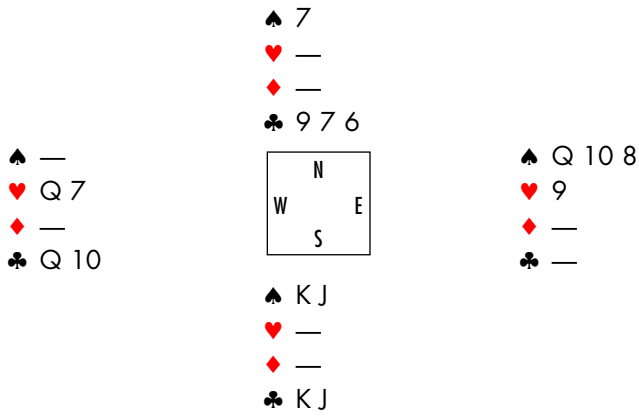
'The next three tricks should be won by your three aces,' said Marc. 'Cash the ♠A, the ♦A (you never know — the ♦K might fall), and the ♣A (because the ♣Q might fall and, as you will see, it is important to cash one round of clubs early).

'Assuming that nothing exciting happens on any of these tricks, surrender a diamond trick to the defense. It doesn't matter who wins this trick or what they return. Supposing East wins the ♦K, this will be the position:



Let's say he returns a diamond, which is as good as anything. You win the trick in dummy and you must now make the key but unintuitive play of ruffing a heart in your hand. This demonstrates that it would not have been effective for East to return a heart instead of a diamond.'

I had finally seen the light. 'I get it — you ruff your ♦Q in dummy and lead a club toward your hand.



If East discards his last heart, you can win the trick and get out with the ♣J. East will have to trump his partner's winner and lead away from his ♠Q at Trick 12.'

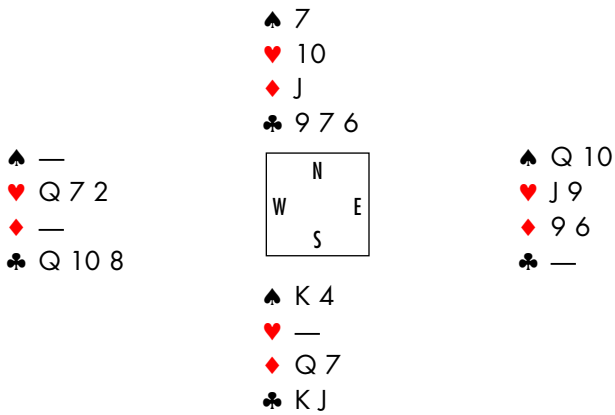
'It would not do East any good to ruff the third round of clubs,' I added. 'A trump return would allow me to draw trumps and enjoy my high club at the end and, on a heart return, I would discard my last club while ruffing in dummy. With the lead in dummy, East's remaining doubleton ♠Q would then be picked up via a trump coup.'

I thanked Marc for sharing this deal with me.

It wasn't until I started to write up this deal that I realized that Marc had made a rare (for him) analytical error, which I had missed as well when we discussed this deal. Did you spot the flaw in Marc's plan and how Marc's line could have been improved?

Suppose that, after winning with the ♦K, East had returned a trump instead of a diamond.

The best declarer could do from there would be to finesse the ♠J, leaving this position:

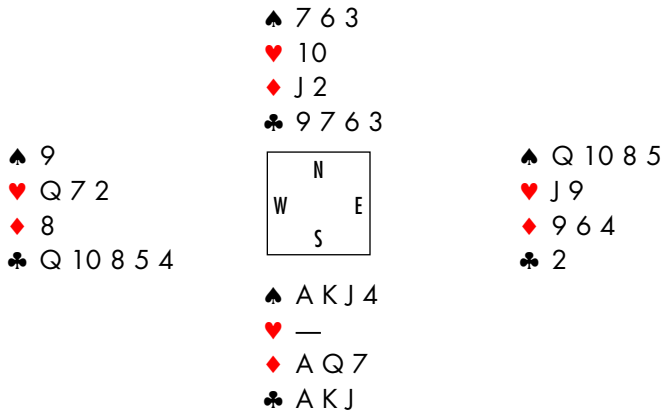


and then play a diamond to dummy. If a club was then led from dummy, East could discard his last diamond (you can work out why this would be fatal for declarer). If, as before, declarer ruffed a heart in his hand and a diamond in dummy, East would then ruff in when a club was led from dummy. At this point a heart return

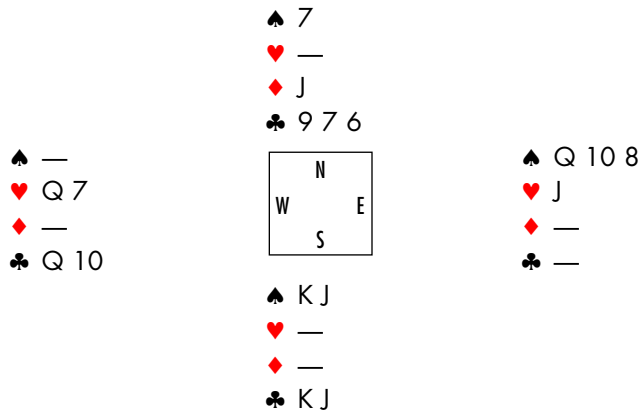
from East would force South to ruff, promoting East's ♠Q into the setting trick.

So I phoned back my friend Marc and told him the bad news. He had not given this deal any more thought during the intervening few days, but remarkably, it took him no more than a few seconds to figure out how declarer could have come out on top against this new salvo from the defenders.

After ruffing the second round of hearts, declarer should surrender a diamond trick to East (cashing a top club first does not hurt, but cashing a top trump first leads to defeat against best defense). It should also be noted that a low diamond at Trick 3 leaves the defense without recourse if West was dealt a doubleton ♦K. We are now here:



There is no winning defense from here, but let's assume that East returns a trump — the only play that allowed the defense to defeat Marc's original line. Declarer wins with a high trump in his hand (finessing the ♠J is an unnecessary risk) and there is now some flexibility in terms of the timing of the next few tricks. The key elements of the play from here are that declarer has to cash a high club, use his first diamond entry to dummy to ruff a heart in hand, and finish the diamonds while ruffing the last round in dummy in order to lead a club toward the closed hand. A club lead from dummy at an earlier point would give East a chance to defeat the contract by discarding a diamond.



We have seen this position before — there is no way for the defense to come to more than one trick from here. East's best defense is to ruff and return a heart, but declarer discards the last club from his hand and takes the ruff in dummy. East's remaining doubleton ♠Q is caught in a trump coup — there is nothing the defense can do about it when declarer plays this way.

Well, if the truth be told, there is something that the defense can do. If West somehow finds the impossible switch to his singleton trump at Trick 2, even Marc Jacobus would still be trying to come up with an answer for declarer. After Marc was kind enough to share this deal with me, the least I could do would be to phone him yet again and tell him to give up!

TAKING ON THE FIELD

This deal comes live from the 2001 ACBL Spring NABC in Kansas City! I played this deal in the first qualifying session of the North American Open Pairs event. I was playing with Darren Wolpert, at the time Canada's best junior player, and now a Bermuda Bowl veteran. Our opponents were New Englanders Doug Doub and Frank Merblum. (Doug and Frank eventually won this prestigious North American Championship.) The deal has been rotated in order to make South the declarer.

♠ J 9 8 5 4
♥ 3
♦ A Q J 7
♣ Q 4 2

♠ A 6
♥ A Q 10 7 2
♦ —
♣ K 9 7 6 5 3

Doug	**Darren**	**Frank**	**Fred**
			1♥
pass	1♠	pass	2♣
pass	2NT	pass	3♣
all pass			

The form of scoring was matchpoints, so I chose to open the bidding 1♥; however, I certainly had no strong convictions that my choice was better than 1♣. I almost never open a five-card suit before a six-card suit, but I judged it to be the best call on this deal. The fact that my hearts were strong and my clubs were weak certainly contributed to my decision.

My bigger concern with a 1♣ opener was that over a 1♠ response I would either have to rebid 2♣ (and risk losing the heart suit) or reverse into 2♥. Had I chosen to open 1♣, I would certainly have chosen the reverse of 2♥ over a 1♠ response, but reversing with only 13 HCP on a possible misfit can be very dangerous. In any case, I considered this to be a very close decision. The next time I hold a hand like this, do not be surprised if I try opening 1♣ instead of 1♥.

Darren responded 1♠ and bid an invitational 2NT over my 2♣ rebid. I was now wishing I had opened 1♣. I chose to be conservative and bid only 3♣. I knew that 3♣ would usually end the auction but 4♣, the main alternative, could get the partnership too high if Darren had only two clubs or if all of his high cards were in the wrong places. I also thought that there was some chance that Darren would be able to raise clubs if the partnership belonged in 5♣. Anyway, Darren passed and there I was in 3♣.

Doug's opening lead was the ♦10 and Darren put down a nice dummy. The club game looked to be a reasonable contract and we would certainly have arrived there if I had opened 1♣ instead of 1♥. Meanwhile, do you agree with Darren's bidding? His 1♠ response and 2NT rebid were obviously correct, but what about his pass on the final round? Should Darren have passed or raised to 4♣ on the third round of bidding? What do you think?

I agree with Darren's pass. Given my non-forcing 3♣ bid and the fact that I like to open light on distributional hands, Darren judged that 5♣ would usually be less than a 50% contract. Getting a plus score on hands like this is critical at matchpoints and Darren did not want to sacrifice a plus score by searching for an unlikely 5♣ contract. Darren obviously had no idea that I had such a powerful hand and that my bidding had distorted its actual distribution. He expected most of the field to play a club partial, and hoped that I could take more tricks than the rest of the field. It turned out that Darren was 100% right about this. I tried dummy's ♦Q at Trick 1 and when Frank followed small, I discarded a small spade.

Think about how you would play as declarer before reading on. Remember that the game is matchpoints, so you don't have to worry so much about making your contract. Just try to win as many tricks as you can.

I continued with a heart to my ♥A, followed by a heart ruff in dummy. I cashed the ♦A for a heart discard and ruffed a diamond in the closed hand. When I led a third round of hearts, Doug followed with the ♥K as I ruffed in dummy. The moment of truth had come.

♠ J 9 8 5 4
♥ —
♦ J
♣ Q

N
W E
S

♠ A
♥ Q
♦ —
♣ K 9 7 6 5

At first glance it appeared to be right to lead the ♣Q in an effort to start drawing trumps. On a good day, only the ♣A would have to be lost and I could take twelve tricks. However, this was how the cards actually lay:

♠ J 9 8 5 4
♥ —
♦ J
♣ Q

♠ K 7 2
♥ —
♦ K 9
♣ J 10

N
W E
S

♠ Q 10 3
♥ J
♦ 6
♣ A 8

♠ A
♥ Q
♦ —
♣ K 9 7 6 5

On this day, leading the ♣Q would have resulted in only eleven tricks for declarer. Frank would have been able to win with his ♣A and give Doug a heart ruff.

Doug had already shown up with the ♥K and the ♦K and rated to have an honor card in spades as well. I decided Frank was

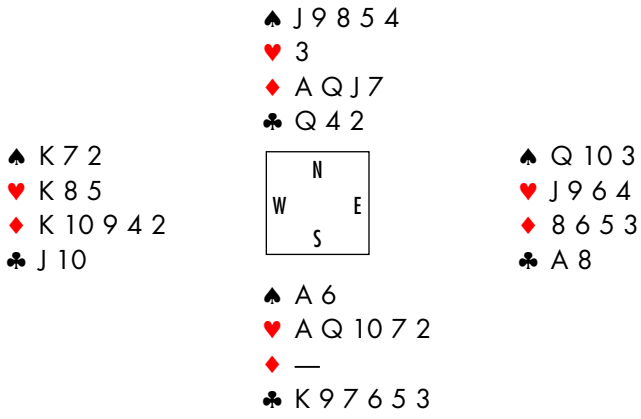
a favorite to hold the ♣A because if Doug held that card, he probably would have taken some action over my 1♥ opening bid. Can you see how I was able to hold the defenders to one trump trick from here?

I continued with a spade to my ♠A and played the winning ♥Q. This left Doug with no answer. If Doug had chosen to discard, then the ♥Q would have held and I could have drawn trumps, losing only one trick. Doug figured this out, of course, and correctly ruffed the ♥Q with the ♣10. I overruffed with dummy's ♣Q to win the trick.

I ruffed a spade back to my hand and played the ♣K, pinning Doug's remaining singleton ♣J as Frank won with the ♣A. Admittedly, I would have felt very silly if Doug had been dealt the ♣A10 doubleton, but I judged this to be unlikely given Doug's silence in the bidding.

I was now able to claim the rest of the tricks. Although +170 would be no triumph at IMPs, this result was well above average at matchpoints. Most of the field played in a club partscore and only one other declarer ended up taking twelve tricks.

The full deal:



THE FEMKE SOLUTION

The Netherlands is a natural haven for bridge players. It has the largest per capita bridge population in the world — in fact, bridge is such a popular sport there that I was once actually recognized on the street! I am quite certain this could only happen in The Netherlands. Moreover, major Dutch corporations such as Forbo-Krommenie continue to take a great interest in our game. The sponsorship of such companies has made it possible for the hard-working local organizers to run some spectacular bridge tournaments each year.

Femke Hoogweg

This deal took place during the International Teams event at the 2001 Forbo-Krommenie, arguably the strongest Swiss Teams event in the bridge calendar. Many of the best players from all over the world play in this event each year and the field is filled out by dozens of strong Dutch teams.

Femke Hoogweg, one of Holland's rising stars of women's bridge, was playing with World Champion Wietske van Zwol against Brad Moss and myself when this deal was played. While the correct line of play is not as difficult as most of the others in this book, it does contain a theme that has not come up before — why bridge experts seem to make correct 'guesses' more often than lesser mortals.

♠ 8 7 3
♥ 7 6 5 2
♦ K 10 7 3
♣ K 4

♠ Q
♥ K J
♦ A J 9 8 4
♣ A Q 9 7 3

Brad	**Wietske**	**Fred**	**Femke**
	pass	pass	1♦
pass	1♥	1♠	3♣
3♠	5♦	all pass	

Brad led the ♠A and my ♠5 was an upside-down attitude signal that requested a spade continuation. Brad continued with the ♠2 to my ♠K, which Femke ruffed. Femke played a trump to dummy's ♦K, followed by a trump toward her hand. She was pleased to see me produce the ♦Q on the second round and won with her ♦A.

Femke started on clubs by leading low to dummy's ♣K. Both defenders followed when Femke returned to her hand with a second round of clubs, but when she cashed a third round of clubs for

a heart discard from dummy, I discarded a spade. Femke then ruffed the fourth round of clubs in dummy to establish the suit. This was the end position she had reached:

♠ 8
♥ 7 6 5
♦ 10
♣ —

♠ —
♥ K J
♦ J 9
♣ 9

The 4-2 club break meant that Femke would have to guess the hearts to make her contract. When she led a heart toward her hand, I followed small.

Think about whether you would play the ♥K or the ♥J from your hand. This is not really a guess — there is definitely a correct answer to this problem. Would you play the right card for the right reason?

Femke correctly played the ♥J from her hand. This proved to be a smart move, as you can see by looking at the full deal.

♠ 8 7 3
♥ 7 6 5 2
♦ K 10 7 3
♣ K 4

♠ A J 4 2
♥ A 8 3
♦ 5 2
♣ 10 6 5 2

♠ K 10 9 6 5
♥ Q 10 9 4
♦ Q 6
♣ J 8

♠ Q
♥ K J
♦ A J 9 8 4
♣ A Q 9 7 3

With the ♥Q on her right and the ♥A on her left, Femke claimed her contract. Her aggressive bidding and strong play had earned a vulnerable game swing for the Dutch Women's Team.

So, do you understand why it was correct for Femke to play the ♥J at the critical point of the deal? My vulnerable overcall and the theory of split aces would seem to suggest that once Brad led the ♠A, the ♥A was more likely to be on declarer's right, making the ♥K the winning play. However, the key inference that allowed Femke to come up with the correct solution to this problem had absolutely nothing to do with the bidding. It had to do with my encouraging signal to the first trick. If the positions of the ♥Q and the ♥A had been switched, I would surely have discouraged spades at Trick 1 in an attempt to get Brad to switch to a heart. After all, if I had held the ♥A, Brad the ♥K and Femke's clubs had been stronger, a heart shift at Trick 2 would have been necessary to defeat the contract; otherwise, three of dummy's hearts would eventually have been discarded on declarer's clubs. Since I did not discourage spades at Trick 1, Femke was able to deduce the true layout of the hands.

The bottom line is that the defenders are in a terrible position on this deal. They are forced to either tell declarer how to make the contract on some layouts (such as the actual layout) or give up on defeating the contract on other layouts. Congratulations to Femke for figuring all of this out and for playing the right card for the right reason.

BOOBY-TRAPPED

This is a declarer play problem that was sent to me by Poland's Andrzej Matuszewski. You, as South, are the dealer with both sides vulnerable holding:

♠ A 8 7 ♥ A K Q 7 4 ♦ K 8 6 5 3 ♣ —

You open 1♥. West overcalls 2♣, and your partner cuebids 3♣ to suggest a limit raise or better in support of hearts. East passes and you must decide what to bid. Unfortunately you are not in a regular partnership. What call would you make?

It is hard to say what the correct call really is. I think that 3♠ and 4♣ both have a lot going for them, as these bids are clear slam tries. I also think 3♦ would be a very appealing bid if partner could read it as a natural or help-suit game try. Knowing partner's feelings about diamonds would definitely make your hand easier to bid. In contrast, 3♠ and 4♣ do not exactly clue partner in that his diamond holding rates to be critical.

The problem is that 3♦ is the only bid available below 3♥. Perhaps 3♦ should just be a 'general game try', not suggesting length in diamonds. However, what a bid *should* mean is not very helpful in the heat of battle — partner doesn't always see things the same way. I would expect diamond length for 3♦ unless the partnership had a specific agreement to the contrary.

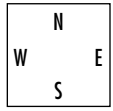
Suppose you bid 3♦ and your partner jumps to 4♥. Assuming your partner reads your 3♦ bid as 'forward going with diamonds', he is likely to have a limit raise with a diamond fit. With more than a limit raise (or with a perfect-fitting limit raise) partner would have cuebid on his way to game. These 'limit raise or better' auctions can be very difficult because both partners are unlimited and must give each other space for possible slam tries. At the same time, opener cannot afford to cuebid on every hand that would accept a limit raise 'just in case partner had slam interest'. Even the most experienced partnerships have trouble with these auctions.

In fact, playing 'old fashioned' limit raises in competition with the cuebid reserved for a forcing raise works better than the 'modern' style in this situation. The modern style (where the cuebid is a limit raise or better and a jump raise is weak) has the advantage of allowing for a preemptive jump raise. I think the modern style is better because the auction is more likely to be 'competitive' than 'slammish' when the auction starts this way.

We have been putting off the issue of what to bid over partner's 4♥. Of course, 4♠ is surely the correct technical bid. We don't think, however, that you should ever stop below slam and it will be very hard to find out if partner has the right cards for a grand slam. Bidding 6♥ is certainly a practical shot (and avoids a likely tempo issue over 4♠-5♥).

In any case, on to the problem!

♠ Q J
♥ J 10 9
♦ Q 10 2
♣ A 9 4 3 2



♠ A 8 7
♥ A K Q 7 4
♦ K 8 6 5 3
♣ —

Both vul.

West	North	East	South
			1♥
2♣	3♣	pass	3♦
pass	4♥	pass	6♥
all pass			

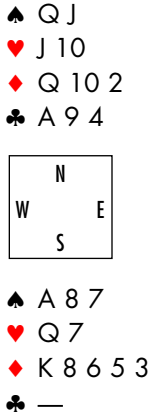
West's opening lead is the ♣Q and partner's dummy is not what you were hoping for. Think about how you would play as declarer before reading on.

You can assume that West has six clubs for his overcall and, given West's lead of the ♣Q, that East has the ♣K. West is therefore marked with the ♦A and the ♠K. One of your primary goals is to play diamonds for one loser. The normal play in this

suit is to start by leading low to dummy's ♦10. There will still be a spade loser, however, as that finesse is certain to fail. The general plan must include a dummy reversal. You should hope to ruff three clubs in the South hand and pitch dummy's remaining spade and club losers on the long diamonds.

You can win the opening lead with the ♣A for a spade discard or win the first trick with a high ruff in the closed hand — either play is fine. It is necessary to start the diamonds at a relatively early point in the play. If the ♣A wins the first trick, then you must continue with a club ruff high, followed by an immediate diamond play.

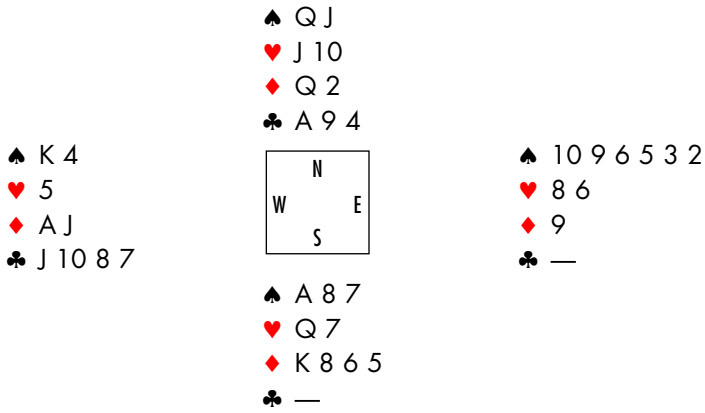
Leaving the ♣A in dummy and ruffing the first trick high leaves some additional flexibility in the timing of the diamond suit. You can now afford to cross to dummy in hearts and ruff another club with a high trump before starting into diamonds. (It is also fine to start the diamonds at Trick 2 after ruffing the first trick high.)



Now you play a low diamond towards dummy and West follows small. You should play the ♦Q from dummy and you can figure this out without having to consider the relative chances of West holding both the ace and the jack versus just the ace. The reason the ♦Q is the right play is that the contract rates to be impossible if West was dealt ♦AJ.

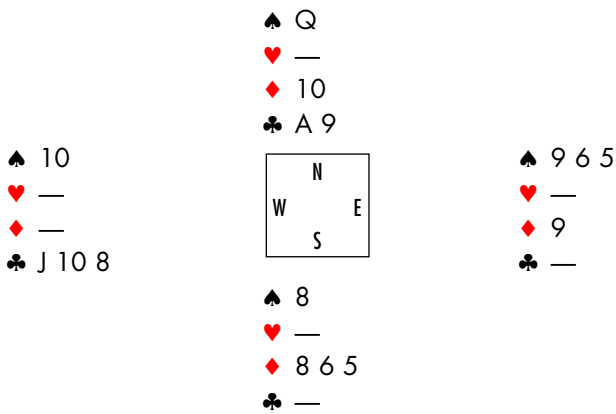
Let's look at the situation more closely. Suppose West was dealt this diamond holding and the ♦10 is successfully finessed.

You are now here:



The best you can do is ruff a third club with a high trump and draw the rest of the trumps. If the ♦Q is now played from dummy, West will win with his ♦A and exit with the ♦J to your ♦K. You will be left with an inescapable spade loser and the contract will fail. Cashing the ♣A for a spade discard and then knocking out the ♦A is no better. West will win with the ♦A and cash a club trick. No, your only real chance to make the contract is to hope that West was dealt the ♦A doubleton and to rise with dummy's ♦Q at Trick 4 (instead of finessing the ♦10).

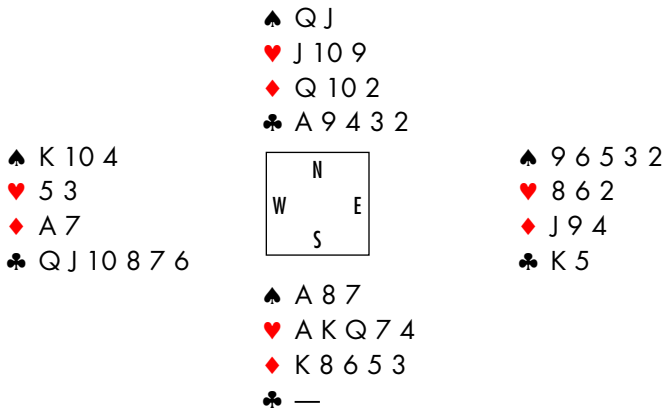
Now your next move is to duck a diamond to West's ♦A. If East makes the unusual play of the ♦J, do not fall for it. If you cover with the ♦K, West will win with the ♦A and exit with the ♠K to your ♠A! These cards will remain:



With the diamond suit blocked, the defense will come to a club trick at the end.

Having followed this logic, you will see that you really need West to have a doubleton ♦A, so you should duck the second round of the suit regardless of what East plays. West is endplayed into playing either a spade away from his ♠K or a club to dummy's ♣A, thereby allowing you to discard your remaining spade loser. In either case you can claim the rest of the tricks.

The full deal:



WINNER ON LOSER PLAY

Gavin Wolpert is one of the top young players in North America. In 2000, at age seventeen, he was awarded the ACBL's King of Bridge Award for having won the most masterpoints of all ACBL members graduating from high school that year. Since then, Gavin has played for the Canadian Junior Team and has won the Canadian National Teams Championship as well as the US National Swiss Teams title.

Gavin Wolpert

This deal was played during Gavin's run of success in 2000 with his then regular partner, David Grainger.

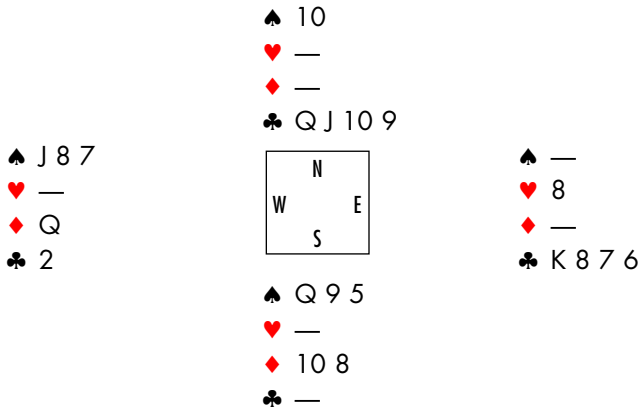
♠ 10 6 3
♥ A K Q
♦ J 4
♣ Q J 10 9 5

♠ A Q 9 5 2
♥ J 10 2
♦ A K 10 8 2
♣ —

West	David	East	Gavin
	1♣	pass	1♠
pass	1NT	pass	2♦
pass	2♠	pass	3♠
pass	4♥	pass	5♦
pass	5♥	pass	6♠
all pass			

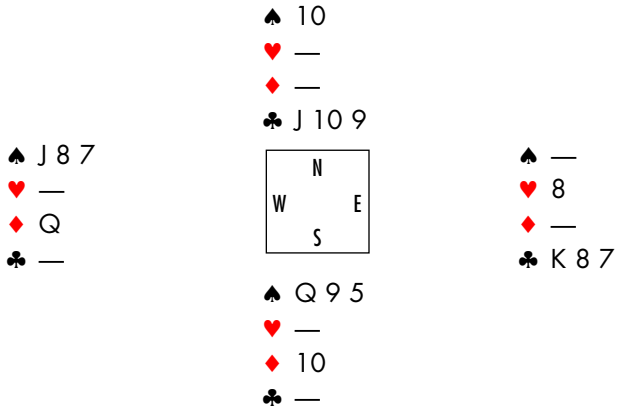
West's opening lead of the ♣A was not nearly as friendly as it first appeared. Gavin ruffed in the closed hand and crossed to dummy in hearts. He played a spade from dummy and won East's ♠K with his ♠A. Gavin took East's ♠K at face value and proceeded to play the hand on the assumption that West had been dealt four spades. He cashed dummy's remaining hearts, followed by the ♦A and ♦K.

Gavin now ruffed a diamond in dummy and West followed. When East discarded, Gavin had an almost complete count on the hand. Gavin was assuming that West was dealt four spades; he now knew that West also had four diamonds. As well, West had followed three times in hearts and had led the ♣A. West's only unknown card was either the thirteenth heart or a club.

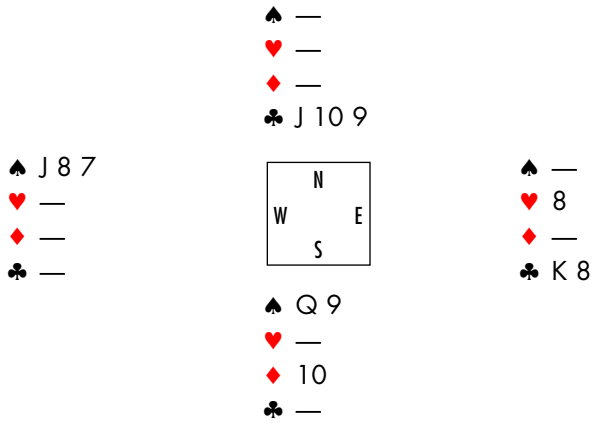


Gavin realized that in order for there to be any chance, West must have another club, as we show in the layout here. Under that assumption, he led the ♣Q. East thought long and hard as to whether or not he should cover with the ♣K: if he covered and Gavin ruffed, Gavin would be able to continue with a diamond ruff in dummy, following that up with a club winner on which he could discard his last diamond. West would have to ruff, but would be endplayed at Trick 12 into leading away from the ♠J. Presumably East figured this out and, after a great deal of thought, he ducked when Gavin led the ♣Q.

Gavin knew that East had the ♣K, but he realized that if he discarded a diamond on this trick the contract would fail. This would be the position:



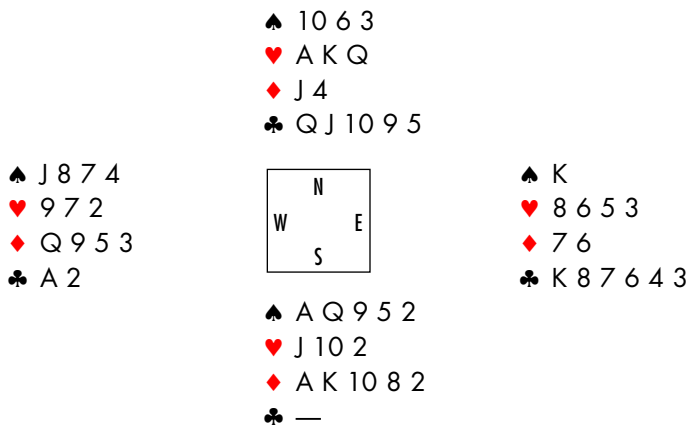
With the lead in dummy, there is no way for Gavin to lose only one trick from here. Gavin realized, however, that he could get home if he ruffed dummy's club winner instead of discarding a diamond. He did so, and then ruffed another diamond in dummy, leaving this position:



With dummy down to just clubs, declarer was forced to lead the suit and East covered with the ♣K. Gavin, proving that dummy's club sequence was just a distraction, discarded his diamond winner and West was forced to ruff his partner's trick. Poor West had to lead away from his ♠J, allowing Gavin to make his contract.

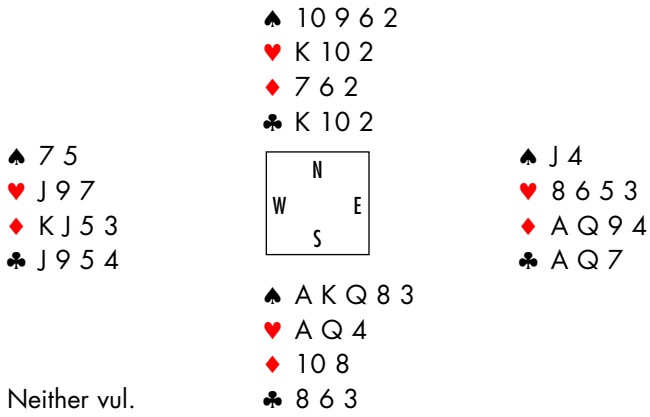
I especially like this deal because declarer has to ruff a winner and then discard a winner on a loser in order to make his contract. Usually in bridge it is the other way around. Nicely played, Gavin!

The full deal:



PARTNERSHIP TRUST IS A WONDERFUL THING!

This deal, which took place during the 2000 ACBL North American Championships in Cincinnati, features a pretty defense found by my partner, Brad Moss, with my cooperation. It was played during the first qualifying session of the North American Swiss Teams. Brad and I, along with teammates Reese Milner, Marc Jacobus and Mike Passell, eventually finished fifth in this event.



Brad	**North**	**Fred**	**South**
			1♠
pass	3♠	all pass	

Brad characteristically chose to make an aggressive opening lead, the ♦5. Some players would think that a heart or a club lead would be safer than a diamond, while others would lead a trump in an attempt to be completely passive. There is no right or wrong answer here, but Brad prefers to lead from his strength against auctions such as this one. It turned out that his diamond lead was the start of a very pretty defense.

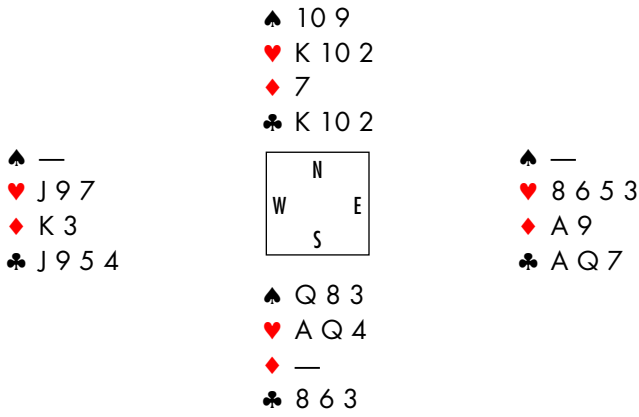
Declarer called for a low diamond from dummy and I had to decide which diamond to play from the East hand. I chose to play the ♦Q, which won the trick. I knew that the declarer could not have a singleton ♦K since the ♦3 was missing and Brad would have led that card (or the ♦J) if his diamond holding had been ♦J10853. Although there was no danger of losing to a singleton ♦K, there were two good reasons for playing the ♦Q at Trick 1.

1. If Brad had been dealt the ♦K, as was in fact the case, then my play of the ♦Q was to let Brad know that I could win the second round of diamonds if the play developed in that direction. If I had won with the ♦A instead, Brad would not have known about the location of the ♦Q.
2. If declarer had been dealt the ♦K, then my play of the ♦Q would establish the ♦J as an entry to Brad's hand. Brad would later be able to gain the lead in diamonds to play a club through dummy. This is the main reason why the ♦Q was the right card for me to play at Trick 1.

I also had an interesting problem as to what card to play to Trick 2. Think about the card you would return as East.

I chose to return the ♠4. I was able to find this play because I could see that there was a danger if I made the 'obvious' diamond continuation. Can you see why a trump return worked well and why a diamond return would likely have been less effective? We'll come back to this point a little later.

Declarer won my trump shift in the closed hand and drew a second round of trumps, extracting all of the defenders' spades. Declarer did the best he could by exiting with the ♦10 and Brad smartly won this trick even though he knew that I still held the ♦A. I followed with the ♦4.



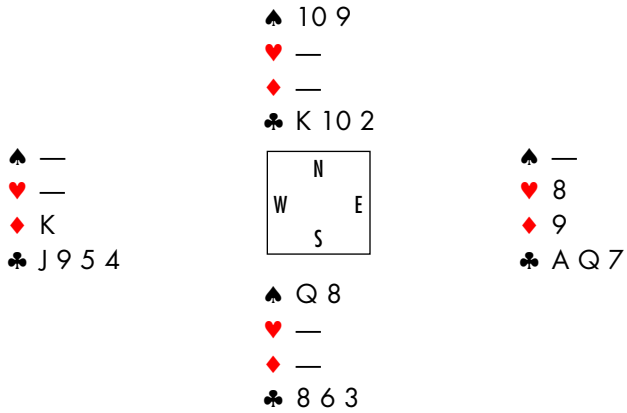
We had reached another critical point. This time it was up to Brad to figure out what the deal was all about and what card he could return to defeat the contract.

Brad found the excellent play of switching to the ♣J (the ♣9 would also work). Brad could also feel the danger I had sensed. He knew that he would not have a chance to be on lead again and needed to make this play count. Note that if Brad had returned a small club, declarer could still have made the contract by playing low from dummy. I would have won with the ♣Q, but declarer could later have led low to the ♣10, holding himself to two club losers. But the big question is: how did Brad know to lead a club instead of a heart? The answer is that my ♦4 on the second round of the suit was a suit-preference signal requesting a club shift. I would have followed with the ♦9 (and not the ♦4) if I had been dealt the ♥AQ instead of the ♣AQ.

Declarer tried the ♣K from dummy and I won with the ♣A, exiting with a diamond for him to ruff. Declarer put up a good fight, eliminating the heart-suit ending in his hand before trying to sneak the ♣8 through Brad. Brad covered with the ♣9, however, and I won dummy's ♣10 with the ♣Q. My ♣7 had grown up into the setting trick, which I promptly cashed. Declarer claimed the last two tricks, but his contract was down one. There was no way for him to have taken nine tricks given our defense.

If you did not spot the danger that was referred to earlier, suppose that I had innocently continued diamonds from the top after winning the opening lead with my ♦Q (the same position results if Brad had continued diamonds after winning the second round

of that suit). Declarer would ruff the third round of diamonds and draw trumps in two rounds. He would then eliminate hearts in three rounds and end in the closed hand.



Here declarer would have a certain elimination position that ensures only two club losers regardless of the lie of the defenders' cards in that suit. He would lead a club towards dummy, covering whatever card Brad chose to play. If Brad followed with a small club, declarer would play the ♣10 from dummy. Although I would win with the ♣Q, I would be endplayed. A club return would reduce declarer to two losers in that suit while a heart or diamond return would concede a ruff and discard. In either case, South would make his contract.

It would not have helped for Brad to play the ♣J on declarer's club play. Declarer would cover with dummy's ♣K and I would win with the ♣A. I would be endplayed as before, forced to either set up dummy's ♣10 or concede a ruff and discard.

In order for the defense to prevent this endplay, it was necessary for both Brad and myself to spot the danger early in the deal and defend accordingly. It is not always easy to construct the unseen hands, to project how the play might go and come up with the appropriate counter-measures. We have both been playing bridge long enough that we have seen deals like this one many times. As soon as we saw the dummy we knew that there was a potential endplay and that our mission was to find a way out of it. Bridge problems are much easier when you have faced similar situations before.

JUGGLING TRUMPS

Thirty years ago, a group of young players grew up together in Montreal who were to form the nucleus of the next Canadian bridge generation after Murray and Kehela. They were Eric Kokish, Joey Silver, George Mittelman, and the late Peter Nagy, all of who went on to national and international success. I have been fortunate enough to play with them all as partners and/or teammates in national and world events. I played this deal with Joey Silver during the eighth round-robin match of the 2000 Orbis Bermuda Bowl World Championships. Our opponents were Argentina's Leonardo Rizzo and Alejandro Bianchedi.

Joey Silver

The deal has been rotated to make South the declarer.

♠ A K 6 2
♥ J 6 3
♦ 10 9 6
♣ J 10 7

♠ 7
♥ K 9 7 4 2
♦ A K 4
♣ K Q 4 2

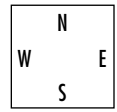
Leonardo	**Joey**	**Alejandro**	**Fred**
		pass	1♥
pass	2♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

Leonardo led the ♠4, playing third- and fifth-best leads. I won the trick in dummy, as Alejandro followed with the ♠J. Think about how you would play as declarer before reading on.

I resisted the temptation to cash the ♠K for an immediate diamond discard. I was worried that releasing control of the spade suit might allow the defense to defeat the contract on some layouts via a forcing game or trump promotion. There was no rush to take the ♠K immediately: I had the diamond suit well under control and I knew I could gain access to the ♠K later through the certain dummy entry in the club suit.

This is a complex deal and the correct line of play is far from clear. I decided to lead a heart towards my hand at Trick 2. When Alejandro followed with the ♥5, I put up the ♥K from my hand. I was pleased to see Leonardo follow with the ♥Q (a possible falsecard, but much more likely to be a singleton ♥Q).

♠ K 6 2
♥ J 6
♦ 10 9 6
♣ J 10 7

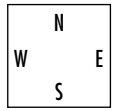


♠ —
♥ 9 7 4 2
♦ A K 4
♣ K Q 4 2

There were two certain trump losers as well as the ♣A. I realized that it would be futile to attempt to draw trumps. The defense would gain the lead three times and they would have the tempo to force me twice in spades, thereby establishing a third trump trick for Alejandro. The time had come to play on clubs and I realized that the suit would probably have to break 3-3 in order for me to have a chance. I led the ♣K out of my hand in an attempt to drive out the ♣A. Leonardo, who knew very little about my hand (one of the benefits of not making game tries) won with his ♣A. As we will see shortly it would not have helped Leonardo to duck this trick, but by winning with the ♣A, he made my task somewhat easier.

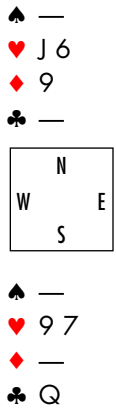
Leonardo returned a diamond (nothing else is better) to the ♦10, ♦Q, and my ♦A. I continued with a club to dummy and then cashed the ♠K for a diamond discard, leaving this position:

♠ 6 2
♥ J 6
♦ 9 6
♣ J



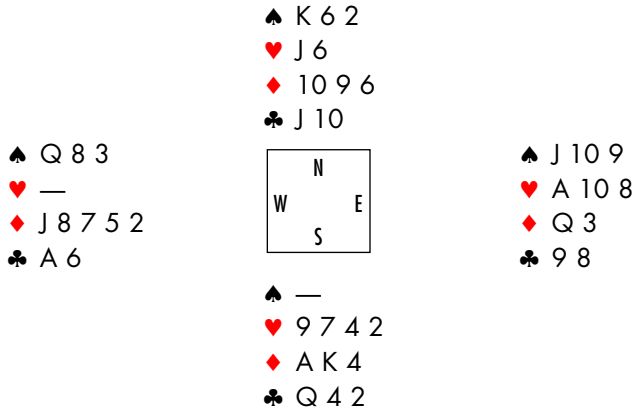
♠ —
♥ 9 7 4 2
♦ K
♣ Q 4

There are several ways to succeed from this point. I actually chose to continue with a spade ruff, return to the ♦K and play a club to dummy. I ruffed another spade in my hand (leading a diamond at this point also works) and reached this ending:



I had nine tricks in and could make certain of a tenth by leading the ♣Q. When West discarded, although I could have ruffed with the ♥J, I simply pitched a diamond from dummy. East ruffed with the ♥8 and I was able to claim my contract as dummy's ♥J was sure to score a trick.

Let's look at some variations on this solution. Let's suppose that West had allowed the ♣K to hold when I led it from my hand.



I could have continued with a low club from hand. If West then decided to take his ♣A and exit with a club (no defense is better),

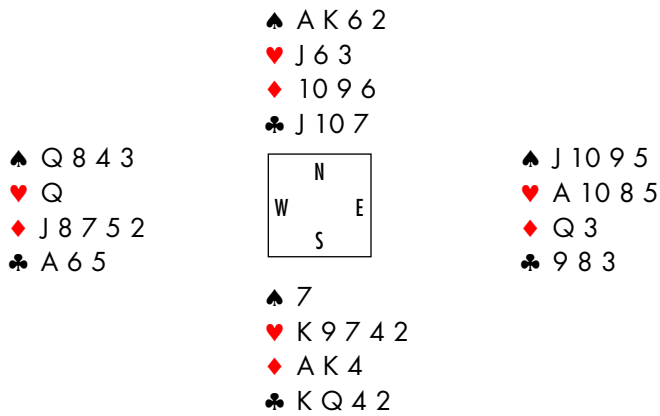
I would have won the trick in dummy and cashed the ♠K for a diamond discard. I could then lead a low trump. Alejandro would have to win with the ♥10 and force me in spades; otherwise I could succeed by drawing trumps. I could then cash the top diamonds and ruff Alejandro's last club with dummy's ♥J, leaving him unable to prevent me from scoring two of the last three tricks.

Even if Leonardo had ducked both the first and second round of clubs, I still could have succeeded. I would have won the second club trick in dummy and cashed the ♠K for a diamond discard. In order to get home, I would then have to ruff a spade in hand and cash the top diamonds, exiting in clubs to Leonardo. Either a spade or a diamond return by Leonardo would effectively neutralize his partner's ♥8.

This is a very complicated deal and we have not come close to covering all of the possible variations. The line I took at the table, however, seems like a good one, and I managed to make a contract in which most declarers at the Bermuda Bowl went down.

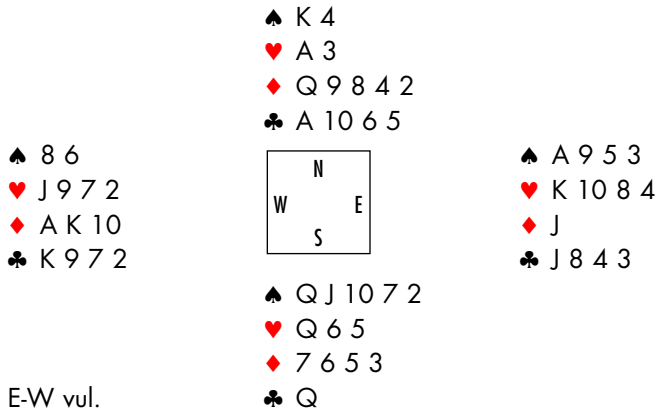
A couple of points are worth noting. Firstly, I could have cashed the ♠K at Trick 2 and still made my contract (I leave the details to you). Secondly, at Trick 2 when East follows small, I could have succeeded by playing any of my hearts except for the ♥9. My choice of the ♥K worked well, but any of my smaller hearts would also have done the job.

The full deal:



THE STRANGE STORY OF THE ACE OF HEARTS

This deal was reported by Alan Truscott in *The New York Times* bridge column and features an interesting defense found by my wife, Sheri Winestock, in a knockout match at the 2001 Toronto Regional.

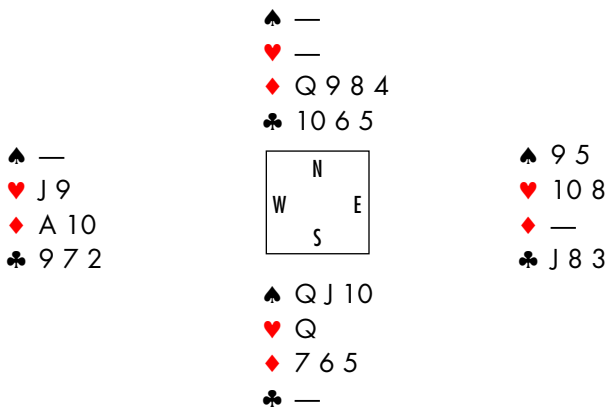


Sheri	**North**	**Fred**	**South**
			2♠
all pass			

South chose to open with a weak 2♠ and all passed. I don't mind the concept of opening the occasional weak two with a five-card suit, but I wouldn't do it on this hand, despite the position and vulnerability, as the spades are too weak.

Sheri started with a high diamond, of course. This was not the best lead if you are looking at all four hands, but in my view, it is the only reasonable lead from her hand. I followed with my singleton ♦J, but Sheri could not read this as a singleton. Sheri and I play upside-down count and attitude signals and I would play the ♦J from a holding like ♦J53. Sheri found the best defense of a heart shift. Her lead of the ♥7, playing third and fifth best, was ducked in the dummy and I won with my ♥K.

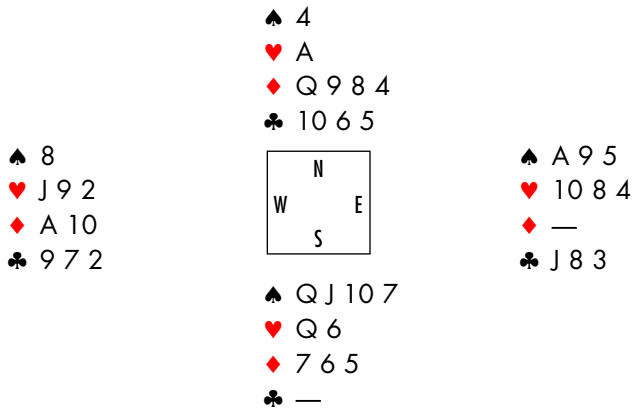
I thought it a clever idea to shift to a club now, and it certainly appeared that this was the case when the ♣Q, ♣K and ♣A were played to the trick. Declarer continued with the ♠K from dummy, which I ducked. I took my ♠A on the second round of the suit and played back a heart to lock declarer in dummy.



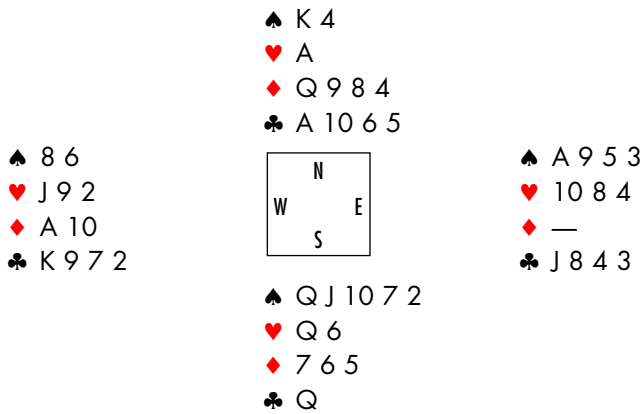
Declarer was now in trouble. He knew he would eventually lose control if he ruffed a club back to his hand so he tried a diamond from the dummy. I discarded a heart while Sheri won with her ♦10.

Sheri had a count on the hand at this point (declarer's thirteenth card was known to be the ♥Q since I had won Trick 2 with the ♥K) so she knew she could lead a club to force declarer and eventually defeat the contract. She saw a more elegant defense, however: she cashed her ♦A while I discarded my last heart and then gave me a heart ruff to defeat 2♠.

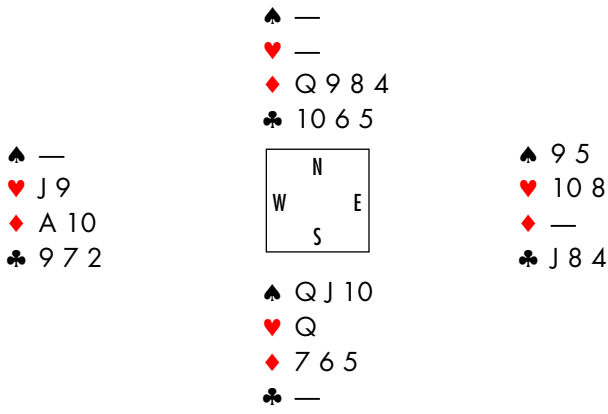
It was certainly cute that Sheri and I were able to get a ruff in a suit in which we each started with four cards, but there were three mistakes made along the way. Declarer made two of them and I made one. Can you see what they were?



Declarer's last mistake was that he should have cashed dummy's ♥A before playing a second round of trumps. Declarer could then have continued with a spade to my ♠A, leaving me with the choice of putting him in his hand to draw trumps or setting up dummy's ♣10 as a winner.



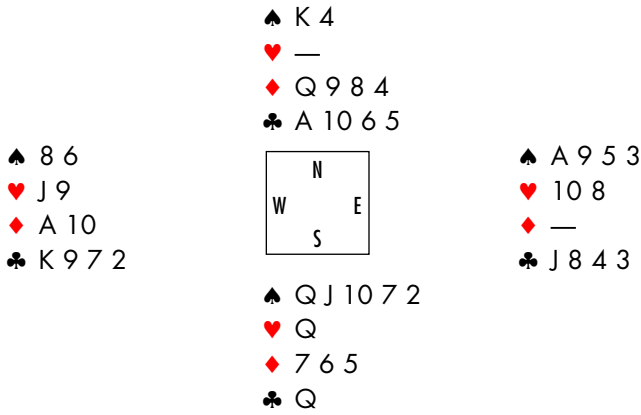
It was vital for declarer to get the ♥A out of the way. Strangely enough, however, my mistake was the same — I should have taken out dummy's ♥A myself (instead of playing my club return) after I won with the ♥K. I could then have won the second round of spades as before and played a club to put the lead back in dummy.



Declarer would be left in a familiar position. Regardless of whether he led a diamond or a club to get off dummy, the defense would prevail.

Do you find it paradoxical that both the declarer and the defense must strive to get the ♥A out of the dummy on this deal? So far we have seen that I made a mistake by returning a club instead of a heart after I won with the ♥K. My error gave declarer a chance to make his contract, but he gave it right back by not cashing the ♥A himself.

Declarer also made an earlier error that would have left the defense with no chance at all. Can you see it? Perhaps not surprisingly, the third mistake on this deal also involved the ♥A! If declarer had played that card at Trick 2 and continued with a heart to East's ♥K, the defense would have been finished. Here's how the cards would lie after that:



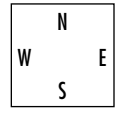
Suppose I return a heart to declarer's ♥Q (as good as anything). Declarer must now lead a diamond toward dummy. Sheri would take her ♦A (ducking does not help) and the best she could do would be to give me my diamond ruff. The ♠A would be the last trick for the defense and the contract would be made.

Sheri congratulates Fred on his 1996 Bermuda Bowl silver medal

KILLING THE CROCODILE

Today we get to see much more top-level bridge than used to be the case. Live Internet broadcasts and rapid dissemination of tournament bulletins via the Net allow us to see the brilliancies and blunders that occur daily around the world. This deal was played in the last segment of the 2004 Camrose Trophy Finals, a yearly tournament involving England, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

♠ A 8 2
♥ 3
♦ K Q 8 7 4 3
♣ Q 8 2



♠ Q 7 6 4
♥ K 10 7
♦ 5
♣ A K J 5 4

West	North	East	South
		pass	2♣*
dbl	2♦*	2♥	2♠
pass	4♣	pass	4♦
pass	4♥	pass	5♣
all pass			

West's opening lead of the ♣10 looked like a good start for the defense. Declarer won in hand in order to lead a diamond toward dummy. West thought about this for a second or two before playing low (which turned out to be good defense) and dummy's ♦K won the trick. Think about how you would continue as declarer before reading on.

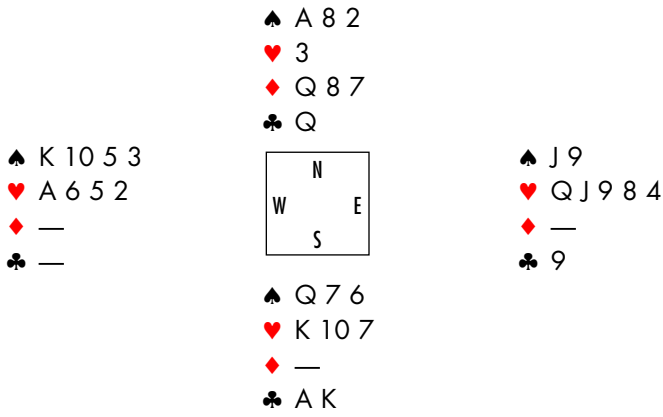
The actual declarer ruffed a diamond in his hand, both defenders following small. He then played a club to dummy's ♣Q. Again, both defenders followed small but the ♣9 did not appear. He ruffed another diamond. The good news was that the ♦A came down so dummy's diamonds were now high; the bad news was that there was no longer any way to make the contract!

♠ A 8 2
♥ 3
♦ Q 8 7
♣ 8

♠ Q 7 6 4
♥ K 10 7
♦ —
♣ A

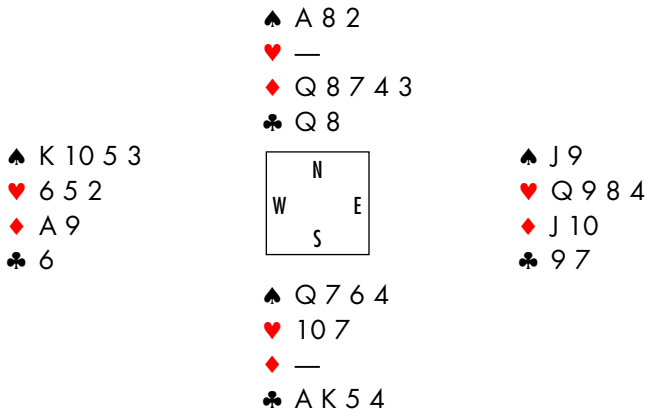
The actual declarer drew East's last trump, but although he was able to enjoy dummy's diamonds, he was a trick short of the eleven he needed. Leaving a trump outstanding and exiting with, say, the ♥K to West's ♥A would have been no better. West would simply have returned a heart for dummy to ruff. East last's trump would neutralize one of dummy's diamonds and the contract would fail.

There are a few ways to make the contract. This is the solution that I consider to be the prettiest. Instead of ruffing the third round of diamonds, declarer should discard either a heart or a spade from his hand! Here's the position after a spade discard; West has won the trick with the ♦A.



When West wins with the ♦A, he is endplayed, as he has to give up something with his return. His best shot is to lead the ♠K in order to take out dummy's ♠A entry. Declarer can counter by leading diamonds. East ruffs and South overruffs. South surrenders a heart trick to the defense, wins the spade return, ruffs a heart in dummy and uses dummy's two remaining diamonds to dispose of his major-suit losers.

After being allowed to win the first round of diamonds, declarer can also get home by playing a heart instead of ruffing a diamond. East splits his honors and South must play his ♥K, as a spade lead from East's side of the table would be fatal.



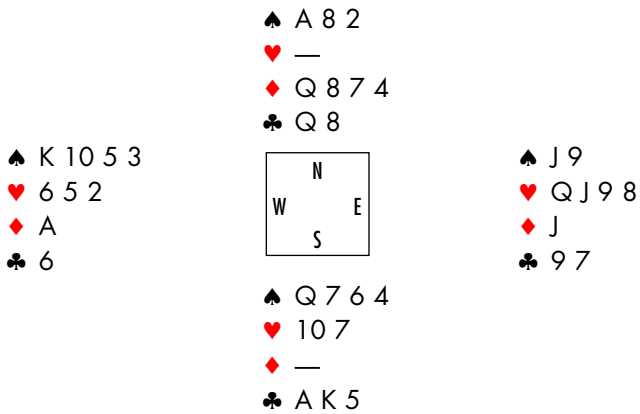
After winning with the ♥A, West has no recourse. Suppose he leads his last trump. Declarer wins dummy's ♣Q and ruffs a

diamond. A heart is ruffed in dummy and a second diamond is ruffed, establishing the suit. Declarer can now draw East's last trump and use dummy's three diamonds for discards. The defense will get a trick at the end, but the contract is secure.

Suppose that instead of leading a second round of trumps, West shifts to the ♠K. Can you see what declarer has to do in order to make 5♣ from here?

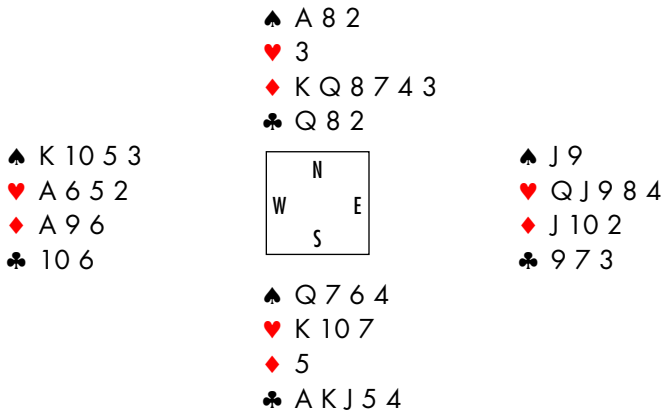
What he must do is play a low spade from dummy — what an unusual suit! The defense is now dead, as there is no way for West to prevent declarer from setting up and cashing dummy's diamonds.

One final variation worth considering involves a diamond ruff in the closed hand at Trick 3, followed by the ♥K to West's ♥A. Declarer plays the ♥K because he prefers having West on lead rather than East who can play a spade through declarer's queen.



This line leaves declarer firmly in control. In fact, West's situation is even more desperate this time. Playing the ♠K will have no real effect in this play sequence. Having already ruffed a round of diamonds, declarer does not have to duck the ♠K anymore (although doing so would not hurt him). After winning with the ♠A, declarer sets up diamonds with a ruff and draws trumps, ending in dummy. With seven tricks in, the ♠Q and three diamond winners left, declarer can claim his contract. If West plays a trump, declarer can win the trump in hand, ruff a heart, ruff the last diamond, draw the last trump and enter dummy with a spade to run diamonds. He takes four diamonds, a heart ruff, a spade and five trump tricks in his hand.

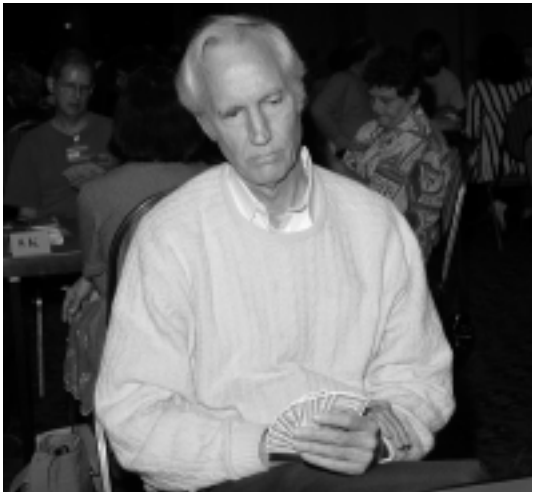
The full deal:



WHEN PARTNER BURIES YOU

The Cavendish Club flourished in New York from its founding in 1925 until it finally closed in 1991. Its membership list was illustrious, and included many players well known in international circles. However, it is chiefly remembered today as the birthplace of the world's biggest money bridge tournament, the Cavendish Invitational Pairs. This began in 1975, and happily has survived the club's departure. It is now an annual event in Las Vegas and attracts many of the world's top experts to compete for a seven-figure prize pool.

This declarer play problem originally came up at the 2001 Cavendish. To the best of my knowledge, only three declarers in the event solved this problem at the table.



Grant Baze

First, however, you get to bid the hand:

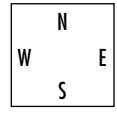
♠ A 5 3 ♥ Q 9 8 7 6 ♦ 9 3 ♣ Q 6 5

As South, you deal and pass. West opens 1♠. Your partner doubles and East raises preemptively to 3♠. You are playing IMPs and only your side is vulnerable. Would you bid 4♥ or pass?

I think it is pretty clear to bid 4♥ here. The knowledge that partner has at most a singleton spade has made your hand much better. Think about some random hands for partner with 1-4-4-4 distribution and only 11 HCP or so and you will see that it doesn't take much to make 4♥ an attractive proposition (especially when vulnerable at IMPs).

If you pass here, there are many hands with which partner will not have the strength to reopen and 4♥ will be either laydown or very good. The fact that any finesses you might require rate to be working is another reason to bid aggressively in this position. Don't worry about partner burying you for bidding 4♥ — he knows that this is a pressure situation. Well, okay, so it is possible that partner will bury you if you bid 4♥. On the actual deal, partner drives to slam via Blackwood. That may not be such a bad thing as 6♥ is a pretty reasonable contract, especially given the bidding, which marks the ♣K with West.

♠ K
♥ K 10 5 2
♦ A K Q 7 2
♣ A J 4



♠ A 5 3
♥ Q 9 8 7 6
♦ 9 3
♣ Q 6 5

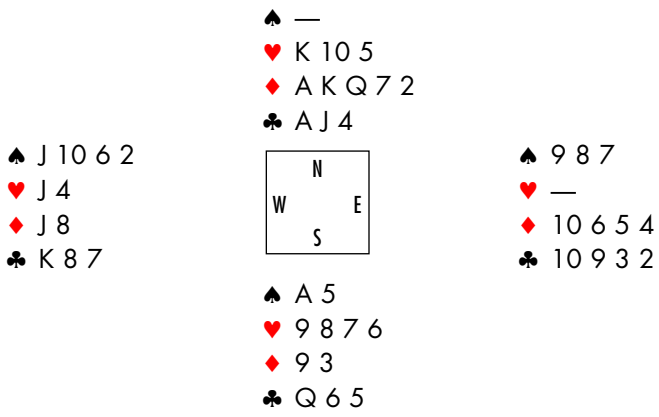
N-S vul.

West	North	East	South
			pass
1♠	dbl	3♠	4♥
pass	4NT	pass	5♦
pass	6♥	all pass	

West's opening lead is the ♠Q. Think about how you would play before reading on.

Given that West must have almost all of the outstanding high cards for his opening bid, East likely has a singleton somewhere to justify his 3♠ call. East's singleton is most likely to be in hearts (because North-South have more combined cards in hearts than any other suit). You should plan to finesse West for the ♥J on the second round of trumps.

It would be an unnecessary risk to overtake dummy's ♠K with your ♠A to take a first-round finesse against the ♥J — you would go down if East has a singleton ♥J. But although it is certainly correct to win dummy's ♠K at Trick 1, if you start trumps immediately, careful defense will defeat the contract on the actual layout:



In this position, after West has won with the ♥A, he will lock you in the dummy by playing a diamond. Your only chance now is to try to return to your hand by ruffing the third round of diamonds. On the actual layout, however, West will be able to overruff with the ♥J to defeat your slam.

Do you see what you could have done to prevent this from happening? Let's go back to the second trick and look at the correct (and winning) line of play. The correct play is to cash two of dummy's high diamonds before leading a heart to your queen and West's ace.

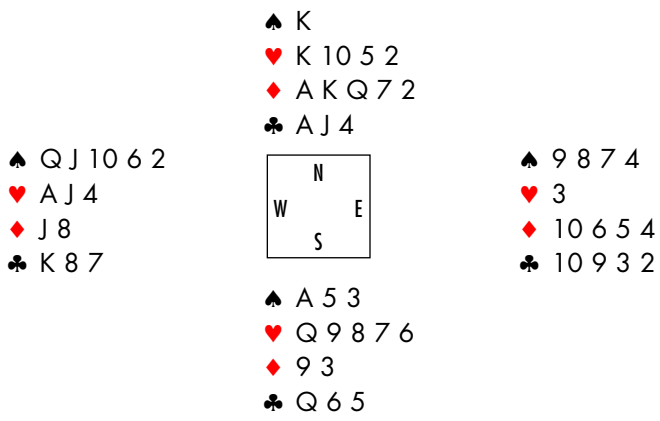
	♠ — ♥ K 10 5 ♦ Q 7 2 ♣ A J 4	
♠ J 10 6 2 ♥ J 4 ♦ — ♣ K 8 7	N W E S	♠ 9 8 7 ♥ — ♦ 10 6 ♣ 10 9 3 2
	♠ A 5 ♥ 9 8 7 6 ♦ — ♣ Q 6 5	

Regardless of which card West plays now, he will be unable to prevent you from getting to your hand to finesse against the ♥J. In practice West would probably exit in clubs, hoping that his partner holds the ♣Q. West must have the ♣K for his opening bid so you can safely duck in dummy, winning with the ♣Q in your hand. You can now finesse West for the ♥J, draw the last trump and claim the rest of the tricks.

Congratulations to Grant Baze, Drew Casen and Peter Weischel who, to the best of my knowledge, were the only declarers in the Cavendish Pairs to bid and make 6♥ by taking the recommended line of play.

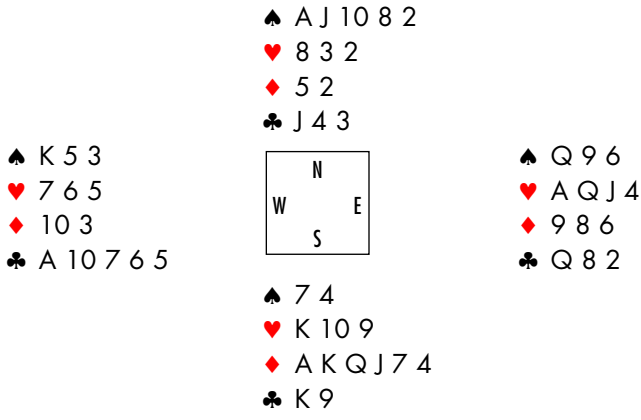
Peter Weichsel

The full deal:



SECOND HAND HIGH

Now back to my theme that every time you sit down at the bridge table, there are interesting deals and things to learn. I was playing in the Flight A Swiss Teams at the 2001 Toronto Regional with partner Bob Morris. Bob and I, along with Eddie Wold, Darren Wolpert and Polly Rich (the Captain of the team) ended up tied for first place in this event. Along the way, this deal came up:



Fred	**North**	**Bob**	**South**
			1NT
pass	2♥*	pass	2♠

What do you think of South's 15-17 1NT bid? I don't think much of it, especially in an IMP game. I really like opening 1NT in general and sometimes do so with far from classic hands, but I would not open 1NT on this particular hand. There are several reasons why I do not like South's choice of 1NT:

1) You could miss a good 3NT. There are plenty of hands with which partner would pass 1NT, thereby missing a laydown or a very good 3NT.

2) You could miss a good slam. This hand has too much playing strength for a 15-17 1NT opening. Partner will sometimes raise to 3NT on hands where either 6♦ or 6NT is a good spot.
3) You could play the wrong game. It's not hard to imagine hands for partner where 5♦ is a much better contract than 3NT, but you are not going to get to 5♦ after a 1NT opening.
4) You could play in the wrong partscore or end up defending the opponents' partscore (or game) when you should be playing the hand. Do not expect partner to judge well in a competitive auction if you start with 1NT. Although opening 1NT could work out well, I prefer a simple 1♦ opening (with the plan of rebidding 3♦ over a 1♥ or 1♠ response from partner). In fact, this course of action probably would not have worked out any better than opening 1NT did on the actual deal (since 3♦ would also fail against best defense), but the result of one deal does not really prove anything.

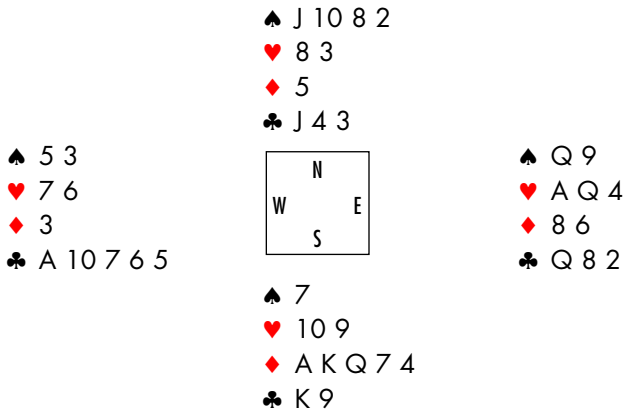
On the actual deal North transferred to 2♠, which became the final contract. Think about what card you would select as your opening lead against 2♠ from the West hand. Pretend you cannot see all 52 cards. What card did I lead?

I chose to lead the ♦10, mostly by process of elimination. Experience suggests that a trump lead usually doesn't work very well against this sort of auction (especially from a holding like mine where a trump lead could easily blow a trick in that suit). I decided that a club lead was too aggressive and a heart lead was too passive. Diamonds was the only suit left. Declarer won my ♦10 opening lead with the ♦J as Bob contributed the ♦9 (an upside-down attitude signal).

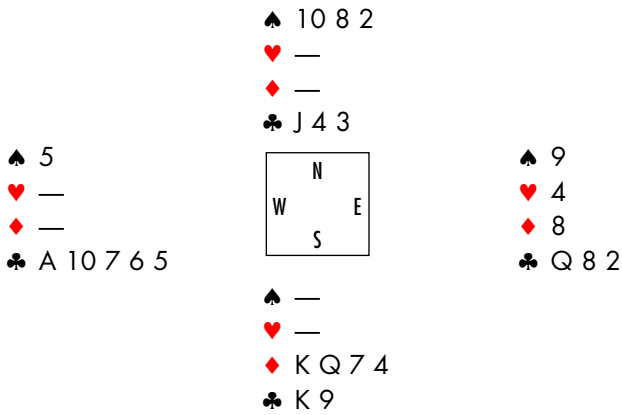
When declarer correctly started to draw trumps by leading low toward the dummy, I found a good moment to try a second-hand high play of the ♠K. Although it is true that this play could have worked very poorly on some layouts, on the actual deal the ♠K play was necessary to give the defense a chance. Declarer won with the ♠A in the dummy and would have made his contract if he had played a second round of trumps to drive out Bob's ♠Q.

The position was far from clear, however, and declarer chose to make the reasonable play of a heart toward his hand (hoping to

lead the second round of trumps toward the dummy later on). Bob inserted the ♥J, covered by the ♥K, which won the trick.



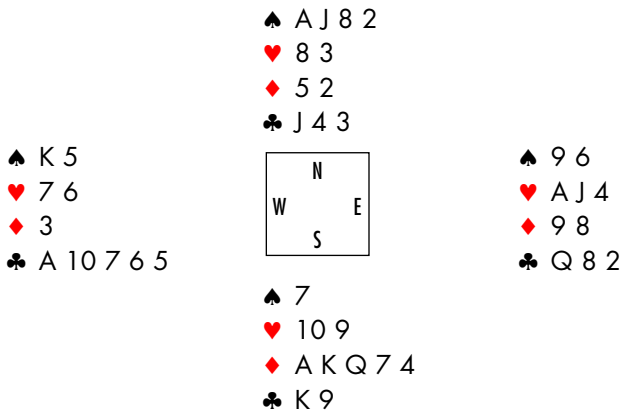
As planned, declarer now played a trump to dummy's ♠J and Bob's ♠Q. Bob cashed his two heart winners and then did very well to get out in diamonds to sever the link between the North and South hands.



Declarer tried to sneak the ♦7 through me, but I knew enough about the deal by this point to ruff with my remaining trump. At first glance it appears that declarer could have succeeded from here by discarding a club from the dummy to endplay me. I would have countered, however, by cashing the ♣A and leading another club to declarer's ♣K. Declarer, down to just diamonds, would have been forced to promote Bob's ♠9 into the setting trick.

Declarer actually chose to overruff my ♠5 with dummy's ♠8. He drew Bob's last trump with the ♠10 and tried a club to his ♣K and my ♣A. I was now able to lead the ♣10 through dummy's ♣J to pin declarer's ♣9, allowing the defense to win three club tricks and defeat 2♠.

The importance of my second-hand high play in spades can be seen from the result at the other table. Our teammate in the South position also chose to open 1NT (he will remain nameless given what I had to say about 1NT). He also played in 2♠ after a transfer sequence. The West at the other table also chose to lead the ♦10, which South won. He then played a spade toward the dummy. When this West followed low, declarer finessed and East won with the ♠Q. This East chose to switch to the ♥Q, covered by the ♥K, which won the trick.



Declarer was then able to draw the rest of the trumps via a second finesse in that suit. He claimed eleven tricks (four spades, the ♥K, and six diamonds) for +200. We scored +50 for winning four more tricks on defense against the same contract, which translated into a useful 6-IMP win for our team.

ANOTHER DAY AT THE OFFICE

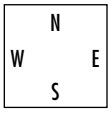
This deal was played by Bruce Gowdy, one of Canada's all time great players, and reported to me by his cousin, John Gowdy. Bruce is the youngest player ever to win a major knockout teams event, having won the Spingold in 1949 at the age of 19. He has won seven Canadian National Teams Championships and has represented Canada in a number of world championships. One of his recent successes was a bronze medal in the World Senior Pairs in Montreal in 2002.

Bruce Gowdy

His cousin John is also an international-class player and he and Bruce formed one of Canada's top partnerships of the 1980s. Although the Gowdys do not play as partners these days, both John and Bruce continue to be very active and successful members of the Toronto bridge community.

Bruce has always been known as more of a card player than a bidder. In this deal, he was faced with finesses in every suit. He carefully and correctly selected which finesses to take and thereby made his contract. There is nothing particularly fancy about this deal — just the good solid technique that has helped make Gowdy a winner over the years.

♠ K J 8
♥ A J 10 7 2
♦ 8 2
♣ K 5 3



♠ A 10 7 6 5 4
♥ 5
♦ A Q 6
♣ J 7 4

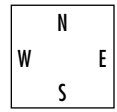
West	North	East	Bruce
			1♠
3♦	4♠	all pass	

West's opening lead was the ♠9. Think about how you would play as declarer before reading on.

Bruce carefully called for the ♠J from dummy. You will see in a moment why this is a smart move. East followed with a small trump as dummy's ♠J won the first trick. Bruce played the ♦2 from dummy and East followed with the ♦10. Bruce correctly refused the diamond finesse, winning the trick with his ♦A.

His next move was to surrender a diamond trick to the defense. West won with the ♦9 as East discarded a club. Bruce's next problem came on the next trick when West continued with the ♦K.

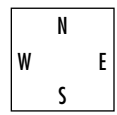
♠ K 8
♥ A J 10 7 2
♦ —
♣ K 5 3



♠ A 10 7 6 5
♥ 5
♦ Q
♣ J 7 4

Bruce made the winning decision to ruff the diamond high with dummy's ♠K. He made another winning decision on the next trick, finessing against East's ♠Q. You can see now why it was crucial to have played the ♠J at Trick 1. If Bruce had played the ♠8 to the first trick, the lead would now be in dummy. Bruce's plan (which you are about to see) required him to be in his hand at this point in the play. He cashed the ♠A next, arriving at this position:

♠ —
♥ A J 10 7
♦ —
♣ K 5 3

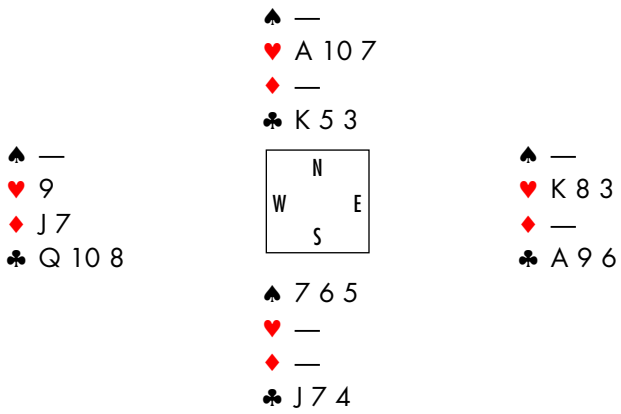


♠ 7 6 5
♥ 5
♦ —
♣ J 7 4

After drawing the last trump, Bruce was faced with the problem of avoiding three club losers. The club suit afforded two possible finesses, one against the ♣A with West and one against the ♣Q with East.

Bruce managed to get home without taking *any* club finesses: he wisely chose to finesse in hearts instead. Bruce led a heart from

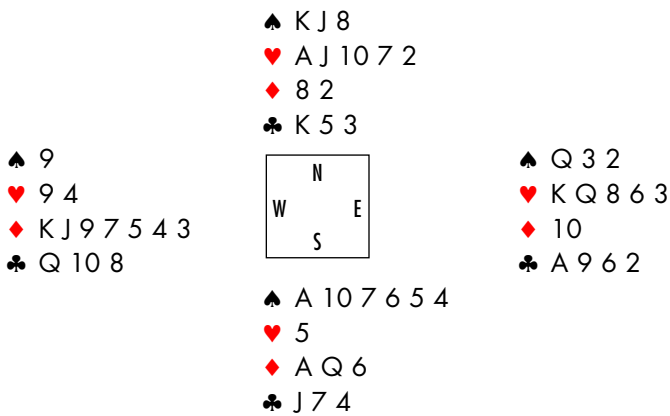
his hand and when West followed small, he finessed the ♥J, losing to East's ♥Q. If West had played a heart honor to this trick, Bruce would have won with the ♥A and exited with the ♥J, discarding a losing club from his hand.



Bruce had lost a trick in hearts, a suit in which he had no losers, but that trick came back with interest. East, with only hearts and clubs remaining, was endplayed. Not only was East forced to give Bruce access to the stranded ♥A, but he was also forced to give up another trick in the process.

Bruce claimed his contract, conceding one club trick to the defense. This was a very well played hand by just about anyone's standards, but it was just another day at the office for Bruce Gowdy.

The full deal:



DIAMOND JUBILEE

One of my personal goals as a player has always been to win an open World Championship event. I came close to doing just that when Canada won the silver medal in the 1995 Bermuda Bowl. Although my Cinderella Canadian team put up a great fight, the American team that took home the gold medal was in a different class than we were. I figured that if I really wanted to win a World Championship, it might be easier to join the Americans than to beat them.

It was with that goal in mind that I moved to Las Vegas in 2002. The depth of talent in American bridge is such that any team that is good enough to qualify to represent the USA in the World Championships is sure to be a contender. However, the same depth of talent in the USA makes it a lot harder to win the American Team Trials than it is to win the Canadian version of that event.

My first really good chance to win the USA Team Trials came in 2005. I was playing on an excellent team and Nick Nickell's team of superstars (almost that same team that beat Canada in the 1995 Bermuda Bowl Final) had already qualified and would not be playing in the 2005 Trials.

I am pleased to report that I did win this event and, at the time that I am writing this, my team is preparing to represent the USA at the upcoming Bermuda Bowl in Estoril, Portugal in November 2005. Despite the Nickell team not being present in the 2005 American Team Trials, we still had to beat several excellent teams in order to win. This deal comes from the last segment of the very close semifinal match (so close that it eventually went into overtime) against the team captained by Richie Schwartz.

♠ A 3
♥ Q 8
♦ K 9
♣ K Q J 10 5 3 2

♠ —
♥ K J 7 5 2
♦ A J 10 6 4
♣ A 6 4

Neither vul.

West	**North**	**East**	**South**
Berkowitz	*Brad*	*Cohen*	*Fred*
3♠	3NT	4♠	5NT
pass	6♣	pass	6♦
all pass			

David Berkowitz on my left dealt and opened 3♠ with neither side vulnerable. My partner, Brad Moss, overcalled 3NT and Larry Cohen on my right bid 4♠. I decided that I wanted to play in slam in one of the red suits and thus bid 5NT (defined as a 'choice of slams' in my partnership with Brad). Brad chose 6♣ which I corrected to 6♦ to show diamonds and hearts. Brad passed (after an eternity) and 6♦ was the final contract.

Berkowitz led the ♣8 and when Brad put down his dummy I immediately realized that I had not bid my hand very well.

Whereas 6♣ was practically laydown, 6♦ was in serious jeopardy. In retrospect, instead of 5NT, I should have made the same call that my friend Drew Casen made with my cards at the other table: 5♠. His partner, Jim Krekorian, bid 6♣ over 5♠ and Drew was able to pass with confidence — he knew that Krekorian would bid 5NT himself unless he had a strong idea what the best final contract would be.

Meanwhile, I tried to not think of the bidding. I spent a full five minutes before I played a card from the dummy, attempting to come up with the best way to bring home my horrible contract. Think about how you would play as the declarer before reading on.

Clearly I was going to have to find the ♦Q in order to make my shaky slam. I was fairly certain that the best percentage play was to win the opening lead in my hand and play a diamond to dummy's nine. This plan would succeed whenever Berkowitz was dealt either two or three diamonds including the queen.

By playing diamonds the other way, I could pick up the same holdings in Cohen's hand, but Berkowitz's known spade length made it more likely that he was short in diamonds. As such, if the ♦Q was doubleton, it was more likely to be with Berkowitz than with Cohen.

After some serious thinking, I decided to go against what I thought were the odds and play Cohen for the ♦Q. Do you know why?

I thought that Berkowitz might not have led what appeared to be a singleton if he had been dealt a likely trick in the form of the queen of trumps. This was by no means a certainty, but I thought that this inference was strong enough to sway the odds.

I therefore won the first trick in the dummy, cashed the king of diamonds and played the ♦9. When I opened my eyes the ♦9 had won the trick as Berkowitz followed with the ♦8. Whew!

Unfortunately I was not out of the woods yet — I still had a decision to make. The straightforward play would be to ruff a spade back to my hand and cash the ♦A in the hope that the trumps had been divided 3-3.

The alternative line was more exciting and I decided to adopt it (I will explain why shortly). I cashed dummy's ♠A and discarded

my ♣A (to cheers from the thousands of people on Bridge Base Online watching the match live via Internet Vugraph). I then led a second round of clubs. When Cohen followed and Berkowitz couldn't ruff, I knew I was in the clear.

Cohen ruffed the third round of clubs (it would not have helped him to discard) and I overruffed. I drew his last trump and played a heart to the dummy's queen. Cohen won with the ♥A and played back a spade, which I ruffed. I tested hearts and, as expected, they were 3-3. I was therefore able to claim the rest of the tricks for a thrilling +920!

So why did I decide to play for diamonds to be 4-2 instead of 3-3?

I knew from the bidding that Berkowitz had been dealt seven spades and I thought it was almost certain that his club lead had been a singleton. At the point I had to make my decision, I knew his distribution was either 7-3-2-1 or 7-2-3-1 and that the two shapes were equally likely.

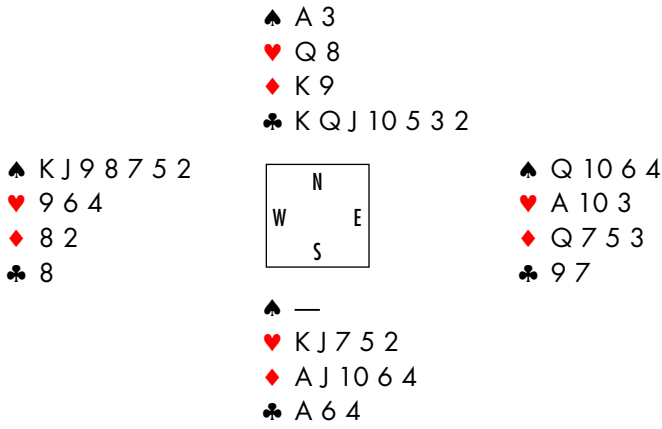
I was therefore faced with a complete guess, at least from a mathematical point of view. There were two reasons why I guessed right and played Berkowitz for his actual 7-3-2-1 hand.

Firstly, Berkowitz had followed with the ♦8 on the second round of the suit. While I knew that he was more than capable of falsecarding in this position, even the world's best players (and David is one of these) do not always have the presence of mind to make such falsecards. I thought that the chances were better than 50% that the ♦8 was the last diamond in his hand.

Secondly, my line of play was more fun! You may find it strange that I would care about something like this in the middle of a desperately close match at one of the most critical moments of my bridge career. However, I consider myself fortunate that, no matter how 'serious' the circumstances, I never lose sight of the fact that bridge is still a game. I became interested in bridge because it was fun and fascinating and I have remained interested in bridge for the same reasons. I was thrilled to have a chance to play a really fun hand at such an important time.

If there are any card gods out there, I suspect that this hand made them smile.

The full deal:



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MASTERCLASS

Imagine sitting beside a world-class bridge player and being able to listen to his thoughts as each hand develops… you can't help but improve your own game! Every hand in this fascinating book comes from actual play; many of them are taken from the author's own experience in world-level competition. Fred Gitelman believes that there is something to be learned from every bridge hand, whether you are a novice or an expert, and he proves it here. Just as fascinating as the bridge, however, are Fred's observations on his partners and opponents, who range from world champions like Alan Sontag to famous amateurs like Bill Gates and Warren Buffett.

FRED GITELMAN (Las Vegas) has a trophy case full of world championship medals, many of them earned playing for his native Canada. He has a well-deserved reputation as the world's leading designer and producer of bridge software, while his website, Bridge Base Online, is the most popular bridge-playing site on the Net. He is well known as a contributor to bridge magazines, but this is his first book.

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