


MY
FAVORITE 52

*Foreword by
Bobby Wolff*

A portrait of Larry Cohen, a man with dark brown hair and blue eyes, wearing a dark blue suit jacket, a light yellow shirt, and a patterned tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

LARRY COHEN

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Acknowledgments

This is an unusual book, since it started out as an interactive software package, and only some years later became the book you are now holding. The original software is still available for purchase if you prefer that version.

A special thank you to Marty Bergen and Kit Woolsey for checking the bridge analysis. Without the high-quality proofreading work (many laborious hours) of Eugene Hung, Arthur Jacobs and Bill Osterhouse there would have been hundreds of errors in the software. I also wish to thank my software proofreaders Konrad Ciborowski, Bernie Miller and Frank van Wezel. No doubt, errors still exist, and indeed more may have been introduced in the transition to the printed page. I welcome any corrections. Please report them to me via my website, www.larryco.com, or to Master Point Press, info@masterpointpress.com.

Of course, I also have to thank Fred Gitelman for designing the software upon which the original version of this book was presented.

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FOREWORD

I've known Larry Cohen throughout his thirty-plus years in the tournament bridge world. By combining his talents as player and writer to select his favorite 52 deals, he has come up with a compilation that will be a treat to bridge aficionados everywhere.

In my partnership with Bob Hamman in the 1980s we often found ourselves face-to-face with Larry and Marty Bergen. It was no surprise to me that several deals from that era have found their way into his favorite 52. They brought back memories for me and made me wonder how many other 'lost gems' were never written about. So many deals in this book have never been published before — it is like an unearthing of recent bridge history.

Many of the exhibits are spectacular. It increases one's fascination with the great game of bridge to see how these amazing deals were actually solved at the table by real humans in real time. I enjoyed the way these deals were presented — I had a chance to try to find the right bid or play for myself, and then read the story of what actually happened at the table.

I have always admired and respected Larry's great contributions to the game, and it was a treat for me to see his all-time favorite deals. I know that readers will share my joy.

Bobby Wolff
Las Vegas, NV
May 2009

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Introduction

Welcome to *My Favorite 52*. I've been collecting these deals for more than thirty years!

I played all 52 of these deals. (Actually, there are 60 deals because Deal 8 has seven bonus deals called 8A-8G and you will also find there's a phantom Deal 53 when you get to the end of the book.) Sometimes I am the hero, but at times I am the goat. In those cases, you can try to avoid the error I made at the table. I was tempted to call this *My Greatest Hits...and Near Misses* — but I couldn't resist the alliteration in *My Favorite 52*. Anyway, how bad can it be to use the number 52, in a book about bridge?

These deals are presented interactively. In fact, they are also available as software — you can play through them on your computer. They were first released in the software version, but I know that most bridge players like books — they prefer to read their bridge in a book as opposed to sitting in front of a computer. Accordingly, I've been persuaded to let the material be released in print format too.

The deals in this collection border on the sensational. They aren't your everyday instructional deals where declarer has to make an ordinary safety play. There are many positions that I trust will be new to even the most veteran readers. Still, I believe that with the warning bells sounded, even the hardest of these problems are actually solvable by advanced-level players.

Each deal is presented in four parts. The first part is the story of the deal itself: where it took place, who was involved and sometimes why it was special. The second part is the bidding. You will follow the auction as we bid one of the hands together. At various times I will give you an opportunity to make your own choice about the right action. From time to time, you will see this symbol:



When it appears, take a moment to think about the situation and try to decide what you would do. In the third part you take the seat of one of the players (be warned, it will usually be the hot seat) and follow the play, making decisions — some critical, some challenging and some less so. You will usually not know which! Again, the clock symbol tells you when to stop and think. Finally you will see the whole deal and learn the result of the deal when it was originally played.

Some of the deals are easy, some are medium, and some are difficult — just like in real life. My hope is that there's plenty to learn from each of them — and I know you'll have fun doing it!

Larry Cohen
Boca Raton, FL
May 2009

SWEET BEGINNINGS

1. Once in a Lifetime

♠ Q J 10 9 8 5 4 2 ♥ — ♦ A K Q 8 6 ♣ —

Do not adjust your glasses. This hand was actually dealt to me! It was during the 1980 Vanderbilt in Fresno, California, in the Round of 16.

The boards were dealt by us, actual human beings. According to the *Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*, if you play a million deals, you can expect to hold this exact pattern three times. To put that in perspective, imagine that you play twenty-four deals a day, three days a week: that's seventy-two deals a week, 3,744 a year. Even if you played eighty years at that rate it would still be against the odds ever to hold this exact distribution.

Here I was, at the age of twenty, already using up my lifetime expectancy of holding such a hand.

The Auction

I was dealer, with both sides vulnerable. What is the correct opening bid? If you know the right answer, it will be all downhill from here. The bidding problems only get easier.



Most people opt for 4♠, 2♣ or 1♠. If I had to pick one of those, it would be 1♠. The hand is much too good for a preemptive 4♠, and you don't have enough aces and kings to open 2♣.

However, there is a better and more accurate call available: 5♠. If you don't believe me, you can again consult the *Official Encyclopedia of Bridge*. Look up 'Five of a Major Opening' and you will see the following definition:

FIVE OF A MAJOR OPENING: *Shows a hand missing both top honors in the trump suit, but no outside losers. Partner is invited to raise to small slam with one of the missing key cards, to grand slam with both. Probably the rarest bid in bridge.*

I can't recall from whom, where, when or why (probably a misspent youth), but I was aware of this 'rarest bid in bridge'. So I reached into the bidding box and pulled out the 5♠ bid and placed it on the table. This drew a few amused looks from the other players. Even in the Vanderbilt, there is room for levity. Left Hand Opponent passed, and my partner, Ron Gerard, started to think.

With a slight smirk (and more amused glances from the table), he reached into his bidding box and produced a 7♠ bid!

I hoped he had interpreted 5♠ the way I had meant it. If he was raising based on the ♣A and ♥A (as opposed to the top spades), this wasn't going to work too well. Everybody passed, and I anxiously awaited the dummy. At least I knew we weren't off the ♠A (no double!).

The Play

Both Vul.

♠ A K
 ♥ K 9 8 4 3
 ♦ 5 2
 ♣ Q 9 4 3

 ♠ Q J 10 9 8 5 4 2
 ♥ —
 ♦ A K Q 8 6
 ♣ —

West	North	East	South
pass	7♠	all pass	5♠

The final contract is 7♠ by South. Perfect! He had the hoped-for ♠AK. You win the trump lead in dummy, as everybody follows. Will there be anything to the play of this hand?

What should you play to Trick 2?



It would be wrong to draw the last trump. If diamonds split 3-3, you will always make 7♠. If they split 5-1 (or 6-0), you will never make your contract. The only relevant diamond split is 4-2. It also happens to be the most statistically likely division. So you should start the diamonds, planning to ruff one in dummy. Everyone follows to two rounds.

♠ A
 ♥ K 9 8 4 3
 ♦ —
 ♣ Q 9 4 3

 ♠ Q J 10 9 8 5 4
 ♥ —
 ♦ Q 8 6
 ♣ —

What if somebody had ruffed this second round of diamonds? As already mentioned, if diamonds were 5-1 or worse, you never could make this contract so don't worry about it. What now?



Let's not screw up the good work: ruff a small diamond in dummy. Playing the ♦Q would subject you to a ruff if an opponent had started with two diamonds and two trumps. Diamonds were 3-3 all along. You ruff something high in your hand and claim your contract.

The Result

Both Vul.

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

	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
	Cohen	
	♠ Q J 10 9 8 5 4 2	
	♥ —	
	♦ A K Q 8 6	
	♣ —	

Notice how disciplined East was. He had two aces (and a king), yet trusted the North-South bidding enough to restrain from doubling the grand slam. Also notice West's proper opening lead. Expecting declarer to have a solid hand outside of trumps, the only 'extra' trick could come from ruffing a small card (from declarer's side suit) in dummy.

At the other table, the South player was unaware of the possible 5♠ opening bid. He started with 2♣ and reached only 6♠, receiving a club lead. Playing IMPs, what is the correct line of play in only a small slam (try to take twelve tricks)?

♠	A K
♥	K 9 8 4 3
♦	5 2
♣	Q 9 4 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px;"></div>
♠	Q J 10 9 8 5 4 2
♥	—
♦	A K Q 8 6
♣	—

After ruffing the first club, should you?

- a) Draw trumps
- b) Play the ♦A and ♦K
- c) Other



Needing only twelve tricks, declarer can always make his six-level contract if diamonds are 4-2 or 3-3. At IMPs, you don't worry about overtricks. In six, you can try to find a way to protect against a 5-1 diamond break. There is an easy way to do so: after cashing a top diamond, continue with a *low* diamond from hand. This is a safety play to guarantee the contract.

If the suit splits 3-3 or 4-2, you've given away a potential overtrick, but you can win any return and draw trump and claim. The advantage comes if the suit splits 5-1. Even if somebody shows out on this trick, you can win any return (even a trump won't hurt you) and ruff your other low diamond in dummy to make twelve tricks. If instead, you laid down another high diamond and an opponent ruffed, you'd be in big trouble. On a trump return, you'd have only one trump left in dummy, but two losing low diamonds in hand. Down you'd go.

Anyway, the diamonds behaved well enough for either 6♠ or 7♠ to make, and our team won 13 IMPs for bidding the grand slam. Take one last good look at the South distribution. You probably will never get to hold such a hand in your lifetime.

THE CAVENDISH

2. Don't Get Greedy

These next five deals come from the Cavendish. This prestigious (and big money) event is held every May in Las Vegas. Both Cavendish events (Teams and Pairs) use IMP scoring. You just want to make (or defeat) the contract — don't worry about overtricks or undertricks.

The Auction

Take these South cards and see if you can do better than many of the world's top players.

♠ Q J 8 7 5 ♥ — ♦ A Q 10 8 3 ♣ 7 5 3

With neither vulnerable, your partner deals and opens 1♣; East jumps preemptively to 2♥. What is your choice of action?



My choice is 2♠. A free bid here shows a pretty good hand. It is forcing (not to game), but usually is played as guaranteeing a rebid unless opener raises, rebids his suit or bids notrump. Typically this free bid at the two-level contains at least ten high card points, but here, even though you have only nine high card points, the hand is worth so much more. Starting with a negative double could work out, but with a five-card spade suit and enough to bid it, I prefer 2♠.

After West takes up your room by jumping to 4♥, partner bids 4♠.

Are you done?



Yes, you should be. You have some good features here such as the ♦A, the good diamond suit and the heart void. However, you are close to a minimum and your trump suit is not so good. In general, when a slam try is a possibility, look at your trump suit. If your trumps were, say, ♠KQJ109, or even ♠QJ10873 or the like, it would be more tempting to look for slam. Here, where partner might have raised on ♠Axx or ♠Kxx, slam would be shaky because a 4-1 trump break would probably

spell defeat. And even a 3-2 trump split would mean you have to take all the rest of the tricks (you'd have to lose a trump trick).

West passes, and you'll soon see if you bid enough.

The Play

♠ A 6 4
 ♥ K 6 4
 ♦ J 9
 ♣ A K Q J 2

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

West	North	East	South
	1♣	2♥	2♠
4♥	4♠	all pass	

West leads the ♥Q. Looks like 4♠ was enough: partner has a lot of high cards but still, slam is not so hot. Barring a miracle spade position (such as ♠109 doubleton with East), you will lose a trump trick. So even if spades are 3-2 you'll still need the diamond finesse. This is a less than 50% slam, thus not worth bidding.

Meanwhile, what should you play to Trick 1 in only 4♠?



It's unlikely West would underlead an ace on this auction, so East is likely to have the ♥A. There is no reason to surrender your ♥K. If East later gains the lead, he won't be in a good position to continue the heart attack. Speaking of which, this deal almost caused some heart attacks (figuratively speaking, of course) around the room, but more on that later. You ruff the first trick in hand and have to decide how to continue. What should you do at Trick 2?



Lead the ♠Q. You might as well start drawing trumps and this is a good way to go about it. Even if the spade finesse loses, East will be on lead and he (with the presumed ♥A) won't be able to do much damage by tapping you. West covers with the king — so much for losing the finesse. After West covers, you win in dummy as East follows with the ♠2 and you have more decisions.

♠ 6 4
 ♥ K 6
 ♦ J 9
 ♣ A K Q J 2

 ♠ J 8 7
 ♥ —
 ♦ A Q 10 8 3
 ♣ 7 5 3

Two tricks in. What now?



It's right to lead the ♦J at this point. Sad to say, I (and many other participants) got this wrong at the table. Let's back up and make the mistake I made, playing another trump, to show you why it is wrong. East showed out, not a big shock on the given auction. Now I was in big trouble. Let's take a look at the whole deal after I won the ♠J at Trick 3:

♠ 10 9	♠ 6	♠ —
♥ J 9 2	♥ K 6	♥ A 10 8 7 5
♦ K 7 6	♦ J 9	♦ 5 4
♣ 10 9	♣ A K Q J 2	♣ 8 6 4

	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	
♠ 8 7		
♥ —		
♦ A Q 10 8 3		
♣ 7 5 3		

West still had two high trumps and there was nothing I could do about it. I cashed two high clubs, but this was just postponing the inevitable. To get up to ten tricks I would need the diamond finesse. Just running clubs would let West ruff in, cash a trump, and play a heart to force out my last trump. I'd be in the wrong hand to take the diamond finesse. So I had to take it now. Unfortunately, once it lost, this meant I'd go down multiple tricks.

I suffered the embarrassment of having West draw my trumps and play a heart through for the defense to run the hearts. At least I wasn't doubled and wasn't vulnerable: it was only fifty a trick, down five and -250. (Even after my early misplay, astute readers will note there were ways to avoid down five, but at fifty a trick, it

wasn't too painful.) However, one declarer was in 6♠ redoubled and took the same line that I did. When he lost the diamond finesse and lost control he was down seven redoubled for -3400! That was the heart attack I was referring to.

Let's go back to Trick 3.

```

♠ 6 4
♥ K 6
♦ J 9
♣ A K Q J 2
_____
♠ J 8 7
♥ —
♦ A Q 10 8 3
♣ 7 5 3

```

The lead was in dummy after capturing West's ♠K with the ♠A. It was a big error to play the second trump at this point. The 4-1 break coupled with the losing diamond finesse spelled disaster. This was not a matchpoint event; overtricks were not of concern. Accordingly, I should have taken the diamond finesse right away. What could go wrong?

Nothing, really. Remember, the ♦K would be the only trick lost so far. West would win and play a heart. Even with the diamond finesse losing, and the heart back to tap me, I would still be 100% okay...

```

♠ 6 4
♥ K
♦ 9
♣ A K Q J 2
_____
♠ J 8
♥ —
♦ A Q 10 8
♣ 7 5 3

```

...by doing what next?



Simply stay off the trump suit. Keep control. You can still afford to lose two trump tricks, so there is no need to draw any more trumps. Let's say you play the ♦A. Even if a defender ruffed this, you'd be fine. There would be only two trumps remaining, and you'd be in control. Meanwhile, you can just keep playing diamonds and laugh at them (well, that wouldn't be polite, but you know what I mean). Diamonds happen to split 3-3 but that doesn't really matter. If you erroneously laid down the

top trump, the 4-1 break would spell doom. You could cash some winners, but eventually West would ruff in, draw your trump and run the hearts. But if you just run winners you have the timing and control. As soon as the defense ruffs in (even if spades are 3-2), you can win the return, play the ♠J and then continue with your winners.

The Result

Neither Vul.

♠ K 10 9 3

♥ Q J 9 2

♦ K 7 6

♣ 10 9

♠ A 6 4

♥ K 6 4

♦ J 9

♣ A K Q J 2

♠ 2

♥ A 10 8 7 5 3

♦ 5 4 2

♣ 8 6 4

N

W

E

S

♠ Q J 8 7 5

♥ —

♦ A Q 10 8 3

♣ 7 5 3

Surprisingly, less than half the field managed ten tricks in this spade contract. It just goes to show you that even the world’s best make mistakes. In retrospect, this deal doesn’t seem extremely difficult. Once you realize that the goal is only ten tricks, you should recognize the need to play safely.

Chapter 2 — The Cavendish • 17

3. A Transport of Delight

Continuing with our Cavendish Pairs deals, here is one that trapped several experts (thankfully I wasn't one of them!). Take the South cards, and see whether you can avoid mistakes.

The Auction

♠ K 7 6 3 ♥ A Q 3 ♦ 5 4 2 ♣ J 10 9

You are at unfavorable vulnerability, in fourth seat. West deals and opens with a weak two-bid in hearts. Your partner overcalls 3♦ and after East's pass, it is up to you.

What is your call?



Too bad they aren't all this easy. With a double heart stopper, notrump shape, and the values for game, you have an automatic 3NT call. As it often does, 3NT buys the contract.

The Play

♠ 10 4 2
♥ K 2
♦ A K Q J 8
♣ Q 3 2

♠ K 7 6 3
♥ A Q 3
♦ 5 4 2
♣ J 10 9

West	North	East	South
2♥	3♦	pass	3NT
all pass			

The final contract is 3NT by South. West leads the ♥J and you examine the dummy. Partner had several choices after the 2♥ opening. Do you see his other options? He could have made a takeout double or overcalled 2NT. Both actions have slight flaws. His spades are poor for a double (it would be nice to have four or at least a

good three-card holding). His doubleton heart holding is poor for notrump, even though he does have enough high card points for that action. A 2NT overcall of a weak two-bid shows the values for an opening 1NT bid.

Anyway, the auction is over and you need to plan the play. Your first decision comes right away. Where will you win this trick?



Win the ♥K in dummy. In notrump contracts, it is a good idea to count winners. (In suit contracts, you typically count your losers.) Here, presuming diamonds split, you have five diamonds and three hearts for sure. It looks like you can easily set up a club for your ninth trick. Is there any danger along the way?

Yes. If the defense could somehow get three spade tricks along with their ♣AK, you would go down. So should you try some other way to get your ninth trick?



No. The other choice would be to play spades yourself. If spades are lying favorably, then you don't need to play them at all; working on clubs will safely set up your ninth trick. So you know you will work on clubs. If they shift to spades, you'll have to hope for good fortune at that time. But for now, you need to look ahead for any other traps.

What if you were to win the first heart in hand, with (say) the queen? Then, when you play clubs, the defense will duck the first round. They aren't here to help you, you know.

♠	10 4 2
♥	K
♦	A K Q J 8
♣	Q 3
<hr/>	
♠	K 7 6 3
♥	A 3
♦	5 4 2
♣	10 9

Now you've blocked the hearts and have no easy way to take your nine tricks. Furthermore, you have set up at least three, maybe four, club tricks for the defense. You'll need some good fortune to make it from this point. So, let's go back to the first trick and correctly win it in dummy.

Just to make sure diamonds aren't 5-0, you can test one round. When everyone follows, what do you do at Trick 3?

♠ 10 4 2
 ♥ 2
 ♦ K Q J 8
 ♣ Q 3 2

 ♠ K 7 6 3
 ♥ A Q
 ♦ 5 4
 ♣ J 10 9



In some cases, you would continue to run your long suit, but not here. You don't want to help the defense by allowing them to signal. Furthermore, running the diamonds would cause you awkward discarding problems from your hand. You know you want to set up a club for your ninth trick, so go to it.

You should play the ♣Q. The trap, though, was to avoid playing a low club from dummy at Trick 3. Let's see what could have gone wrong with that plan. After winning his ♣K, West could knock out another of your top hearts.

♠ 10 4 2
 ♥ —
 ♦ K Q J 8
 ♣ Q 3

 ♠ K 7 6 3
 ♥ A
 ♦ 5 4
 ♣ J 10

Now what? Do you see the trouble that lurks? If you play another club, the defense could win it and play a third club. Big trouble for you. Not only have you set up their clubs, but you have no way back to your ninth trick, the good heart. Playing dummy's ♣Q wouldn't necessarily help. The defense could duck, and you'd still be cut off from your good heart.

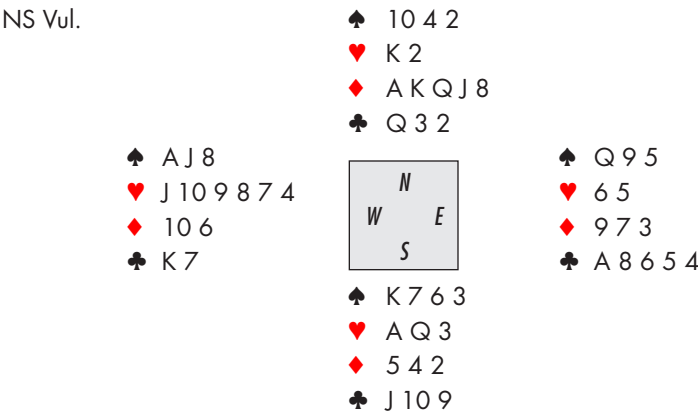
So let's go all the way back to Trick 3. We've seen that playing a low club does not guarantee you the contract. No matter what happens, the defense can manage the clubs in a way to keep you out of your hand for the long heart. And you obviously can't cash the hearts before the clubs as that would set up West's suit. If instead you start clubs with the ♣Q from the dummy, can the defense still block you?



No. This is the winning plan! If both defenders duck, you immediately have your nine tricks. Whichever opponent wins the trick, your communications are fine. You can win the second round of hearts in hand and play another club. In this way, you always have a way back to your good heart at the right time. (If they let you hold this trick, you'll be in your hand to take the good heart.) You will be able to score your third club trick while retaining an entry to your good heart.

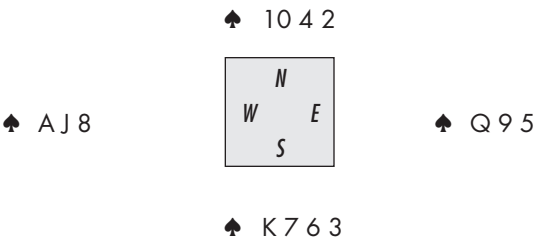
The Result

As long as you play the ♣Q on the first round of the suit, you make your contract in comfort, scoring +600.

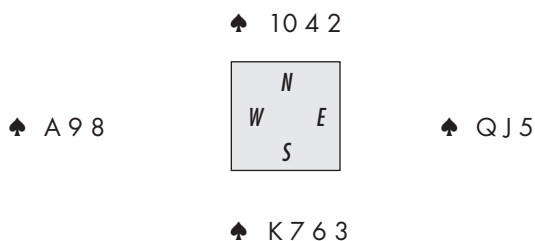


Connoisseurs of the game might find it interesting to consider what would happen if East shifts to spades when in with his ♣A.

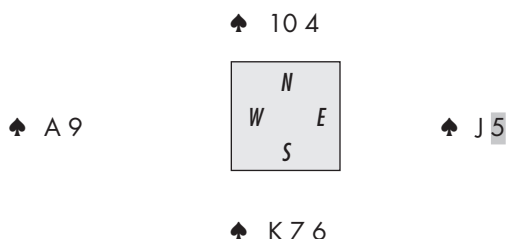
The defense needs to take three spade tricks to defeat the contract. Can they? If East shifts to a low spade, they have no chance. Declarer simply plays low and West is on lead and can't do any harm. What if East shifts to the ♠Q?



We can see that declarer can succeed by covering, but how does he know to? What if we change the layout? Look at this new diagram and observe.



This time, if declarer covers, the defenders run the suit. West is now on play to lead the ♠9 and allow three defensive tricks. The winning play for declarer this time is to duck the ♠Q. Now the suit is frozen.



If East continues with a low spade, as shown, declarer ducks. Had East played a high spade, declarer would have covered, of course. Against expert defenders, the percentage play on East's shift to the ♠Q (or ♠J) is to cover. This loses only when East starts with ♠QJx and wins in all other cases (including ♠AQx).

Back at the real full deal, we can observe that if East did shift to the ♠Q after winning his ♣A, declarer would indeed have had a guess to make his contract. In real life, most Easts would just continue their partner's suit instead of finding the spectacular spade play.

4. Guessing Right

This deal is from the 1997 Cavendish Teams. I was the dummy, but witnessed an interesting exchange (thrust and parry) between my partner, David Berkowitz, and the defenders. North-South are vulnerable. Take the East cards with Perry Johnson and follow along.

The Auction

♠ 9 8 ♥ K 6 ♦ J 7 6 5 4 2 ♣ J 6 2

West	North	East	South
			2♣
pass	2♥	pass	2NT
pass	3♥	pass	4NT
pass	5♣	pass	5NT
pass	6♣	pass	6NT
all pass			

I've translated the auction into Standard (even though our real auction used Precision). After a strong 2♣, North bids 2♥, natural. You pass, of course, and South rebids 2NT showing 22+ balanced. North rebids 3♥, promising at least six. South uses Roman Keycard Blackwood and RHO shows one keycard. The 5NT bid asks for specific kings and 6♣ shows the ♣K. South now places the contract in 6NT.

The Play

Your partner leads the ♣3, won in dummy. Are you ready? If ever a deal shows the need to think at Trick 1, this is it.

♠ 10 7 5	
♥ A J 10 9 8 7 5	
♦ 10 3	
♣ K	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	♠ 9 8 ♥ K 6 ♦ J 7 6 5 4 2 ♣ J 6 2

I know you have no problem in clubs, but you never know when a quiz is coming. Declarer crosses to hand with the ♠A, partner contributing the ♠6. Are you ready? Declarer leads the ♥Q, partner plays the ♥4, dummy the ♥5, and you play — what?



The ♥6. It's a shame I had to warn you by making this play a quiz. Without all the help, this wouldn't be as easy. Most players are familiar with similar situations where a holdup is routine.

♠ 7 2	♠ K Q J 10 9 8 <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 15px; width: 100px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♠ 5 4	♠ A 6 3
-------	--	---------

With this spade suit in dummy at notrump, and no side entries, South leads a spade. West plays high to show his doubleton, dummy plays the ♠K and East routinely ducks. That is the only spade trick declarer can take.


♠ 7 2	♠ A Q J 10 9 8 <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 15px; width: 100px; margin: 5px auto;"></div> ♠ 5 4	♠ K 6 3
-------	--	---------

Here is a similar situation. Again dummy has no side entry. Declarer plays a spade to the queen and again East ducks. This time, however, the tempo is important. If East can manage to duck in tempo, declarer will likely enter his hand to take another losing spade finesse. In either case, with no side entry to dummy, the long spades will wither on the vine.



Jeff Meckstroth

NS Vul.

	Cohen	
	♠ 10 7 5	
	♥ A J 10 9 8 7 5	
	♦ 10 3	
	♣ K	
Jeff Meckstroth		Perry Johnson
♠ J 6 4 3		♠ 9 8
♥ 4 3		♥ K 6
♦ Q 8		♦ J 7 6 5 4 2
♣ 10 8 5 4 3		♣ J 6 2
		
	Berkowitz	
	♠ A K Q 2	
	♥ Q 2	
	♦ A K 9	
	♣ A Q 9 7	

Let's look back at the 6NT contract, with all four hands in view. Jeff Meckstroth led a club, very annoying for the declarer (David). Notice that declarer had tons of tricks: his only problem was a lack of entries to dummy. David played a spade to his hand (more on that in a moment).

David led the ♥Q and Perry Johnson made the expert play of ducking his king in perfect tempo while Jeff followed with the ♥4. Perry looked as if he had not a care in the world. David played another heart, Jeff produced the ♥3, and declarer had reached the moment of truth.

Notice that Jeff played high-low with his doubleton. David couldn't read anything into this, as playing high-low would be the correct play even if West had started with ♥K43. In that case, East wouldn't need count and West could try to fool declarer. Against most players, David would finesse. He'd figure that East couldn't be good enough to produce such a smooth duck with ♥Kx. In general, you should never assume your opponent has made a great play. (Remember that famous saying, 'You'll never go broke underestimating the American public'.)

David did not underestimate his opponent. I don't know how he did it, but he guessed to play the ace! David had the rest for +1470 and a 1-IMP gain against the 1430 scored in 6♥ at the other table.

The Result

It is interesting to note that David didn't have to cross to his hand and finesse in hearts. What if he had led a heart from dummy at Trick 2? What should the defense have done? Obviously if East or West had taken the ♥K on the first round the hand would have been over. So East would have had to duck. And have done so smoothly, of course.

If West had held ♥Kxx, he'd also have had to duck on this heart trick (in tempo). Maybe David should have made this play at Trick 2, and then the defense wouldn't

have had as much time to prepare for it. On the other hand, crossing to hand to lead the ♥Q would save an overtrick IMP if West had started with the singleton ♥K.

On the actual layout, Perry could have won his ♥K and saved the IMP, but that would not have been the percentage play at this form of scoring. So why were we in this dumb contract at all (when 6♥ would have been easy)? David knew we had plenty of tricks and we were missing either the ♥A or ♥K. He put us in notrump for two reasons. For one, we might have had twelve tricks outside hearts. Maybe my hearts weren't so good, but I'd have the ♠J or ♣J or ♦Q to produce extra tricks. Consider a North hand such as:

♠ J x ♥ K J x x x x ♦ Q x x ♣ K x

Even if hearts break 4-1, there are twelve tricks in notrump. Also, maybe the defense could get a ruff to beat 6♥, while 6NT might have twelve running tricks after knocking out the missing high heart. I had shown the ♣K, so David didn't foresee this entry problem — if I had even one small club, he would have twelve easy tricks (thirteen if the ♥K were onside). My singleton king, combined with the diabolical club lead, were what caused the headache.

I admired the great play by Perry Johnson, and the great table read by David.

Just in case anyone is wondering, David is six feet tall (but Perry was holding his cards back).



David Berkowitz

5. Without a Net

We stay at the Cavendish Pairs, this time for the 1984 event. At unfavorable vulnerability, I held the South cards.

The Auction

♠ Q 8 7 4 ♥ 8 ♦ A Q 6 ♣ J 10 9 6 2

The dealer on my right opened with a 4♦ preempt. I waited for an alert, as many in the field use a 4♦ opening as Namyats to show a good 4♠ opening. No alert was coming: it was natural. I passed, as did my left-hand opponent. My partner, Marty Bergen, balanced with a double, East passed and it was up to me.

What did I do?



At the table I bid 4♠. However, looking back, I have my doubts. Surely at any other vulnerability I would have passed and led my singleton heart. I'd have an excellent chance to take three trump tricks (two by force and one by ruffing a heart). Then we'd get some other tricks from partner's hand since he entered the auction at the four-level.

Even at the actual vulnerability, I think I should have passed, but I had just turned twenty-five and I guess I didn't know any better. I suspect most players would bid 4♠, and it's not the worst bid ever, that's for sure. However, left-hand opponent doubled. Now I was feeling much worse: it looked like I had run into a trump stack.

After two passes, it was up to me again. What now?



I wasn't going to be stubborn about playing in spades. Looking for greener pastures, I ran to 4NT, which has to be natural in this auction. It can't be Blackwood and I can't mean it for takeout. I suppose 5♣ was a possible call, but with my double diamond stopper, and partner likely to have hearts stopped, I decided to contract for only ten, not eleven, tricks.

West doubled again. Whether he had his bid or not, it was the macho thing to do — and I expected the double. Back to me so soon? I had had enough. No testosterone-driven redouble, that's for sure!

I'm going to let you play this one — good luck.

The Play

♠ A 9 3
 ♥ K 9 7 5
 ♦ 9
 ♣ A K 8 7 4

 ♠ Q 8 7 4
 ♥ 8
 ♦ A Q 6
 ♣ J 10 9 6 2

West	North	East	South
		4♦	pass
pass	dbl	pass	4♠
dbl	pass	pass	4NT
dbl	all pass		

West leads the ♦5, and a so-so dummy appears. More would have been nice, but he could have had even less. In balancing seat, with shortness in their suit, I agree 100% with Marty's double. East plays the ♦10, no doubt from a suit headed by the KJ10, and you win the ♦Q. (Nothing fancy here. This is not the time for a hold-up play. You have lots of work to do.) How should you continue?



Play the ♣J. You don't want to break spades yet (playing low to the ♠A isn't likely to do you any good), and you certainly don't want to play hearts. Why not hearts? Assuming clubs run, you have seven top tricks in the minors plus the ♠A for eight. You might think that you should build the ninth trick with the ♥K and then throw West in to lead from the ♠K for your tenth, but that won't work.

Even if West has the ♥A (which is admittedly likely), he can just duck. You'll have nine tricks, but no endplay. You'd have to cash your ♦A to cut communications, but East would be able to keep a heart entry (all he needs is the ♥Q, ♥J, or ♥10) to get West off the hook.

So your best shot is to start with the clubs. You lead the ♣J and West covers. Would he do so with ♣Qxx? Not likely, but possible. It would be necessary if you started with ♣J9(x). When East follows you see West did not start with ♣Qxx. You might as well play a few rounds of clubs, being careful to keep entries to both hands. When you play the ♣A East discards the ♦3.

♠	A 9 3
♥	K 9 7 5
♦	—
♣	8 7 4
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 5px 0;"></div>
♠	Q 8 7 4
♥	8
♦	A 6
♣	10 6 2

So far, so good, but you can't play clubs forever; what's your eventual plan?

- a) Heart from hand
- b) Spade from hand
- c) Spade from dummy
- d) Other



You'd better not run all of your clubs; you need entries. Meanwhile, your best chance is to play spades from dummy. For his double, West probably has most of the missing major-suit high cards. You don't expect East to have the ♠K, but if he has the ♠J or ♠10 either singleton or doubleton, you are in business. How can you take advantage of this position?



You can take an intra-finesse, playing a low spade to the ♠8. If East started with a singleton ♠10 or ♠J, you'd cover with the ♠Q and then when West took his supposed ♠K, you'd have a finessing position against the other spade intermediate. Here, where East follows low, you have to hope he still has one more spade and that it is either the ♠10 or ♠J. Actually, even if West started with ♠KJ10, you will be able to force a second spade trick (more on that later).

West wins the ♠J and plays another diamond. You win the ♦A — from the bidding and play, you are sure diamonds are 7-2; there is no need to hold up. How do you continue now?



♠ A 9
 ♥ K 9 7
 ♦ —
 ♣ 8 7 4

 ♠ Q 7 4
 ♥ 8
 ♦ 6
 ♣ 10 6 2

Completing the intra-finesse, you now lead the ♠Q. Even if West started with all three big spades (♠KJ10), you are in business. He has to cover (otherwise you would run the ♠Q and pray, since if East has the ♠K he'll run the diamonds). Anyway, the auction strongly suggests the ♠K is with West. Let's suppose that West plays the ♠K. Even if nothing good happens (like the ♠10 falling from East), you'd be able to drive out West's ♠10 and if West has that and the ♥A you still have your ten tricks. This is why you kept all the club entries to hand for later.

In actuality, West doesn't cover. What do you think is going on? Do you have the nerve to play low?



Back your judgment and play the ♠9! How are your nerves? What's minus 1100 or so? Success! East plays the ♠10.

That's why West didn't cover. He would have set up three spade tricks for you had he played the ♠K. (You'd take dummy's ♠A, then dummy's ♠9, then come to your hand for the high ♠7.)

♠ A
 ♥ K 9 7
 ♦ —
 ♣ 8 7 4

 ♠ 7 4
 ♥ 8
 ♦ 6
 ♣ 10 6 2

That hurdle behind you, what now?



Play the ♠4. There is no reason to set up the ♥K yet. Just in case East has the ♥A

(even though it's very unlikely), why give him all of his tricks? You might as well take what is yours and play a heart up at the end. So cash your nine tricks, making sure to keep a club entry to hand. Then you play your heart (a spade is just as good), fully expecting West to be down to the ♠K and the ♥AQ.

He is indeed, and has to give dummy the tenth trick.

The Result

NS Vul.

		Bergen			
		♠	A 9 3		
		♥	K 9 7 5		
		♦	9		
		♣	A K 8 7 4		
♠	K J 5 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"><div style="text-align: center;">N</div><div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;">WE</div><div style="text-align: center;">S</div></div>		♠	10 6
♥	A Q 10 6 2			♥	J 4 3
♦	5 2			♦	K J 10 8 7 4 3
♣	Q 5			♣	3
		Cohen			
		♠	Q 8 7 4		
		♥	8		
		♦	A Q 6		
		♣	J 10 9 6 2		

This is exactly how the play went in 1984 and the score (we had to look it up) was +810. We won lots of IMPs for +810 (although I aged a few years when I floated the ♠Q towards East's hand with all those established diamonds). This was one of those memorable events. We were in last place at the halfway point and ended up first overall, beating out the world's best, Jeff Meckstroth and Eric Rodwell, who finished second.

It turns out that double-dummy defense (without a computer, it's hard to figure out) would have defeated the contract, but no one was going to do it in real life. Passing 4♦ doubled would likely have resulted in +500. Also, as long as declarer guesses spades, North-South can make 5♣ on any defense.

6. Your Lucky Day

This will be our final deal from the famous Cavendish.

The Auction

♠ Q 6 3 ♥ — ♦ 9 8 3 ♣ A K Q 10 9 6 4

I held the South cards in third seat with neither vulnerable. Take over and see how you do. Partner passed and East opened 1♦. You might not guess my action. What do you think I did?



I bid 3♣. A bid of 2♣ would be ‘normal’ but I’ve been accused of not being normal; I prefer a jump to 3♣. No, I don’t play intermediate jump overcalls, that would be truly abnormal in today’s preempt-happy world. This jump is ‘weak’ in theory, but I prefer to describe it as ‘wide-range’. Once partner is a passed hand, anything goes. As long as I don’t think we have a game, why not take up extra room from the opponents? Here I suppose game is possible but it’s unlikely. In the long run, it pays to take away a level of bidding from the enemy.

After your left-hand opponent’s negative double, partner jumps to 5♣. This is a bit surprising. You pass, of course, and West doubles on the way out.

The Play

♠ J 9 8 5
♥ A K 9 6 4
♦ 6
♣ J 7 2

♠ Q 6 3
♥ —
♦ 9 8 3
♣ A K Q 10 9 6 4

West	North	East	South
		1♦	3♣
dbl	5♣	pass	pass
dbl	all pass		

The ♣5 is led, and it appears as if partner has misjudged. Actually, partner was a bit unlucky. If the majors (his or yours) were reversed, then this would be a super contract. In fact, you'd have good play for 6♣!

As it is, you are off three top losers (two spades and a diamond). Meanwhile, your side has enough defense to defeat any game contract the other way. However, with the actual trump lead, you may still have a chance in your doubled game: you can throw away two spades on dummy's high hearts. But will that be good enough?



No! In a suit contract, you should start by counting immediate losers.

Since you can dispose of two spades, you can get down to only two immediate losers (one high spade, one high diamond). That's good. But what about winners? Seven trumps in hand and the ♥AK only comes to nine tricks. Can you arrange some ruffs in dummy?

Yes, you can give up a diamond, but no doubt the defenders will play another round of trumps. That will leave only one trump in dummy to ruff with. That gets you up to ten tricks and leaves you with an extra low diamond in hand with no place to put it. Any way you look at it, you are a trick short. Do you have a solution in mind?



It turns out (as it so often does), that the key play occurs at Trick 1! You have a chance to make your contract as long as you have enough dummy entries. The plan has to be to set up dummy's long heart for an extra trick. You will need a 4-4 heart break and a total of three entries (two to ruff hearts and one to get back for the established fifth heart). The only way to reach dummy three times is the club suit, but if all goes well you will have the needed entries.

The percentage play is to finesse dummy's ♣7 at Trick 1! This wins whenever West started with the ♣8. Going up with the ♣J is right only if East started with exactly the singleton ♣8. It is anti-percentage.

So you cover the ♣5 with the ♣7 and... success! East plays the ♣3 and you are in dummy for the first time. You might as well get rid of two spades. Everyone follows to the first two high hearts.

Now you play the ♥4, ruffing with a high club, trying to set up dummy's fifth heart for a needed discard. Everyone follows. So far, so good.

♠ J 9 8 5
 ♥ 9 6
 ♦ 6
 ♣ J 2

 ♠ Q
 ♥ —
 ♦ 9 8 3
 ♣ K Q 10 9 6

Does your next play matter? What is it going to be?

- a) ♠Q
- b) ♦9
- c) ♣K
- d) ♣9



It might matter. There is still one trump outstanding. If you played a diamond out of hand, surely the defender with the remaining trump would win it and play the last trump. Then your only hope will be that 4-4 heart break. By playing the ♠Q, you give yourself a slight extra chance. Maybe East will have both high spades (you know he has no more trumps to lead, as West must have the ♣8 after the play to Trick 1). Perhaps East won't work out to put his partner in with a diamond for a trump play (maybe he would have to underlead some high honors).

So you lead the ♠Q, but East wins the ♠K and returns a diamond to West's ♦10. So much for that idea. At least you tried. West plays the last trump, of course. You win in dummy, ruff another heart, cross your fingers, and this is your lucky day: hearts split 4-4. Now you can concede a diamond, ruff a diamond, and pitch a diamond on the fifth heart.



Larry Cohen

The Result

Neither Vul.

	♠ J 9 8 5	
	♥ A K 9 6 4	
	♦ 6	
	♣ J 7 2	
♠ 10 7 2		♠ A K 4
♥ Q J 8 2		♥ 10 7 5 3
♦ A J 10 4		♦ K Q 7 5 2
♣ 8 5		♣ 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	
	♠ Q 6 3	
	♥ —	
	♦ 9 8 3	
	♣ A K Q 10 9 6 4	

It was my lucky day, too, because bid for bid and card for card this is what happened when I played the deal in Las Vegas. The rest was easy, really just a claim. The lowly ♣2 was the last entry to dummy for the long heart. So 5♣ doubled, bid and made for +550 and lots of IMPs across the field. It turns out that several other tables also made +550 North-South, but it was still quite a good result. Obviously a spade or diamond lead beats the contract a trick.

SUMMER NATIONALS

7. Normal Is as Normal Does

I played this deal in the Life Master Pairs at the New Orleans Nationals in 1995, with David Berkowitz, my regular partner for many years. Try taking his (the South) cards at favorable vulnerability.



David Berkowitz

The Auction

♠ A K 8 6 5 2 ♥ — ♦ J 10 9 ♣ A Q 9 2

You have a nice-looking hand and you start with the obvious 1♠. Any plans for science go out the window when West jumps to 4♥, partner competes to 4♠, and East goes to 5♥. What should be your next call?



Holding six spades and extra offense, not to mention a void in their suit, defending is out of the question, so you bid 5♠. You might have a slam, but in such competitive auctions you shouldn't be greedy. Opposite a perfect hand, slam might be there, but partner might have already stretched with his 4♠ bid.

After two passes, East doubles. What should you do?



Pass. Again, try not to be greedy. A redouble might feel macho, but you don't really want to chase them to 6♥. If they have a diamond fit, they could do quite well in hearts. Meanwhile, if 5♠ doubled makes, you should score quite well enough, thank you.

The Play

♠ Q J 10 9 7
♥ 8 5
♦ 5 3 2
♣ K 8 6

♠ A K 8 6 5 2
♥ —
♦ J 10 9
♣ A Q 9 2

West	North	East	South
4♥	4♠	5♥	1♠
pass	pass	dbl	5♣
			all pass

Dummy has only six high card points, but what beautiful points they are! Even if you lose three diamond tricks, there's a chance this will be a profitable sacrifice against 5♥.

The opening lead is the ♥2. For the second deal in a row, the opponents have erred on opening lead (this makes bridge much easier!). Having escaped a diamond lead, you have a chance to make your contract if the clubs provide a discard for one of dummy's diamonds. East plays the ♥J and you ruff the first trick.

What do you play next?

- a) ♠5
- b) ♦9
- c) ♣A
- d) ♣2



There is absolutely no reason to postpone drawing trumps. You play the ♠5, West follows with the ♠3, you play dummy's ♠Q, and East discards the ♦8. You are pleased to see the spades 2-0. It doesn't hurt you at all, but bodes well for the East-West pairs who buy the hand in hearts. Just for practice, you eliminate dummy's last heart, ruffing with the ♣A to keep your spade entries to dummy, if they are needed. Then you draw the last trump as East throws the ♣3.

Now what?

♠ 10 9 7
♥ —
♦ 5 3 2
♣ K 8 6

♠ K 8
♥ —
♦ J 10 9
♣ A Q 9 2

- a) ♠10
- b) ♦2
- c) ♣K
- d) ♣6



If clubs are 3-3, nothing matters. Most players with this club holding would lay down the ace and then play low to the king. If West has the ♣10 or ♣J singleton, this reveals the break and puts you in dummy to finesse at the right moment. However, the ♣K is the correct card.

That ‘normal’ play of the ♣A should be made only if there are no side entries. The normal play in clubs would be right in a normal situation. This situation is anything but normal. For his vulnerable 4♥ bid, there is a good chance West has an eight-card suit. He also has two spades, so he rates to be short in clubs. How short?

Recall the opening lead, the ♥2 to East’s ♥J. What was that all about? Obviously, West has underled some pretty big cards in hearts, presumably the ace. When East played the jack at Trick 1, he surely didn’t have ♥AKQJ. This was a big tip-off that West underled the ♥A, and you should know why. An ace underlead in such a situation is almost always made to obtain a ruff, presumably in clubs (thus the suit-preference ♥2).

When you lead the ♣K, East follows with the ♣4, you play the ♣2 and West plays the ♥4. Indeed, West started with a club void. However, after laying down the ♣K on the first round of the suit, you are in position to score all four club tricks.

You play a club and East splits with the ten and you win your ace. Then you cross back to dummy (notice that when drawing trumps you were careful to keep entries to both hands for later transportation). You take the marked club finesse and throw away one of dummy’s diamonds on your long club. You exit in diamonds, ending up with eleven tricks and your doubled contract. Had you started clubs at Trick 4 by leading low to the ace, you would have received the bad news. However, at this point there would have been no way to pick up the clubs for four tricks, and down you would have gone.

The Result

Now let's go back and look at the full deal.

EW Vul.		♠ Q J 10 9 7		
		♥ 8 5		
		♦ 5 3 2		
		♣ K 8 6		
♠ 4 3		<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>		♠ —
♥ A K 10 7 6 4 3 2				♥ Q J 9
♦ Q 6 4				♦ A K 8 7
♣ —				♣ J 10 7 5 4 3
		♠ A K 8 6 5 2		
		♥ —		
		♦ J 10 9		
		♣ A Q 9 2		

For making 5♠ doubled, you get a top, but even had it failed, your −100 would have been quite a good result. By now, you've probably realized that East-West would have done well in 5♥. How well? It turns out they are cold for all thirteen tricks in hearts. In fact, a few tables played 7♥ doubled East-West, making, for a score of +2470.

8. In for a Penny, In for a Pound

This deal is unforgettable in many ways. It helped me win the 2002 ACBL Player of the Year Award (for best performance at the three National tournaments). I was able to edge out my regular partner David Berkowitz by ‘stealing’ his wife Lisa for the National Mixed Teams event in Washington D.C. (David had a professional date on a different team). Lisa is one of the top women players in the country and a past World Champion.

When I play with her (once every few years), we play a simplified version of the card that we each play with David. It might be referred to as ‘Precision Lite’.

The Auction

♠ J 6 ♥ Q 3 ♦ A Q J 4 3 ♣ A Q J 6

Sitting South at favorable vulnerability, I dealt and opened the bidding 1♣, strong, forcing, and artificial according to the Precision System.

Lisa responded 2NT. We hadn’t discussed it, but in Precision, the normal meaning of this bid is 14+ high card points and a balanced (any 4-3-3-3 or 4-4-3-2) hand. With David, I use 3♣ in this sequence as a sophisticated and complicated inquiry with artificial responses. With Lisa it was undiscussed, so I abandoned the science we didn’t have and jumped to what I thought we could make: 6NT. With 31+ high card points and my good five-card suit, this seemed the most likely contract. At this form of scoring, Board-A-Match, there is a premium for playing in notrump. A making small slam in notrump will win a full board against a making small slam in a suit contract.

West passed and Lisa passed but East doubled. Oops. I thought we could make 6NT, but East seemed to think otherwise. He was on lead, and I suspected he had either two aces or an ace-king in the same suit. Can you guess what I did?



I bid 7♣. We would almost surely lose the board with –100 (or more), so I wasn’t going to just sit there and watch East cash two tricks. If he had two aces, we were surely dead. You can’t get more dead than dead, so if running to 7♣ meant down two instead of down one, it would still be a lost board. However, if the double was based on an ace-king, maybe we could make seven of a minor — if it was played from my side! With West on lead, if she (this was the Mixed Teams) had a blind guess, she might lead the wrong suit. With any luck, we could manage thirteen tricks.

But why bid my shorter suit, you ask? Let’s presume you are off either the ♠AK

or the ♥AK. That leaves partner with just about everything else. By playing in clubs, you might be able to take thirteen tricks, while the same number might not be available in diamonds.

Picture a hand like this for partner:

♠ A K x x ♥ J x ♦ K x x ♣ K 10 x x

opposite your

♠ J 6 ♥ Q 3 ♦ A Q J 4 3 ♣ A Q J 6

In 7♦, you have no realistic chance on any lead. I count eleven tricks. However in clubs, with the wrong lead, you can hope to ruff two spades in your hand, draw trumps, and then run the diamonds while throwing away both of dummy's heart losers. That's two extra tricks for playing in the 4-4 instead of the 5-3.

East doubled 7♣, but quite slowly. This did not seem like a two-ace double. It seemed like an 'Uh oh, what have I done?' double. No doubt East had an ace-king in a major and now realized the error of his ways. He (and I) anxiously awaited West's lead.

The Play

♠ 9 2
♥ A K J 10
♦ K 9 6
♣ K 8 5 2
—
♠ J 6
♥ Q 3
♦ A Q J 4 3
♣ A Q J 6

The final contract was 7♣ doubled, by South. You can see what West's winning lead would be, but would she find it? As you can see, it actually made no difference that we were in clubs instead of diamonds. On any non-spade lead, we'd have the first thirteen tricks.

East was the Swedish expert, Peter Fredin. He has a history of being involved in strange deals such as this. Had he passed 6NT, he could have led high spades and taken the first five tricks for down four! Now everything depended on West's opening lead.

With nothing to go by, West tried the ♥9 — it turned out her hearts were the doubleton ♥98, while she had queen-fourth in spades. If her partner did have an ace-king, it seemed unlikely to be in spades. How could two experts bid to 6NT off the ace-king-queen of a suit?

Soon after the heart lead, I was claiming thirteen tricks and +1630. Instead of looking up the score, Peter sheepishly just wrote 'lose' in the scoring column as I was filling out the score ticket.

The Result

Neither Vul.

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

	♠ J 6	
	♥ Q 3	
	♦ A Q J 4 3	
	♣ A Q J 6	



It got worse for Peter when he discovered what happened at the other table. Somehow (it is not on record), North-South reached an amazing contract, 4♥! At this form of scoring, 4♥ is a super contract. As long as hearts split 4-3, there are eleven easy tricks. The defense can take two high spades, but that is all. Declarer can ruff a third spade in the short hand and draw trumps and claim. The score for 4♥ making five is +450, which would beat any other game contract.

North-South were very unlucky to run into the 5-2 heart split. In fact, with repeated spade leads they ended up failing by three tricks for -150. However, they were going to win the board for their -150: had Lisa been left alone in 6NT, she would have been down four for -200. It would have been a horrible loss on the board for our team, and a super win for their team. Our team went on to win the event by less than one board. This deal was clearly the difference.

That 4-4 fit was my most memorable example of playing in a shorter suit, but for some reason I have had a career filled with such occasions. Let me show you some of the highlights. It is hard to believe that so many similar (yet highly unusual) situations can happen in one bridge career. Please come with me now on the 'bonus tour' of seven deals (8A to 8G) which venture into the world of the 'short fit'.

8A. 4-4 Beats 6-5

We start with a deal from the Life Master Pairs of 1995 in New Orleans.
David Berkowitz and I were sitting North-South.

♠ A Q 6 5 4 3
 ♥ A 5
 ♦ 4
 ♣ A Q 7 5

 ♠ K J 8 7 2
 ♥ 8 4
 ♦ A J
 ♣ K J 9 3

The Auction

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2NT*	pass	3♣*
pass	3♦*	pass	3♠*
pass	3NT*	pass	4♣*
pass	4NT*	pass	5♥*
pass	5NT*	pass	6♣*
pass	6♦*	pass	6♠
pass	7♣	all pass	

David must have been surprised when I dealt and opened the South cards 1♠! From your catbird seat, you can see that 7♠ has no play at all: North-South have to lose a heart trick. David started his investigation with Jacoby 2NT. There are many variations on this convention and the responses to it. Some pairs even play a 2NT response to one of a major as an old-fashioned natural notrump bid and use 3♣ as the artificial game raise.

I responded 3♣ with the South cards. In the original version of Jacoby 2NT, this would have shown a singleton or void in clubs. However, in the version David and I play, 3♣ just says, ‘Partner, I have a minimum with any shape’. The 3♣ bid says nothing about clubs and nothing about our distribution. Usually, opposite this minimum, partner signs off in game, depriving the opponents of any information about declarer’s shape. This makes them lead blind and defend in the dark. If responder happens to be still interested in slam, then he can ask again with 3♦, as David did here.

After the re-ask, we use the next step to say we have a singleton or void in a side suit. I responded the second step, 3♠, to say I had any 5-4 with two doubletons. (With 6-3-2-2 shape we bid the third step, and with 5-3-3-2 shape we jump to four of our major.)

Once the opener shows his 5-4-2-2 shape, the responder can ask which is the four-card suit. We use the next step (3NT here) to ask. To answer, we use the first step for four cards in the lowest suit (second step for the next suit, third step for the highest suit). So I bid 4♣, to show that my four-card suit was the lowest ranking, clubs.

Knowing my exact 5-2-2-4 shape, David now used Roman Keycard Blackwood. My answer showed two keycards (and no trump queen). Now David knew I had the ♠K and the ♦A, and he asked about kings. We show ‘specific kings’ instead of number of kings, so my 6♣ bid showed the ♣K. David now knew I had, roughly

♠ K x x x x ♥ x x ♦ A x ♣ K x x x

Now he asked if I had any other kings, and my 6♠ bid showed that I did not. At this point, David knew that 7♠ had no play, but that 7♣ should have lots of play. So he bid the club grand slam.

The Play

♠ A Q 6 5 4 3
 ♥ A 5
 ♦ 4
 ♣ A Q 7 5

♠ K J 8 7 2
 ♥ 8 4
 ♦ A J
 ♣ K J 9 3

They led a trump, and the play was easy. I won the trump lead in hand. I cashed the ♦A. I ruffed a diamond high in dummy: it couldn’t hurt to expend the ♣A. I didn’t expect the diamond to get overruffed, but it never hurts to show off a little. Now I claimed, stating that I would draw trumps and throw my heart loser on dummy’s sixth spade.

The Result

Both Vul.

♠ —

♥ K 10 9 6 3 2

♦ K 7 6 2

♣ 8 6 4

♠ A Q 6 5 4 3

♥ A 5

♦ 4

♣ A Q 7 5

♠ 10 9

♥ Q J 7

♦ Q 10 9 8 5 3

♣ 10 2

♠ K J 8 7 2

♥ 8 4

♦ A J

♣ K J 9 3

N

W E

S

Thirteen tricks were easy in clubs and for +2140 we received 37.5 out of 38 match-points. Played by North, a spade lead beats 7♣.



David Berkowitz

8B. The Big Bucks

This next deal was played in a knockout teams event at the 2004 Regional tournament in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. David and I are fortunate to be able to play in Regional tournaments and earn a living at the same time. There is no shortage in America of wealthy individuals who want to play with professional teammates. When I can play with David and get paid for it, it's hard to say no. I'm aware that the presence of pros and clients in tournament bridge is a sore spot for some people, but I'm just here to report the bridge facts.

The Auction

David	
♠	A Q 6 4 2
♥	5
♦	J 7 6
♣	A 8 5 2
<div></div>	
Larry	
♠	J 3
♥	A K Q 10 7 6 4
♦	—
♣	K Q 10 3

West	North	East	South
			1♣*
pass	1♠*	pass	2♥
pass	3♣	pass	5♦*
pass	5NT	pass	7♣
all pass			

Playing our Precision system, I opened the South hand 1♣, artificial and forcing. David's 1♠ response showed five-plus spades and enough to be in game (typically eight-plus high card points). I bid my heart suit, naturally.

David now bid 3♣, also natural, showing four-plus clubs. We are proud of the fact that our bidding is mostly natural. Other than the start (1♣), it's pretty easy for a 'man on the street' to follow our bidding. (Well, that specialized Jacoby 2NT on the last deal might not have been for the common man.) And maybe the man on the street wouldn't follow this next bid. My jump to 5♦ looks strange, but expert readers will be quite familiar with this animal.

Any strange double-jump to the five-level in a new suit can't reasonably be natural, so it is used as a specialized form of Roman Keycard Blackwood. It shows

a void in the suit jumped in (diamonds, in this case) and asks for aces outside that suit. This is called Exclusion Blackwood — it excludes the void suit. The asker doesn't care about an ace opposite his void (basically useless), but wants to know about the other aces.

Most experts take this one step further and ask not only about aces, but about the trump king as well. Just as Roman Keycard asks about the four aces and the king of trumps, so does Exclusion Blackwood. So, technically, this jump to 5♦ is called Exclusion Roman Keycard Blackwood. When players first find out about this convention, they fall in love with the toy and can't wait to show it off to their friends. It is pretty neat when it comes up, but alas, it does not come into use too frequently.

Here I may have been pushing the issue a bit, but I decided that if David had both black aces then I would take my chances on seven. I could hope for seven heart tricks, four clubs, and the ♠A for twelve. A diamond ruff in my hand would make it thirteen, albeit with some potential handling problems (not to mention a possible club loser if David didn't hold the ♣J).

The responses are similar to those used in regular Roman Keycard Blackwood. Here, the third step showed 'two without the trump queen'. This meant he had two keycards (not counting the ♦A if he had it) and no trump (club) queen. I had the information I wanted. He had two keycards outside diamonds, which had to be the black aces (I was looking at the other keycards).

So I put us into what turned out to be quite an ambitious contract.

The Play

♠	A Q 6 4 2
♥	5
♦	J 7 6
♣	A 8 5 2
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px;"></div>
♠	J 3
♥	A K Q 10 7 6 4
♦	—
♣	K Q 10 3

As you can see, you do need the East-West cards to be friendly. It turned out that the ♠K was offside, but that wasn't too important. The hearts and clubs behaved, so it was easy to take thirteen tricks.

We had one spade, seven hearts, three top clubs to draw trumps, and then a trump left in each hand for thirteen tricks. Walk through the play if you like. You can take your winners in any order, but as long as you don't take a spade finesse, thirteen tricks are easy.

The Result

EW Vul.

		David			
		♠ A Q 6 4 2			
		♥ 5			
		♦ J 7 6			
		♣ A 8 5 2			
		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div>			
♠ 10 9 8				♠ K 7 5	
♥ 9 8 3				♥ J 2	
♦ A Q 8 5 3				♦ K 10 9 4 2	
♣ 7 6				♣ J 9 4	
		Larry			
		♠ J 3			
		♥ A K Q 10 7 6 4			
		♦ —			
		♣ K Q 10 3			

Our counterparts at the other table were happy to have stopped in 6♥ making only six when the spade finesse failed. Little did they know that they would lose 10 IMPs for their +980. We were a little lucky to make 7♣, but it was a reasonable shot. As David likes to joke, that's why we get the big bucks.



David Berkowitz and Larry Cohen

8C. Who Am I to Object?

This next deal also comes from a knockout teams at a 2004 Regional tournament, this time in Fort Wayne, Indiana. We play in only three to four Regionals a year, but they seem to provide lots of deals to write about.

The Auction

David

♠ A 6 2
♥ K 10 7 2
♦ A Q 9 7
♣ K 5



Larry

♠ Q J 9 5 3
♥ 3
♦ K 10 8 5
♣ A Q 4

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

With both sides vulnerable, West dealt and opened 1♥ and David overcalled 1NT with the North cards. I bid 2♥, a Jacoby transfer to 2♠. I highly recommend the modern treatment after partner's strong notrump overcalls: 'systems on'. Treat the 1NT as if partner opened 1NT and use Stayman, transfers, etc. The old way was to use the cuebid of the opponent's suit (2♥ in this case) as Stayman. That treatment is inferior and a thing of the past.

After transferring, I bid 3♦, natural. There was no rush to jump to game (which game?). It is a good habit to continue to describe your hand to partner until you know for sure what the final contract should be. David bid 3♠ showing his three-card support. He also was in no hurry to place the final contract. Even after learning of spade support opposite, I expected to reach only 4♠, but I thought I was worth one tiny move. I had a little extra, and opposite a perfect hand, slam could be on. The 4♣ bid showed a control in clubs (usually an ace or king — occasionally a singleton or void).

David now thought he knew enough to place the contract. He expected me to have five spades, four diamonds and slam interest (due to my 4♣ bid). David

had good prime cards and great trumps (if playing in diamonds). If he wanted to play in diamonds, who was I to object? At team scoring, there is no big premium for playing in a major instead of a minor. Here David's decision was excellent. By choosing diamonds as trumps, we gave ourselves a good chance to make our slam. The opening bidder (West) surely would have the ♠K, so we might get by losing only the ♥A.

The Play

David

♠ A 6 2
♥ K 10 7 2
♦ A Q 9 7
♣ K 5



Larry

♠ Q J 9 5 3
♥ 3
♦ K 10 8 5
♣ A Q 4

They led the ♥A and David proudly tabled his dummy. They continued with the ♥Q and I ruffed in hand. You can see now why we had to play in diamonds, not spades. If spades were trumps, we could have several spade losers. With diamonds trumps, I had no such worries.

After crossing to dummy in clubs, I ruffed another heart in hand. I knew the ♠K was onside from West's opening bid. As long as diamonds behaved, I'd be home free. Both players followed to two rounds of diamonds. That was a pleasant sight!

The rest would be easy. After drawing trumps, it was just a matter of crossing to hand and cashing my other high club to throw a spade from dummy before taking the winning finesse. This was the big advantage of playing in diamonds. No spade to lose.

The Result

Both Vul.

	David										
	♠ A 6 2										
	♥ K 10 7 2										
	♦ A Q 9 7										
	♣ K 5										
♠ K 10 8 7	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		♠ 4
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ A Q J 6 5		♥ 9 8 4									
♦ J 4		♦ 6 3 2									
♣ J 8		♣ 10 9 7 6 3 2									
	Larry										
	♠ Q J 9 5 3										
	♥ 3										
	♦ K 10 8 5										
	♣ A Q 4										

With the marked spade finesse, I had my twelve tricks and a nifty +1370. Our counterparts played the normal spade game and barely survived the 4-1 break to emerge with ten tricks for +620. That gave our team thirteen juicy IMPs. Again, we were a little lucky that everything behaved, but I suppose we could take pleasure in the old adage: good bidding is its own reward.



Larry Cohen

8D. Pick a Slam

Here we go again, this time from the 2000 United States Team Trials final. This deal helped us win a close match and a trip to represent the United States at the World Championships in the Netherlands (where we won the bronze medal).

The Auction

Larry

♠ A 7
♥ K Q 3 2
♦ A 9 5
♣ A K 5 2



David

♠ 8
♥ A J 8 7 6 4
♦ Q 6
♣ Q 8 7 4

West	North	East	South
			2♥
pass	2NT*	pass	3♣
pass	4♣*	pass	4♥
pass	5NT*	pass	6♣
pass	7♣	all pass	

David held the South hand and opened 2♥ as dealer, at favorable vulnerability. This would be considered ‘heavy’ in today’s undisciplined world, but we actually play somewhat disciplined weak two-bids. I had quite a hand opposite a weak two in hearts. I could just blast into 6♥, but I chose a scientific approach. I bid 2NT, forcing and artificial, asking for a feature. I think that ‘feature’ is a fine way to play, as is Ogust. I have no strong feelings, just pick one and make sure your partner is playing it the same way as you!

David’s 3♣ showed a non-minimum hand and a feature — usually an ace or a king (never shortness). Here David had no ace or king, but with such a maximum he wanted to show me something. Since I was looking at the ♣AK, I knew he must have something in clubs like Qxxx and a good hand. My 4♣ bid was not what it seems. We play that any 4♣ bid after partner has preempted asks about trumps and aces. It is a form of Blackwood that allows you to stop in four of your major if the answer reveals you are off too many keycards.

David's answer showed one keycard, which is what I expected. I now unleashed another special bid, also common in expert usage: all jumps to 5NT are treated as 'pick-a-slam'. They don't invite seven, and they are not the Grand Slam Force (which 'never' comes up). My plan was to see whether David had any interest in playing in clubs. I knew about his six hearts to the ace, but if he had a decent four-card club suit, and I offered the choice, I figured he would take it.

With a nice four-card side suit in clubs, David was happy to show interest in playing there. All along, I had hoped for this outcome. I could envision his actual hand and I knew that playing in clubs would provide an extra trick. So, I bid 7♣.

The Play

Larry

♠ A 7
♥ K Q 3 2
♦ A 9 5
♣ A K 5 2



David

♠ 8
♥ A J 8 7 6 4
♦ Q 6
♣ Q 8 7 4

As in the previous deals in this section, we did need some good breaks. It would have been nice if David held the ♣J instead of the ♥J. As it was, we needed 3-2 clubs and no heart ruff on opening lead.

All was well. The opponents led a trump (they were 3-2) and David drew trumps and claimed. He had the three trump tricks, six hearts, two side aces, and then a ruff in each hand. In effect, our diamond loser vanished — he threw my small diamonds on his long hearts and then ruffed a diamond in dummy. He didn't actually have to play it out. Once he drew trumps he just showed his hand and we went on to the next deal.

The Result

Our counterparts reached 6♥ on our cards for +980 — not a bad result (they avoided the no-play 7♥, and they did well to reach a slam which needed at least a little good fortune). Our teammates were delighted to win 10 IMPs for −980 against our +1440.

This was just another small chapter in our history of reaching spectacular 4-4 fits.

8E. Counting to Thirteen

Larry

♠ K 10 9 8 5 4

♥ A Q 6

♦ 8

♣ A 8 6



David

♠ A Q 6

♥ 10 4 2

♦ A 7 3

♣ K Q J 2

If you're looking for a 4-4 fit, you won't find it on this deal. No, we're really looking for a shorter trump suit this time. Playing with David in the Pan-American Open Pairs in 1991, I held the North cards. We can make an easy slam in spades. There are twelve top tricks. If the ♥K were with West, there would be a grand slam, but on the actual lie, 6♠ was the limit.

The Auction

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	2♥*	pass	2♠
pass	4♦*	pass	4NT*
pass	5♣	pass	5NT
pass	6♠	pass	7♣
pass	pass	7♦	dbl
all pass			

The auction started tamely when David opened with a strong notrump. I transferred to spades and then splintered in diamonds. This promised six-plus spades and shortness (0-1) in diamonds.

David used Roman Keycard Blackwood and I answered 5♣. At the time, we were using 5♣ to show 0 or 3 keycards (this is not the best method, but it was what we were used to and it is a headache to change). At this point, David knew I had the ♠K, ♥A and ♣A (it was impossible for me to have zero keycards on this auction — I had to have three). He could count twelve top tricks (six spades, two red aces and four clubs).

So he asked for kings, in search of a thirteenth trick. We show specific kings, so my 6♠ bid denied any side kings. If I held a seventh spade, I was also allowed to go to a grand slam (since by virtue of his king-ask, David had to be interested).

Now David was ready to spring his real plan. Knowing that 7♠ (or 7NT) would be at best on a finesse, he bid 7♣! He knew that with clubs trumps, he could ruff a diamond in my hand for the thirteenth trick. He expected my actual 6-3-1-3 shape, and could count on thirteen tricks barring any bad breaks.

As you can see, thirteen tricks in clubs would have been easy. Aside from the twelve top tricks, a thirteenth can be had by ruffing a diamond in the North hand. However, East believed our auction and sacrificed in 7♦, taking advantage of the favorable vulnerability.

The Result

NS Vul.

	Larry	
	♠ K 10 9 8 5 4	
	♥ A Q 6	
	♦ 8	
	♣ A 8 6	
♠ 7 3 2		♠ J
♥ 9 8 7 3		♥ K J 5
♦ K Q 9 2		♦ J 10 6 5 4
♣ 7 5		♣ 10 9 4 3
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	David	
	♠ A Q 6	
	♥ 10 4 2	
	♦ A 7 3	
	♣ K Q J 2	

We managed to hold declarer to six tricks, for +1700, and we got all the match-points. Apparently nobody reached the excellent club grand slam (which would have been worth +2140). The deal helped us to win a bronze medal the only time the event was held.

8F. Getting Away with Greed

♠ K 7 6 ♥ A J 4 ♦ 7 6 4 ♣ A K Q J

I held this hand playing with David Berkowitz in the 1999 National Open Pairs in Philadelphia. Take my South cards, and hang on for a wild ride.

The Auction

Partner dealt and opened 1♠, both vulnerable, and already this hand had big potential. How should I start?



It's best to start with your best suit and await developments. (Don't use Jacoby 2NT without four-card support!) We play 2/1 Game Force, but even if you are playing Standard, starting with 2♣ is best. Partner rebids 2♦. Because you are in a game force, you might as well stay low for now: you show your spade support with 2♠ and await more information. (A raise here is not a preference; it should promise at least three-card support.) Partner bids 3♣. At this point, you expect him to have approximately 5-1-4-3 shape.

West	North	East	South
	1♠	pass	2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	3♣	pass	?

There is not a 100% right bid here, but I believe that 3♥ is best, and it is the call I made at the table. It was too early to jump to any conclusions. Although I suspected partner's shape, I didn't know what kind of hand he had. Was it a minimum? Was he interested in slam? Maybe he could tell me more.

West	North	East	South
	1♠	pass	2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	3♣	pass	3♥
pass	4♦	dbl	pass
pass	redbl*	pass	?

He told me more. His 4♦ would tend to show interest in bigger and better things. RHO doubled to ask for a diamond lead; of course, he doesn't know yet who will be

on lead. My pass of the double gives partner another chance. He will think spades are trumps — this can't possibly be an offer to play in 4♦ doubled — meanwhile, he can give you more information. A redouble of a control bid promises first-round control, so North is showing the ♦A. That's a relief. If his 4♦ was based on just the king, you'd have big problems in the diamond suit (with East's double indicating strength).

Again, there is no 100% correct action, but I decided to bid 4NT, Roman Key-card Blackwood in spades. I wasn't necessarily going to play in spades, but since it was our first agreed suit, that is the keycard suit. I would have a chance this way to find out about the important ♠Q.

Partner responded 5♠. How interesting. Partner has two keycards (which must be aces) and the ♠Q. At the very least, he has:

♠ A Q x x x ♥ x ♦ A x x x ♣ x x x

For his opening bid, you can expect a little bit more. Certainly the ♠J or ♣10 would be nice cards. What do you think I bid?



Notice I didn't ask you what the 'correct' bid is. Once again there is no 100% answer, and I certainly came up with a dramatic bid. I jumped to 7♣. Why not spades? With spades as trumps, partner would have lots of diamond losers. He could throw one on my long club, but what about his other diamond losers? In fact, with spades as trumps, I wouldn't have bid even a small slam.

However, with clubs as trumps, it is a different story. I could throw my little diamonds on his long spades. I could hope to ruff my ♥J and ♥4 in his hand. That's thirteen tricks! Everyone passed, and I anxiously awaited the dummy.

The Play

♠ A Q 9 4 3
 ♥ 9
 ♦ A J 10 9
 ♣ 8 5 2

 ♠ K 7 6
 ♥ A J 4
 ♦ 7 6 4
 ♣ A K Q J

West leads the ♦8. Here we are back in the land of the 4-3 fit in a minor with a longer fit in a major. There wasn't much extra in dummy. The shape was what I

pictured, but it would have been nice if the $\heartsuit J$ and $\heartsuit 10$ were the $\spadesuit J$ and $\clubsuit 10$. Anyway, one nice thing about ‘planning the play’ during the auction is that you are now ready. You win the $\heartsuit A$. What should you play at Trick 2?

- a) $\spadesuit A$
- b) $\spadesuit 3$
- c) $\heartsuit 9$
- d) $\clubsuit 2$



Start with the $\heartsuit 9$. You’ll need the spades to come in, and no bad club break. If you survive the black suits, you should be okay. Since you plan to throw your diamonds on the spades, you will have to ruff both heart losers in the dummy. You have no choice but to play hearts while dummy has trumps remaining, so you play a heart to the ace and ruff one of your heart losers in dummy. You can afford one round of trumps to come to your hand, and you ruff your last heart in the dummy:

\spadesuit	A Q 9 4 3
\heartsuit	—
\diamondsuit	J 10 9
\clubsuit	—
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px;"></div>
\spadesuit	K 7 6
\heartsuit	—
\diamondsuit	7 6
\clubsuit	K Q J

You cross to your hand in spades. So far so good, but the moment(s) of truth awaits. You play the $\clubsuit K$ and everyone follows as you throw a diamond from dummy. Clubs weren’t 5-1 — that’s good news! When you play the $\clubsuit Q$ everyone follows. The fact that they split 3-3 gives you hope that spades are also splitting well.

\spadesuit	A Q 9 4
\heartsuit	—
\diamondsuit	J
\clubsuit	—
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px;"></div>
\spadesuit	7 6
\heartsuit	—
\diamondsuit	7 6
\clubsuit	J

You play the ♣J, checking for lurkers and postponing the agony (or ecstasy, if you are an optimist). Eureka, the spades split! Good (lucky?) bidding is its own reward. You can now claim, throwing your losing diamonds on the spades, as planned.

The Result

Both Vul.

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

For bidding and making 7♣ we scored 2140 and a top on the board, and went on to win the event. In retrospect, I think I was too greedy. I should have contented myself with only 6♣. I had learned in the auction that 6♠ would be hopeless, so I was already at a big advantage. Bidding 6♣ and making seven would have been almost a top. Most of the field played in spades and made only eleven tricks. It wasn't worth the risk to bid seven: a bad black-suit split would have spelled doom.

Furthermore, we were favored by a helpful opening lead. After East's double, I expected a diamond lead, but I knew that a trump lead would have been harmful. Say that West had hit on a trump lead (usually called for against grand slams). I'd have to cash the ♥A and ruff a heart in the dummy, arriving at this position:

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

Now I'd have to cross back to the ♠K to ruff the last heart in dummy. Oops! No way off dummy. Down we'd go. Furthermore, there was no way to prevent this, as the club lead cuts the communications. I actually envisioned this in the bidding. It was risky to presume no trump lead!

It would have been much different if I had held the ♠J. Then, even with a trump lead, I'd be able to win and cash the ♥A, ruff a heart, cross to the ♠K, ruff the last heart in dummy and still have another entry to my hand to draw trump. Of course, this would require 3-2 spades and no worse than 4-2 clubs.

This time I got away with it. Next time, I won't be so greedy. If there is a next time.



Larry Cohen

8G. How Low Can You Go?

Enough of the 4-4 and 4-3 fits. We are still in the 8A to 8G series. How low can we go? You guessed it. We will end this excursion with a 4-2 fit!

Larry

♠ Q 8
♥ J 7
♦ Q 9 8 7 4
♣ A 10 7 3



David

♠ A K J 10
♥ 5 4
♦ K 10 6 5 3
♣ K Q

We are about to journey from the ridiculous to the sublime. This deal comes from the National Open Pairs in 1994. David and I held the North-South cards as shown.

The Auction

West	North	East	South
	pass	pass	1NT
pass	2NT	pass	3♠!
pass	4♠	all pass	

In third seat, with East-West vulnerable, David opened with an off-shape strong notrump. Personally, I would have preferred 1♦ with his hand, but then there would have been no story to tell. I raised to 2NT, natural and invitational. We believe it is important to have this bid available (rather than using it as a transfer or having to divulge too much information by starting with 2♣ on all invitational hands).

David liked his hand, but was reluctant to bid 3NT. He knew (from my failure to use Stayman) that I had at most three hearts. Given that he had two small hearts, he expected a heart lead and he wasn't keen on playing 3NT. A 3♠ bid here would typically show five, but David trotted out his excellent four-card major. I had weak hearts myself, and if David was suggesting spades, I thought my doubleton honor would be reasonable support. David was delighted to pass, and thus we had arrived in a 4-2 fit! As you can see, 3NT and 5♦ have no play at all, so this was the only game with a chance.

The Play

West, a Hall-of-Famer, led a trump and David won in hand. There is no legitimate line of play. If declarer draws trumps and then knocks out the ♦A, the defense will run hearts. However, the defenders can't see all the cards. David played a low diamond, and West didn't see the need to play second hand high with his doubleton ♦A. It never occurred to him that he had to win his ♦A and give his partner a diamond ruff!

How could David, who had opened 1NT and then shown spade length, actually be holding five diamonds? David played a second round of diamonds, and the defenders could give up — now they can get only their two heart tricks. A third round of hearts can be ruffed in dummy; then David can come back to hand in clubs to draw trumps. As it was, West played another trump and David ended up with eleven tricks for +450.

The Result

EW Vul.

		Larry			
		♠	Q 8		
		♥	J 7		
		♦	Q 9 8 7 4		
		♣	A 10 7 3		
♠	7 4 3	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; display: inline-block;"><div style="text-align: center;">N</div><div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;">WE</div><div style="text-align: center;">S</div></div>		♠	9 6 5 2
♥	K 10 8 3			♥	A Q 9 6 2
♦	A J			♦	2
♣	J 8 6 4			♣	9 5 2
		David			
		♠	A K J 10		
		♥	5 4		
		♦	K 10 6 5 3		
		♣	K Q		

The late (and great!) Alfred Sheinwold was kibitzing us when we played this deal. He wrote it up, and it won the Romex award for 'Best Bid Hand of the Year'. I was pleased with the award, but I have my doubts; this was really a no-play contract.

I hope you enjoyed this tour of seven bonus deals. Maybe the title should have been *My Favorite 59*. But for a bridge book (not to mention alliteration), I couldn't resist calling it *My Favorite 52*.

9. The Bridge Detective

♠ A J 8 5 2 ♥ Q J ♦ 4 ♣ K 9 8 5 2

We've made it out of the world of the 4-4, 4-3, and 4-2 fits. I held this hand in the 1996 Spingold in Miami. It was the Round of 16 and I invite you to take my South cards with both sides vulnerable.

The Auction

The dealer on my right opens 1♥ and I have an immediate decision to make on my first call. What will it be?



I bid 1♠. If you passed, you need to be more aggressive. If you answered 2♥, don't feel bad. This hand has the right shape for a Michaels bid and some experts would make that call. However, at this vulnerability, I'd prefer to have better suits. If partner doesn't fit spades, you will end up at the three-level. Furthermore, the ♥QJ might be good on defense and wasted on offense. If you changed the hand by making the hearts into two small ones and putting the queen and jack into the black suits, I'd use Michaels.

West raises to 3♥. In most high-level tournaments (and the Spingold certainly qualifies), this bid is played as a preemptive action, based on four trumps and a weak hand (approximately 0-6 high card points). Partner jumps to 4♠ and East doubles. Any choice here?



Every now and then you get an easy one. There is no reason to even dream of any call other than pass. Everyone else passes too. I was pleased with the auction — opposite spade support, I thought I had a nice hand for offense.

The Play

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

 ♠ A J 8 5 2
 ♥ Q J
 ♦ 4
 ♣ K 9 8 5 2

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

The contract is 4♠ doubled, by South. West leads the ♥6 (playing third and fifth best leads) and dummy is somewhat pleasing. The singleton heart is great, as are dummy's black suits. You could have done without the diamonds (which might serve to defeat them in a heart contract, but won't help you in 4♠).

East wins the ♥A and does some thinking. He shifts to the ♣A and you drop the ♣9. It's a good habit to drop random cards like the ♣9 here instead of always playing your lowest. You'll find that all expert players do this. It makes it a little tougher on the opponents. Every now and then there is a method to this madness. You can try to screw up their signaling by smoothly playing the card that will cajole them into helping you out. Here I can't see that it matters, other than that the ♣9 looks kind of high and might hide your club length.

East continues clubs and you are pleased (but not surprised — East wouldn't be likely to shift to a club from ♣AJx) to see them 2-2. If West had ruffed, you'd be down right away. You'll lose the ♦A and maybe a trump trick. Now if you can get the trumps right, you should make your contract.

You are in dummy with the ♣Q. What will you play next?

- a) ♠K
- b) ♠10
- c) ♠4
- d) ♦2
- e) ♣10



Play the ♦2. It looks strange to lead away from the ♦K, but you don't really care how you play the diamond suit. You will lose only one diamond trick no matter what. What you really want to do is get a count on the hand. You have a guess for the ♠Q,

and you want to learn as much as you can before you play on spades. There is no danger of an enemy ruff, since neither defender has any clubs.

When you play the ♦2, East wins the trick with the ♦J as West follows with the ♦8. East returns the ♥9, you play your ♥Q and West covers with the ♥K which you ruff in dummy.

♠	K 10 7
♥	—
♦	K 10 7
♣	10 7
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 15px; width: 100px; margin: 5px 0;"></div>	
♠	A J 8 5 2
♥	—
♦	—
♣	K 8 2

What do you play now?

- a) ♠K
- b) ♠7
- c) ♦7
- d) ♣10



Play the ♦7 and continue your work at getting a count on the hand. On this trick, East follows with the ♦A and West the ♦3 as you ruff in hand. That's interesting. It sure seems as if East started with AJ doubleton of diamonds, otherwise he wouldn't have risen with the ♦A here.

Now that you 'know' he is 2-2 in the minors, you should have an idea about how to play the spades. Which way will you go?

- a) ♠A
- b) ♠5



The ♠5. West appears to have started with ♦ Q9xxxx and ♣ Jx and at least four hearts from the bidding. Accordingly, he has at most one spade. Or, if you prefer to count East's hand, he must have started with at least three spades. If he had only two spades (to go with two diamonds and two clubs) that would give him seven hearts — not possible on the bidding.

When you play the ♠5, West plays the ♠6, North the ♠K and East the ♠3.

And now?

a) ♠10

b) ♦K



Play the ♦K. If you wanted to play another trump, I have sympathy. However, playing the ♦K first can't hurt. Why bother? Well, you can't trust everyone. Maybe East rose with the ♦A from ♦AJx to try to get you to miscount. This play will confirm that he really did start with 2-2 in the minors.

When you play the ♦K, East plays the ♥2 and you throw a club. So now, with the count confirmed, you play the ♠10. East follows with the ♠9. Are you with me? Do you play the ♠A or the ♠8?

♠	10 7
♥	—
♦	10
♣	10 7
<hr/>	
♠	A J 8
♥	—
♦	—
♣	K 8



You finesse — you know East wasn't 2-7-2-2. You draw the last trump and claim your contract for +790. You lost one trick in each side suit. Careful detective work enabled the winning guess in trumps to make ten tricks.

10. Trust Your Partner

This deal comes from the Life Master Open Pairs played in Las Vegas in 2001. I was sitting West, and I'm going to put you in the East seat with my partner (David Berkowitz).

The Auction

♠ 10 ♥ A 8 7 4 3 ♦ J 7 5 4 2 ♣ 10 7

As West, with North-South vulnerable, I open the bidding 1♦. We play Precision, where this could show as little as a two-card suit (because a 1♣ opener is artificial and strong). In addition, when we open one of any suit (other than clubs), we are limited to 11-15 high card points.

North doubles, and it is up to David. What should he do?



In general, over a takeout double, you make the bid you would make even without the double. If you have a good hand (ten-plus high card points) you can start with a redouble. With a normal hand like this, make the normal call: 1♥. South bids 1♠ and your partner (me) rebids 2♦. Now you know he has real diamond length; in fact, when he rebids a suit, it shows at least six cards (just as in Standard bidding).

This reminds me of one of my favorite people, Roberta Salob. A super bridge teacher (and person), she is always telling her students that rebids promise six cards. 'Who rebids five-card suits?' she asks. 'Perverts!' She has an entire lesson based on the premise that 'Only perverts rebid five-card suits'. I hope this doesn't offend anyone (Roberta tells me that every now and then she runs into a prudish student who objects to this phraseology).



Arnold & Roberta Salob, Maria & Larry Cohen

When I rebid 2♦, not only did I promise six-plus, but I must also point out that we play support doubles. So when opener fails to make a support double, he denies three (or, of course, four) hearts. You now know that West has at most two hearts and six-plus diamonds.

North jumps to 4♦. This must be a splinter bid in support of spades. It has to show quite a good hand, since it is driving to game after a non-jump (non-forcing) 1♠ bid.

West	North	East	South
1♦*	dbl	1♥	1♠
2♦	4♦*	?	

What now?



Especially at this vulnerability, you should bid 5♦. You don't necessarily expect to make 5♦, but surely it will have a chance. Furthermore, they rate to be making 4♣ (partner's high diamonds won't take too many tricks on defense). If you need one more reason, just 'Follow the LAW'. You have eleven trumps and can bid to the five-level.

Not so fast! South competes to 5♣. Too bad. You were hoping to play in 5♦. Not so fast again! Partner isn't done yet and he bids 6♦. This is getting exciting. Notice that there have been nine calls since the auction began, and none of them were passes! This is highly unusual. Now North does pass, as do you. Maybe you will buy it now? No, South isn't through yet either and continues with 6♠. Hard to believe a player who could bid only 1♠ after the takeout double is now going on, but that's what happened at the table.

It's not clear what to do now, but I think I agree with what David did.

He doubled. After all, I did open the bidding and he at least had a sure heart trick. If I had a singleton heart, maybe his double would encourage me to lead it (thinking that David must have an ace for his double and that it was likely to be in his suit or in trumps). Finally, everyone passed and it was my lead.

The Play

♠ A J 3 2

♥ Q J 5

♦ —

♣ A K Q 5 3 2



David

♠ 10

♥ A 8 7 4 3

♦ J 7 5 4 2

♣ 10 7

West	North	East	South
1♦*	dbl	1♥	1♠
2♦	4♦*	5♦	5♠
6♦	pass	pass	6♠
pass	pass	dbl	all pass

Sure enough, I did lead a heart, the ♥K, and this is what David saw.

With the heart lead, the defense was off to a great start. You know from the auction that declarer isn't short in hearts, so you are surely beating this.

From North's point of view, he thought he was tabling a good dummy. If South has good trumps (like ♠KQxx or longer), this would be a great contract with a diamond lead. Declarer could presumably ruff in dummy, maybe arrange another diamond ruff in dummy, and then throw hearts on clubs. However, possibly influenced by the double, West has produced the killing heart lead.

Which heart should David play?



David overtook the ♥K with his ♥A. That's right, he overtook my ♥K. I'll explain why in a moment. Then he returned the ♥4 and gave me a heart ruff. Declarer had the rest. Without this exact defense (♥K lead overtaken for a ruff), the contract makes easily. Declarer has eleven top black tricks and can ruff a diamond in dummy for the twelfth trick (he throws away three heart losers on dummy's clubs and loses just one heart).

The Result

NS Vul.

	♠ A J 3 2	
	♥ Q J 5	
	♦ —	
	♣ A K Q 5 3 2	
Larry		David
♠ 9 7 6		♠ 10
♥ K		♥ A 8 7 4 3
♦ A K Q 10 9 8 3		♦ J 7 5 4 2
♣ 8 4		♣ 10 7
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; align-items: center;"> <div>N</div> <div style="display: flex; width: 100%;"> <div style="width: 33%;">W</div> <div style="width: 33%;">E</div> </div> <div>S</div> </div> </div>	
	♠ K Q 8 5 4	
	♥ 10 9 6 2	
	♦ 6	
	♣ J 9 6	

So how did David know? He said in the post-mortem that he trusted me. ‘With ♥Kx, you would have led low,’ he said.

I would have? I silently wondered. David said that I was known to have short hearts (from my non-support double), so whatever heart I led, David would presumably win with the ace if he had it and return a heart to try to give me a ruff. So with ♥Kx, it would be right to lead low and then get my king (never mind greedily trying to beat it two by leading the ♥K then a low one to the ♥A for a ruff).

Leading the king from ♥Kx would be dangerous. According to David, he would always presume the ♥K was a singleton and would overtake (as he did in real life). The contract would make, and I don’t know if our partnership would have survived the post-mortem after that result.

On the actual deal, we got a very good board for 6♠ doubled down one, +100. East-West can make ten tricks in a diamond contract. Against best (spectacular by David, I’d say) defense, North-South can be held to eleven tricks in spades (or clubs).

If I’d actually been dealt ♥Kx, would I have figured out to lead low? We’ll never know.

11. The Underdog Shows Teeth



*(l. to r.) Jerry Goldfein, Mark Cohen, Brian Glubok
Luella Slaner, Marty Bergen, Larry Cohen*

This deal comes from the unforgettable 1983 Spingold, played in New Orleans.

Unforgettable for me, anyway. Our Cinderella squad had knocked off some great teams to reach the semifinals. We were underdogs in just about every match. Our team sponsor, Luella Slaner, was not even a Life Master. She was a brilliant woman (a mayor, a nuclear physicist) and a very special lady. Just not a very experienced bridge player.

As my teammate in the first quarter, she held the North cards. She and her partner Brian Glubok were playing against world champions Chip Martel and Lew Stansby. At the other table, I was playing with Marty Bergen against Peter Pender and Hugh Ross.

Take Brian's South hand as dealer, both vulnerable, and see how you do.

The Auction

♠ A K Q 8 4 ♥ K 2 ♦ 10 6 ♣ A K J 4

How should you start?



Brian opened 1♠. A case could be made for 2♣ (or even 2NT), but this hand has lots of potential and I think it is best to start low. I suppose it could go pass-pass-pass, but that might not be the end of the world (just the end of the auction).

Partner raises to 2♣. And now?



Bid 3♣. There are people who like to fool around with their bidding here to confuse the opponents. This isn't the right time. Surely on any lead or any bidding you expect to make 4♠, so the only issue is whether or not you have a slam. Slam is quite possible, and maybe you belong in clubs, so you should introduce the suit. It wasn't long ago that you were reading about all those deals where it was crucial to reach a 4-4 fit!

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♠	pass	3♣
pass	4♣	pass	?

Sure enough, partner seems to like clubs. Observe that your 3♣ bid was not a control bid (or 'cuebid'). It was natural. When partner now bids 4♣, that is also natural, a plain old raise.

What next?



Cuebid 4♥. Now you are in a control-bidding situation. It is way too late to play in hearts, and clearly this is a try for slam (otherwise you would have just signed off in 4♠). Incidentally, the term 'control bid' instead of 'cuebid' was coined by Jeff Rubens in *The Bridge World* magazine. I think it is a great term. It distinguishes a bid that shows a control (such as this), from a bid that doesn't (such as a Michaels cuebid which really is just a 'cuebid').

Partner bids 5♥, a control bid in hearts. That's an interesting development. Do you think she has a diamond control?



Yes, you would expect her to hold one. I know I told you she was inexperienced, but let's assume you are facing an expert. When you bid 4♥ (skipping 4♦) you denied a diamond control. (When you are slam bidding, controls are bid up the line.) So if partner also lacked a diamond control (first- or second-round) she should sign-off in 4♠. As to the reason why she bid 5♥ instead of 5♦, that's hard to understand. Furthermore, it isn't clear what to do at this point, but up until now, I think there was a lot to learn.

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

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♠	pass	3♣
pass	4♣	pass	4♥
pass	5♥	pass	6♠

Let's take a look at partner's hand, and I'll 'tell it as a story'. It's not often you see three consecutive bids (look at South's first three) get raised! Luella wasn't stupid. She knew that her expert partner would play the hand if she always raised anything he'd bid. At the end, Brian just jumped to 6♠. I actually think that if Brian was going to bid slam, he should have tried 6♣. His partner could always correct back to spades if she didn't like clubs. It could have been right to play in clubs because a 4-4 fit often produces one more trick than a 5-3 fit.

The Play

Both Vul.

Martel

♠ J 5
 ♥ Q 10 8 7
 ♦ 8 7 5
 ♣ 10 8 7 2

Luella Slaner

♠ 10 9 8
 ♥ A 6 5
 ♦ K 9
 ♣ Q 9 6 5 3

N

S

W

E

Brian Glubok

♠ A K Q 6 4
 ♥ K 2
 ♦ 10 6
 ♣ A K J 4

Stansby

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

In this case, there was actually a 5-4 club fit, and clubs has the added advantage of making even if there is a bad spade break. On the actual East-West layout as shown,

6♠ was doomed for several reasons. For one, a diamond lead beats it since East can take two diamond tricks. In actuality, East doubled. This was a Lightner double, asking for an unusual lead. In this case, West figured out it was probably based on a club void, so he led a club. East ruffed and cashed the ♦A (not that it mattered on the actual layout) for down one.

Do you see what the best contract was? Definitely 6♣ by North, protecting the ♦K. But 6NT by North (maybe she should have pulled after East's double) is also good: it makes as long as spades run. This deal was from the first quarter, and there is a good reason I remember it. Brian and Luella were having a bad game, and expected to be minus 35 IMPs or so for the first sixteen boards. This result certainly didn't look good for them.

The Auction At Table 2

Both Vul.

		Pender			
		♠	10 9 8		
		♥	A 6 5		
		♦	K 9		
		♣	Q 9 6 5 3	<div><div><div><div></div></div></div><div><div><div>N</div><div>W</div><div>E</div><div>S</div></div></div></div>	
		Ross			
		♠	A K Q 6 4		
		♥	K 2		
		♦	10 6		
		♣	A K J 4		
				Cohen	
		♠	7 3 2		
		♥	J 9 4 3		
		♦	A Q J 4 3 2		
		♣	—		
Bergen					
		♠	J 5		
		♥	Q 10 8 7		
		♦	8 7 5		
		♣	10 8 7 2		

However, at the other table, Marty and I were having our best game ever. Everything was going right and we were actually ahead by 32 IMPs at the end of the quarter. (We were thinking we might be ahead by 80, but we knew to expect bad results from the other table.)

At our table, Hugh Ross opened the same 1♠ as Glubok. Bergen passed, and North bid a forcing 1NT. He was intending to jump to 3♠ next to show a three-card limit raise, but I jumped preemptively to 3♦. This was aggressive, but when you are big underdogs in a match (and we really were), you take chances. Actually, I think East should have bid 3♦ over the raise to 2♠ in the other room. It was super cautious to pass.

South doubled now, ostensibly for penalties, but probably just showing a good hand, and everyone passed! Perhaps there was some confusion. If the double didn't promise diamond cards (it doesn't seem to), why wouldn't Pender now raise spades? The final contract was 3♦ doubled, by East.



Hugh Ross

The Play At Table 2

Anyway, Pender left in the double, and Ross led a trump. It is normal procedure to lead trumps against doubled partials when your side has most of the strength. The trump lead went to Pender's king and my ace. I didn't want the defense to get a heart ruff, so I drew a second round of trumps.

When diamonds split 2-2, I could claim. I would lose just two hearts and two spades. I could ruff the third round of spades in dummy. I thanked Marty at the time for the dummy, and now, some twenty-plus years later, I want to do it again. Thank you, partner.

The Result

We were +670, which was a super cover for our teammates' poor -200. We won 10 IMPs, a very fortunate result. We led by 58 at the half and Luella had fulfilled her playing requirements. She sat out at night and we put in our front four to protect the huge lead.

However, we played poorly and the lead started to slip away. The match ended up hinging on a memorable committee ruling, and we hung on to win by only 4 IMPs. On the committee deal, Marty made a bad claim at the table. He showed his cards, and said, 'I'm not going to do anything stupid'.

Unfortunately, he was in the process of doing something very stupid. The claim was a bit shaky and the director made one ruling, the committee another and we barely survived. The next day, in the finals, we were really overmatched. The front four for the other team was Hamman-Wolff and Soloway-Goldman. In this match, Marty opened the weakest weak-two ever. He opened 2♠ on a five-card suit headed by the eight. Vulnerable, no less!

His opponents had a cold slam in 6♠, Marty's 'suit'! However, while we won that battle ([see Deal 19](#)), we still lost the war. Still, second overall in the Spingold, with Luella, is a great memory. The deal I've just described is the one that I'll always credit with getting us to the final.

12. Restraint Is Rewarded

This deal is from the 2000 Open Pairs at the Summer Nationals in Anaheim, California. After you finish [Deal 22](#) (which has a similar theme), I will refer you back to this place. Take the East cards held by my partner, David Berkowitz and see how you do.

The Auction

♠ 6 5 ♥ K Q 10 ♦ A 9 8 ♣ J 10 7 5 2

With North-South vulnerable, South deals and opens 1♠ and North responds with 1NT (semi-forcing). It is up to you now. Will you do anything?



Pass. I'm all for aggression at matchpoints, but let's not get crazy. You're a bit light (and need a fourth heart since you are light) for a takeout double. Overcalling 2♣ with this suit is not winning bridge.

South makes an unusual rebid, a jump all the way to 4♥, and buys it there.

The Play

♠ A
♥ J 6 3
♦ 10 6 4 3
♣ Q 9 8 4 3



♠ 6 5
♥ K Q 10
♦ A 9 8
♣ J 10 7 5 2

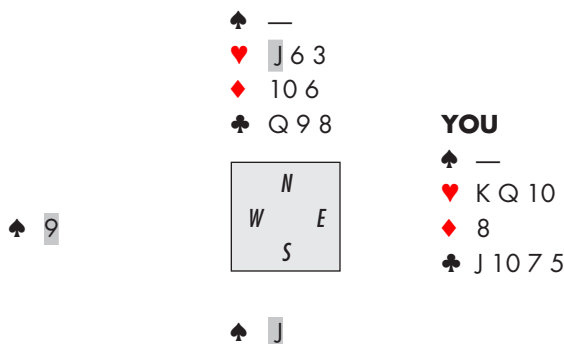
West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	1NT*	pass	4♥
all pass			

Partner leads the ♦K and you encourage with the ♦9, declarer following with the ♦5. Partner's continues with the ♦2 and your ace is ruffed by declarer with the ♥2. This comes as no surprise; declarer must have lots of major-suit cards.

When declarer leads a spade to the ace, it is not the time for you (or partner) woodenly to give honest count. Normally, with a doubleton, you'd play high-low to show an even number. However, this is a suit declarer will be working on. You don't need to give him any help by signaling the situation accurately. Partner follows with the ♠2 and you with the ♠5. Declarer plays the ♣3 off dummy, you play the ♣2, declarer wins the ♣A and partner follows with the ♣6.

Declarer has already shown up with 1-1 in the minors. For his jump to 4♥ he must be at least 6-5 (I'd have thought 6-6, but that is no longer possible). Declarer cashes the ♠K, throwing a club from dummy as partner follows with the ♠8.

Now declarer plays the ♠J, and when partner follows with the ♠9 declarer goes into a long study. No doubt, he is considering a ruffing finesse against the ♠Q. He probably should have planned this in advance. By his huddle, he is showing the defense he lacks the ♠Q. It would be coffee-housing (highly unethical) if he put on this act and did have the ♠Q.



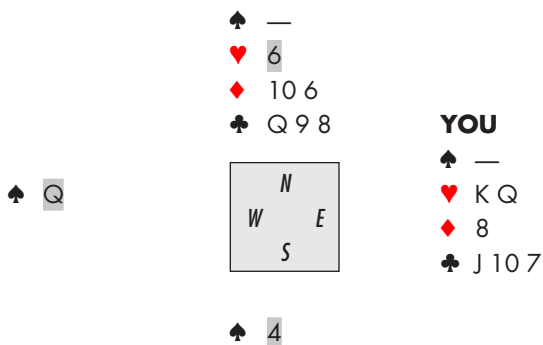
After long thought, he ruffs with the jack. What is your plan?

- Overruff then play a diamond
- Overruff then play a club
- Discard



It's unfortunate I had to put this in quiz form. Without the warning bells, most players would overruff now and think later. At the table, David found the proper play of discarding. The general principle is: if an overruff will show no immediate gain, consider postponing it. Here you will get your trump tricks in due course, and shortening your own trump holding can only help declarer. Declarer is presumably 6-5 (six spades and five hearts) and he has already ruffed once in his hand. He is in danger of getting tapped out.

Declarer comes to his hand with the ♥A as partner follows with the ♥3. Declarer ruffs another spade in dummy, dropping West's ♠Q as you expected.



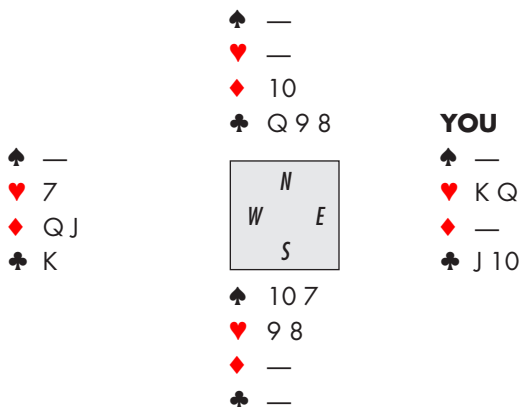
What is your plan this time?

- Overruff then play a diamond
- Overruff then play a club
- Discard



Again, you should discard.

Don't undo the good work. The principle is the same. Don't shorten your own trumps — you will always be entitled to your trump tricks later. Declarer has to shorten his trumps again by ruffing to get back to his hand.



Let's now have a look at the remaining cards. No surprises here. Declarer has the good spades and a couple of hearts. He has lost only one trick, but what can he do now?

He can't play a spade, because West will ruff and East has two high hearts. Neither can he play a trump, because you would draw trumps and get the rest of the tricks. Because of your staunch refusal ever to overruff, you have found the winning

Diagram illustrating a bridge hand layout. The table is oriented with North at the top.

North's Hand (Top Left):

- Spades: —
- Hearts: 6
- Diamonds: 10 6
- Clubs: Q 9 8

South's Hand (Bottom Left):

- Spades: —
- Hearts: K Q
- Diamonds: 8
- Clubs: J 10 7

Dummy's Hand (Top Right):

- Spades: —
- Hearts: 7
- Diamonds: Q J 7
- Clubs: K

Declarer's Hand (Bottom Right):

- Spades: 10 7 4
- Hearts: 9 8 5
- Diamonds: —
- Clubs: —

Central Box (Dummy's Position):

- North (N)
- South (S)
- East (E)
- West (W)

So your decision to discard (instead of overruffing) was crucial. Now let's back up even further. This is where you had to make your first good decision.

Diagram illustrating a 3-player bridge game layout. The players and their cards are:

- Player 1 (Left):** ♠ Q9, ♥ 74, ♦ QJ7, ♣ K
- Player 2 (Top):** ♠ —, ♥ J63, ♦ 106, ♣ Q98
- Player 3 (Right):** ♠ —, ♥ KQ10, ♦ 8, ♣ J1075

The central table shows the seating arrangement: North (N) and South (S) are seated opposite each other, while West (W) and East (E) are seated opposite each other.

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How about tapping declarer? No good. Declarer would ruff and then ruff his last spade in dummy. Again, you'd be dead. If you overruffed, declarer would win the next trick and draw trumps, and if you discarded, declarer would also have it easy. He'd play trumps himself and soon claim ten tricks. No matter what, East has to avoid overruffing at the key moments.

The Result

NS Vul.

♠ Q 9 8 2

♥ 7 4

♦ K Q J 7 2

♣ K 6

♠ A

♥ J 6 3

♦ 10 6 4 3

♣ Q 9 8 4 3

♠ 6 5

♥ K Q 10

♦ A 9 8

♣ J 10 7 5 2

♠ K J 10 7 4 3

♥ A 9 8 5 2

♦ 5

♣ A

I don't really like South's bidding, but that's beside the point. David's expert defense got us most of the matchpoints on the board. A score of -620 would have been very poor.

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13. A Deal for Columbus

This deal was played in the 1992 Life Master Pairs in Toronto. Take the South cards on a venturesome auction.

The Auction

♠ — ♥ J 8 6 5 ♦ A 9 5 4 ♣ A Q J 8 4

You deal, at unfavorable vulnerability, and start with... what?



Generally, with a five-card suit and a four-card suit (in this case two four-card suits), you start with the five-card suit. However, although 1♣ is not really wrong, I prefer 1♦ for several reasons. Given your spade void, the most likely response from partner is 1♠. Then what? You don't have enough strength for a reverse (which is what 2♦ or 2♥ would be after a 1♠ response).

Therefore I think it best to open 1♦, so that you can rebid a simple 2♣ on the next round. This way you will have shown both minors. The other way, you'd have to bid 1♣ then rebid 2♣ with only five. Yes, this way partner will expect a fifth diamond, but I prefer this lie to rebidding a five-card suit.

No surprise, partner responds 1♠. As planned, you can now show your clubs. Partner won't know your clubs are longer than your diamonds, but he should be aware that it is possible. One other thing I like about this auction (as opposed to 1♣ then 2♣) is that he knows approximately nine of your cards, whereas the other way he only knows about five (which he thinks are six!).

Over your 2♣ rebid, partner now bids 2♥, the fourth suit. In modern methods, this bid is completely artificial, and I highly recommend playing it as 100% forcing to game. Some players try to have exceptions, but I prefer the simple way. What now?



Usually, after the fourth suit, if you have a stopper there, you bid notrump. But not with this hand type. A typical hand for 2NT at this point would be:

♠ x ♥ A Q x ♦ A 10 x x x ♣ K x x x

With a four-card heart suit, it is best to raise the fourth suit. This promises four hearts and serves many useful functions. For one, it lets your side find a 4-4 heart

fit if it exists. Even though 2♥ is artificial for the time being, it is possible partner has four-plus hearts with longer spades. If you raise (promising four), your side can still reach hearts. If partner doesn't have four-plus hearts, all is not lost. He will know so much about your hand: you've shown a three-suiter with very short (0-1) spades. He will have almost all the information he needs to conduct the rest of the auction.

West	North	East	South
			1♦
pass	1♠	pass	2♣
pass	2♥*	pass	3♥
pass	4♣	pass	

Partner raises your clubs now. What does this mean? Well, you are in a game force, so this is forcing. He has club support and was not interested in 3NT, nor was he interested in rebidding his spades. What should you do now?



You have a minimum in high cards, but a very suitable hand for slam. Your clubs (trumps) are excellent in strength and length (remember, partner doesn't know about the fifth club). You have two aces and three first-round controls. This has become a super hand and you should definitely control-bid 4♦.

Partner bids 4NT, Keycard for clubs. Many expert pairs use fancy conventions (such as Kickback) to ask for aces or keycards in a minor. They like to avoid 4NT as Blackwood because the responses quickly take you past five of the minor. However, for simplicity assume you are using regular 4NT as RKC. You have two keycards (aces, in this case) and the trump queen. The normal response to show this would be 5♠. What about the void?

There are several different schemes out there for showing voids in response to Blackwood. It is especially complicated when the trump suit is a minor because most of the responses take you past six of the minor. Some people use a 5NT response to show two keycards and a void. Others jump in the void suit. Still others respond at the six-level instead of the five-level (here, 6♠ would show two keycards, the trump queen, and a void, but you should never jump above six of the trump suit).

Of course, you might decide not to show the void at all — especially when the void is in partner's suit, when it usually won't be of much use. There is no right answer here, but you need to make up your mind. If you think for a long time and then bid 5♠, your partner will know you have a void (or else you just can't remember the responses to Blackwood!).

If you did a double take when reading my comment about the hesitation, I don't blame you. Of course it is 100% unethical to have such thoughts. The word

‘impure’ comes to mind. However, this is part of the game. Sometimes your tempo will convey unauthorized information. You are entitled to bid slowly (but not intentionally so). If you do bid a slow 5♠, your partner must not and should not figure out that you have a void. To do so would be... well, I can’t think of a nice way to put it. It’s cheating. There is no nicer way to say it.

Over 5♠, your partner jumps to 7♣. Surely, he wouldn’t cheat, so you can be sure he has all the missing keycards (♠A, ♥A and ♣K) — he wouldn’t take advantage of your slow 5♠ bid. This long and tortuous auction is finally over (I hope I didn’t torture you!).

The Play

♠ A J 10 8 2
 ♥ A
 ♦ K Q 2
 ♣ K 10 9 2
 —
 ♠ —
 ♥ J 8 6 5
 ♦ A 9 5 4
 ♣ A Q J 8 4

West	North	East	South
			1♦
pass	1♠	pass	2♣
pass	2♥*	pass	3♥
pass	4♣	pass	4♦
pass	4NT	pass	5♠
pass	7♣	all pass	

The final contract is 7♣ by South and West leads the ♣5. I hope you have some mental energy left over from the auction for the play of the hand. Partner has tabled a fine dummy, but you are far from claiming thirteen tricks.

What is your general plan?

- Draw trumps at once
- Ruff hearts in dummy
- Ruff spades in hand



The right choice is (c): ruff spades in hand. You certainly won’t draw trumps. You have nowhere near enough tricks if you do so. You will need your trumps for ruffing. In suit contracts it is good to start by counting losers. Here there are no im-

mediate losers, but if you look at the hand with the long trumps (South), you have to figure out what you will do with all of those potential (late) losers.

South has four hearts, but only the ♥A to cover them — leaving three heart losers. He also has a fourth diamond to worry about if the suit isn't behaving. He can throw one low red card on the ♠A, but still has three other potential losers. Can he plan on ruffing three hearts in dummy and throwing the fourth diamond if necessary on the ♠A? No. The handling (especially with this trump lead) is a problem. Let's try it (you would do this mentally before touching a card).

You'd win the first trick; it doesn't really matter where, since you are cashing the ♥A next to get ready for heart ruffs in dummy. Let's say you came to hand then with a spade ruff. Remember, you are planning to ruff three cards in dummy — you can't ever cross in trumps. Now comes the first heart ruff in dummy.

Are you starting to get a bad feeling about this? You should be. This is too awkward. How will you keep getting back to hand? You could cross in diamonds for now and ruff another heart in dummy. Now what? The lead is in dummy.

♠	A J 10 8
♥	—
♦	K Q
♣	K
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 15px; width: 100px; background-color: #f0f0f0;"></div>
♠	—
♥	J
♦	9 5 4
♣	A Q J

Whether or not you cash the ♠A first, you will have to ruff a spade to hand to ruff the last heart in dummy. Now you are in dummy and the defense still has two trumps remaining. You will have to ruff another spade to hand to draw trumps and will go down if clubs are 3-1.

There were several variations along the way (such as cashing the ♠A first, or deciding to play for diamonds to come in), but the bottom line is that ruffing hearts in dummy shouldn't have you doing cartwheels. Back to Trick 1. There is a much easier and better line of play available. Although you normally don't try for ruffs in the long hand, that is clearly the way to go here.

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

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

Watch how much easier (and more fluid) the play is if you ruff spades in hand. You win the first trick in dummy. You ruff a spade in hand to begin. You cross in diamonds to ruff another spade in hand.

♠ A J 10
 ♥ A
 ♦ Q 2
 ♣ K 9 2

 ♠ —
 ♥ J 8 6 5
 ♦ A 9 5
 ♣ A Q

You have to cross to dummy a few more times, but you should cross now in diamonds — not hearts. This second diamond is the only risk you must take. You will go down if diamonds are 5-1 (unless you are lucky enough to find one defender 1-1 in the minors). This small risk is worth taking. If you get by this trick, you are home free. There is no 100% line of play: all other lines end in failure on 3-1 club breaks or other poor splits. Yes, it would be nice to draw trumps before playing the second round of diamonds, but you need all of your trumps in hand to ruff spades.

Why did you make the risky play of crossing in diamonds when it would have been much safer to use hearts to cross? Because you will need those heart entries later. Just wait and see. It was better to play the diamonds first, lest somebody threw diamonds as you were ruffing spades in hand. On the next spade from dummy, East throws a heart. East is out of spades. If he was throwing diamonds, you wouldn't want to have to cross any more in diamonds. Now, you can safely travel to dummy's ♥A and ruff the last low spade.

♠ A
 ♥ —
 ♦ 2
 ♣ K 9 2
 ♠ —
 ♥ J 8 6
 ♦ A 9
 ♣ —

The defense still has two trumps outstanding. However, you don't care if they split or not. You ruff a heart to dummy with the small trump. I said you would need all of those heart crossings at some point. This was the final crossing (I feel like Christopher Columbus with all of these crossings).

Now you can claim. As it turns out, neither diamonds nor clubs split, but it doesn't matter. At the end you draw West's two trumps and take the ♠A and ♦A for your thirteen tricks.

The Result

NS Vul.

♠ K 9 6 5 3 ♥ K 9 3 ♦ 7 6 ♣ 7 6 5	♠ A J 10 8 2 ♥ A ♦ K Q 2 ♣ K 10 9 2 <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; margin: 10px 0; text-align: center;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; font-weight: bold;"> N E </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; font-weight: bold;"> W S </div> </div> ♠ — ♥ J 8 6 5 ♦ A 9 5 4 ♣ A Q J 8 4	♠ Q 7 4 ♥ Q 10 7 4 2 ♦ J 10 8 3 ♣ 3
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Now you can see all the cards. This is exactly how the cards were in 1992 (coincidentally, exactly 500 years after 1492!) and how David and I bid and played the hand. At +2140 it was worth most of the matchpoints. There are many successful lines of play, but also many that would fail. Maybe some reader will write in with an improvement, but essentially the recommended line of play works on anything but a bad diamond break (5-1 or 6-0).

Can you do better? If so, you can have your name in print when this book is reprinted!

EUROPEAN DEALS

14. A Super Expert Partner

This deal comes from the Politiken Pairs played in 1998 in Copenhagen. Politiken is the largest Danish newspaper and they sponsored the event by providing expenses and a generous prize pool for the players.

I was invited to play and when my regular partner (David Berkowitz) couldn't make it, I asked my good friend, Steve Weinstein. He graciously accepted. We've played together several times with great success (Stevie is one of the top players in the USA — that may be a secret to the general public, but all the experts know!).

Take the West cards, and see if you can match the brilliant defense produced by Mr. Weinstein.

The Auction

♠ A 9 5 4 3 ♥ Q 7 3 2 ♦ 9 6 ♣ Q 7

The dealer on your right opens 1♥, with both vulnerable, and it is up to you. Would you overcall?



I'm all for getting in early, but this would be a bit too aggressive. Your suit is poor, your length in the opponent's suit is a negative, your doubleton queen is not a big asset, and you are vulnerable. Only the wild cowboys would overcall with this hand.

So you pass, and LHO bids 2♦, natural and game forcing. RHO rebids 2♥. This does not promise a six-card suit, it just means that opener has nothing more descriptive to say. It could be bid on a balanced hand that lacks a stopper(s) in the black suit(s). It is important for partnerships to discuss what the 'default' is in this situation. Does 2NT guarantee stoppers in the unbid suits? Does a 2♠ or 3♣ bid show extras? Does 2♥ promise a sixth heart? Obviously, if you say 'yes' to all of those questions, you will sometimes pick up a hand that has no rebid!

LHO raises to 3♥ — still forcing, of course. Now RHO bids 4♣, a 'non-serious' control bid. This method is popular among experts. When a major is agreed, and the pair is on their way to four of the major, a 3NT bid is used as artificial and says, 'Partner, I have extras. I'm interested in slam'. Other bids (such as this 4♣) are used

to say, ‘Partner, I have a minimum. I’m not strongly interested in slam, but I am showing you a control in case you are interested’. Lately, the trend has been to invert the meanings (3NT is the weak hand; control bidding shows the slam hand). Since most hands are not slams, using 3NT this way usually avoids giving unnecessary information to the defenders.

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

North retreats to 4♥, the final contract.

The Play

♠ A 9 5 4 3 ♥ Q 7 3 2 ♦ 9 6 ♣ Q 7

Can you match Stevie’s opening lead?

- a) ♠A
- b) ♠3
- c) ♥2
- d) ♦9
- e) ♣Q
- f) ♣7



Stevie led the ♠3. Typically you don’t lead (or underlead) aces against suit contracts. However, sometimes the auction is suggestive of such a strategy. Here you know dummy has diamonds and declarer has clubs controlled. Declarer probably does not have a spade control — he could have shown it over 3♥ (a singleton or a king can be shown when control bidding below the game level).

Since declarer doesn’t rate to have anything in spades, I think this is a rather clever lead. I’m not sure I would have thought of it myself. When you do underlead an ace, you expect declarer (and unfortunately, sometimes partner) to misguess.

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



Sadly for you, declarer goes right up with dummy's ♠K as if he could see your hand. If declarer had, say, ♠Jx he would have played low from dummy. He'd play you for the ♠Q, which you're going to lead from much more often than your actual ♠A. Maybe declarer started with two low spades and suspected that you might have underled on this auction.

Dummy leads a trump and partner surprises you (mildly) by producing the ♥A. You are surprised, because that doesn't leave much of a hand for declarer. Let's see, ♥KJ10xx and presumably the ♣AK. There isn't much else left.

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



Now partner plays the ♠J. When South plays low, you know partner also has the ♠Q (since declarer didn't cover). What card should you play?

- a) ♠A
- b) ♠9
- c) ♠5
- d) ♠4

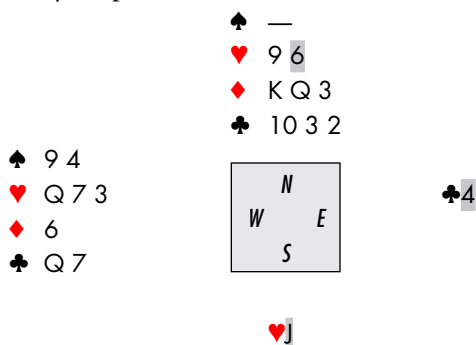


Play the ♠A. Partner (someone to be loved and trusted and who happened to have the initials L.C.) is trying to clarify the spade layout for you. He himself doesn't know too much about the hand. He suspects (from declarer's failure to cuebid 3♠) that you've underled the ♠A. He is showing you that he has the ♠Q and leaving the defense up to you. If he wanted to keep playing spades he could have laid down the ♠Q.

You are sitting here looking at surprisingly strong trumps. However, your clubs are not so great (you know from the bidding that declarer has the top clubs). If you had better clubs, you could have left partner on lead to play one (you would have played a very low spade to suggest a club switch). You are the one who knows how to defend this hand. You have excellent trumps, so you direct the defense by over-taking the ♠J and tapping declarer with another spade.

Declarer crosses to dummy in diamonds and partner plays the ♦8. This is a count signal. Partner is showing you an even number of diamonds.

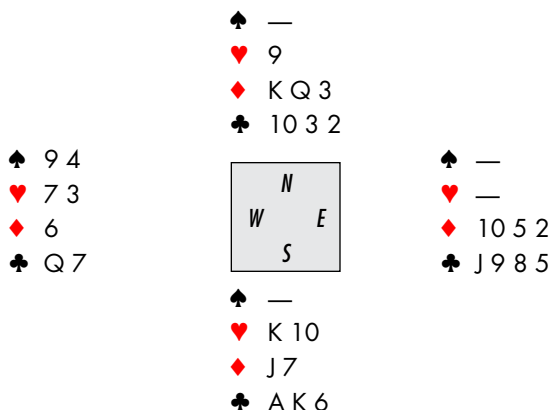
I am a big believer in helping partner with signals. Don't worry that it might help declarer. In the long run, partner will need it more. (This is not meant in an insulting way.) Declarer leads a heart from dummy and receives a slight jolt when East shows out throwing the ♣4. After a moment of thought he plays the ♥J. Are you ready with your plan?



And right now, do you take this trick?



You should duck the heart. This was your chance to shine! Did you work it out? Let's do things the wrong way first. Say you had won this trick with the ♥Q. Most players would do this, especially if not warned in quiz format. Let's look at all the cards now.



This should be no surprise at all. You knew from partner's diamond count that this was the exact distribution. You knew from the bidding that these were the approximate high cards (you didn't know who had the $\heartsuit J$ or $\clubsuit J$).

Look at the position now: the defense has no chance. If West plays a spade, declarer ruffs in dummy, comes to hand, draws trumps and claims. If West plays anything else, declarer also wins, draws trumps, and claims. The $\heartsuit J$ and $\clubsuit J$ don't even matter. With declarer having the $\heartsuit J$ his life is easy, but even without it, he could draw trumps, test diamonds, and when they don't split the clubs would run.

The clubs would run? Huh? Let's just take a quick look to see what would happen if East had the $\heartsuit J$ instead of declarer.

	\spadesuit —										
	\heartsuit 9										
	\diamondsuit K Q 3										
	\clubsuit 10 3 2										
\spadesuit 9 4	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		\spadesuit —
	N										
W		E									
	S										
\heartsuit 7 3		\heartsuit —									
\diamondsuit 6		\diamondsuit J 10 5									
\clubsuit Q 7		\clubsuit J 9 8 5									
	\spadesuit —										
	\heartsuit K 10										
	\diamondsuit 7 2										
	\clubsuit A K 6										

Now East has diamonds stopped. But on the run of the trumps, East has to keep all his diamonds and would have to abandon club control.

	\spadesuit —										
	\heartsuit —										
	\diamondsuit K Q 3										
	\clubsuit 10 3										
\spadesuit 9 4	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr><tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr><tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr></table>		N		W		E		S		\spadesuit —
	N										
W		E									
	S										
\heartsuit —		\heartsuit —									
\diamondsuit 6		\diamondsuit J 10 5									
\clubsuit Q 7		\clubsuit J 9									
	\spadesuit —										
	\heartsuit —										
	\diamondsuit 7 2										
	\clubsuit A K 6										

Declarer would draw trumps, leaving East with the cards shown. Declarer would try the diamonds. They wouldn't be 3-3, but alas, declarer's $\clubsuit 6$ would take the game-going trick.

Now let's put the cards back to the way they were and go back to the key trick. Stevie saw that winning his ♥Q was tantamount to giving up. So he ducked. Let's jump back into the West seat and try it from here.

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

Wouldn't it be nice if a super-expert could make the key plays for you?

Look how much better things are for you now that you've let declarer have this trick. In fact, he can no longer make the contract. Try this hand yourself and you will see you can't make it.

If declarer plays the ♥K he is doomed. If he then plays another heart, you run the spades. So he has to try the diamonds, but you will ruff in on the third round and declarer will be stuck with a club loser. And if he tries something else, like playing diamonds instead of the ♥K, you can ruff in on the third round and declarer still has that club to lose.

The Result

Both Vul.

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

No matter what declarer tries, once you duck your ♥Q, the contract is down one. For defeating 4♥ you get a very good score. And in fact, the deal was published (like several others in this book) in the *New York Times*.

Well done, Stevie! And reader(?)!



Steve Weinstein

15. Signaling as Declarer

♠ A K Q 10 3 2 ♥ K 8 ♦ K 9 5 ♣ A 9

With IMP scoring, I held these South cards in 1990 in the Netherlands. I was playing with David Berkowitz in a special invitational pairs game, called the EOE-optiebeurs, in a seaside town called Zandvoort. In America, bridge pros earn money getting paid by playing sponsors. In Europe, companies sponsor tournaments (to get publicity) and the players play for prize money. Notable European tournaments have been sponsored by the Danish newspaper Politiken ([see previous deal](#)) and Dutch computer consulting company Cap Gemini. The sponsors invite top pairs from around the world and pay expenses and prizes. It is indeed an honor to be included.

The Auction

West, the dealer, opened 3♣ at favorable vulnerability, which was passed around to me.

What should I do?



Guessing to bid 3♠ (a huge underbid) or 3NT or 4♠ makes no sense. Why not double first and see if partner has anything interesting to say?

Partner doesn't do anything special: he bids 3♦. But had he jumped, you could have explored for a slam. The fact that he has shown diamonds might also be of some help to you.

What now?



A 3♠ bid by you would show a very good hand, but would not be forcing! I think you are too good for only 3♠. Would partner know to raise to game with, say:

♠ x x x ♥ x x x ♦ Q J x x ♣ x x x

Of course he wouldn't. You can't mess around when it comes to bidding vulnerable games at IMPs. It is not the time to bid delicately. Bid 4♠.

The Play

♠ 8 7 5
 ♥ J 7
 ♦ Q J 10 8 4 2
 ♣ Q 6

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

West	North	East	South
3♣	pass	pass	dbl
pass	3♦	pass	4♠
all pass			

The ♦7 is led, and a reasonable dummy appears. If this deal illustrates anything at all, it will show how important it is to be prepared. I always make a habit of knowing my opponents' carding methods. They must either tell you (if asked) or have a convention card with full explanations. Before the opening lead, I took a glance over and learned the following:

Leads: 4th best, middle from three low cards

Carding: Standard Count and Attitude

Why all the preparation? Well, this lead is probably a singleton. When East wins his ♦A, he will likely try to give his partner a diamond ruff. Which card from you offers the best chance to dissuade him?

- a) ♦K
- b) ♦9
- c) ♦5



You should drop (in tempo) your ♦K. Because they lead middle from ♦975, East might decide to play West for that holding.

However, East wins his ♦A and returns the ♦6. Who was I kidding? West was unlikely to lead dummy's suit from three small and East has seen through the feeble falsecard attempt.

Does it matter what you play now?

- a) ♦9
- b) ♦5



It matters very much — the ♦5 is the right card (more on this to follow). You might have got this right by just playing closest to your thumb. My Grandma Tillie also would have got it right. (No offense intended, I indeed had a Grandma Tillie.) However, if you thought this was just the situation to drop the ♦9, think again.

This theme comes up often. There is a definite method to the madness here. When East gives his partner a ruff, it is standard for the spot played to be a suit-preference card. East is trying to show West where his re-entry is for another diamond ruff. West will look carefully at the diamond spots and will have to decide how to reach his partner. West led his singleton diamond. East returns his highest diamond spot in the hopes that his partner can read it as showing a heart card.

West ruffs and can now beat the contract by playing a heart to East's ♥A for another diamond ruff. But if he doesn't play a heart, you will win, draw trumps, and claim the rest. How does West know? What if East held the ♣A instead of the ♥A? Then a club switch would be the winning defense. West will be looking for that suit-preference message. The diamonds that he can't see are the ♦9 and ♦3.

From West's point of view, was East's ♦6 a low one from ♦96 or was it a high one from ♦63 (the actual case)? He can't tell. It is fifty-fifty and West might guess wrong.

The Result

Let's have a look at the full deal.

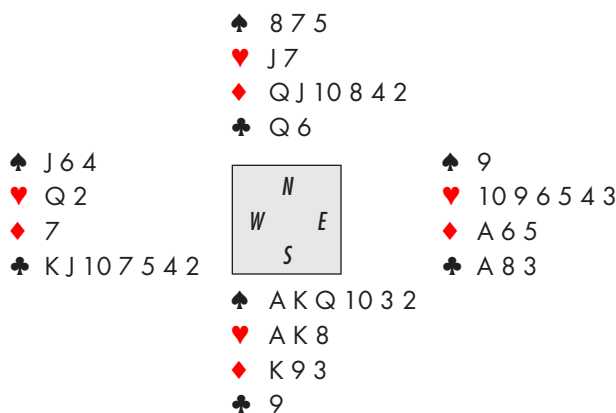
NS Vul.

	♠ 8 7 5	
	♥ J 7	
	♦ Q J 10 8 4 2	
	♣ Q 6	
♠ J 6 4		♠ 9
♥ Q 2		♥ A 10 9 6 5 4 3
♦ 7		♦ A 6 3
♣ K J 10 7 5 4 2		♣ 8 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A K Q 10 3 2	
	♥ K 8	
	♦ K 9 5	
	♣ A 9	

I was lucky — he did guess wrong against me. He tried a club at Trick 3 and I was able to claim the rest of the tricks after drawing trumps. But the key point was that I gave West a losing option.

Back at Trick 2, if you foolishly (or randomly) played the ♦9, the hidden spots would then be the ♦5 and ♦3. West would ruff and a quick examination of the spots would indicate that East was showing a heart card; he had played the highest missing diamond (the ♦6), suit preference for the highest missing suit.

Let's make a slight change in the deal. East now has the ♣A instead of the ♥A. Also the diamond spots are a little different.



West again leads to East's ♦A, and this time East returns the ♦5 for West to ruff.

Which diamond should you play?

1. ♦9
2. ♦3



This time, you should play your highest diamond, the ♦9. When West ruffs, he will again be in a quandary. The missing diamonds are the ♦6 and ♦3. Was East's ♦5 a high one from ♦53 or a low one from ♦65? West can't tell. He has a fifty-fifty guess again and may go wrong. However, if you carelessly played low on the previous trick, West would have it easy. Now the missing diamonds are the ♦9 and ♦6. West knows the ♦5 was East's lowest diamond. So he has no trouble shifting to the lowest side suit, clubs, to get another ruff.

I suspect that most readers will have their heads spinning after all this focus on minutiae. Fortunately, there is an easy way to know which spot to play when you are declaring. You don't have to sit there thinking about the missing high and low ones — and how best to falsecard.

Here is the rule:

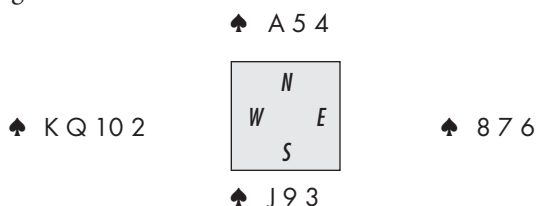
Play the same suit-preference card you would play if you were one of the defenders!

When the defenders are playing standard carding, if you as declarer want them to shift to your higher side suit, then play your highest spot. If you want them to shift to your lower side suit, then play your lowest spot.

On the layout above, since you want West to play hearts, you play a high diamond (the ♦9). This will make it look to West like East's diamond is high and he might go wrong. On the original layout, where you had the ♣A and not the ♥A,

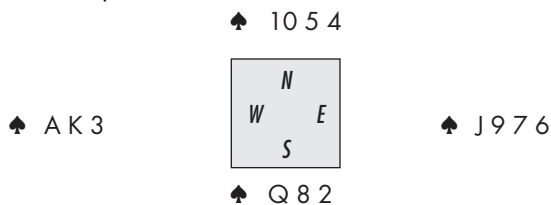
since you want West to play clubs (the low suit), you'd play a low diamond (the ♦5). This will make it look to West like East's diamond is low.

This signaling method for declarer also works for attitude. If you want to encourage West to continue a suit, you should play high. This will make East's card also look high.

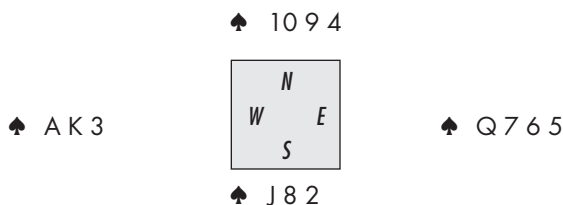


Suppose West leads the ♠K against South's contract (notrump or trump, either way). East plays low (the ♠6) to discourage the suit. If South plays low, West will see that the ♠6 was the lowest — and he will not be tempted to continue. South wants West to continue, so he should encourage West by playing high. (Remember, you signal as declarer using the same methods as the defenders — so if they play upside-down attitude, play your lowest card to encourage a continuation.)

With your ♠9 play, West might go wrong. He doesn't see the ♠3. He might think East's ♠6 is high from ♠J63. By playing your 'encouraging' ♠9, you may lead the opponents astray.



In this new layout, if you want West to continue, play a high spot (assuming they play that high encourages). West won't see the ♠2, and he might think East has it; you may fool him.



In this case, where you wish to discourage, play the low spade. Keep the ♠8. West may think that East's ♠7 was from ♠J87 and he may switch.

So remember: as declarer, signal the same way you would (using the same methods) as a defender. This works for attitude and suit preference (and can mess up their count as well). If your opponents don't know enough to watch their partner's signals, then I suppose you'll just be wasting mental energy.

16. Taking No Chances

I played this deal in the 2000 World Championships in Maastricht. This charming old Dutch city is one hundred miles south of Amsterdam.

The Auction

♠ 10 7 5 4 3 2 ♥ — ♦ A Q J ♣ A K J 8

With both sides vulnerable, take the South cards (in an IMP match). After two passes, how do you start?



Bid 1♠; nothing sneaky here. LHO preempts with 3♥ and your partner jumps to 4♠. RHO competes to 5♥.

Now what?



I bid 6♠. There is no 100% correct answer, but I believe this to be the most practical call.

Partner probably doesn't have much wastage in hearts (with the vulnerable opponents bidding to 5♥). For his jump to game opposite a third-seat (potentially light) opening, he must have decent values — and presumably he has some spade cards.

What about control-bidding 6♥ to try for a grand? Nah. That would be too pushy opposite a passed hand. Partner would need the ♠AK and then some.

The Play

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

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

The opening lead is the ♥K. Dummy's spades are super but there isn't much help in the minors. There is nothing tricky about Trick 1 here. You clearly should ruff.

There is also nothing difficult at Trick 2 either. You lead the ♠3 to dummy's ♠A. If there is no reason not to draw trumps, then draw trumps. West follows with the ♠9 and East with the ♠8.

Should you draw a second round?



Yes. You have enough entries (two more) to do any finessing later on. Meanwhile, it would be a crime to give up a ruff in a minor. You play the ♠K and East follows with the ♠Q, West discarding the ♥2.

And now what do you play?

- a) ♠J
- b) ♦3
- c) ♣2



Play the ♣2. All follow low. If you were to take a diamond finesse, and it lost, the defense would exit in diamonds and leave you at the mercy of the club suit. When everyone follows to this club trick, you are in excellent shape. You can't afford to lose both the ♦K and the ♣Q.

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

You have no sure way to avoid a club loser. However, you have now reached a 100% position. Do you see it? How can you be sure of making your contract?



You can cross to dummy (play the ♠7 to the ♠J following the automatic procedure of keeping trump entries fluid to both hands) and lead a club, RHO following low.

No guesses here: you finesse, not caring what happens. If LHO wins (from an original ♣Qx holding), he will now be endplayed. Say he wins the ♣Q and plays a heart. You will ruff in dummy and throw a diamond from hand (and then throw the other diamond on the long club). If LHO wins the ♣Q and plays a diamond, you have no diamond loser (also throwing the last diamond on clubs).

If the finesse wins (as in fact it did here), you also claim. You've managed to avoid a club loser, and now the diamond finesse will be for an overtrick. What if East had showed out when you led the second club from dummy? No problem. You'd win your ♣K and toss West in with the ♣Q for the same endplay. Whatever red card he plays next will allow you to avoid a diamond loser.

The Result

This was the actual full deal in Maastricht.

Both Vul.

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

Once everyone followed to the first few tricks, the slam was 100%. Several declarers failed. They played clubs from the top, and then had to lose a trick in each minor. If it can happen in the world championships, it can happen anywhere. If you found the correct line, maybe you should be playing in the next world championships.

17. Taking a View

Still at Maastricht, in 2000, this and the next deal still cause me pain. I wrote about them in a self-deprecating article called ‘Hoodwinked in Holland’ (*Bridge Today* magazine, Nov/Dec 2000 issue).

♠ 7 5 ♥ Q 10 2 ♦ A Q 10 5 3 2 ♣ A K

This was my hand in the bronze-medal match against England. We had just lost to Poland in the semifinals and I wasn’t in the greatest frame of mind to begin with. Still, this match against England (which had lost to Italy in the other semifinal) was for a medal, so this deal did hurt!

The Auction

I was North, vulnerable against not in third seat, and I saw two pass cards on the table. I had several choices available. Our 1NT range is 14-16, but I didn’t like it with this hand. The six-card minor is no problem — occasionally you can open 1NT with something like:

♠ K x ♥ K J ♦ K J x x x x ♣ A J x

since it is probably as good a description as any. My hand, with such good prime cards, a great suit and lousy spades, didn’t look right for notrump. It also felt too good for 1♦ (which in our Precision system would have promised only two-plus diamonds anyway). So I opened with a strong (artificial) Precision club.

How many HCP did this promise? As Precision players, David and I get asked this all the time. There is no perfect answer. How many HCP would you say a 2♣ opener in Standard promises? The only way to answer such a question is to refer to balanced hands, notrump openings. Since we play 1NT as 14-16, we open 1♣ with 17+ (intending to rebid notrump). When most people open 2♣, they have 22+ if balanced (because they open 2NT with 20-21).

If you are unbalanced, all bets are off. Everyone has a different opinion as to what constitutes a strong 2♣ (or Precision 1♣) opener. If pressed, I answer, ‘If balanced, seventeen-plus. If unbalanced, roughly worth seventeen-plus.’ I think this actual hand evaluates to enough for a strong 1♣ — just barely.



Colin Simpson

My LHO, Colin Simpson, overcalled 1♦. Most pairs use some kind of artificial system against a big 1♣, but in this case, 1♦ was natural. I waited for an alert, but none came. The bid really showed diamonds!

What does that do to the value of my hand? It ruins it. So much for evaluating to seventeen-plus. With a likely ♦KJ9xx sitting over me, it is now much worse. David responded 1♠. In Precision this shows five-plus spades and is forcing to game. Yes, even by a passed hand. Normally it shows eight-plus high card points. Here it would be eight to eleven or so (we open all twelve-counts).

Can you guess what I rebid? I passed. Yes, you read that correctly. I passed David's forcing bid! I 'never' do such things, but here I reasoned as follows:

- 1) Game force or not, David is limited since he is a passed hand.
- 2) I had stretched to open 1♣ in the first place, so let's just pretend I didn't open 1♣.
- 3) My hand has turned to garbage. In effect, my diamonds are now worth only ♦Axxxxx.
- 4) Where are we going? With bad splits likely (I know about the diamonds, for sure), how will we make a game?
- 5) Why look for other contracts? We rate to go plus in the 5-2 fit if we stay low (at the one-level).

So I thought I made a well-calculated decision. Meanwhile, I could sense the anger from across the table. This really was a violation of partnership discipline (both my pass and the anger as well!).

The Play

I will get the suffering over quickly. Here are all four hands.

NS Vul.

	♠ 7 5	
	♥ Q 10 2	
	♦ A Q 10 5 3 2	
	♣ A K	
♠ A 9 4 2		♠ 10 8
♥ A 7 5		♥ K 6 4 3
♦ 7		♦ J 6 4
♣ 10 7 5 3 2		♣ Q J 6 4
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ K Q J 6 3	
	♥ J 9 8	
	♦ K 9 8	
	♣ 9 8	

The 1♦ overcall was an outright psyche. David is a well-behaved partner, but I think I saw steam coming out of his ears as I tabled dummy and he realized the full implications of what had happened. He played quickly and took nine tricks for +140.

The Result

At the other table North-South bid to 3NT and made it easily. So we lost a game swing. I felt sick. Fortunately, we won the match (and the bronze medal) but obviously I have not forgotten this episode.

18. They Got Me Again

That last deal was bad enough, but it is part of a two-pronged story.

This deal (also from Maastricht 2000) comes from the earlier semifinal match that we lost to Poland. We had fought through nearly two weeks to reach this stage of the event. We got off to a good start in the match, but then this deal came along. It ruined my day (and my life). Well, not really, but it still does haunt me.

The Auction

♠ K J 8 2 ♥ A J 10 ♦ 10 9 7 ♣ A K J

I held the South hand shown. With neither vulnerable, David dealt and opened 1♦. In our Precision system, this showed 11-15 HCP and could have been made on as few as two diamonds. Because 1♣ is the artificial force, we have to open 1♦ with many hands that would open either 1♣ or 1♦ in Standard. I responded 1♠. Responding to the 1♦ opening is natural, much the same as responding to a Standard 1♦.

David jumped to 3♠, which was also natural, showing four-card support. However, it is slightly different from a Standard 3♠ bid. Since he is limited (11-15 HCP), he can't be bidding this based on strength. Instead, it is based on shape and promises a singleton or void (in clubs or hearts, of course).

At this point, I had slam interest. I pictured ♠AQxx and ♦AQJxxx, opposite which we'd have a play for seven! I could have asked him where the shortness was (not literally, of course, but via an artificial 3NT). However, since I didn't care too much whether he had short hearts or clubs, I just made a control bid of 4♣ to see if he was interested in slam. If his next bid was 4♠, I'd let it go.



Krzysztof Jassem

Now Krzysztof Jassem came in with a double of my 4♣ bid, and David redoubled. A double of a control bid is lead-directing. Usually such doubles are made with the ace or king, but with a holding such as QJ10xx or even Q109xx, you might still double to get the lead. Here, if I were a defender with ♥ xxxx and ♣ Q1098x, I'd double to suggest to partner that he lead a club instead of a heart.

The redouble after a control bid also shows a control (first- or second-round). I knew from my ♣AK that David's control was shortness — not a surprise — but if he didn't want to show his control, he could have retreated to 4♠. We have an agreement that after an opponent's double of a control bid, the return to our trump suit is the weakest action. Anything else shows interest. This is an extension of the Principle of Fast Arrival.

Since David showed interest, I decided we should be in slam. I was never going to bid seven (he couldn't have ♠AQxx and ♦AKQxxx — that is too strong for a limited 1♦ opener). I saw no point in using Blackwood. Surely we weren't off two aces given David's auction so far. So I chose a simple jump to 6♠ and everyone passed.

The Play

♠ A Q 6 4
♥ 7 6 3
♦ A K 6 3 2
♣ 10

♠ K J 8 2
♥ A J 10
♦ 10 9 7
♣ A K J

West	North	East	South
	1♦	pass	1♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♣
dbl	redbl	pass	6♠
all pass			

I was hoping West would lead his suit (clubs). He took three minutes before making his opening lead, the ♥2. David's hand was a little disappointing, especially with this heart lead. I would have preferred a sixth diamond, although that would make it a '5 or 7' hand on the actual opening lead.

With a club lead, I'd have had no trouble. With a trump or diamond lead, I'd also be fine. I could hope to set up diamonds for two heart discards from hand. I'd claim on 3-2 trumps and 3-2 diamonds. But with this \$*!-ing heart lead, I had big troubles. It's not really fair to double for a club lead and then lead something else.

East produced the ♥Q and I won the ♥A. What card should I play now?

- a) ♠2
- b) ♥10
- c) ♦10
- d) ♦7
- e) ♣A
- f) ♣J



Play the ♠2. Many thoughts came to mind, all of them depressing. With the ♣Q surely on my left, how could I avoid a diamond and a heart loser? Could I hope to sneak the ♥10 through LHO and then discard dummy's other heart on the ♣AK? Nah. Could I play the ♣J from hand and hope LHO might be caught napping? Nah. Could I hope for a diamond miracle? Maybe.

I started by drawing trumps. The trumps broke 3-2 and West, who had a doubleton, discarded the ♠2. I decided to finish the trumps, ending in my hand. That way, I could try for something sneaky in diamonds.

♠	6
♥	7 6
♦	A K 6 3 2
♣	10
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 15px; width: 100px; margin: 5px 0;"></div>	
♠	J
♥	J 10
♦	10 9 7
♣	A K J

Maybe the ♦QJ would drop doubleton. Or maybe West had ♦QJx and East the ♦8x. Maybe West would be asleep and fail to cover the ♦9 with ♦QJ8.

I led the ♦9 and West covered with the ♦Q. Interesting. I wasn't dead yet. Now I had a choice. I could hope West started with ♦QJ doubleton and lay down the other high honor in dummy, or, as I did, I could come back to my hand to play the ♦10.

I was hoping West started with ♦QJ5. Since he started with only two spades, I thought it distributionally more likely that he was 2-3 in spades and diamonds (making East 3-2). Playing West for ♦QJ doubleton would mean LHO was 2-2 in spades and diamonds with RHO 3-3. Why play for four cards in those suits with West and six with East instead of 5-5? Maybe because West rated to have club length for his double of 4♣? I was far from sure.

West's next card, the ♣5, made it all moot. There was no way to pick up the diamonds.

The Result

Neither Vul.

	♠ A Q 6 4	
	♥ 7 6 3	
	♦ A K 6 3 2	
	♣ 10	
♠ 5 3		♠ 10 9 7
♥ 9 5 2		♥ K Q 8 4
♦ Q		♦ J 8 5 4
♣ 9 8 7 6 5 4 2		♣ Q 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	
	♠ K J 8 2	
	♥ A J 10	
	♦ 10 9 7	
	♣ A K J	

I had to lose a diamond and a heart for down one. Without a heart lead, I would have made the contract (losing only a diamond trick). I'd play a top diamond, and when the ♦Q fell, I'd give them the ♦J. Then I could unblock my other diamond from hand and have two discards for hearts on dummy's diamonds.

As I picked up my cards for the next deal, my RHO, in a thick Polish accent, asked, 'Vut ver your clubs on last deal?'

'Ace-king-jack,' I told him.

'I had queen-second.'

That is Polish for doubleton queen. That meant that my contract was cold. Easy, I'd say. I could have drawn trumps, played the clubs (not even needing to finesse) and thrown two hearts from dummy. Then I could play the ♦A and give East the ♦J — he would be unable to hurt me.

Why did West double 4♣ on ♣9876542? He was just fooling around. I suppose you could call it psychic. However, he caught a big fish on his line. Maybe I should have seen through this. After all, West was likely to be on lead himself (unless we ended up in diamonds).

Boy, did I feel stupid. I felt even worse when my teammates turned out to be -480 on this deal. We lost 11 IMPs instead of winning the same number had I played on clubs. This 22-IMP difference changed the momentum of the match, and we went on to be routed.

The egg is still on my face.

HAMMAN DEALS

19. Colors Are for Children

This deal brings me into the ‘Bob Hamman’ section. He’s one of the all-time bridge greats, and our paths have crossed many times over the years. This much-publicized deal came early in my career and in the prime of Bob’s. He was playing his fourth Spingold final (in 1983), and I was only in my second. Our team was a huge underdog. Our captain was Luella Slaner ([see Deal 11](#)). Miraculously, we had reached the final, but let it be said that our team was trailing by 40 IMPs in the final quarter when this deal occurred.

♠ K J 10 ♥ A 10 8 ♦ Q ♣ A K 9 7 5 2

Bob held the South cards shown at favorable vulnerability.

The Auction

The dealer on his right, one Marty Bergen, had opened 2♦ which artificially showed a weak two-bid in spades. (We used two-under preempts, which will be discussed in more detail on [Deal 23](#).)

Can you guess what Bob did?



He bid 2NT. There is no clearcut solution, but I agree with Hamman’s choice. The hand is too good for a 3♣ overcall, and a takeout double is likely just to get partner to bid diamonds. Meanwhile, 2NT is fairly descriptive — the point count is right, even though the shape isn’t perfect. (Incidentally, if you ever teach bridge, be aware that many low-level students will think that 2NT here is for the minors — not realizing that it shows a good notrump-opening type of hand.)

Hamman’s partner, Bobby Wolff, raised to 3NT. At the time, Hamman-Wolff were considered one of the best (if not the best) partnerships in the world. I led the ♦6, and we all awaited Bobby’s hand.

The Play

♠ A Q 9 5 3
♥ K 7 5
♦ 9 7 2
♣ Q 3

♠ K J 10
♥ A 10 8
♦ Q
♣ A K 9 7 5 2

West	North	East	South
		2♦*	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

Look at dummy. When you do, you will experience the same shock that Hamman must have felt at the table. Yes, that was really the dummy. And that was really the auction. Has it sunk in yet? A weak two in spades? Had Marty forgotten our convention? Maybe he really had diamonds? What are North-South doing in 3NT?

Hamman’s only hope was that the fourth-best diamond lead was from the ace-king. No such luck: the opponents are about to run six diamond tricks. Then you have the rest. Down two.



Bob Hamman

The Result

EW Vul.

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

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

	N	
W		E
	S	

Now for the post-mortem. Here is the full deal, in all its glory. Marty was a pioneer in aggressive preempting, but even by his standards, this was off the chart. He did try to convince me later that his spade suit had nice texture. ‘Look at that sequence, the 8-7-6,’ he proclaimed. Notice also that he was red against white. No problem; ‘Colors are for children’ is one of Marty’s favorite sayings. Seriously, though, he wasn’t normally this reckless. With time running out in the match, and a 40-IMP deficit, he decided that desperate measures were called for. And he did achieve a super result.

Notice my opening lead. I’m not talking about the decision to lead fourth-best as opposed to the jack (either is possible). I’m talking about the decision to lead diamonds. I know from over the years that leading Marty’s ‘suit’ is usually not prudent, so even if I’d had a spade, I probably would have led a diamond.

So we took the first six tricks and wondered what would happen at the other table. The exact auction is not on record, but Soloway, with the East cards, didn’t find the ‘obvious’ weak-two opening in spades. He passed and our teammates reached a reasonable contract of 6♣ by South. Bobby Goldman, as West, led a diamond and Paul Soloway won the first trick. With clubs 3-2, declarer has twelve easy tricks. However, Soloway had some clues from the bidding. He figured out to return a spade at Trick 2; Goldman ruffed and the contract was down one. Our team had a small gain on the deal (+100 vs. +50 was 2 IMPs). It was a small victory in battle, but we lost the war. Hamman’s team won the match.

Please notice, however, something really strange about this deal. While 6♣ couldn’t make for North-South, there was a slam they could make. Yes, 6♠. All declarer loses is a diamond. He can handle the 5-0 trump break. So Marty is in the record books. He opened a weak two-bid (in a Spingold final, no less) in a suit where his opponents had a small slam!

20. Just an IMP



The Nickell Team

This deal comes from the semifinals of the 2004 Vanderbilt in Reno, Nevada.

Our team was facing NICKELL (Nick Nickell-Dick Freeman, Jeff Meckstroth-Eric Rodwell, Bob Hamman-Paul Soloway). This team dominated the US bridge scene for more than a decade, but for some reason, David and I have done surprisingly well against them. We've played against NICKELL eight times and won four of those matches. I suppose 50% doesn't sound great, but considering the opposition, that's not a bad record.

In three of those victories, we had wild comebacks. In Reno, our team trailed by 53 IMPs entering the final sixteen deals. We picked up exactly 53 IMPs! That meant overtime. In the eight-deal playoff, our team trailed by 1 IMP going into this final deal. You can try holding the South hand with our teammate, Steve Robinson.

The Auction

♠ A K 2 ♥ K 7 ♦ 8 3 ♣ K 10 9 7 5 4

Facing Soloway and Hamman, with both sides vulnerable, Steve opened the South hand 1♣. His partner, Peter Boyd, responded 1♦ and Hamman overcalled 1♥. Rightly or wrongly, Robinson rebid 2♣.

Since they were playing support doubles, this denied holding three-card diamond support. A free bid here shows a little something extra. In today's world of light openers, I think he was worth it. His ♥K has added value after RHO's overcall, all his cards are prime (aces and kings) and he has a decent six-card suit.

Boyd cuebid 2♥. What does that show? There are misconceptions out there about such bids. Some people learn about an animal called a Western cuebid. As a teacher, I can say that I wish the term had never been invented. Officially, it means something like 'asking as opposed to telling about a stopper(s) for notrump'. Usually, the Western cuebid is made at the three-level. Why do I dislike the term? Because such cuebids are always better interpreted by logic than by rote or convention. In this case, is 2♥ asking for a stopper?

West	North	East	South
			1♣
pass	1♦	1♥	2♣
pass	2♥	pass	?

Maybe, maybe not. Partner could have some good hand with no heart stopper. He might be hoping you can bid notrump. Perhaps he has:

♠ Q J x ♥ x x x ♦ A K Q J x ♣ x x

But maybe he has hearts stopped himself, and some hand that had to make a forcing call, something like:

♠ x ♥ A x ♦ A K Q J 10 x x ♣ Q x x

My point is this: bidding the opponents' suit at the two- or three-level should just be thought of as forcing. Or think of it as some good hand. Regarding stoppers, just don't worry about it. If you have their suit stopped and want to bid notrump, then do so. If you don't have their suit stopped, then don't bid notrump. It's that simple.

Here you have hearts stopped and no special distribution to show, so you bid 2NT. Sorry for the lecture, but I had to get it off my chest. Too many students have asked me about Western cuebids. And too many opponents have asked me, 'What does your partner's 2♥ show?' There is no specific answer to give to such questions. Whatever partner had in mind you will soon see, because he raises to 3NT.

The Play

♠ J 10 7
♥ 8 2
♦ A Q J 10 7 4
♣ A J

♠ A K 2
♥ K 7
♦ 8 3
♣ K 10 9 7 5 4

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

West leads the ♥J. Partner's 2♥ bid was logical. He couldn't bid 2♦ (weakish) or 3♦ (invitational) and he couldn't bid notrump himself. If you hadn't bid notrump, he no doubt would have bid clubs or diamonds next (forcing). Once you bid notrump, he was delighted to raise to game.

Notice, however, that you have not reached the best contract! You will fail in 3NT if the ♦K is wrong (unless you manage to bring in the club suit). Meanwhile, 5♦ is a much better contract (it will probably make even with the ♦K wrong — you can work on the clubs and probably lose nothing other than the two top red tricks). Back in your 3NT, East wins the ♥A and clears the hearts. What is your plan?

- a) take a diamond finesse
- b) cash the ♣A and ♣K and then take a diamond finesse
- c) take a club finesse



I like the finesse in clubs, but I don't think this is clear-cut. And I didn't even say which way to finesse in clubs. The vulnerable overcaller rates to have the ♦K, so I don't think the diamond finesse is a good bet. Robinson didn't think so, either. He decided to rely on clubs for his contract.

He could have finessed either opponent for the ♣Q, or he could have played the ♣A and then the ♣K, falling back on diamonds if the ♣Q didn't come down. With East likely having heart length, you could argue that West is more likely to have club length, so maybe he should have played a club to the jack early on. On the other hand, if West has four clubs, the only way to pick them up is if East has the singleton ♣Q. If they are 3-2, it is not too much against the odds to play for East to have the ♣Q.

Anyway, Robinson chose to finesse East for the queen. And... rats! West won the ♣Q and the defense cashed three more heart tricks for down one. With our team down by 1 IMP, and this being the final deal, things looked bleak. Our 53-IMP fourth-quarter comeback looked to be wasted. Boyd-Robinson (our teammates) had failed by one trick (−100) in 3NT on the North-South cards. Even if Meckstroth-Rodwell reached 3NT down one, the board would be pushed and we'd lose by one heartbreaking IMP.

Things started differently at our table: Rodwell (South) opened a 14-16 1NT. He could have opened a Precision 2♣ (11-15 HCP, six-plus clubs), but I don't mind his actual choice. He was short one high card point but this hand is worth more than its point count.

The auction was short and sweet — Meckstroth simply raised to 3NT.

Even without the heart overcall, West (with ♥J109x) had a natural heart lead and led the ♥J. East (that would be me) played the ♥3. Rodwell asked and was told that it showed an odd number of hearts. I like to signal count at Trick 1 versus notrump. Later on, I can manage to signal attitude (by using a method called Smith Echo).

Here my count signal wasn't much help to Rodwell. He could see that as soon as he lost the lead in either minor, the defense would be able to run hearts to defeat him. He was in the same predicament that Robinson faced, but with different information. Rodwell didn't have any clues from the opponents' bidding.

What's the best plan, given the information declarer has?

- take a diamond finesse
- cash the ♣A and ♣K and then take a diamond finesse
- take a club finesse



Eric took option (b) — a different decision than the one made by Robinson. This time I am confident it is the percentage choice. By cashing the top clubs, you can combine your chances. If the ♣Q fell (not such a long shot), you'd be home. If not, you still have the diamonds in reserve. Rodwell had no reason to suspect East held the ♦K (no bidding). His line of play was about 70% (the ♣Q falls or the 50% diamond finesse).

The only small problem was that when the diamond finesse lost, as it did on the actual deal, there was the matter of an extra undertrick. When I won my ♦K, I crossed to David's hand in hearts and he cashed the good ♣Q. Now when we ran the hearts we had six tricks for down two.

The Result

That was +200 to win 3 IMPs against our teammates' -100. We won the match by 2 IMPs to complete the improbable comeback.

Both Vul.

	♠ J 10 7	
	♥ 8 2	
	♦ A Q J 10 7 4	
	♣ A J	
David		Larry
♠ 9 6 5 3		♠ Q 8 4
♥ J 10 9 6		♥ A Q 5 4 3
♦ 9 6		♦ K 5 2
♣ Q 8 2		♣ 6 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A K 2	
	♥ K 7	
	♦ 8 3	
	♣ K 10 9 7 5 4	

21. Bad Break?



David Berkowitz

This deal was played by my partner, David Berkowitz, in the 1993 Vanderbilt. I remember it well for several reasons. For one, it was written up in the New York Times as the best-played hand of the tournament. For another, it came in the fourth quarter of our semifinal match against Meckstroth-Rodwell and Hamman-Wolff. It was another of those wild victories over NICKELL. We overcame a 33-IMP deficit in the final quarter with the help of this deal. Why have we had so many amazing comebacks against this team? One reason might be that we are so often trailing.

The Auction

♠ A Q 7 ♥ A 10 3 2 ♦ — ♣ K 9 8 7 6 3

Both vulnerable, David opened 2♣ as dealer. In Standard, this hand would be a 1♣ opening, but we were playing Precision. Our 1♣ opening shows a strong hand, usually 17+HCP. With clubs, we open 2♣ (we don't need 2♣ for strong hands, since they all start with 1♣). West, Jeff Meckstroth, doubled. This is a takeout double, just as you would expect.

The rest of the auction was artificial, and I don't think it would serve any purpose to describe all the bids here. Suffice it to say that East-West did no further bidding other than to double the final contract, which was 5♣. Rodwell (the partner of the takeout doubler) was the one who doubled the final contract.

The Play

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

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

West	North	East	South
			2♣*
dbl	2♦ ¹	pass	2♥ ²
pass	3♣ ³	pass	5♣
pass	pass	dbl	all pass

1. Artificial enquiry.
2. Unspecified four-card major.
3. No major suit, non-forcing.

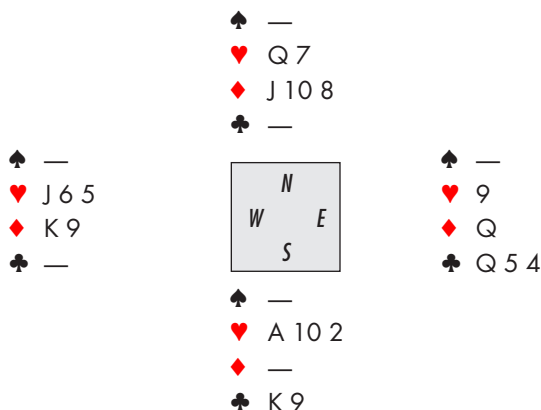
The ♦A (ace from ace-king) was led and a decent dummy appeared. It's always good when partner's high cards are in your side suits, not opposite your void. For his final double, Rodwell probably had at least ♣AQxx and maybe ♣AQxxx. The key is to avoid losing two trump tricks and a heart trick. The first trick is easy: you ruff.

You cross to dummy with the ♥K, as Meckstroth plays the ♥4 and Rodwell the ♥8. In theory, the opponents are playing upside-down count, but I wouldn't be so sure they are signaling honestly here. In any event, from West's takeout double of 2♣ without many high cards, he is likely to be at least 4-4 in the majors. What next?



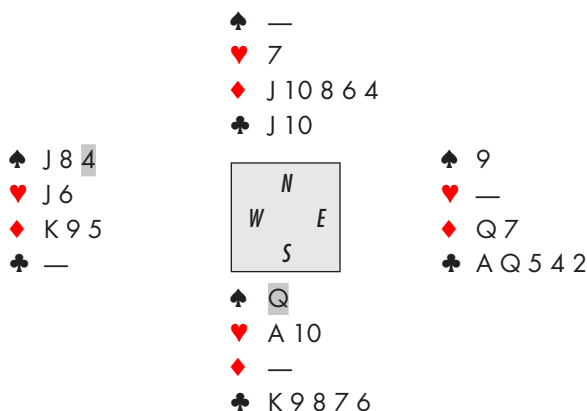
It's right to cash the ♥Q (I'll show you how and why shortly). This was not an easy one. In fact, at the other table, declarer got it wrong. The other declarer (also doubled by East) tried to draw trumps. East won the ♣A and the suit split 5-0 (no big surprise). East played another trump and declarer was in trouble.

He ruffed a diamond and played three rounds of spades, to reach this position:



Declarer still had to lose a trump and a heart for down one. There really was no way to make it after the club play at Trick 3.

Back at our table, David suspected the hearts (and the clubs) would break poorly. However, he saw that he could get home as long as hearts were 4-2. (He would have to take the slight risk that spades were 6-2.) So first he took a second round of hearts. Then he cashed two top spades, arriving here:



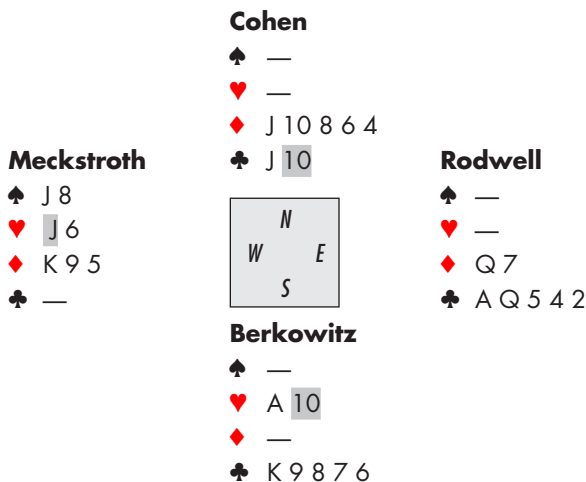
Now came the ♠Q. What did he throw from dummy?



Well, yes, dummy's little heart... and then what did he do?

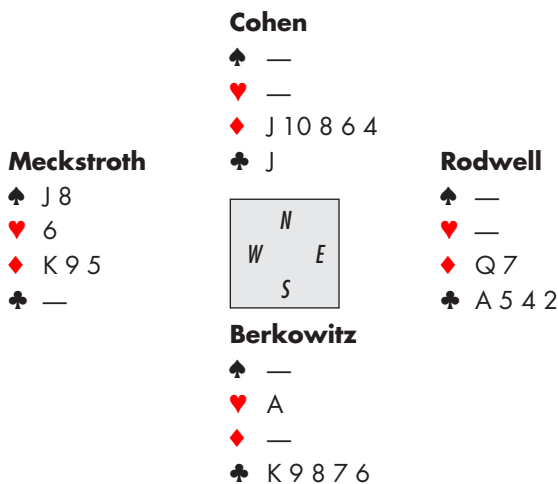


He ruffed the ♥10 in dummy with the ♣10. That was the way to avoid a heart loser. What could East do?



If he didn't overruff, David would play a diamond and all East would get would be his two high trumps. David would ruff the ♥A in dummy if need be, while if East was out of diamonds and able to ruff with the ♣A, David would discard the ♥A. So on the trick in our diagram, East's only choice would be to overruff.

But now East is dead. What can he do? Cashing the ♣A would leave David in control, so that's no good. A diamond would let David ruff in hand and then he could trump the good ♥A in dummy. So East's only chance (after overruffing with his ♣Q) was to exit with a low club, which is what he did.



That gave David one last test. Should he play the ♣K or win this trick in dummy?



Don't fall at the last hurdle! Playing low wouldn't work. The lead would be in dummy, and David would have had to play a diamond, tapping himself out. East would be in control and would score one of his low trumps by force. David would never get the ♥A. However, winning with the ♣K in hand was clear. Now declarer had control. He had one more trump than East, and he could knock out the ♣A, take the tap in diamonds, draw trumps, and claim.

The Result

Both Vul.

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

David's thoughtful line of play gave him +750 against −200 at the other table. We won 14 IMPs on the deal and went on to complete the comeback and win the match by eight.



Eric Rodwell

22. A Theme Revisited

This deal might be familiar to some serious students of the game. It has appeared in several books, and I was proud (although ultimately sad) to be there when it took place. I watched this deal from the dummy as my partner Marty Bergen declared. Take the East cards. You will be in the chair of maybe the best bridge player of all time, Bob Hamman, competing in the US Team Trials.

The Auction

♠ A J 9 5 3 2 ♥ A K 5 ♦ 10 9 2 ♣ 2

South opened 1♣ (natural) with both vulnerable, and North responded 1♥. It would be normal to bid 1♠ here, but Hamman and his partner Bobby Wolff were playing intermediate jump overcalls when vulnerable. Accordingly, Hamman tried 2♠. On his left, Bergen bid 3♦, a reverse at the three-level.

Wolff jumped to 4♠, which was passed around to Bergen. Bergen bid 4NT, which experts would not treat as Blackwood. Here, it would mean, 'Partner, I want to bid five of a minor, but you choose'. What length in the minors is he showing? Longer clubs, no doubt, since with equal length he would have opened 1♦. Yet since he is willing to play in diamonds, he must have at least five (with only four, he would either bid 5♣ or not bid 4NT). So I'd guess six-plus clubs and five diamonds. The dummy (I'm calling myself a dummy) bid 5♦. And rightly or wrongly, Hamman doubled.

The Play

Dummy

♠ Q 6 2
♥ 10 9 8 7 4 2
♦ J 8 5
♣ 7

	N	
W		E
	S	

Hamman

♠ A J 9 5 4 3
♥ A K 5
♦ 10 9 2
♣ 2

West	North	East	South
			1♣ ¹
pass	1♥	2♠	3♦
4♠	pass	pass	4NT
pass	5♦	dbl	all pass

1. Natural

Bobby Wolff (West) leads the ♠7 (standard leads) and a rather poor dummy comes down (sorry, Marty). Dummy follows low.

What should Hamman do — play the ♠A or the ♠J?



It is nearly impossible from the bidding that declarer has a singleton ♠K: partner couldn't have bid 4♠ with only ♠1087. So you should play the ♠J. Declarer ruffs. Now you still have the ♠A and ♠K on defense to tap declarer later. Bergen lays down the ♣A and ruffs a club in dummy with the ♦8.

Dummy

♠ Q 6
♥ 10 9 8 7 4 2
♦ J 8 5
♣ —



Hamman

♠ A 9 5 4 3
♥ A K 5
♦ 10 9 2
♣ —

What is your plan?

- Overruff and play a heart
- Overruff and play a spade
- Overruff and play a diamond
- Other



The correct answer is 'other'. And in fact, Hamman did 'other' — he discarded a spade. As Alan Truscott wrote in the New York Times, 999 players out of 1,000 would overruff. Hamman was familiar with the theme and as you look at the full deal you can see why his play was correct.

	Cohen	
	♠ Q 6	
	♥ 10 9 8 7 4 2	
	♦ J 5	
	♣ —	
Wolff		Hamman
♠ K 10 8		♠ A 9 5 4
♥ Q J 3		♥ A K 5
♦ 4 3		♦ 10 9 2
♣ K Q		♣ —



Declarer is in dummy. East still has all three trumps. What can declarer do?

If he crosses in trumps to ruff another club, he's in horrible shape. He could ruff a spade to hand, but he has lost control. He will never enjoy the clubs. Once Hamman failed to overruff, declarer had to go down three, –800. There was no way out.

Let's go back to where dummy ruffed with the ♦8. Let's suppose Hamman made the normal-looking play of overruffing.

	Cohen	
	♠ Q 6	
	♥ 10 9 8 7 4 2	
	♦ J 5	
	♣ —	
Wolff		Hamman
♠ K 10 8		♠ A 9 5 4 3
♥ Q J 3		♥ A K 5
♦ 4 3		♦ 10 2
♣ K Q		♣ —



Now there is a two-trick swing! No matter what Hamman returns, declarer gets out for down only one! Let's look at just one possibility (but trust me, they are all the same). If he plays spades, declarer ruffs, then ruffs a club high, draws the trumps and he has control. He loses only a club and a heart (and the previous overruff) for down only one, –200. Back at the key moment, overruffing leads to down one. Discarding leads to down three!



Bobby Wolff

The Result

Both Vul.

Wolff

♠ K 10 8 7
♥ Q J 3
♦ 4 3
♣ K Q 10 8

Cohen

♠ Q 6 2
♥ 10 9 8 7 4 2
♦ J 8 5
♣ 7



Hamman

♠ A J 9 5 4 3
♥ A K 5
♦ 10 9 2
♣ 2

Bergen

♠ —
♥ 6
♦ A K Q 7 6
♣ A J 9 6 5 4 3

At the other table, South played in 5♣ doubled and lost a heart and three clubs. This meant down two, −500 for North-South. For his memorable defense, Hamman's team won 7 IMPs and went on to win the match by 5 IMPs. Had he misdefended, they would have lost. The theme is identical to the one in [Deal 12](#), where I said I'd refer back to it.

23. A Fond Memory

♠ A 4 3 ♥ A ♦ A K 5 4 2 ♣ A 9 6 5

The previous Team Trials deal was a heartbreaker for sure, but this one falls on the opposite end of the spectrum. It was from earlier in the match and might be classified as comic relief. It is surely one I will never forget. I suspect my opponents haven't forgotten it either. At favorable vulnerability, I held the above West cards. On my right was Lew Stansby and on my left was Chip Martel, world champions both. Sitting opposite me was one of the most aggressive preemptors of all time, my good friend Marty Bergen.

The Auction

Marty was the dealer and at these colors he hardly ever passed. Sure enough he opened 2♦, which for us showed a preempt, but not in diamonds. We played two-under transfer preempts: 2♦ showed spades, 2♠ showed clubs and 2NT showed diamonds (2♥ was natural since we had to use 2♣ for strong hands.) We played these two-unders to allow Marty even more latitude in preempting. If partner was at all interested, he could bid the next step to ask. Opposite the typical minimum, we were able to stop as low as possible. I have since concluded that this is a poor method, as it makes it too easy for the opponents to get in.

Anyway, here I was with this super hand opposite a weak two-bid in spades. Opposite a normal weak two, I could think about a grand slam. Maybe partner would have ♠KQJ10xx and the ♦Q, for example. Opposite Marty, as I liked to put it, I hoped nobody would double us in 2♠!

Well, that's an exaggeration of course, but still, I wasn't really thinking of slam. You see, Marty's favorable vulnerability preempts were a sight to behold. Any five-card suit and any thirteen cards qualified. He could have had:

♠ 10 x x x x ♥ x x ♦ x x x ♣ x x x

— really!

So instead of insisting on game (or looking for slam), I decided to ask more about his hand by bidding 2♥. (At least I didn't just bid 2♠, which would have been a sign-off.)

With the opponents silent, Marty gave his usual answer: 2♣, 'Partner, I have a minimum'. So what else is new? Marty always seemed to have a minimum. I passed. That is not a misprint. I passed! I swear to it, I was there. You haven't lived until you've seen one of Marty's favorable-vulnerability weak twos. Maybe this was taking it too far, but we were not vulnerable, and if we missed a decent game, so be it.

Meanwhile, my opponents might balance — and balance they did! Chip Martel's 3♥ bid was passed back around to me. What do you think I did?

Yes, I doubled. I didn't think our side could make a game, but I also didn't think Martel could take nine tricks. With any luck, I could cash my five top tricks and maybe one from Marty as well for a juicy 500.

Much to my surprise (and delight), Lew Stansby ran to 4♣. Now we were really getting somewhere. This one I felt confident about beating. Christmas had arrived. I was on lead against 4♣ doubled and vulnerable.

Cohen	Martel	Bergen	Stansby
2♥*	pass	2♦*	pass
pass!	3♥	2♠*	pass
dbl	pass	pass	pass
dbl	all pass	pass	4♣



Marty Bergen and Larry Cohen

The Play

♠ A 4 3 ♥ A ♦ A K 5 4 2 ♣ A 9 6 5

So which of my four aces should I lead? I've waited many years as an author to present this as a choice.



There is no 100% correct answer, but why not lead from the diamond combination and look at dummy?

Martel

♠ Q 6 5
 ♥ K Q J 9 4 3
 ♦ J 8 3
 ♣ J

Cohen

♠ A 4 3
 ♥ A
 ♦ A K 5 4 2
 ♣ A 9 6 5



Dummy is beautiful (to me, anyway). I suppose I could be really greedy and wish there were no ♣J on the table, but still, this looks juicy! Partner drops the ♦Q and declarer plays the ♦7. What does that mean?

On defense, signaling with an honor shows the one below it. In general, you never play high-low to signal a doubleton with Qx. Here, though, with the ♦J in dummy, partner might be starting a high-low. He knows you won't play him for the jack. You play the ♦K and partner follows with the ♦6 declarer playing the ♦9. Sure enough, his ♦Q wasn't a singleton.

Now what do you play?

- a) ♠A
- b) ♥A
- c) a low diamond
- d) ♣A



You are going to give partner a diamond ruff, yes. However, you do want a heart ruff when he gets in, so you play your ♥A first. You also should cash your ♠A before giving partner the diamond ruff. Why? Declarer ran from 3♥ doubled, so maybe he has a singleton in hearts. When your partner plays a heart for you to ruff, you don't want declarer to throw away a spade loser.

Having cashed the major-suit aces, which diamond do you play and why?



You should play the ♦2. When giving a ruff, you signal suit-preference. You want partner to return the lowest side suit, hearts. Partner ruffs with the ♣7 and duly returns a heart. Declarer ruffs with the king. And you?



You follow the general principle of trump promotion. When declarer ruffs high, if you overruff, there is no gain. By discarding, you set up an extra trump trick. This is now the position:

	Martel	
	♠ Q 6	
	♥ K Q J 9	
	♦ —	
	♣ J	
Cohen		Bergen
♠ 3		♠ J 10 8 7
♥ —		♥ 8 7 5
♦ 5 4		♦ —
♣ A 9 6 5		♣ —
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W<div>E</div>S</div> </div>	
	Stansby	
	♠ K	
	♥ —	
	♦ —	
	♣ Q 10 8 4 3 2	

You have taken the first five tricks, and partner’s heart play has promoted a second trump trick for your side. You now have two natural trump tricks for down four for +1100.

The Result

NS Vul.

	Martel	
	♠ Q 6 5	
	♥ K Q J 9 4 3	
	♦ J 8 3	
	♣ J	
Cohen		Bergen
♠ A 4 3		♠ J 10 8 7 2
♥ A		♥ 8 7 6 5 2
♦ A K 5 4 2		♦ Q 6
♣ A 9 6 5		♣ 7
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W<div>E</div>S</div> </div>	
	Stansby	
	♠ K 9	
	♥ 10	
	♦ 10 9 7	
	♣ K Q 10 8 4 3 2	

Marty’s weak two was quite ugly. However, it could have been worse! The ♦Q and ♠J10 were nice cards. I had misjudged. In fact, 4♠ is a pretty good contract, and given the good breaks, it would have made. However, +1100 was certainly better than +420. Also it made our opponents think twice before balancing for the rest of the match.



Lew Stansby

What happened at the other table? For some reason, East started out with a pass. How can anyone bid like that? This time it was South who preempted, a fairly normal 3♣. Personally, I think 3NT is the correct overcall on my hand, but West chose a rather tame (lame?) 3♦. Everyone passed and East-West made their unambitious contract for +110. They were only one zero short of the +1100 achieved at the other table.

One thing I'll never forget about this deal is the way the late, great, Alfred Sheinwold described it in his syndicated bridge column. He wrote:

When Bergen bid only 2♠ (meaning 'My hand isn't weak — it's decrepit!'), Cohen passed casually, as though he had only a mediocre hand. The opponents naturally dashed into the auction, with Cohen after them, chopping their heads off.

I can make all the fun I want and have all the fond memories I want, but let the record show that even though we won this battle, we lost the war.

SÆLENSMINDE

24. Harassment

This deal and [Deal 25](#) are a pair. They were played in the same two-board round of the Blue Ribbon Pairs at the 2002 ACBL Fall Nationals in Phoenix, Arizona. Both were against a top young Norwegian pair. The West player, Erik Sælensminde, is an interesting character. With a shaved head, glasses and an earring, he hardly has the look of one of the top players in his country.



Erik Sælensminde

Take David Berkowitz's East cards and see how you do.

The Auction

♠ 10 7 6 3 2 ♥ A 9 7 6 ♦ 9 3 ♣ A Q

Would you open as dealer, vulnerable against not?



You should pass. I'm all for aggressive opening bids, but not this one. I like the aces and 'quick tricks', but the big negative is that your suit is so lousy. If you do open 1♣, and end up on defense, you wouldn't want partner to plunk down the ♠K from ♠Kx, for example, on opening lead. If you subscribe to the Rule of 20, this hand comes to only 19 (10 HCP + 9 cards in the two longest suits).

LHO opens 3♥ which is followed by two passes. Should you balance?



No, not this time. Let me say that I'm all for aggressive balancing, but again, this isn't the right time. Your partner couldn't act over the preempt, so it's not likely the hand belongs to your side. You have length (lots of it) in their suit and that is a clear warning sign against bidding.

Could you get lucky if you bid 3♠ and catch partner with four-card support? Sure, but that's a lot to hope for. What if you bid 3♠ and found partner with, say, 1-2-5-5 shape? I don't mean to be pessimistic, but let's just say that your poor spade suit, coupled with your good hearts, argues for defending.

The Play

Tormod Roren

♠ A K Q 5 4

♥ —

♦ K J 10 2

♣ K 10 6 2



David

♠ 10 7 6 3 2

♥ A 9 7 6

♦ 9 3

♣ A Q

West	North	East	South
pass	pass	pass	3♥

The final contract is 3♥ by South. Your partner leads the ♠J and you see this dummy. Yikes! One of the benefits of writing this book is that I have a wire on every board. It's sure easy to talk you, dear reader, into passing throughout with the East cards, when I know that your RHO has that hand. Seriously, though, I agree with both passes and that's what David did at the table.

Declarer plays the ♠A from dummy. What do you play at Trick 1 and why?



In general, at Trick 1, third hand should signal his attitude towards the opening lead. In this situation, though, the attitude is fairly obvious — you can't like spades. Also there is a good chance the lead is a singleton and partner will want to know how to reach you for a spade ruff. When attitude is not relevant, your card should be suit-preference, so you play your lowest spade, the ♠2, to suggest the lower side suit, clubs, as declarer follows with the ♠8.

Declarer plays the ♠K at Trick 2 so he is the one who ends up providing the spade ruff for partner. West ruffs with the ♥3. Realize that from declarer's point of view, the ♠J could have been from ♠J10x; he didn't know spades were 5-1. Partner dutifully shifts to the ♣4 and dummy plays low. Notice partner's club spot. It is useful to have partnership agreements about shifts to spot cards in the middle of the hand. In this kind of situation, you play third and fifth, also known as 'low from odd'. Partner's low club means he started with an odd number of clubs (1, 3, 5 or 7). After winning the ♣Q, you know that it is safe to cash your ♣A before the mice get at it. What do you do after that?

Tormod Roren

♠ Q 5 4
♥ —
♦ K J 10 2
♣ K 10



David

♠ 10 7 6
♥ A 9 7 6
♦ 9 3
♣ —

- a) ♠10
- b) ♠6
- c) ♥A
- d) ♥6
- e) ♦9



You might as well annoy declarer with more spades. He won't have any useful discard to make. (He has at most one diamond to lose, and it doesn't seem like he started with a singleton diamond.) You play your lowest spade since you have nothing in diamonds (you wouldn't want to hint that you have the ♦Q — partner might underlead his ♦A).

Declarer ruffs the spade with the ♥K. This feels good, your ♥9 is starting to become a relevant card. Declarer plays another high heart, which you win. Partner plays high-low in trumps, a signal typically used to show either suit preference or desire to ruff (shows another trump).

Tormod Roren

♠ Q 5
 ♥ —
 ♦ K J 10
 ♣ K 10

**David**

♠ 10 7
 ♥ 9 7 6
 ♦ 9 3
 ♣ —

And now?



Might as well continue a good thing and play the ♠7. For the same reasons stated previously, it must be best to harass declarer with spade plays. Declarer again ruffs high. Now you closely examine your remaining hearts. They are looking better and better. Declarer plays his last high heart, the ♥10 (he already ruffed with the ♥K and ♥J, and he used the ♥Q to drive out your ♥A). Declarer then exits with a low heart to your seven.

Tormod Roren

♠ Q
 ♥ —
 ♦ K J
 ♣ K

**Larry**

♠ —
 ♥ —
 ♦ A Q 7
 ♣ 9

David

♠ 10
 ♥ 9
 ♦ 9 3
 ♣ —

Sælensminde

♠ —
 ♥ 5
 ♦ 8 5 4
 ♣ —

At this point, let's look at all the cards and see how this poor declarer is doing. He knew there were only two trumps outstanding and he hoped they were 1-1. When he played a low heart to you he was trying to minimize the damage.

Instead, he is in for more suffering. You draw his last trump. Ouch! This adds insult to injury. What should declarer throw from dummy? A spade was clearly out, so it was either a club (which sets up West's ♣9) or a diamond, which is what declarer chose to discard. Now you play a diamond and partner gets two diamond

tricks. Yes, declarer was still paying attention and he kept the right card (the ♣K) in dummy for Trick 13.

Dummy took the last trick, but declarer was down four, -200. Personally, I don't understand the need to open 3♥ with that South hand. Maybe North-South were playing a system that precluded a 2♥ opening.

The Result

EW Vul.

	Tormod Roren	
	♠ A K Q 5 4	
	♥ —	
	♦ K J 10 2	
	♣ K 10 6 2	
Larry		David
♠ J		♠ 10 7 6 3 2
♥ 8 3 2		♥ A 9 7 6
♦ A Q 7 6		♦ 9 3
♣ 9 8 7 5 4		♣ A Q
	<div><div>N</div><div>W<div>E</div>S</div></div>	
	Sælensminde	
	♠ 9 8	
	♥ K Q J 10 5 4	
	♦ 8 5 4	
	♣ J 3	

Looking at the North-South cards, how many tricks do you think they should make in a heart contract? On the surface, they are off the ♥A, ♦A and ♣AQ, just four tricks to lose. However, with the bad spade break and the constant defensive harassment, declarer ended up losing eight tricks! For defeating it four tricks, we received 111 out of 116 matchpoints. (Top was 116 because there were 117 tables playing this same deal.)

25. A Rare Feat

This deal and the [previous one](#) were played in the same two-board round against Sælensminde and his partner, Tormod Roren. (The directions are rotated to make declarer sit South.) You will see more torture inflicted on Eric Sælensminde, shown this time as sitting West but still to David Berkowitz's left. Take David's South cards and play along — we're vulnerable and they're not.

The Auction

♠ A K Q 8 6 3 ♥ A 6 ♦ A Q 2 ♣ 10 4

Sælensminde opens 1♦ (and I warn you that these guys open light, very light) and it is passed to you in fourth chair.

How should you balance?



You could just jump to a game (in spades or notrump), but what's the hurry? You are too good for an overcall, so you have to start with double. By the way, a jump to 2♠ in the balancing seat is not preemptive, it is intermediate. However, this hand is too strong for that action. A balancing jump to 2NT also shows a strong hand (it is not 'unusual' for the two lowest suits); it shows approximately 19-20 points. This hand has 19 HCP, but with top tricks and a six-card suit I think it is too strong for 2NT.

Partner bids 1♥ over your double, and it is up to you. I didn't show you a quiz this time, because there are too many reasonable answers. You could bid spades (but not just 1♠, which wouldn't be enough) or notrump. You could even cuebid 2♦. Once partner couldn't jump in response to your double, I think slam is out of the question so it is just a matter of partscore or game and in which strain.

I'm not thrilled with David's choice of 2NT. If everyone passed, it isn't likely that exactly 2NT would be the right contract. It is a big underbid, in my opinion. One way to decide if you are worth driving to game on your own is to try the 'balanced Yarborough test'. If you can envision a game opposite

♠ x x x x ♥ x x x x ♦ x x x x ♣ x x x x

you should bid it. Here, with a diamond lead (you picture the best scenario) you'd expect to make 3NT, so you should not stop short of game.

Anyway, David got raised to 3NT, the final contract. This was matchpoints. Let's see if it was greedy not to mention the spade suit.

The Play

Larry

♠ 9 7 4
♥ K Q 4 2
♦ 7 6 5
♣ Q 6 5



David

♠ A K Q 8 6 3
♥ A 6
♦ A Q 2
♣ 10 4

West	North	East	South
1♦	pass	pass	dbl
pass	1♥	pass	2NT
pass	3NT	all pass	

The ♦10 was led, and David was happy when he saw the dummy. Yes, 4♠ is a much safer contract, but once he had escaped a club lead, and even better, received a diamond lead, this 3NT contract was looking mighty good. David won the first trick with the ♦Q.

What next?

- a) ♠A
- b) ♥A
- c) ♦A
- c) ♣10



Every now and then, you get an easy one. Given that spades aren't 4-0, you have eleven top tricks (six spades, three hearts and, after the lead, two diamonds). You might as well run your long suit and see if something develops. It wouldn't make sense to do anything else first.

Everyone follows to two rounds of spades, but now you have to start paying attention. Good matchpoint players thrive here. They carefully watch the discards and often emerge with an extra trick. I always ask about the opponents' carding (or look at the convention card). On the ♠Q, West throws the ♦4 and East the ♣2. It turns out they are playing upside-down attitude, so East's ♣2 says he likes clubs.

You will surely keep all of your hearts in dummy, that's your biggest chance for a twelfth trick. On the fourth spade West throws the ♦8, you discard a diamond from dummy and East throws the ♣3.

On the next trick, lead the ♠3. This is a sneaky play I use when running a long suit. On the penultimate round, I play the lower card; it might look to the

opponents (if they have not been counting) that I am done running the suit. Sometimes they make a mistake, not realizing another (higher) card still remains to be played and that they have another discard still to make. West throws the ♣J, you throw a club from dummy and East plays the ♣7.

Larry

♠ —
♥ K Q 4 2
♦ 7
♣ Q 6



David

♠ 6
♥ A 6
♦ A 2
♣ 10 4

When the last spade, the ♠6, is led, West now goes into a long huddle. Even if you have lost track of the discards (maybe because I am ‘talking’ too much), it is usually the case that the defensive tempo will give the show away. It appears that West is in trouble now. He must have started with four hearts, otherwise it would be painless for him to throw one. He also must be down to only two diamonds. He has to keep both so that your little diamond doesn’t set up. If he still had three diamonds left, he wouldn’t be in any pain. Looking rather unhappy, he throws the ♣A. What do you think his last six cards are?

It feels as if he has kept both red suits protected so he can’t have any clubs left. That would mean he started with approximately

♠ J x ♥ J 10 x x ♦ K 10 9 x x ♣ A J

East would have the ♣K, not inconsistent with his signal. That’s not an opening bid you say? Not for me or you, but it is for Sælensminde. At favorable vulnerability, as here, they open most ten-counts, especially with a little shape. It’s their style and it says ‘very light openings’ on their convention card.

What should you throw from dummy on your last spade?

- a) ♥2
- b) ♦7
- c) ♣6
- d) doesn’t matter



It doesn't matter. You have already done the good work. Let's throw the ♥2 and take a look at the remaining cards.

	Larry	
	♠ —	
	♥ K Q 4	
	♦ 7	
	♣ Q 6	
Sælensminde		Roren
♠ —		♠ —
♥ J 10 8 5		♥ 9 7
♦ K 9		♦ J
♣ —		♣ K 9 8
	David	
	♠ —	
	♥ A 6	
	♦ A 2	
	♣ 10 4	

West had to keep all those red cards, or he would have set up your twelfth trick at once. He had to hope his partner had the ♣K10, so he threw away all his clubs. However, you have the ♣10, and you should now play it to set up your twelfth trick. East wins the only trick for the defense with the ♣K and you have the rest.

West opened light and then failed to take even one trick. In fact, his opening diamond lead set him up for a rare triple squeeze. That's right, the run of the spades squeezed him in three suits — keeping the ♣A would simply have given you a trick in one of the red suits

The Result

NS Vul.

	Larry	
	♠ 9 7 4	
	♥ K Q 4 2	
	♦ 7 6 5	
	♣ Q 6 5	
Sælensminde		Roren
♠ J 5		♠ 10 2
♥ J 10 8 5		♥ 9 7 3
♦ K 10 9 8 4		♦ J 3
♣ A J		♣ K 9 8 7 3 2
	David	
	♠ A K Q 8 6 3	
	♥ A 6	
	♦ A Q 2	
	♣ 10 4	

David made twelve tricks for a beautiful +690. This was again worth 111 out of 116 matchpoints. Coupled with the [previous deal](#), it was an unforgettable round.

WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

26. Playing from the Right Side

This deal comes from the 2002 World Championships in Montreal. It was from the Round of 16 in the Rosenblum Cup, the premier team event of the year. Our team was facing the best Dutch team and we won the match with surprising ease. This is one deal from the match that I had lots of fun with. Take my South cards and see how you do.

The Auction

♠ 7 ♥ Q 5 3 ♦ K 3 2 ♣ A K 10 9 5 3

They are vulnerable, and you are not. After partner's 1♥ opening as dealer, your first call is easy.



You start with 2♣. Whether or not this is game forcing, it is the best way to start. You plan to raise hearts next, but for now you should show the best feature of your hand.

West overcalls 2♥, partner's suit. It's hard to keep track these days of what is alertable or not. In ACBL-land (at least as I write this), no cuebids are alertable. However, this was a World Bridge Federation event, where different rules apply. I think the entire issue is much ado about nothing. If anyone wants to know what 2♥ means here, he can ask when it is his turn.

David asked and was told it showed the unbid suits, spades and diamonds, like a Michaels bid. David rebid his hearts, promising at least six. Because we play that a 2/1 is game forcing, this bid was forcing.

West	North	East	South
	1♥	pass	2♣
2♥*	3♥	4♠	?

My vulnerable opponent jumped all the way to 4♠. This looked to be a pinochle deck. Well, not really. They rated to have a big fit in both of their suits, and we

might be in the same situation with our clubs and hearts. The next call isn't clear, but let me remind you that David and I play Precision, so his hand was limited to about 11-15 HCP. What do you think I did?



I passed! We were clearly in a forcing-pass situation. Once we've forced to game (as 2♣ did), you can't then decide to let the opponents play undoubled in their game. You have to either bid on, or double them. If David happened to be short in clubs and had good defense (spade or diamond cards), he could double. But if he had not much defense and a little something in clubs, he would bid on.

He did bid on, bidding 5♣ and showing club support in the process. Opposite the ♣Q, the ♥AK and the ♦A, I could picture a slam, but it would be quite greedy to play him for specifically those cards.

What did I do now?



I passed again! Why didn't I go back to hearts? Yes, it is a higher-scoring contract and a known nine-plus card fit. And yes, David plays the hands well enough to be trusted to play 5♥. But I wanted to play this one from my side. Not because I was having a good day, but because I didn't want a diamond lead through my king. Picture David with some hand such as:

♠ A x ♥ A K J 10 x x ♦ x x x ♣ Q x

From my side, we'd have a chance at twelve tricks in clubs whereas from his side, 5♥ would go down on a diamond lead (presuming the ace is with West).

And 5♣ became the final contract.

The Play

David

♠ K 5
♥ A K J 10 7 4
♦ 10 7 5
♣ Q 7



Larry

♠ 7
♥ Q 5 3
♦ K 3 2
♣ A K 10 9 5 3

West	North	East	South
	1♥	pass	2♣
2♥*	3♥	4♠	pass
pass	5♣	all pass	

The opening lead is the ♠4, and now you see David's actual hand. I think he did well to bid on. With his ♠K, he might well have doubled 4♠. However, if he assumed West had both missing aces, that would give him only one defensive trick in the spade and diamond suits, so to beat 4♠, he'd need three of our clubs and hearts to cash. Meanwhile, we had reached a very good contract of our own.

What should you play from dummy at Trick 1?



Normally, people don't underlead aces, so you would usually play low and hope third hand plays the ace (from say, AJ10xx, worried that you might have a singleton queen). Here, though, there is a strong chance from the bidding that West has the ♠A and he might be underleading it to try to get East on lead. Accordingly, I played the ♠K and it won the trick, East following with the ♠8. So it appeared that was the case.

You can see now how good it was to play in clubs. You've avoided a diamond lead through the ♦K. On the other hand, if your ♠K had lost to East's ♠A, a diamond would probably come back and you'd be down. However, that would mean 4♠ was making. When the ♠K holds, you are off to a good start.

So West is trying to get his partner on lead — whether for a diamond through or to get a heart ruff, you aren't sure yet.

What should you play at Trick 2?

- a) ♠5
- b) ♥A
- c) ♥4
- d) ♦5
- e) ♣Q
- f) ♣7



David

♠ 5
 ♥ A K J 10 7 4
 ♦ 10 7 5
 ♣ Q 7

**Larry**

♠ —
 ♥ Q 5 3
 ♦ K 3 2
 ♣ A K 10 9 5 3

I can see no reason to postpone drawing trumps. You start with the ♣Q, of course. East follows with the ♣2 and West the ♣8. You play a second round. RHO follows low on the second round. This could be one of those big moments.

What will it be?

- a) ♣K
- b) ♣10



It must be right to put in the ♣10.

If you play the ♣A and LHO shows out, you'll probably go down. East will eventually get in with his ♣J and poke a diamond through: you will need the ♦A onside. On the other hand, if this finesse loses to the ♣J, what can go wrong? West cannot get two diamond tricks leading them from his side and you can eventually throw your diamonds on dummy's hearts.

There are two small dangers. One is that West could now give East a diamond ruff. The only other danger is that West started with ♣Jxx and a heart void, and he would still need East to have the ♦A to reach him for a heart ruff. Is this scenario possible?

Theoretically, yes, but most unlikely. Why would West with something like:

♠ A Q J x x ♥ — ♦ Q J x x x ♣ J x x

underlead his spades at Trick 1? That would be way against the odds. Even if he hit his partner with the ♠K, that wouldn't ensure a defeat. I think with that hypothetical hand, West would either lay down the ♠A or try a diamond lead. Most likely, West underled his spades to get a diamond play from partner. He was hoping East held the ♠K for his leap to 4♣. Probably West also had the ♦AQ and anticipated (maybe from my pass of 5♣) that I might have the guarded ♦K.

So playing the ♣10 isn't a 100% sure thing, but it is what I did at the table and it worked when West threw a diamond! I claimed thirteen tricks, stating that I would draw the trumps and throw the diamonds on the hearts for +440.

The Result

EW Vul.

Netherlands

♠ A Q J 10 4
♥ 9 6
♦ A Q J 6 4
♣ 8

David

♠ K 5
♥ A K J 10 7 4
♦ 10 7 5
♣ Q 7



Larry

♠ 7
♥ Q 5 3
♦ K 3 2
♣ A K 10 9 5 3

Netherlands

♠ 9 8 6 3 2
♥ 8 2
♦ 9 8
♣ J 6 4 2

At the other table, our teammates defended against 4♥ by North. My teammate, Zia, led the ♦9 and the defense quickly took two diamond tricks, a diamond ruff and the ♠A to beat the contract. Our team won 10 IMPs on the deal and went on to win the match in comfort.



Zia Mahmood

27. Carpe Diem

This is another deal from the 2002 World Championships in Montreal. Playing in an early round knockout match, I held the West cards shown:

♠ J 10 8 7 5 2 ♥ K 4 2 ♦ K 7 6 ♣ 5

The Auction

At unfavorable vulnerability, your partner deals and opens 1♣ (natural this time). RHO overcalls 1♥, and your first decision is easy. What is your call?



You bid 1♠. Bidding spades after a 1♥ overcall (the way we play) promises at least five. If I had only a four-card suit, I would have to make a negative double. LHO jumps to 4♥ and partner competes to 4♠. More action. RHO forges on to 5♥.

West	North	East	South
		1♣	1♥
1♠	4♥	4♠	5♥
?			

And you?



I doubled. If this were a forcing pass situation, maybe you would leave it up to partner. Maybe not. I think that there are many reasons to double. You have a singleton in partner's suit (and an easy lead at that). You have the ♥K which is likely to be a trick on defense and not offense. Your spades, although long, aren't so good at the top. After the double, everyone passes.

The Play

It is time to make that obvious opening lead — which is?



Your singleton club, of course. You should be delighted with the dummy you see.

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



West	North	East	South
		1♣	1♥
1♠	4♥	4♠	5♥
dbl	all pass		

Your ♥K is behind the ace (as you suspected). Dummy seems to have wasted cards in spades — the ♠AK might even be opposite a void. And especially after declarer takes partner's ♣J with the ace it looks good that your side didn't go on to 5♠. Your side was off at least three top tricks.

Declarer lays down the ♥A and partner shows out, playing the ♠3. You follow with the ♥4, since it is normal procedure to play high-low in trumps if you can ruff something (in this case, a club). If you followed with the ♥2, partner would presume you weren't interested in ruffing anything. Declarer continues with the ♥3. Are you going to win this or duck?



There is no reason to duck. There is good reason to win. You might be able to score your ♥2 by ruffing. So you win the ♥K, partner following with the ♣2.

Now what?

- a) ♠J
- b) ♥2
- c) ♦K
- d) ♦6



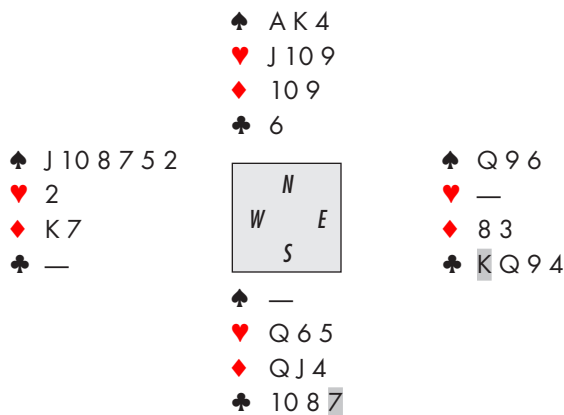
This was your chance to shine! I hope you didn't play a major suit. You know from partner's opening bid that you can safely switch to diamonds (declarer can't possibly have the ♦AQ). Furthermore, it is almost a sure thing that partner's opening bid contains the ♦A.

In that case, you should be able to get your ♥K, the ♦AK, and probably a club as well. Partner rates to have started with something like:

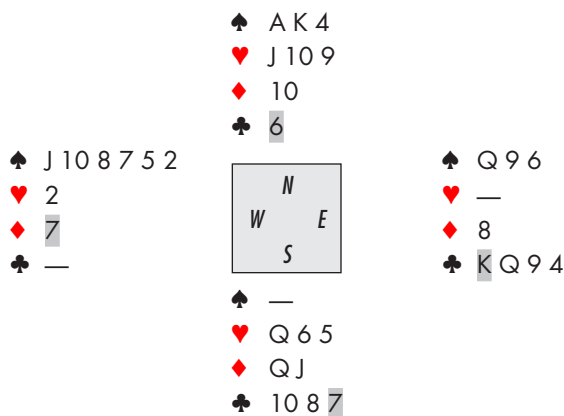
♠ Q x x x ♥ — ♦ A x x (?) ♣ K Q J x x (?)

so you should start with the ♦K. Why the ♦K as opposed to a more ‘normalish’ low diamond? Watch what happens if you carelessly shift to a low diamond.

Partner wins the ♦A. He cashes the ♣K. And you play what on this trick?



As you can see, the defense can get only one more trick — your ♦K. Let’s now go back to the earlier trick where you were on lead with your ♥K. You could have foreseen that playing the ♦K would produce an extra trick. All you needed was for partner to have both the ♦A and the ♣K. You’d have been able to cross in diamonds and, in the diagrammed position, discard a low diamond on partner’s high club.



Then you’d get your well-earned diamond ruff for an extra undertrick, down three for plus 500. The key was to get that ♦K out of the way at the appropriate moment.

The Result

EW Vul.

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

In real life, our auction started 2♣ (natural, Precision) by David with the East cards. South overcalled 2♥, I bid 2♠, and everything continued thereafter as described. For +500 we won 10 IMPs. Our teammates bought the hand North-South in 4♥ undoubled, down only one, -50.

28. Listening to Partner

This deal occurred in 1993 in Santiago, Chile. I was on a team representing the United States in the Bermuda Bowl, the World Championship event played every two years.

The Auction

♠ K 10 2 ♥ A K 6 3 ♦ J 5 ♣ K 10 7 2

With neither side vulnerable, I held these South cards. My partner, David Berkowitz, and I were playing Precision, of course, so I will change the auction (slightly) to conform to Standard methods. Let's pretend that partner opens 1♣ playing Standard American. Your first call is routine: you respond 1♥, your four-card major. Partner rebids 1♠.

What now?



You have an opening bid opposite an opening bid, so you have to make sure you reach game. In the old days, where a jump raise was played as forcing, you could have jumped to 3♣. In the modern bridge world, such a jump would be only invitational, so you rule that out. You can't bid notrump without a diamond stopper, so that leaves only one option: you bid 2♦, the fourth suit. The common treatment is to use this bid as artificial and game forcing. A few players treat the fourth suit as forcing, but not to game. I find this impractical; it is much simpler to play it as 100% game forcing.

West	North	East	South
	1♣	pass	1♥
pass	1♠	pass	2♦*
pass	2♥	pass	?

Partner now bids 2♥. What kind of hand might he have? This is a largely unexplored (but important) area of bidding. Is partner showing extras? Is he promising three-card heart support?

There is no universally agreed upon answer. On the issue of extras, most would say that partner does not promise extras since you forced him to bid. On the issue of the third heart, most would say he does promise three. However, picture partner with a hand such as:

♠ A 5 4 3 ♥ Q 10 ♦ 4 3 2 ♣ A Q 4 3

What is he supposed to do over the forcing 2♦? He won't want to bid 2NT without a diamond stopper, and rebidding one of the black suits with only four cards makes no sense. So when partner bids 2♥ here, you can't be sure what he has.

What should you do next?



Bid 3♣. You have good club support, and should show it. For the moment, nothing else fits.

West	North	East	South
	1♣	pass	1♥
pass	1♠	pass	2♦*
pass	2♥	pass	3♣
pass	3♥	pass	?

Partner bids hearts a second time. Now you can be sure he has three-card support: he wouldn't raise again with only two, and he would have raised the first time with four. Another decision.



I like 3♠. This is the 'expert' bid. You have already denied four spades (else you would have bid 2♠ over 2♥), so partner will know you have only three-card support. In these laborious fourth-suit auctions, both partners should be finely attuned to the fact that the key issue is 'Which strain?'. The theme should always be game before slam. Both partners are doing everything they can to find out if they belong in 3NT or four of a major or five of a minor.

It is easy when a 4-4 major-suit fit is located. Here that is not the case, so a delicate exploration is needed. Your 3♠ bid gives partner one last chance to try 3NT. It is beginning to look like diamonds aren't stopped, but you might as well continue to describe your hand and see if partner can figure out where you belong. You have shown your four hearts (with five you would have insisted on hearts), your club support, and now a spade fragment.

West	North	East	South
	1♣	pass	1♥
pass	1♠	pass	2♦*
pass	2♥	pass	3♣
pass	3♥	pass	3♠
pass	4♥	pass	?

Partner bids hearts yet again! And now?



Pass. Enough is enough. Partner seems to be insisting on the 4-3 heart fit, and who are you to decide otherwise? Maybe he has ♥QJ10 or the like. Trying for eleven tricks in 5♣ seems wrong, and overruling him on the 4-3 fit (bidding 4♠) would deprive you of the pleasure of playing it!

The Play

Berkowitz

♠ A 7 6 3

♥ Q 9 7

♦ Q 7

♣ A Q 8 4



Cohen

♠ K 10 2

♥ A K 6 3

♦ J 5

♣ K 10 7 2

The ♠Q (standard leads) is led and finally you get to look at dummy. Are you surprised? Not really. Partner's bids all seem fine to me. Just for the record, David's actual opening with the North cards was a Precision 1♦ (showing two-plus diamonds and 11-15 HCP). We had an auction quite similar to the one shown and reached the same 4♥ contract.

Let's say you win in dummy. This isn't completely clear, but I had two small reasons:

- 1) You might need a hand entry later on (you'll see why).
- 2) You might as well keep your ♠K10 as a tenace for a possible endplay.

What is your next play?

- a) ♠3
- b) ♥7
- c) ♦7
- d) ♣A
- e) ♣4



As I've said often in this book, if there is no reason to postpone drawing trumps, then draw trumps. Here I can see no reason for postponement. When you lead the

♥7, East plays the ♥2 and West the ♥8. When you play a heart to the ♥Q West plays the ♥J and East the ♥4. When you lead dummy's ♥9, East plays the ♥5. Only the ♥10 is missing. To rise or not to rise?

Berkowitz

♠ 7 6 3
♥ 9
♦ Q 7
♣ A Q 8 4



♥ 5

Cohen

♠ K 10
♥ K 6
♦ J 5
♣ K 10 7 2



Play low. It is not 100%, but it is very much with the odds. If you go up with the ♥K, you are playing West to have started with exactly ♥J108. If you play low, you are playing him to have started with ♥J8.

This is a Restricted Choice situation. It is more likely West started with ♥108 or ♥J8 than specifically ♥J108. With the latter holding, he had a choice of playing the ten or jack on the second round, so you should assume he had no choice (that he was dealt ♥J8 doubleton). There are many other ways (some deeply mathematical) to come to this conclusion. The Official Encyclopedia of Bridge has four full pages on this topic!

And as it turns out, West discards the ♦2. You breathe a relieved sigh as that hurdle is safely negotiated. Now you want to come to hand to draw the last trump. Which suit will you use to do that?



No, not clubs — spades. You'd like to postpone playing the club suit to the last possible moment (not to mention that East could have a club void and ruff in). This spade play is completely safe. If East started with a singleton, he is free to ruff your loser. When he follows, you are almost home free.

Which spade do you play from hand?

- a) ♠K
- b) ♠10



The ♠K of course. Finessing would be smart only if you had a death wish. Yes, if West's lead was from shortness and East had the ♠J you could finesse the ♠10 and make an overtrick. That would be playing West for the singleton or doubleton ♠Q along with a doubleton heart. Possible, but not likely. More importantly, why should you risk what is a spectacular contract? At any form of scoring, +420 is a magnificent result on this North-South combination. West follows to the ♠K and the end is near. You draw the last trump, throwing a diamond from dummy, and have to tackle the club suit.

Berkowitz

♠ 7 6
♥ —
♦ Q
♣ A Q 8 4



Cohen

♠ 10
♥ —
♦ J 5
♣ K 10 7 2

What do you know so far? Not much. The opponents' silence implies that nobody has that many diamonds. Hearts were 4-2 with East having the length, but West appears to have at least three spades to the queen-jack, and maybe a fourth card there. There is no reason to do anything fancy in the club suit so you play a club to the ace.

If everyone follows low, you plan to continue with the ♣Q from dummy (because at that point, the only 4-1 break you can pick up is jack-fourth with East). If East happens to drop the ♣9 on the first club trick, you will probably lead to the ♣K next and try to pick up jack-fourth with West. Notice that if East were dealt ♣J9xx and is smart enough to drop the nine, he will get a club trick that he would not have otherwise.

Anyway, all this ♣9 talk becomes academic when East plays the ♣J. The rest is easy: you claim ten tricks for a super +420.

The Result

Neither Vul.

		Berkowitz			
		♠ A 7 6 3			
		♥ Q 9 7			
		♦ Q 7			
		♣ A Q 8 4			
♠ Q J 4		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"><div style="text-align: center;">N</div><div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between;">WE</div><div style="text-align: center;">S</div></div>		♠ 9 8 5	
♥ J 8				♥ 10 5 4 2	
♦ A 6 3 2				♦ K 10 9 8 4	
♣ 9 6 5 3				♣ J	
		Cohen			
		♠ K 10 2			
		♥ A K 6 3			
		♦ J 5			
		♣ K 10 7 2			

Bidding and making 4♥ was a result to be proud of. Our team won 10 IMPs on the deal when the North-South pair at the other table reached 3NT down one. It is worth noting that 3NT by South has chances. On any lead but a diamond, it is cold. Even with a fourth-best diamond lead from West, when dummy plays low, East has to figure out to go up with the ♦K. Should he?

Yes! If declarer had the ♦A, he would have put up dummy's ♦Q, so East should know that West has the ♦A and put up his ♦K. Easy when looking at all four hands, but...

29. One of My Better Plays

This deal comes from the World Open Pairs Championship in Lille, France, a tournament that conjures up painful memories for me. David Berkowitz and I led the event with two deals to play and fell to second place on that last fateful round. I held these West cards earlier in the event when we were still in first place. We were facing the strongest Swedish pair, Lindqvist-Fredin. You may remember Peter Fredin from [Deal 8](#). (Sorry, Peter.)

♠ 9 6 5 ♥ Q ♦ 9 7 6 ♣ A K J 9 5 2

The Auction

We were vulnerable against not, and after two passes, it was up to me. I opened 2♣, which in our Precision system shows an opening bid with six-plus clubs and at most 15 HCP. I was delighted to be able to make this bid. In Standard, I'd have opened 1♣ (it is fine to open light in third seat, even at this unfavorable vulnerability). However, a standard 1♣ opening doesn't really promise such good clubs. By opening a Precision 2♣, I was able to show the main feature of my hand. Furthermore, it had some preemptive effect. It was nice to be able to start at the two-level to make things harder for the opponents. It felt like I was showing an opening bid and preempting at the same time. LHO doubled, and partner raised to 3♣. I love finding a fit and making the opponents act at the three-level.

This was passed around to North, who doubled again, and RHO removed to 3♠. I was content, but David wasn't. He doubled on the way out — I hoped he wasn't counting on me for much defense!

West	North	East	South
		pass	pass
2♣	dbl	3♣	pass
pass	dbl	pass	3♠
pass	pass	dbl	all pass

The Play

The final contract is 3♠ doubled, by South. What do you lead?



There are two conflicting rules here:

- 1) Lead trumps against doubled partscores.
- 2) When in doubt, lead a singleton.

I'd say I was in doubt. How were we going to beat this one? Heart ruffs, I hoped. So the lead is the ♥Q.

	Fredin
	♠ A K 2
	♥ J 9 8 2
	♦ A K 10 3
	♣ 8 6
Cohen	
♠ 9 6 5	
♥ Q	
♦ 9 7 6	
♣ A K J 9 5 2	



Dummy has lots of pleasing features to the defense:

- 1) only three trumps;
- 2) a doubleton club (so it looks like your ♣AK will cash);
- 3) not too many high card points so your partner should have lots to contribute.

Partner wins the ♥A as declarer follows with the ♥6. Are you watching the spots? When you are anticipating getting a ruff, partner will be giving you a suit-preference signal to tell you where his re-entry is. Partner returns the ♥3. Declarer plays the ♥K and you trump with the ♠6. It is normal to high-low in trumps to show an odd number. (This is the opposite of the standard way count is given in a non-trump suit.) What now?



I led back the ♣J. Okay, underleading the ♣AK is one thing, but why lead specifically the ♣J? I'm proud to have thought of this play at the table, so let me explain it.

Partner clearly has the ♣Q. He played back such a low heart (the ♥3) — he wouldn't do that without a club honor. If he had only small clubs, he would have played some other heart spot. Even with nothing in diamonds, he couldn't afford to play a card that would get you to underlead your club honors if he didn't have a high one.

So you will underlead your ♣AK to get another heart ruff. But why the jack? You soon will see what I had up my sleeve. Partner, as expected, takes his ♣Q and returns the ♥7 giving you another ruff. Declarer plays the ♥10. Look closely at the heart spots again. Partner has now played the highest remaining heart. What is he telling you this time? Now he is saying 'nothing more in clubs'. The high spot is suggesting the highest side suit, diamonds.

He does not want you to try to cross in clubs. Do you think he has the ♣10? No, he absolutely should not. He knows from the bidding and play that you have underled the ♣AK with your ♣J to his ♣Q at Trick 3. If he held the ♣10, he would have just returned his lowest heart spot. That way, you could get to his hand by underleading in clubs again for another heart play.

Even if hearts aren't 4-4-4-1 around the table, you would want partner to play another heart. This would kill declarer's good ♥J in dummy, and also might promote a trump trick by forcing declarer to ruff high. So the whole point of playing the ♣J back at Trick 3 was to find out if partner had started with the ♣Q10 or the ♣Q without the ♣10. Now you have found out. (If you led some other club to partner's ♣Q, he wouldn't know to signal his ♣10 or lack thereof.)

	Fredin
	♠ A K 2
	♥ J
	♦ A K 10 3
	♣ 8
Cohen	
♠ 9	
♥ —	
♦ 9 7 6	
♣ A K 9 5 2	



So what do you play now?

- a) ♠9
- b) ♦9
- d) ♣A



Cash the ♣A. With no way to cross to partner again, you should take your winner. When you play the ♣A, partner follows with the ♣4 and Lindqvist plays the ♣7. The contract is already down one. How should you try for more?



Did you read my diatribe about the ♣10? You haven't seen that card yet. You know partner doesn't have it, so declarer must have it. Play the ♣K. Declarer ruffed low in dummy — he didn't know whether I had opened 2♣ with only five of them or David had raised on a doubleton queen. However, this was his only hope to get out for down one and salvage some matchpoints. Unfortunately, David overruffed with the ♣4 (see full deal below).

If clubs had been 5-3, declarer could have scored his ♣2, then played the top spades and hoped to take the rest. Ruffing high was conceding at least down two

(it would set up another spade trick for the defense) and –300 wouldn't be many matchpoints. However, when the try for down one failed, he knew what would happen next. David returned the ♥4.

	Fredin
	♠ A K
	♥ J
	♦ A K 10 3
	♣ —
Cohen	
♠ 9	
♥ —	
♦ 9 7 6	
♣ 9 5 2	

	N	
W		E
	S	

More torture for declarer. He correctly ruffed with the ♠Q. Now, though, with no heart winners left in dummy, he had to take the diamond finesse, losing to David's queen. David played the fifth heart, and this set up yet another trick! Finally, declarer had suffered enough.

The Result

EW Vul.

	Fredin	
	♠ A K 2	
	♥ J 9 8 2	
	♦ A K 10 3	
	♣ 8 6	
Cohen		Berkowitz
♠ 9 6 5		♠ J 10 4
♥ Q		♥ A 7 5 4 3
♦ 9 7 6		♦ Q 8 2
♣ A K J 9 5 2		♣ Q 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

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

For down four, he got a zero, and we got a top. Credit goes to David for his frisky raise. Had North-South guessed to defend against 3♣ (especially if they had doubled), they would have been the ones with the great board.

What I'll always remember, however, was the discovery play of the ♣J to find out the suit-preference information about the ♣10. It was something I had never seen before. Bridge continually provides such special moments.

30. A Hand for the Newspaper

For our final World Championship deal, we return to Maastricht in the Netherlands, in 2000. Our team was playing against Portugal; I sat East and David Berkowitz was West.

The Auction

♠ 4 ♥ K Q J 7 3 ♦ 9 5 4 3 ♣ A 4 2

South held the cards shown at favorable vulnerability. His partner dealt and opened 1♠ and he responded 2♥. In a 2/1 game forcing system, you'd have to bid 1NT, but this pair was not using that approach. North raised to 3♥, and South carried on to game.

The Play

Portugal

♠ A 10 8 7 5 2

♥ A 5 4

♦ K J 10

♣ 7



Portugal

♠ 4

♥ K Q J 7 3

♦ 9 5 4 3

♣ A 4 2

The ♣Q was led, and a very suitable dummy appeared. On a great day (the ♦Q on-side and very friendly breaks), you can envision twelve tricks. Meanwhile, since this was a team game with IMP scoring, the goal was to take ten.

Should declarer:

- Win the ♣A and ruff a club in dummy? If so, what next?
- Win the ♣A and play a diamond (to the ten, presumably)?
- Try to set up spades?



How about a fourth choice? Can you plan to take the two black aces and eight trump tricks? No, that won't work. You can ruff only two clubs in dummy and

score only five trumps in hand — that is seven trump tricks and two aces (one short). The other three lines listed all have reasonable possibilities.

I'm going to use a term that Marty Bergen and I use all the time. We say, 'Tell it as a story'. When a bridge deal has no clear answer, and we don't want to spend ten minutes thinking about a 76% line versus a 77% line of play, we just shrug and ask to have it 'told as a story'. Here there are too many options and no clear answer. Some deals are just like that.

So I'll 'tell it as a story'. Declarer won the ♣A in hand as I followed with the ♣3. That part was easy. He decided to work on diamonds. Even if the ♦10 were to lose to the ♦Q, declarer would still be in great shape. He could later knock out the ♦A and maybe get two established diamond tricks. Good news. The diamond finesse worked, East winning the ♦A. East switched to a trump. More headaches. Declarer decided to win in dummy.

♠	A 10 8 7 5 2
♥	5 4
♦	K J
♣	—
<hr/>	
♠	4
♥	K Q J 7
♦	9 5 4
♣	4 2

Declarer cashed the ♠A as East-West followed low. Then he ruffed a spade to his hand. He ruffed a club in dummy (David playing the ♣5) and I followed with the ♣K. At this point, he is in excellent shape. He has taken five tricks. Can you see the road to five more?

♠	10 8 7 5
♥	5
♦	K J
♣	—
<hr/>	
♠	—
♥	K Q J
♦	9 5 4
♣	4

Declarer played the second round of trumps, observing the 4-1 break when David showed out on the heart lead. No problem. Declarer had all the high ones so he was able to draw all the trumps. Now declarer had eight tricks, and the 'marked' diamond finesse would produce two more — he played a diamond up and called for dummy's jack.

I suspect many of you have read between the lines and know what is coming.

Yes, the nerve of some people! Back at Trick 2 I had won the ♦A when I could have won the ♦Q. Very sneaky. I won the ♦Q, cashed the ♠K and played a club to David (I had greedily unblocked my ♣K on the second round of the suit). We took the last three tricks for down two.

The Result

EW Vul.

		Portugal			
		♠ A 10 8 7 5 2			
		♥ A 5 4			
		♦ K J 10			
		♣ 7			
David Berkowitz				Larry Cohen	
♠ J 9 6				♠ K Q 3	
♥ 2				♥ 10 9 8 6	
♦ 8 7 6				♦ A Q 2	
♣ Q J 10 9 6 5				♣ K 8 3	
		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>			
		Portugal			
		♠ 4			
		♥ K Q J 7 3			
		♦ 9 5 4 3			
		♣ A 4 2			

Looking at all the cards, I'm sure you can find a way to make ten tricks (there are many). How did I know to make the showy ♦A play to derail declarer? Declarer had taken a long time at Trick 1. That gave me extra time to think about the deal.

There was a good chance that declarer would play diamonds at some point. When he did, I decided that if I falsecarded with the ♦A, it probably couldn't hurt. Even though I'd be temporarily giving away a trick, I presumed it would come back. Declarer would almost surely repeat the finesse at some later point.

I had enough preparation time to make this play in normal tempo. I'd like to tell you that I had the entire deal diagnosed, but I cannot tell a lie: I was taking a chance. There are many times (learned through experience) when a smooth falsecard such as this can pay huge dividends. In this case, I was rewarded big time. Declarer thought he saw a path to ten tricks, and he took it. As the play developed, I just 'knew' that eventually the late diamond finesse was part of his plan.

A note of caution: I don't advise you to go around looking for a chance to make these 'newspaper' plays (so-called because when they are right, they get you in the newspaper column) on every deal. For every one of these spectacular plays that triumphs, you have to consider the consequences when they backfire. It can be embarrassing when these plays don't work. There are plenty of opportunities to win at bridge by just avoiding errors on the mundane deals.

SPRING NATIONALS

31. Deep Thought

Back in America, this deal was played during my victory with Dave Berkowitz in the 1999 National Open Pairs in Philadelphia. I was dealer at favorable vulnerability with the East cards, and I invite you to take my seat.

The Auction

♠ 9 8 6 3 ♥ 6 ♦ 10 9 7 6 4 ♣ 9 7 4

I know, it doesn't look very exciting. You start with a boring pass. However, you never know when what you do at your turn will matter. By virtue of this deal appearing in this book you know it's important, but you need to adopt that attitude on every deal, no matter what.

LHO opens 1♦, and your partner makes a weak jump to 3♥. It is my belief that this preempt opposite a passed hand (especially at this vulnerability) has a very wide range. It could be based on total garbage or it could be a good hand. Once East passes, West can take liberties. RHO now takes an unusual call: 4♥. This must show some great hand, presumably with diamond support. Anyway, you pass. It is ridiculous to double here (some people actually would). All that does is give the opponents an extra round of bidding. It frees South up to pass or redouble (control-showing) if he wishes.

Opener now jumps to a small slam in diamonds and everyone passes. It seems as if he may have taken 4♥ as promising diamond support. Considering the zero-count you were dealt, it was nice of the opponents to land in the only suit where you have a chance to take some tricks.

The Play

♠ K Q J
♥ J 8 7 4
♦ A J
♣ A Q J 6



Cohen

♠ 9 8 6 3
♥ 6
♦ 10 9 7 6 4
♣ 9 7 4

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

David leads the ♥K and dummy is a bit of a surprise. What would you have done with North's hand after South's 1♦ and a 3♥ overcall? With 19 HCP the hand is really too good to bid only 3NT. It would be nice if 4NT were available as natural and invitational, but many would play that as Blackwood (either Keycard or plain old ace-asking). Some partnerships wouldn't even know what 4NT meant. Apparently North didn't know either. He clearly didn't think it would be natural, so, that said, what was he to do? He improvised with a 4♥ cuebid (whatever that meant), and then subsided when his partner bid slam.

Declarer wins Trick 1 in hand. Too bad, it would have been nice if partner could cash the ♥AK. Declarer plays the ♦2 and your partner produces the king! Hmmm. It looks as if they are not in their best contract. Partner's ♦K must have been good news and bad news for declarer — mostly bad, since it looks as if you might get two trump tricks. However, nothing is guaranteed yet. Dummy has lots of winners to run, and declarer plays after you.

Declarer cashes the ♦J and David throws the ♥2 (odd-even, not count). After taking stock, declarer starts the clubs. He plays a club to the ♣K and then two more rounds, everyone following. Next comes the thirteenth club. Do you get the feeling that the moment of truth has arrived?

♠ K Q J
♥ J 8 7
♦ —
♣ A



Cohen

♠ 9 8 6 3
♥ —
♦ 10 9 7
♣ —

It would be a good idea to count declarer's hand. You know he started with ♣Kxx and ♦Q8xxx. He must have the ♠A to go with his known ♥A for his opening bid. So he started with

a) ♠Axxx ♥A ♦Q8xxx ♣Kxx

or

b) ♠Axx ♥Ax ♦Q8xxx ♣Kxx

Those are the only two possibilities. Which do you think it is? Partner would normally have a seven-card suit for his three-level preempt, which would point towards hand (a), where declarer has one heart. However, your partner was at favorable vulnerability (and facing a passed partner), so he might have been frisky enough to jump on only a six-card suit. That would mean hand (b).

Which card will you play?

a) ♦7

b) ♦9

c) ♠3

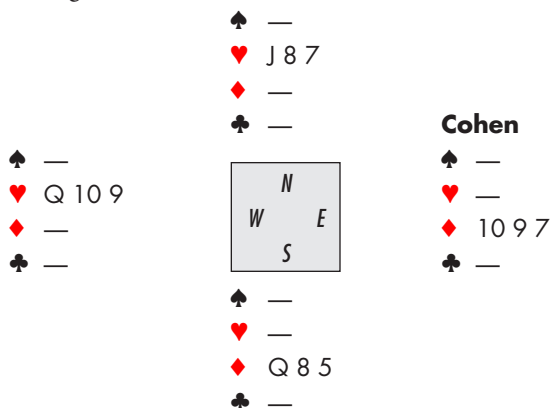
d) ♠9



It is the moment of truth. This is the kind of play that an expert should get right. Most players would get it wrong (especially if they weren't giving this zero-count hand their full concentration). You had this narrowed down to one of two layouts. By brute force, you should be able to work out the right play. Here's how you should think it out.

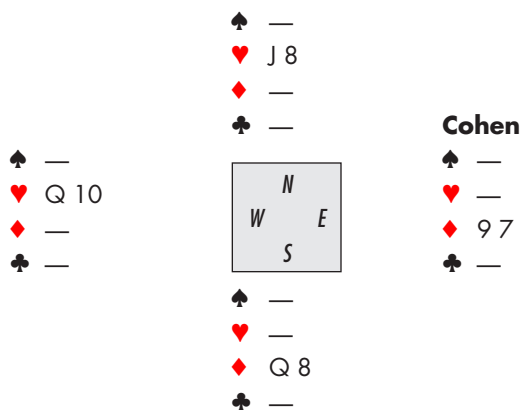
First, let's consider hand (a): ♠Axxx ♥A ♦Q8xxx ♣Kxx

If you threw a spade, declarer would also throw a spade. Then declarer would work on spades. By now, declarer also would know everybody's hand. Can you see that you'd be dead? Declarer would run winners ending in dummy to produce this three-card ending.



He leads a heart from dummy. If you ruff low, declarer overruffs and claims twelve tricks. If you ruff high, declarer underuffs (don't forget, he knows your last three cards) and you would have to play a diamond to give him a free finesse and his contract.

So let's go back to where you face the moment of truth. Throwing a spade, as we've seen, is no good. So you have to explore what would happen if you ruff. First, let's try a high ruff. Declarer would throw a spade away; now you couldn't play a trump, of course, so you'd exit in spades. Declarer would shorten himself by ruffing a heart in his hand. Then would come more spades.



Do you see that you won't get any more tricks? You are about to be trump coupé. Declarer plays a heart from dummy and claims his contract.

Again, back to the moment of truth. You have mentally discovered that throwing a spade or ruffing high doesn't work against hand (a), where declarer started with 4-1 in the majors. All that's left is to try ruffing low. Lo and behold, that won't work either. After overruffing, declarer would just start the spades and play more spades. You are not in good shape here. When declarer leads dummy's heart, you are finished. If you throw a spade, declarer takes his ♦5 and then the ♦Q for the first twelve tricks. And, ruffing in doesn't help either. Declarer can either overruff and take his ♠A, or simply discard his ♠A. Either way it is 6♦ making.

Whew! That was a lot of mental energy, but the conclusion was that if declarer started with four spades you can't beat it. Nothing you do matters.

Now you have to figure out if your play matters against hand (b). Bad news. The director is hovering over your shoulder telling you to speed it up. To speed things up, let's again actually look at the layout you are going to envision. You can't beat it if declarer has hand (a), so picture hand (b) as shown.

♠ K Q J
 ♥ J 8 7
 ♦ —
 ♣ A

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 5 4
 ♥ 9
 ♦ Q 8 5
 ♣ —

Here we go again (mamma mia)! Let's see what would happen with your spade discard. This doesn't look like a good approach. Declarer would throw his heart loser. Then would come the spades, leading to a familiar and unhappy ending where the lead is in dummy and you have yet to take a trick. And you will only take one. If you ruff low, South overruffs. If you ruff high, he underuffs (this guy is good!). No matter what, he will make twelve tricks. So here you are again, back at the moment of truth. You couldn't beat hand (a), no matter what. Against hand (b), we've just seen that throwing a spade won't work. You are nearing the end of this chain of logic. (That's good, because the director is ready to throw you out of the event.)

♠ K Q J
 ♥ J 8 7
 ♦ —
 ♣ A

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ A 5 4
 ♥ 9
 ♦ Q 8 5
 ♣ —

If you ruff high, declarer will throw his losing heart. He will need the rest of the tricks. You would exit in spades. Declarer will shorten himself — this is a National Championship, you know, declarer knows what he has to do. This is the variation (we're getting intimate with this deal) that we've seen before. Here you are getting trump coup'd at Trick 12.

Back at the moment of truth for the last time. We've seen that everything so far has been a losing action. All we're left with is to hope for hand (b) (the one shown)

NS Vu|.

♠ 10 7 2
♥ K Q 10 5 3 2
♦ K
♣ 10 3 2

♠ K Q J
♥ J 8 7 4
♦ A J
♣ A Q J 6



♠ A 5 4
♥ A 9
♦ Q 8 5 3 2
♣ K 8 5

Cohen

♠ 9 8 6 3
♥ 6
♦ 10 9 7 6 4
♣ 9 7 4

32. Play Like Bob and David

This deal comes from the Vanderbilt Knockout Teams of March, 2001 played in Kansas City, Missouri. I held the East cards, and I invite you to accompany me on this defensive adventure.

The Auction

♠ Q 7 ♥ Q 8 7 4 ♦ K J 9 ♣ K 7 5 4

The opponents start with a strong 2♣ on your left and a ‘waiting’ response of 2♦. This is the most popular treatment these days in the United States. I think it is superior to step responses or to using 2♦ as a negative reply. (I don’t mind using 2♦ as waiting with the stipulation that it shows a little something — with a 2♥ response to show a really awful hand, such as 0-4 HCP.)

You pass, of course, and now the opponents bid 2♠ natural, then 3♣ which is alerted. Again, they are using the most popular methods of the millennium (I hope this isn’t out-of-date if you happen to be reading this in some year like 2066). Cheaper minor by responder on the second round is artificial and a ‘double-negative’, typically 0-4 HCP. The responder is allowed to pass if opener rebids his suit at the three-level.

Opener bids his second suit, hearts, and then responder takes a preference to spades. Opener now makes a rather surprising bid, a jump to 5♥. It’s not clear what this is asking for, but responder passes and the final contract is 5♥.

The Play

♠ 4 3
♥ J 6 2
♦ 5 4 2
♣ Q J 10 6 2



Cohen

♠ Q 7
♥ Q 8 7 4
♦ K J 9
♣ K 7 5 4

West	North	East	South
			2♣
pass	2♦*	pass	2♠
pass	3♣*	pass	3♥
pass	3♠	pass	5♥
all pass			

South has shown at least 5-5 in the majors and a big hand. Partner leads the $\heartsuit 3$. Dummy has a little something in clubs but he didn't think that was what South was looking for. Dummy plays low, and you have your first (mild) decision. Third-hand high? Pick a card:

- a) $\heartsuit K$
- b) $\heartsuit J$
- c) $\heartsuit 9$



Play the $\heartsuit J$. This is not the time to follow the old 'third-hand high' adage. Surely partner would not underlead an ace on this auction (nor on most auctions), so you know declarer holds the $\heartsuit A$. The $\heartsuit J$ is a bit of a discovery play. You will find out right away who has the $\heartsuit Q$. When you later gain the lead, that information will help you with your decision. Declarer wins the $\heartsuit A$.

Incidentally, you are playing third and fifth leads, so you know partner started with five diamonds. Why five? Because if he had only three, declarer would have four, which is not possible when he has shown at least ten cards in the majors. Since partner has five, you know declarer started with two diamonds and that partner has five to the queen.

Declarer lays down a top trump, partner following with the ten, which you presume is a singleton. Next comes a high spade. While I am big on giving count, I don't think either defender should be anxious to help declarer here. The defenders will know the spade situation soon enough.

Declarer plays the $\spadesuit K$ and partner has followed up the line with the $\spadesuit 6$. This normally would show an odd number, but he might not be carding honestly here. Declarer takes the $\spadesuit A$ next (your $\spadesuit Q$ falling) and leads the $\spadesuit 5$. Partner follows with the $\spadesuit 9$ and declarer ruffs in dummy with the $\heartsuit J$. How good do you think declarer's spades are?

Well, if declarer's spades were solid, he wouldn't bother ruffing one in dummy. He must be missing either the $\spadesuit 10$ or the $\spadesuit J$ to be playing this way.

\spadesuit —	
\heartsuit J 6	
\diamondsuit 5 4	
\clubsuit Q J 10 6 2	Cohen
	\spadesuit —
	\heartsuit Q 8 7
	\diamondsuit K 9
	\clubsuit K 7 5 4

	N	
W		E
	S	

Do you overruff or discard on this trick?



This isn't one of those fancy situations (see Deals 12 and 22). You have a 100% lock to beat this contract. You know from the play to Trick 1 that you can reach partner with the ♦Q. And when he wins he had better play a spade back (you wouldn't yell at him if he failed to, would you?). So you overruff dummy, underlead in diamonds to partner's queen, and get a spade overruff of dummy for down one.

The Result

Both Vul.

	♠ 4 3	
	♥ J 6 2	
	♦ 5 4 2	
	♣ Q J 10 6 2	
Berkowitz		Cohen
♠ 10 9 6 2		♠ Q 7
♥ 10		♥ Q 8 7 4
♦ Q 8 7 6 3		♦ K J 9
♣ 9 8 3		♣ K 7 5 4
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A K J 8 5	
	♥ A K 9 5 3	
	♦ A 10	
	♣ A	

As you look at the full deal, there is a much more interesting variation to explore. As is so often the case, declarer screwed up at Trick 1. He should have ducked the first trick.

Why? Well, why not? He had to lose a diamond anyway, and by ducking he would sever the defensive communications. This would stop the actual disaster he incurred where East was able to overruff, cross in diamonds, and then get another overruff. A good rule of thumb is this: if you have to lose a trick for sure, lose it early, not late.

What would have happened now? For lack of anything better to do, let's say East returns a diamond (anything other than a trump would lead to the same result). Let's say declarer again lays down a top trump and then starts the spades. Remember now, he has already lost the diamond trick. The defense needs two more tricks to defeat 5♥. Declarer ruffs the spade with dummy's ♥J. This would be the moment of truth for East.

	♠ —		
	♥ J 6		
	♦ 5		
Berkowitz	♣ Q J 10 6 2	Cohen	
♠ 10 9		♠ —	
♥ —		♥ Q 8 7	
♦ Q 8 7		♦ K	
♣ 9 8 3		♣ K 7 5 4	



♠ J 8 5
♥ K 9 5 3
♦ —
♣ A

If East overruffs (as you did when you knew you could still reach partner in diamonds), the hand would be over. Declarer could win any return, draw trump and claim the rest. Accordingly, East should not overruff. (This can't hurt: even if West had the ♠J, declarer would have to ruff another spade in dummy and now East could overruff and still remain with the setting trump trick.) Not only must he avoid overruffing, but he must do so without much pause for thought. With East's smooth tempo, declarer now has a good chance to go down.

What does the tempo have to do with this? Declarer would play a trump now, but he has a major headache here. You can see that he can make the contract by finessing the ♥9, but that would be fatal if West started with ♥Q10 doubleton. West would win the (now bare) ♥Q and give East a spade ruff for down one.

However, when the ♥J was played on the previous trick, if East played low without a care in the world, I don't think declarer would play him for the ♥Q. So he would probably go up with the ♥K here, expecting the ♥Q to fall. But this would leave you the last laugh. You'd have two natural trump tricks to defeat the contract.

Again, I refer you to Hamman's brilliant play on [Deal 22](#) and Berkowitz's defense on [Deal 12](#). Maybe I should have posed the initial problem this way so that you could play 'like Bob' and 'like David'. That's the third deal we've seen where the 'obvious' overruff on defense is a losing action.

33. Staying Awake

I played this deal in the Goldman Pairs, the featured four-session matchpoint event of the New York City Regional each May. Take these East cards from the 1990 event.

The Auction

♠ 5 4 ♥ 7 2 ♦ 8 7 3 ♣ A K Q 10 8 3

You are in fourth seat with both sides vulnerable. South on your left opens 1♠ and, after your partner passes, RHO bids 2♦, game forcing. What should you do?



This is not the time to be a chicken. You should bid 3♣ and not worry about going for a number. You desperately want a club lead, and you would hate to hear LHO bid 2NT, raised to 3NT (or 2♠ raised to game), and see your partner lead a heart! It's not likely you will get doubled when you have such a good suit, and even if you do, the opponents likely have a game.

LHO raises to 3♦ and your partner raises you to 4♣. RHO bids 4♠, and you have done enough.

The Play

♠ Q 9 3
♥ A K J 10
♦ K J 10 9
♣ 5 4



♠ 5 4
♥ 7 2
♦ 8 7 3
♣ A K Q 10 8 3

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

Partner puts the ♦2 on the table. So much for getting your club lead! This card must be a singleton; he'd have no other reason to lead a diamond on this auction.

In such a situation (an obvious singleton lead), your card will signal suit preference. Partner will know you don't like diamonds when you fail to win the trick.

If you had a heart entry (unlikely with this dummy!) you'd play a high diamond. With your club entry, you follow with the $\heartsuit 3$. You hope partner has a high trump and that he can cross to you in clubs to get his diamond ruff.

Dummy's $\heartsuit 9$ wins the first trick, and then the $\heartsuit A$ is played from dummy. Next comes the $\heartsuit K$, and on this trick, declarer throws a club. Partner! Why didn't you lead my suit? When faced with such aggravation, it is important to retain your focus. Partner is trying the best he can. He really doesn't hate you. When he made his opening lead, he did it for what he thought was a good reason. Your job is to continue to play bridge and not let the negative emotions interfere with your thought process. This is easier said than done, but here is your chance to practice. Declarer continues with dummy's $\heartsuit J$. What is going on?

\spadesuit Q 9 3	
\heartsuit J 10	
\diamondsuit K J 10	
\clubsuit 5 4	
<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>	\spadesuit 5 4 \heartsuit — \diamondsuit 8 7 \clubsuit A K Q 10 8 3

From partner's lead and declarer's $3\diamondsuit$ bid, you presume declarer has ace-queen-fifth of diamonds. He must also have at least five spades from his $1\spadesuit$ opening. If he were 6-1-5-1 he wouldn't be playing this third round of hearts; he'd be working on trumps. No doubt he has another club loser to get rid of, so declarer must be 5-1-5-2.

You know that partner has the $\heartsuit Q$, so even if declarer throws a club, partner can take the trick. What should you discard? Should it be the $\clubsuit A$, an unmistakable signal? Maybe the $\clubsuit 10$? Maybe something else?



You should 'discard' a trump! Why? Declarer was intending to throw away his other club loser on this trick. If you discard, partner will win his $\heartsuit Q$, but will have no way to reach you to get his diamond ruff; declarer will be out of clubs. Now that you have forced declarer to overruff, he still has a club loser in hand. Partner will later win his hoped-for high trump and cross to you in clubs for his ruff. If declarer had discarded his last club, you would have been on lead to play a diamond right away to give the ruff.

	♠ Q 9 3	
	♥ 10	
	♦ K J 10	
	♣ 5 4	
♠ A 7 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS </div> </div>	♠ 5
♥ Q 8 6		♥ —
♦ —		♦ 8 7
♣ J 6 2		♣ A K Q 10 8 3
	♠ K J 10 8	
	♥ —	
	♦ A Q 6 5	
	♣ 9	

Here is the position after declarer has overruffed. Now partner can win the ♠A, cross to you in clubs and get his diamond ruff to hold them to ten tricks.

The Result

Both Vul.

	♠ Q 9 3	
	♥ A K J 10	
	♦ K J 10 9	
	♣ 5 4	
♠ A 7 2	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE </div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS </div> </div>	♠ 5 4
♥ Q 9 8 6 5 2		♥ 7 3
♦ 2		♦ 8 7 3
♣ J 6 2		♣ A K Q 10 8 3
	♠ K J 10 8 6	
	♥ 4	
	♦ A Q 6 5 4	
	♣ 9 7	

This was the original full deal. On a club lead, it would have been easy to cash your three top tricks to hold declarer to ten tricks. With partner's actual singleton diamond lead, it required careful and alert play by you. To review, declarer won the diamond lead in dummy and played the ♥A, ♥K and another heart. He was attempting a Scissors Coup, whereby he could cut the defensive communications. If you had failed to ruff, he would have made an overtrick by throwing his second club. Partner would get only his ♥Q and the ♠A.

By ruffing in, you prevented declarer from making his overtrick. If he didn't overruff, you'd give partner a diamond ruff. If he did overruff, you'd still have a club entry to give the diamond ruff. The resulting -620 instead of -650 made a big difference. On the actual deal, with a 25 top, -650 would have been worth only eight matchpoints. For -620, you get an above-average fifteen matchpoints. Were you awake?

34. Precaution

This deal was played in the 1989 Reisinger in New York City. Normally, the Reisinger is thought of as the National Championship Board-A-Match event held once a year at the Fall Nationals. However, there is also a Reisinger Knockout teams, which is a regionally-rated (IMP-scoring) event played every spring in the New York City area. Take my hand (figuratively, of course) and see if you can duplicate my actions.

The Auction

♠ K Q 3 ♥ 8 3 2 ♦ A 2 ♣ A K 10 6 4

You are South, and dealer with East-West vulnerable. How would you begin?



This hand is a balanced 16-count, so 1NT seems routine. The unstopped suit (hearts) doesn't bother me, nor does the possession of a five-card suit (that would still be true even if it were a major). My only slight concern is that this hand may be too good. Yes, it is only 16 HCP, but any reasonable evaluation method would consider it to be worth more like 18. The fifth club alone (especially in such a good suit) is worth at least one extra point. You wouldn't be willing to trade that ♣4 for, say, the ♥J would you? Then it would be a seventeen-count, but a much worse hand. Even trading the ♣4 for the ♥Q (now an eighteen-count) would result in a worse hand.

Not only do you have a fifth club, but you have all prime cards. You have quick tricks, good honor combinations (king-queen, ace-king) and no jacks. I believe jacks are overrated while aces are underrated in the 4-3-2-1 count popularized by Goren. In fact the Goren 4-3-2-1 count, while wildly popular and simple, is really not that good. My friend Roberta Salob asks her students, 'You know where Charles Goren is today, right? Dead!'

I am almost talking myself out of 1NT but I know that's what 99% of readers would prefer (and it is what I did at the table), so let's go with it. Partner bids 2NT, which you are playing as conventional. It is part of a four-suit transfer method and is a transfer to diamonds. These days, I prefer not to use this treatment. I prefer to use 2NT as natural and find some (any!) other way of showing diamonds if that happens to be what responder has in mind. Why? Because when you give up 2NT as natural, the only way to invite is to go through Stayman. You have to respond 2♣ and then follow up with 2NT. This sequence is still invitational to 3NT, but doesn't promise a four-card major. What is the problem with this?

Well, when the bidding starts, for example, 1NT–2♣; 2♥–2NT you are giving way too much help to the opponents. It tells them a lot about declarer’s hand. It helps them defend. It helps them make the opening lead. Sometimes the 2♣ bid gets doubled for the lead. Usually it doesn’t get doubled, but even that is helpful to the opening leader (he knows his partner doesn’t have great clubs). The great Meckstroth-Rodwell partnership convinced me that in the long run, the fake-Stayman sequence just gives away too much — they abandoned it. If it was an issue for them, it’s an issue for me. Anyway, back at the ranch, you have to respond to this diamond-showing 2NT.

When playing four-suit transfers such as this, all partnerships have to agree on what opener’s rebids mean. When there are two possible answers (such as 3♣ or 3♦), each one should have an assigned meaning. One shows a minimum (or a rejection if the responder is inviting game), the other shows a maximum.

Which is the ‘right’ way? There is a very tiny reason for using the following scheme:

3♣ (the first step) shows the rejection (worst hand).

3♦ (actually completing the transfer) shows an acceptance (best hand).

This is typically written on the convention card as ‘between denies’, meaning that the ‘between step’ denies a good hand.

The reason this is slightly better is that the responder to 1NT with say,

♠ x ♥ x x ♦ J x x x x ♣ J x x x x

can bid 2NT to transfer to diamonds. If his partner likes diamonds and bids 3♦, so be it. Meanwhile, if the 1NT opener dislikes diamonds he bids 3♣ (to reject). Responder passes, figuring that if opener doesn’t like diamonds, he might as well play in 3♣.

Anyway, if you are already comfortable with doing it the other way, don’t waste mental energy to change it. The most important thing is to make sure you have agreed with your partner as to which bid is which. This all presumes you don’t take my (and Meckwell’s) suggestion to abandon this four-suit transfer method altogether.

Let’s presume you are playing that 3♦ shows the acceptance. You have a super-maximum hand, and good diamonds, so you accept. (Sure, a third diamond would be nice, but you can’t wait to have the perfect hand to accept; this one is 90% — good enough.)

Since you are probably worn out from reading by now, you’ll be pleased to see partner has no torture in mind. He just jumps to 6♦ to end the proceedings.

The Play

♠ —
♥ A K J
♦ K 10 8 7 6 4 3
♣ Q 7 2

♠ K Q 3
♥ 8 3 2
♦ A 2
♣ A K 10 6 4

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	2NT*	pass	3♦
pass	6♦	all pass	

The opening lead is the ♥10. This is an excellent contract. If both minors behave, you'll make seven, but those aren't good enough odds to warrant being in a grand slam. Meanwhile, you'd have to be pretty unlucky to go down in six.

What do you think of partner's auction? Once you bid 3♦ to say you liked his suit, I think he was right to insist on slam. However, he should have at least investigated seven. If your ♠Q were in diamonds, you'd surely belong in 7♦. Even with your wasted ♠KQ, 7♦ has play. Those five points could easily have been better located. On the other hand, sometimes simple is best. By avoiding science, partner hasn't helped the defenders. What if South's hand were:

♠ A K Q x ♥ Q x x ♦ A Q x ♣ x x x

Scientific bidding would have told the defense to lead clubs. By 'bashing', partner has made the defense lead blind.

If partner wanted to investigate, I suppose he would bid 4♦ to initiate a control-bidding sequence. (However, some might think that to be a non-forcing invitation!) He could also jump in spades, either to 4♠ as a splinter or to 5♠ as Exclusion Keycard Blackwood. All of those approaches have flaws, including a possible misunderstanding.

Anyway, another good thing about this brief auction is that it saves your brain (if I haven't worn it out for you) for the play of the hand. I'll start you off with the obvious play of winning in dummy. What next?



If there is no reason to postpone the drawing of trumps, then do so. Lead the ♦3 from dummy to the ace. In the business, we say that East played a 'quack' (in this

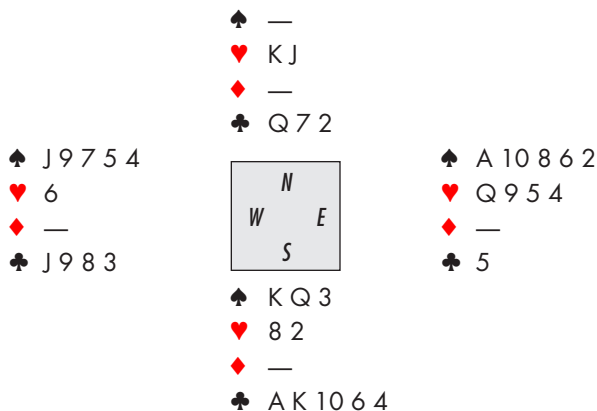
case the ♦J). That doesn't mean a crazy psychologist, it means a queen or a jack. This term comes in handy when describing this sort of layout. You can give the North-South diamond layout and say, 'On the diamond ace, East plays a quack, then...'

You play the ♦2 next, and West follows with the ♦9. You have to guess whether or not to finesse. This is a Restricted Choice situation — but let's back up and see if this is really what you want to do at this point.

Do you agree with the ♦2 play?



The ♣A was actually the correct play at this point (before the second trump). This was not an easy play. Let me see if I can convince you. The only way you can go down is if both minors go awry. Even if you were to misguess in trumps, you would still survive if the clubs came in. However, what if the remaining other three suits (the non-diamonds) are as shown here?



Let's say that you lost a trump trick. In this diagram, you have another trick to lose. The clubs don't come in and the ♥Q and ♠A are both wrong; nothing works.

In fact, this was the real layout of the side suits, all sitting poorly for declarer. You also might lose a diamond trick since at this point it is a guess as to whether East started with ♦QJ doubleton or just a singleton honor.

If you misguess diamonds, what will you do next? You are going to have to try the clubs. When they fail to come in, you'll be in trouble. There is no entry to South if you set up the long club by ruffing, so you will need one of:

- 1) The heart finesse (not likely given the first trick)
- 2) A ruffing spade finesse (it fails)
- 3) A squeeze — no such luck.

With the cards as shown, there is nothing declarer can do about dummy's ♥J; it would eventually lose a trick. So after the ♦A dropped East's quack, you should take the precaution of laying down the ♣A. This is pretty safe. Even if clubs are 5-0, and somebody ruffs, you still have lots of good chances. Meanwhile, now that everyone has followed, you have a 100% claim. Yes! You no longer have to worry about the ugly scenario we just visited.

Do you see the 100% play?



Playing a diamond to the ten gives you a 100% claim. Not because it follows the normal 2:1 odds of Restricted Choice, but because if the ♦10 wins, you have no diamond loser and now it is just a question of an overtrick. But even if it loses, as it did in real life, you are home free. All the trumps are gone. If East plays spades, he sets up a discard for dummy's ♥J: you will throw it on a good spade. If he exits in hearts, that certainly takes care of dummy's potential heart loser.

And finally, if he plays a club that means they weren't 4-1 the wrong way. You can win the ♣Q in dummy and they will show to be either 3-2 or 4-1 with a marked finesse against East's ♣J (West would show out on this trick). At the table, when I lost the diamond finesse, East (who started with only one club) had to play a major suit and help me out. I claimed twelve tricks for +920. The precaution of cashing the ♣A was in fact crucial (I love it when a 'correct' play bears fruit). Without the ♣A play, East would still have had his club and been able to exit safely with it when the ♦10 lost to the ♦Q — and down you'd go.

EW Vul.

EW Vul.

♣ J 9 8 3

♣ Q 7 2

N
W *E*
S

♣ AK 10 6 4

♣ 5

180 • My Favorite 52

35. A Juicy Contract

This deal, from the 1993 Vanderbilt, might be considered comic relief. I was playing against Roy Welland and his wife Christal. This couple loves bridge and seemed to be able to play as partners without marital strife. These days, they sponsor different superstar professional teams, both getting excellent results. For some reason, in the 1990s, whenever I played against Roy, good things happened (for me). It was just one of those crazy things. And this is one of those crazy deals.

The Auction

♠ A Q 10 9 ♥ 4 ♦ A Q J 9 3 ♣ K 9 4

I held the East cards shown. With both sides vulnerable, David Berkowitz dealt and passed. Christal opened 1♣ and it was up to me. What do you think I bid?



You shouldn't make a takeout double on this hand (with a singleton heart you're asking for trouble). I'm not a fan of four-card overcalls, and see no reason not to overcall in my best suit. So I bid 1♦.

LHO bid 1♠. How many spades should that show? This area of bidding is so often confused by intermediate players. When the auction begins 1♣ - 1♦ overcall, a negative double promises at least 4-4 in the majors. Therefore a bid of 1♥ or 1♠ shows four or more. It does not promise five. If responder has a four-card major, and not four in the other major, he bids one of his major. I think people mix this up with a similar auction: one of a minor followed by a 1♥ overcall — now a double shows four spades and a free 1♠ bid does indeed promise at least five. So on the actual auction the 1♠ bid showed enough to respond (typically 6+ HCP) and four-plus spades.

David jumped to 3♦, which we play as preemptive. It is what I think of as a LAW of Total Tricks bid, saying 'I expect our side has nine trumps, so we are safe at the nine-trick level.' It shows a weak hand, about 0-6 HCP.

RHO passed and it was up to me. What is the correct call?



It must be right to pass now. You have a promising hand, but where are you going? The only possible game is 5♦, but you rate to be off two aces to start. Barring a miraculous dummy or super-friendly layout, game is remote.

LHO reopened with a double. In the modern world of bridge, such doubles

are not for pure penalty. Especially when the opponents have bid and raised a suit, a double of a partial in a competitive auction usually means ‘partner, I have some cards, but no clear action’.

RHO took out the double to 3♠. This was getting interesting, but I’m not greedy by nature, so I decided to pass. I thought I could beat 3♠, but maybe the auction wasn’t over yet. So maybe I am greedy.

LHO bid 3NT and RHO removed to 4♥. This was really getting entertaining. What was going on? It sounded as if North had three spades and four hearts. She wasn’t thrilled with 3NT (on a likely diamond lead) and was hoping to back into a 4-4 heart fit.

What would you do now?



West	North	East	South
	1♣	1♦	1♠
3♦	pass	pass	dbl
pass	3♠	pass	3NT
pass	4♥	?	

I doubled. It looks strange not to double with ♠AQ109 when they were in spades and to double with a singleton when they are in hearts. Here was my reasoning: now they are in game, so a double won’t cost much if it is wrong. They won’t be going any higher than game (whereas when they were still in a partial, more bidding was possible). Furthermore, I expected David to have at least four hearts, maybe five. RHO had four and LHO might have only three — certainly four at most for his bidding.

Look what happened next:

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

Juicy! Now they had run to something I could really sink my teeth into. I doubled again, feeling quite good about life. The auction was finally over.

The Play

Christal

♠ K J 6
♥ A J 9 2
♦ 8 7
♣ Q J 8 7



Larry

♠ A Q 10 9
♥ 4
♦ A Q J 9 3
♣ K 9 4

If I felt giddy during the auction, I was delirious when I saw dummy's spades! Wow, this was going to be expensive. The opening lead was the ♣3. When declarer called for dummy's ♣Q, I saw no good reason to cover, and declarer played the ♣5 from his hand.

I'd be lying if I said I thought declarer would play a heart to his ten and David's queen at Trick 2, but when it happened, I decided that letting dummy's ♣Q win the first trick hadn't been such a bad idea. From my double of 4♥, declarer must have thought I had the ♥Q.

Scoring a trick with partner's ♥Q was just an added bonus for me. David played another club, completing a high-low to show a doubleton. This time declarer ducked the club to his ♣10 in hand.

Next came a spade to dummy's ♠J and my ♠Q.

Christal

♠ K 6
♥ A J 9
♦ 8 7
♣ J 8



Larry

♠ A 10 9
♥ —
♦ A Q J 9 3
♣ K

Now what?

- ♣ K
- ♠ A
- ♦ A
- ♦ Q
- ♣ K



Play the ♣K. Who is to say that partner won't ruff this? And indeed, he does ruff. Partner has taken two tricks. I love this game! Partner plays a diamond to your ace. And you? This isn't too hard — just clear the diamonds and sit back with those beautiful trumps.

Declarer wins the ♦K, which he had to have for his 3NT bid (and his double). At this point, declarer could have salvaged something from the wreckage by playing winners, but he didn't know I had all the rest of the spades. He knew I had five diamonds and three clubs, but he didn't know I had a singleton for my double of 4♥.

You guessed it — he played another trump. And I claimed the rest! Yes, a defensive claim. I stated I would draw declarer's trumps and run the diamonds.

The Result

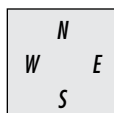
Both Vul.

David

♠ 5 3
♥ Q 8 7 6 3
♦ 10 6 5 4
♣ 3 2

Christal

♠ K J 6
♥ A J 9 2
♦ 8 7
♣ Q J 8 7



Roy

♠ 8 7 4 2
♥ K 10 5
♦ K 2
♣ A 10 6 5

Larry

♠ A Q 10 9
♥ 4
♦ A Q J 9 3
♣ K 9 4

This meant down seven and +2000 for East-West. Declarer had scored only two club tricks and a diamond trick. The other table played in some partscore (after all, this is nothing more than a partscore deal). We won 18 IMPs and easily won the match.

Our success against the Wellands in the '90s did not survive the end of the decade. Since the turn of the millennium we have had more than our share of losses to teams captained by both Roy and Christal. You can't win 'em all.

ALL AROUND DEALS

36. The Beginning of a Beautiful Friendship



David Berkowitz and Larry Cohen

This deal comes from a 1985 Regional matchpoint game in Rye, New York. David Berkowitz held the South cards, and we were playing together for the first time. Take David's cards in second seat at unfavorable vulnerability.

The Auction

♠ A K 4 ♥ A J 4 2 ♦ A K 9 2 ♣ A Q

With North-South vulnerable, East passes as dealer. Since we were using 3NT as Gambling, David had no choice but to open with a strong 2♣. Readers who are familiar with our partnership will wonder about this: 'Don't you guys use Precision, where the strong opening is 1♣?' We do now, but the first few years we played together, we used Standard American bidding — our version of it, anyway.

Partner responds 2♦, which is 'waiting'. Some players use control (or step) responses, others use 2♥ as a double negative, and others use 2♦ as negative. All of these methods have merit, but I think using 2♦ as waiting is easiest. What is your rebid?



Presume a 2NT opener shows 20-21. Therefore a 2NT rebid (after 2♣-2♦) shows 22-23, maybe 22-24. With your 25 HCP you have to do more, so that leaves a jump to 3NT, which shows about 25-27 HCP in a balanced hand. Now partner bids 4♥.

What's that? It doesn't come up often, but after this auction you should play something simple. Since you play Stayman and transfers over natural notrump bids, here you can use 4♣ as Stayman, 4♦ to show hearts and 4♥ to show spades.

Over your 4♠ bid, partner bids 4NT. Is that Blackwood, or is it quantitative? Damned if I know! In analogous (but easier) auctions, such as 1NT – 2♥; 2♠ – 4NT, by definition (or partnership agreement, if you will) I like to use 4NT as quantitative. With a Blackwood hand, partner starts with Texas, as in 1NT – 4♥; 4♠ – 4NT. So I play that a Jacoby transfer followed by 4NT is always quantitative, and Texas followed by 4NT is always Keycard, typically Roman Keycard Blackwood. This permits responder to transfer to his suit and then either issue a general slam invitation or use Blackwood. But here the transfer on the four-level is hard to define as either Jacoby or Texas. It is the only transfer partner has.

As a brand new partnership at the time, we hadn't discussed this situation. What a dilemma you face. You could answer Keycard (you have them all), but I think it is practical to make a value bid of 6♠. You have a nice hand for spades, and whatever partner has in mind, how bad can this be?

So you jump to the slam and everyone passes. Let's see what you have done to yourself.

The Play

Larry

♠ Q 9 8 6 2

♥ 9 3

♦ Q J 3

♣ 8 7 6

David

♠ A K 4

♥ A J 4 2

♦ A K 9 2

♣ A Q

West	North	East	South
		pass	2♣
pass	2♦*	pass	3NT
pass	4♥*	pass	4♠
pass	4NT	pass	6♠
all pass			

West leads the ♠10 against 6♠. I didn't have much, just two queens and a jack. However, I wanted to show confidence in my new partner's declarer play, so I had decided to make a move towards slam even with that junk in the dummy. 'Sorry, pard.'

I had intended my 4NT as natural and invitational. Had the opponents led hearts, you would have needed a bit of good fortune. However, on this trump lead you have time on your side and should be able to get rid of one of dummy's hearts on your diamonds. You might as well win the first trick in your hand, East following with the ♠5; there are plenty of entries to your hand, and you never know if you might need dummy's ♠Q as a later entry. What should you play to Trick 2?



You should play the ♣A.

This is not the intuitive play. Your first thought is that you shouldn't try anything fancy in trumps. Defenders tend not to lead singleton trumps, especially important cards like the ten. It's quite unlikely East started with ♠Jxxx. So you should presume no trump losers.

Suppose you were to get greedy and try to make seven. Let's follow the play. You would cross to dummy in diamonds and take a club finesse. If it won you'd cash the ♣A, lay down the top spade, cross in diamonds again and ruff a club in hand.

Larry

♠ Q 9 8

♥ 9 3

♦ 3

♣ —



David

♠ —

♥ A J 4 2

♦ A K

♣ —

Oops. You're not making seven. How are you going to get to dummy? You have no quick way there, and you are subject to losing a diamond ruff. Even if diamonds are 3-3, you can't enjoy the long diamond since there is still a trump outstanding. In this hypothetical position, you could make seven only if one opponent remained with both diamonds and the long trump — quite a long shot.

So your planning ahead shows that you should forget about thirteen tricks and just try to take twelve. You've seen that even taking a winning club finesse wouldn't have let you make an overtrick. But what if that club finesse had lost? You'd be in big trouble. Let's see why.

Let's back up to Trick 2 where I asked you what you should play. You'd start by crossing to dummy, and then take the club finesse — which loses. West would play another trump and you'd win in hand. You'd lay down the ♣A and cross to dummy in order to ruff the last club in hand, arriving here:

Larry

♠ Q 9 8

♥ 9 3

♦ 3

♣ —

**David**

♠ —

♥ A J 4 2

♦ A K

♣ —

Look familiar? You're in the same dilemma as when the club finesse won: no way back to dummy to draw the last trump. But this time, you have already lost a trick and are likely to lose one more for down one. So let's back up once again to Trick 2 when I asked you what you should play.

Since you've seen that a winning club finesse doesn't really help you (the communications aren't there), and a losing club finesse is fatal, you shouldn't even bother. It goes against your instincts, but by laying down the ace (spurning the finesse) you can make sure of twelve tricks (barring no bad splits). You concede a club trick next, and are pleased to see that the ♣K was actually offside.

Now you are in excellent position to get your club ruff in hand. West returns the ♠3.

Larry

♠ Q 9 8 6

♥ 9 3

♦ Q J 3

♣ 8

**David**

♠ K 4

♥ A J 4 2

♦ A K 9 2

♣ —

Which spade should you play from dummy?



Play the ♠9. You might as well take this free finesse. If the ♠9 wins, you will be in dummy to ruff a club. If it gets covered, nothing has been lost. East plays the ♠J so you have to win your ♠K in hand, but your foresight has put you in a good position.

Larry

♠ Q 8 6
 ♥ 9 3
 ♦ Q J 3
 ♣ 8

**David**

♠ 4
 ♥ A J 4 2
 ♦ A K 9 2
 ♣ —

As long as diamonds aren't 5-1 or 6-0, you have enough entries to do all of your work. Your first crossing to the ♦J lets you ruff a club in your hand. Then you can cross to dummy a second time in diamonds.

You draw the last trump and claim twelve tricks. You can throw one of dummy's hearts on your diamonds. The key to making your contract was to anticipate the entry situation at the start of the play. Crossing at Trick 2 with a diamond to take a club finesse would have been fatal. There weren't enough entries to dummy to finesse clubs, ruff a club, and get back to draw the last trump.

The Result

NS Vul.

Larry

♠ Q 9 8 6 2
 ♥ 9 3
 ♦ Q J 3
 ♣ 8 7 6

♠ 10 3
 ♥ K 8 7 6
 ♦ 8 7 6
 ♣ K 9 5 4

**David**

♠ A K 4
 ♥ A J 4 2
 ♦ A K 9 2
 ♣ A Q

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

When David declared this hand in 6♠ at the Rye Regional he took the correct line of play. He was rewarded with twelve out of twelve matchpoints. That seems a bit excessive to me, but the whole game went that way. We scored 247 on a 156 average, and our partnership was off to a roaring start!

37. Larry-Proof

This deal comes from the unforgettable 1984 Spingold. It is unforgettable for me because we won, but will be remembered by most for what happened away from the table.



George and Edith Rosenkranz

It all started during the Round of 64. We were playing a close match and had many kibitzers in the fourth quarter. Among them was Edith Rosenkranz, the wife of our team captain and sponsor, George Rosenkranz. You cannot imagine nicer people nor a happier couple. George achieved fame (and wealth) when his Syntex Corporation was responsible for the invention of ‘the pill’ (for birth control) in the 1950s.

We won a close match, and that was the last I saw of Edith for the night. It turned out she was abducted a few minutes later from the hotel garage. She was being held for two million dollars ransom. The next morning, the FBI was everywhere. Of course they interviewed Marty Bergen (my partner) and me, since we were just about the last people to have seen Edith. George was obviously distraught beyond belief, and of course couldn’t play. Meanwhile, bridge players being the way they are, our ‘main four’ players (the team had six members altogether) continued without him. Our teammates at the other table were Meckstroth and Rodwell — they don’t come any better!

We kept winning (playing four-handed) and, after three days, Edith was recovered. George delivered the ransom money but with police intervention they got the money back, captured the perpetrators (three bridge players!), and Edith was completely unharmed (other than psychologically).

When Edith came back to the hotel, she took a tour of the playing areas — and received incredible applause, smiles and tears. The kidnapping received international mainstream press coverage. Not only did it have a happy ending, but our team continued to win matches (still without George, of course) and we actually won the Spingold.

This deal came from the third day and I invite you to take my South cards with both sides vulnerable. Even though I was quite shaken by the kidnapping, it was time to focus and play bridge.

The Auction

♠ K Q 6 4 ♥ Q 3 2 ♦ Q J 7 ♣ A Q 2

This was my hand as South, both vulnerable. Fortunately, the start was easy. I opened 1NT, and West preempted with 3♦. Marty bid 4♦.

What's that?

- a) 'Stayman' for the majors?
- b) transfer to hearts?
- c) other
- d) needs discussion



It does need discussion. This shows how important it is to have a thorough discussion of any conventions you choose to play. Like so many players, Marty and I played Texas Transfers: 1NT-4♦ showed hearts and 1NT-4♥ showed spades. However, what about over interference? Is it still on? If so, through what level? You need to discuss such things with your partner. Our agreement was 'Texas is on in all competition'. Nowadays I don't like that treatment: I prefer 4♦ here to be for the majors. With my current partners, I play that Texas is on only through an intervening bid of 3♣. But whatever you do, you have to have an agreement with your partner.

Anyway, I had no choice here but to follow our methods of the day. I accepted the transfer. Marty jumped directly to 6♥ — do not pass Go, do not bid Blackwood. And now?

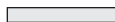


I passed, of course. Who am I to overrule partner?

The Play

Bergen

♠ A 8 7
♥ A K 9 7 6 5 4
♦ —
♣ 8 7 5



Cohen

♠ K Q 6 4
♥ Q 3 2
♦ Q J 7
♣ A Q 2

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

The ♠J (standard leads) arrives on the table, and an inspection of dummy reveals that there are eleven top tricks (three spades, seven hearts and one club). There is a possible twelfth trick in spades or clubs.

Too bad they didn't lead a high diamond — that would have set up my twelfth trick immediately. The club finesse can wait. What about the spades? Is there a way to take four tricks?



There are several ways:

- 1) a 3-3 break (unlikely).
- 2) The ♠J is singleton. Win dummy's ♠A and then run the ♠8 (after drawing trumps). The problem with this is that you lose either to ♣J109 or to ♠J10 and ♠J9 doubleton or longer.
- 3) The ♠J is from ♠J10 or ♠J9 doubleton. Then you can play two top spades and finesse on the third round.

None of these spade plays is a sure thing. If you lay down two high ones, and the lead was a singleton, then it will be too late to change course. East would still have the ♠109 — too much for you to handle. How about combining the chances? Try spades first and if that doesn't work then fall back on the club finesse? Not a bad idea. But time for you to decide.

In all cases, it can't hurt to win the ♠A (East follows with the ♠2) and test the trumps. You start with the ♥A, and both follow. They split 2-1. There is only one trump outstanding.

What's the plan now?

- a) play the ♥K then run the ♠8
- b) draw trumps then cash the top spades
- c) run trumps
- d) draw trumps then take a club finesse
- e) other



Other is a plan I haven't mentioned. However, it is the plan I embarked upon at the table. For his vulnerable 3♦, you can assume that West has long diamonds, probably headed by the ♦AK.

In that case, there is a 100% line of play. You don't need the club finesse and you don't need a favorable spade position. You start by coming to hand by drawing the last trump. You lead a top diamond, covered and ruffed in dummy. You cross to a high spade as West shows out (so the double finesse would have worked — but you didn't need to take that risk). You ruff another diamond in dummy, cross again in spades and administer the coup de grace:

Bergen

♠ —
♥ K 9 7
♦ —
♣ 8 7 5



Cohen

♠ 6
♥ 3
♦ J
♣ A Q 2

You lead the ♦J, West covers, and you let him have the trick. You discard a club from dummy. Whatever West plays next, you have the rest. He has only diamonds and clubs left. A diamond lets you throw a club from dummy and ruff in hand. A club gives you two club tricks.

The Result

Both Vul.

		Bergen			
		♠ A 8 7			
		♥ A K 9 7 6 5 4			
		♦ —			
		♣ 8 7 5			
♠ J		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="text-align: center;">N</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; padding: 0 10px;"> WE </div> <div style="text-align: center;">S</div> </div>		♠ 10 9 5 3 2	
♥ 8				♥ J 10	
♦ A K 10 9 6 5 3 2				♦ 8 4	
♣ 10 4 3				♣ K J 9 6	
		Cohen			
		♠ K Q 6 4			
		♥ Q 3 2			
		♦ Q J 7			
		♣ A Q 2			

I hesitate to show the full deal, because it turns out that anything reasonable I did was going to succeed. The club finesse would have won and (as you know) the spades also could have been picked up. So any fool could have made this one. However, it was nice to come up with the line that worked no matter what.

38. The 65th Board

No story of the '84 Spingold would be complete without this bonus Deal #38. This was actually Deal #65 from the final match. 'But the match was 64 boards,' I hear you say, 'how could there be a 65th deal?' It turned out that one of the boards was fouled (misduplicated), so a substitute had to be played.

We had compared scores and our team had won by 19 IMPs. We were already celebrating when the directors informed us of the error and gathered the two teams together to play the replacement board. So our team had to play this one extra deal knowing that as long as we didn't lose 19 IMPs, we'd win the match (and the Spingold).

The Auction

Both Vul.

Alan Sontag

♠ KJ 10 7

♥ Q 8 7 5

◆ J942

♣ 5

Marty Bergen

♠ 6 2

♦ A Q 8 7

♣ AKQ1864



Larry Cohen

♠ Q 8 3

♥ A 6 3 2

◆ K 10 6

♣ 10 3 2

Steve Sion

♠ A 9 5 4

♥ KJ 10 9 4

◆ 53

♣ 97

Both sides were vulnerable, and I was delighted to pick up the flat, boring East hand. ‘How could 19 IMPs swing on this one deal?’ I wondered. Just watch! The deal produced a 20-IMP swing! Marty, with his freaky hand, wasn’t as comfortable. The auction started quietly with two passes. Steve Sion, in third seat, was wondering how he could win 19 IMPs after this start. He decided to create some action with a wild opening bid of 4♥ on his 4-5-2-2 eight-count.

Marty overcalled 5♣, bidding what he thought he could make. Alan Sontag also wanted to generate action, so he jumped to 6♥! Enough is enough. I doubled. I knew North-South were screwing around, and I knew Marty would have his bid. (Yes, even Marty has his bids when vulnerable and up 19 IMPs with one deal to go!)

North redoubled. He was still fighting hard for those 19 IMPs. Marty was suffering a little. He wondered if it was a real freak deal with voids galore. He really wanted to take out insurance by bidding 7♣, but eventually he passed.

West	North	East	South
	pass	pass	4♥
5♣	6♥	dbl	pass
pass	redbl	all pass	

The Play

Down three off the top, declarer misguessed spades to finish down four, +2200 to Marty and Larry.

The Result

At the other table, our teammates also had a scary moment. West opened 7♣ in fourth seat! Not a bad shot at winning 19 IMPs. Everyone passed and Rodwell sweated out his opening lead. It turns out that any lead would have beaten it, but Rodwell selected a spade and was relieved to see his side cash the first two tricks for down two. For +2200 and +200 our team won 20 IMPs. Added to our 19-IMP lead, we now had won the match by thirty-nine. The 20-IMP swing was achieved, but in the ‘wrong’ direction.

Later the directors made another ruling. They discovered in the fine print of the rules that a deal can’t be played after the final score of the match is known. So the 65th deal was (sensibly) cancelled and the final margin in the history books is 19 IMPs. Still, it was quite a moment to see that kind of ridiculous bidding in the finals of the Spingold. Now I suppose it is as if it never happened.



Alan Sontag

39. Earning Your Keep

♠ Q 8 3 ♥ Q J 8 ♦ A K 9 ♣ J 7 5 3

I held these South cards in 1997 in a Patron Member game. What's that, you ask? There are three National Championship tournaments each year in America, and on the evening before the tournament begins there is a pairs game to raise money for charity. Since the early 1990s, I've been playing in these games with Patron Members — ACBL members who pay an annual fee for special benefits, one of which is to enter a draw to play with a top ACBL expert in these charity events. I've been that 'top expert' quite often, but before you say what a great guy I am for doing this, I will admit that it isn't all bad for me. Not only is it an honor to fill this position, but it gives me free publicity, in that a photo of me and the Patron Member always finds its way into print. My friends tease me about it, but as I know in the business, any publicity helps. I teach, write and host bridge cruises, and exposure is a good thing!

Anyway, now that I've given away my secrets, come take my cards and see if you can match my play on this deal.

The Auction

With neither side vulnerable, West, the dealer, opened 1♠ and my partner bid 2♠. East raised his partner to 4♠. By the time it was my turn, we were at the four-level. We were playing a specialized version of Michaels. My partner of the night told me she liked to use a major-suit cuebid to show specifically the two highest unbid suits. I always play what my partner du jour wants to play, so here I was, knowing partner had at least 5-5 in the red suits. What should it be?



I bid 5♥. When my partner said she wanted to play this form of Michaels cuebids, I didn't think much of it, but it turned out there was no madness to the method. In this particular case, knowing that she held hearts and diamonds, it seemed we had a big red-suit fit (and the opponents the same in the black suits). If we had been playing regular Michaels Cuebids, and my partner's other suit might be clubs, I would not have bid 5♥. My ♦AK9 could be worth three tricks on defense against spades (diamond lead ♦AK and a ruff).

We could easily have too many club losers in 5♥ if her clubs were, say, ♣Qxxxx. However, with diamonds as her side suit opposite a hand such as:

♠ x ♥ A K 10 x x ♦ Q x x x x x ♣ x

we could make 5♥. LHO doubled, fairly quickly, and everyone passed.

The Play

Patron Member

♠ A
♥ K 9 7 6 5 2
♦ Q J 7 6 3
♣ 4



Larry

♠ Q 8 3
♥ Q J 8
♦ A K 9
♣ J 7 5 3

West	North	East	South
1♠	2♠	4♠	5♥
dbl	all pass		

West led the ♠4. This is a pleasant dummy. Not only does it have a sixth heart, but it also has only one loser in the black suits. Barring anything unforeseen, it appears you have eleven easy tricks. How should you begin?



One of my three declarer keys ([see the end of the deal for a list of all three](#)) is:

Decide whether or not you should draw trumps.

How do you decide? On roughly half of all deals, you will start by drawing trumps. If you might need your trumps for other purposes (entries, transportation, ruffing losers), you won't start by drawing trumps. If you have too many immediate losers, you will need to set up some winners and will sometimes have to postpone drawing trumps.

When none of those conditions exists (as here), the default is to draw trumps. So you play a heart to the ♥Q. You get a rude shock when RHO shows out, playing the ♠5. Maybe this will slow you down a bit.

West wins the ♥A and plays the ♣Q to his partner's ♣A, and East plays a spade through, which you cover and ruff in dummy. You need the rest of the tricks. What will you do now?

Patron Member

♠ —
♥ K 9 7 6
♦ Q J 7 6 3
♣ —



Larry

♠ 3
♥ J 8
♦ A K 9
♣ J 5 3



An easy one. You can (and will) continue to draw trumps. You take the marked heart finesse and draw the last trump, East throwing low black cards. As long as diamonds aren't 5-0, you have the rest. Have you been watching East's discards?

He has yet to throw a diamond. If he had thrown even one, you could now claim (knowing that the diamonds are all good). So you can't claim, but will you do anything crazy? How should you finish up?



Lead the ♦3. Were you tempted to play the last trump in case there was a squeeze? What squeeze? The only danger is that one defender has all five diamonds. If so, he would keep them all. The other defender could easily protect the black suits. What harm could it do to cash the last trump? We will discuss this later. Meanwhile, East plays low. Which diamond will you play from hand?

Is this really a decision?

- a) ♦A
- b) ♦9



Play the ♦9. No, that is not a misprint. It is what I played at the table, and if you got it right, take an A+ grade! The diamonds were indeed 5-0. Why the dramatic play? All the clues were there. First of all, you know West started with five spades (his 1♠ opening) and four hearts (from the play). Early in the play, you knocked out his ♥A and what did he do?

He played the ♣Q to his partner's ♣A. What was that all about? For his opening bid, West should have the ♣KQ. (He wouldn't have opened with only the ♠K, ♥A and ♣Q.) That ♣Q play looks like he wanted to make sure his partner would overtake with the ♣A. He was desperate to have his partner win the ♣A if he had it. Laying down the ♣K would not have gotten his partner to overtake.

So if West didn't want his partner on lead, he could have simply laid down the ♣K to retain the lead himself. Why did he want his partner on lead? You can envisage a diamond void. Anyway, East didn't get the message because he played a spade when he got in. There were other clues as well. West had nine cards in the majors and it seems three or four clubs. He probably started with at most one diamond, and with a singleton, he might have led it.

Even if he did start with a singleton diamond (rather than a void) and chose not to lead it, the only way this play of the ♦9 could lose was if West started with specifically a singleton ♦10.

So this ♦9 play wasn't 100%, but I'd say it was about 99%. Now you can see why it would have been an error to play off dummy's last trump. You need an entry to get back to the good diamonds. You cash the ♦AK and cross to dummy and claim the balance.

The Result

Neither Vul.

		Patron Member	
		♠	A
		♥	K 9 7 6 5 2
		♦	Q J 7 6 3
		♣	4
		<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
♠	K 10 7 6 4	♠	J 9 5 2
♥	A 10 4 3	♥	—
♦	—	♦	10 8 5 4 2
♣	K Q 9 6	♣	A 10 8 2
		Larry	
		♠	Q 8 3
		♥	Q J 8
		♦	A K 9
		♣	J 7 5 3

For making 5♥ doubled, you get a top board (as did we). I had earned my money that night. Unfortunately, a check for \$0.00 won't buy much!

LC's Three Declarer Keys

When I teach bridge, I stress these three keys for play in a suit contract:

- 1) *Take your time at Trick 1 — this is the most crucial stage of the play;*
- 2) *Count your losers (tricks you have to lose). Focus on declarer's hand (or the long-trump hand);*
- 3) *Decide whether or not to draw trumps. Usually the result from Key 2 will help your decision. If you have too many losers you need a Plan B, which usually will entail the postponement of drawing trumps.*

Note: In notrump contracts we usually count winners — not losers.

40. Think It Through

This deal was played in a 1978 Knockout Teams at a New York Regional. The only reason I recall it (more than twenty-five years later) is that Alan Truscott wrote it up in the New York Times. I was nineteen years old at the time, and he wrote about the young local boy defending a hand well. Take my East hand and see how you do.

The Auction

♠ J 8 3 ♥ K J 6 ♦ K J 7 4 ♣ A 5 3

I dealt at unfavorable vulnerability and opened 1♦. My partner responded 1♥, and RHO doubled. In the 1970s, support doubles and redoubles had not even been invented! Eric Rodwell devised the idea some time around 1980: a support redouble here would show three-card heart support (and any strength). Some people use a support redouble (or double) only if they have a little extra, but I don't understand that treatment. If it was good enough to open, it is good enough to tell partner how many trumps you have. If you have a minimum (as here), he'll find out about it later.

Anyway, as I said, this was before the convention existed, so I passed. LHO jumped to 2♠ in response to the takeout double and RHO bid the spade game. Everyone passed, and it was my partner's opening lead.

The Play

♠ A K 9 4
♥ A 9 4 3
♦ 5
♣ K 7 6 2



YOU

♠ J 8 3
♥ K J 6
♦ K J 7 4
♣ A 5 3

West	North	East	South
		1♦	pass
1♥	dbl	pass	2♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

Partner led the ♣Q (standard leads) and this was what I saw (see previous page). Given the form of scoring (IMPs), I think North's jump to game was clear. With four good trumps, prime cards (aces and kings) and a singleton, why mess around? The ♣Q held the first trick.

I signaled low playing the ♣3, because if partner wanted to shift to hearts, that was fine with me. However, he didn't continue clubs and he didn't shift to hearts either. He switched to the ♠5 and dummy played the ♠4. What card should I play to this trick?



I played the ♠8. This play probably won't matter, but in general, this is the right approach. Don't waste the ♠J, which is almost sure to lose to the ♠Q and will make life easy for declarer. He might have to ruff diamonds with dummy's ♠A and ♠K, so you want to save your ♠J which might be a trick later on.

After winning the trick with the ♠10, declarer plays the ♦2, partner follows with the ♦3 and you win cheaply with the ♦7. And now?

♠	A K 9	
♥	A 9 4 3	
♦	—	
♣	K 7 6	
		YOU
		♠ J 3
		♥ K J 6
		♦ K J 4
		♣ A 5



Return the ♠3. It looks as if declarer's only extra tricks will come from ruffing diamonds in dummy, so you want to prevent that. Furthermore, partner always likes it when you follow his defense. Again you play a low spade and retain the ♠J in case it becomes a trick later on (even though that's not likely). Partner shows out as declarer wins cheaply in dummy.

Declarer wins the ♠9 and calls for the ♣6 from dummy. Here's a breather for you: what do you do?



You play low, of course, and declarer ruffs with the ♠6. Declarer ruffs a diamond in dummy. Are you counting? He ruffs another club in hand, setting up dummy's ♣K. He ruffs another diamond in dummy, felling partner's ♦A. Are you still counting? What was declarer's shape?



5-2-5-1. This wasn't too hard. Partner has shown up with one spade and declarer with one club, so you know declarer is 5-1 in the black suits. When partner's $\heartsuit A$ fell, you knew that declarer started with $\heartsuit Q10xxx$ so you know everyone's distribution.

\spadesuit —	
\heartsuit A 9 4 3	
\diamondsuit —	
\clubsuit K	
	YOU
	\spadesuit J
	\heartsuit K J 6
	\diamondsuit K
	\clubsuit —



Declarer plays dummy's good club. And you?

- a) \spadesuit J
- b) \heartsuit 6
- c) \diamondsuit K



This was your moment to be a hero, and play the $\heartsuit 6$. With proper counting and analysis, this can be worked out. You know declarer's last five cards other than the exact size of his hearts.

He is left with $\spadesuit Q$ $\heartsuit ???$ $\diamondsuit Q 10$.

You already have two tricks, and need two more. Let's first see what will happen if declarer does not have the $\heartsuit Q$.

\spadesuit —		
\heartsuit A 9 4 3		
\diamondsuit —		
\clubsuit K		
	YOU	
	\spadesuit J	
	\heartsuit K J 6	
	\diamondsuit K	
	\clubsuit —	



\spadesuit Q
\heartsuit 10 2
\diamondsuit Q 10
\clubsuit —

♠ —	♠ —		
♥ 8 7 5 2	♥ A 9 4 3		
♦ —	♦ —		
♣ J	♣ K		YOU
		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 10px; width: 150px; height: 100px; position: relative;"> <div style="position: absolute; top: 10%; left: 40%;">W</div> <div style="position: absolute; top: 10%; right: 10%;">N</div> <div style="position: absolute; bottom: 10%; left: 40%;">S</div> <div style="position: absolute; top: 40%; right: 10%;">E</div> </div>	♠ J
			♥ K J 6
			♦ K
			♣ —
	♠ Q		
	♥ Q 10		
	♦ Q 10		
	♣ —		

♠ —
 ♥ 8 7 5 2
 ♦ —
 ♣ —

♠ —
 ♥ A 9 4 3
 ♦ —
 ♣ —

♠ —
 ♥ K J 6
 ♦ K
 ♣ —

♠ —
 ♥ Q 10
 ♦ Q 10
 ♣ —

N
 W E
 S

This was why you should not have ruffed. You would be in big trouble, because declarer would exit in diamonds and, to borrow a term from chess, you could tip over your king (and I don't mean the ♥K). Anything you play gives declarer his contract.

Correct defensive plays can be made using counting and logic. Concentration doesn't hurt either. All you have to do is watch the cards. If you do, you know declarer's exact shape in the endgame. Then you just have to go through the two scenarios in your head: 'If he doesn't have the ♥Q, he is down no matter what. So, if he does have the ♥Q, what can I do about it?' Then you project the play. You know that ruffing will lead to your getting endplayed. You know that discarding a heart will work. Just using a little brain power goes a long way. No textbooks teach this kind of position. It doesn't have any fancy term and doesn't fit any bridge category.

The Result

EW Vul

♠ AK94

♥ A 9 4 3

◆ 5

♣ K 7 6 2

♠ 5

♥ 8 7 5 2

◆ A93

♣ QJ1094



♠ J 8 3

♥ KJ 6

◆ K174

♣ A 5 3

♠ Q 10 7 6 2

♥ Q 10

♦ Q 10 8 6 2

♣ 8

This was the full deal. Concentration, counting, logic: together they are the key to winning bridge!

41. Sometimes It's Just Your Day



Marty Bergen

This deal is from the 1988 Life Master Pairs in Salt Lake City. Before I tell you what happened, let me digress.

My partner at that time, Marty Bergen, was a bidding scientist. He loved methods. He invented methods. He lived for methods. I like to play mostly natural, with few methods and no memory strain. This divergence eventually ended our successful partnership.

One of Marty's inventions was BROMAD. This acronym stands for Bergen Raises Of Major After Double. Thus, after $1\spadesuit$ - dbl, a raise to $2\spadesuit$ can be made with total garbage (0-5 HCP) and three trumps. With a 'real' raise to $2\clubsuit$, you bid an artificial $2\clubsuit$. This is alertable and shows 6-9 HCP and three trumps.

This method was later modified by other experts and is now in use by most top partnerships. I had trouble with it at first, but soon added it to my memory. So forget all that, and come back to our Deal 41. I held the North cards as shown; we were vulnerable and they were not.

\spadesuit J 9 7 3 \heartsuit Q 8 2 \diamondsuit — \clubsuit K Q 9 8 7 2

The Auction

Marty opened $1\diamondsuit$. I would probably have responded $1\spadesuit$ to this, but not so fast — RHO made a takeout double. I haven't given you a bidding quiz at this point, because there is no clear answer. You still could bid $1\spadesuit$, but that is not as attractive when RHO's double tends to show four spades. You could bid 1NT, but that seems strange with a void. You could even pass — it is not mandatory to bid and this hand looks like a misfit.

I found another choice: 2♣. Without the double, 2♣ would have shown 10+ HCP. In fact, we were playing 2/1 Game Forcing, so I could never make this call if RHO passed. However, after a double, it is standard to redouble with 10+ HCP. Thus all two-level bids are moderately weak and not forcing. They show fewer than 10 HCP and usually at least a six-card suit.

Then partner alerted! Oops. I knew right away what I'd done, but it was too late. As soon as he said 'Alert,' I remembered: my 2♣ bid was not supposed to be natural. It was artificial. It didn't show clubs. What did it show? It was supposed to show a diamond raise! It promised 6-9 HCP (at least I had that), but also showed four-plus diamonds. I didn't have that. Not even close.

This was an extension of BROMAD. Instead of a Bergen Raise of a Major, it was supposed to be BROMAD. Note that the lowercase 'm' stands for 'minor'. This was Marty's latest convention, called Bergen Raises of a minor After Double.

'Who cares about clubs?' Marty asked me rhetorically as he explained the convention. It was better to have a weak raise (2♦) and a good raise (2♣) available. It had sounded good at the time (three months prior to the event), but it had also never come up. Now it had come up. Not only that, but it was during the finals and we were leading the event! We had ten kibitzers, an intense atmosphere. I was dying.

Now what? There was nothing I could do. You can't make a face. You can't show any visible signs that you have forgotten your agreements. You just have to take it like a man. LHO passed. And Marty started to think and think and think... Ugh! 5♦! A stab to my heart. Not unexpected, though. I had zero diamonds. The takeout doubler didn't have too many diamonds. Who had all the diamonds? Marty. With my having promised at least four, it was inevitable that he would bid lots of diamonds.

RHO doubled again. This didn't look like the takeout variety. It looked like the 1400 variety. Now what?



Pass. This was the only possible call, for several reasons. Most importantly, you must recognize the ethical implications and obligations. When you (I) bid 2♣, it was meant to show clubs. You (I) are not entitled to be 'woken up' by partner's alert. If you meant to show clubs, and partner decided to rebid 5♦, who are you to overrule him? Maybe he has eight solid diamonds and a little club fit on the side. You have nothing special. So you are not entitled to bid now. You can't ethically 'rebid' your clubs — you've already shown them, in theory. Furthermore, where can you run? (I wanted to run to the non-Life Master Pairs.) Do you really want to bid 6♣? Nah. Besides, if you pass, you don't have to play it.

Everyone passed. The nice thing about having kibitzers is that you can ask one of them to turn the dummy and you can leave the table. I decided to exercise this option. I apologized to Marty and announced, 'I'm going to get something to drink.' (Poison sounded like a good option.)

The Play

West	North	East	South
			1♦
dbl	2♣*	pass	5♦
dbl	all pass		

I saw them lead the ♠A as I sheepishly left the table. I came back a few minutes later and Marty seemed to be doing surprisingly well. Let's hop over to his seat and have a look. He had quite a lot of diamonds facing what he thought was four-card support.

Embarrassed Larry

♠ J 9 7 3
♥ Q 8 2
♦ —
♣ K Q 9 8 7 2



Poor Marty

♠ —
♥ A 5
♦ A Q 9 7 6 5 4 2
♣ J 5 3

Dummy's diamonds must have been a shock, but all things considered, it wasn't a horrible dummy. He ruffed the opening spade lead. What should he do at Trick 2?



Lead the ♦A. Strange as it seems, the plan is to draw trumps. West drops the ♦J while East plays the ♦3. I like the ploy of throwing a club from dummy. The defense might think your clubs are useless. You know better, but you don't need all those extra clubs in dummy, so throw one and make it look like you have other things in mind.

What next?

- a) ♥A
- b) ♦Q
- c) ♦4
- d) ♣3



Continue drawing trumps, yes, but how? You can't do anything about 4-1 diamonds, so focus on a 3-2 break. If West's ♦J was from ♦J10, you would be better off playing the ♦Q next. But West is the one with the high card points, he doubled twice. East (who must have some major-suit length) couldn't come in at the two-level. Who is more likely to have the ♦K? It's not 100%, but I'd say 85-90% that West has the ♦K.

After the ♦J drops, you should play a low diamond in the hopes of losing only one diamond trick. If you use Restricted Choice, you also come to the same conclusion: KJ or K10 is twice as likely as specifically J10. West could have dropped either the J or 10 from J10 doubleton so when he drops the jack, you should assume it was because he had to drop it from KJ, having no choice.

When you play the ♦4 you get good news! West wins the trick with the ♦K. You continue your deception by throwing another club from dummy. West looks a bit frustrated, and eventually plays the ♠K, which you ruff.

You draw the last trump, this time throwing a spade. Enough with the clubs from dummy — you do need to keep one extra for a heart discard. Eventually (you could run more trumps first) you play on clubs. Because clubs are 2-2, West can't hold up enough times. You are able to throw your heart loser on the long club, making 5♦ doubled for +750!

The Result

NS Vul

Embarrassed Larry

♠ J 9 7 3
♥ Q 8 2
♦ —
♣ K Q 9 8 7 2

♠ A K 10 4
♥ K 10 9 7 3
♦ K J
♣ A 10



♠ Q 8 6 5 2
♥ J 6 4
♦ 10 8 3
♣ 6 4

Poor Marty

♠ —
♥ A 5
♦ A Q 9 7 6 5 4 2
♣ J 5 3

Believe it or not, 5♦ doubled was cold the entire time. West could never attack hearts and as long as declarer guesses diamonds, eleven tricks are his. We tied for top with +750 and went on to win the event.

If you can get a top when you totally screw up, you know it is your day. When you learn a new convention, it often causes an accident. Once that accident occurs, usually it is the only time. In fact, I was never to forget BROMAD again.

42. EATT

This deal is from the 1985 Regional two-day Goldman Pairs in New York City. I was playing with Marty Bergen and even though we didn't do well, this deal is one I just never forget. Marty and I had an expression for this sort of deal, but since we want this book to be suitable for all the family, I'll edit it a bit. When something spectacularly good happens, we call it EATT, 'Ecstasy At The Table'. On this deal, I was ecstatic!

The Auction

♠ A ♥ 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 ♦ 8 ♣ K 9 3 2

I held these West cards at unfavorable vulnerability. Marty dealt and opened 1♦ and the 1♥ overcall from RHO surprised me a bit. Too often, I see players with my hand in this situation give the show away. They act surprised. Or worse, they ask something like, 'What does 1♥ show?' Give me a break.

Experienced players learn to pass as if they are sitting there with some normal boring 4-3-3-3 piece of junk. After I passed, LHO cuebid 2♦. This was strange. Most people play that a cuebid promises support. Exactly how many hearts were there in this deck?

Marty competed with 2♠. Such a free bid shows not only a decent hand, but also extra shape. He wouldn't make such a bid with 4-4 in spades and diamonds. It shows four spades and at least five, usually six-plus, diamonds. RHO passed. Too bad, I wasn't looking forward to my next call.

What should it be?



I mentally held my nose and bid 3♦. Ugh! A preference at the three-level with a singleton. In retrospect, maybe I should have bid 2NT. At the time, though, I thought a confident 3♦ was best. You get through LHO, and you get past partner (thank you, partner, for not bidding something really ugly like 5♦!).

Now, for the EATT: RHO's next call. Are you ready? Happy Days Are Here Again! Yes, 3♥ by RHO. There must be fifteen hearts in this deck! Your reaction? What do you call?



If you don't double this one, you aren't doubling enough. You don't have to worry about them running. Where can they run? Opposite partner's decent spade-diamond hand, the opponents are in deep doodoo (well, I told you this is a family publication).

You get the hoped-for pass-pass-pass.

West	North	East	South
		1♦	1♥
pass	2♦	2♠	pass
3♦	pass	pass	3♥
dbl	all pass		

The Play

What is your opening lead?



Lead the ♥9. You shouldn't lead either singleton in the hopes of getting ruffs. You have the long trumps (for sure). You don't need ruffs. You want to make sure the opponents don't get any extra tricks by ruffing something in dummy.

Furthermore, there is no need to attack: your side has everything under control. Spot cards in the trump suit on opening lead should show suit preference and you love spades, hence the lead of your highest heart.

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



Where, I wonder, was North's double over your 3♦ preference? Mighty timid, I'd say. He certainly got what he had coming to him. I always keep a poker face at the table, but I really had to keep from biting my lip. We were defending 3♥ doubled and I had seven trumps! For this to happen without a bidding misunderstanding must set some sort of record.

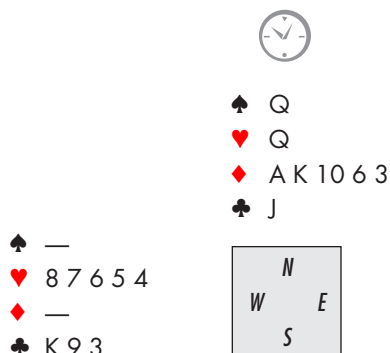
Dummy wins the first trick as partner throws a low diamond. You didn't expect partner to follow, did you? Declarer (who they had to revive when he saw the first trick) now plays a spade to your ace.

What next?



With declarer marked with the top hearts, partner must have the rest of the high cards. You might as well be greedy. As long as declarer didn't bother to take his top diamond(s), maybe you can keep him from getting them. So lead a club to partner's

♣A. Partner seems to have figured out the theme — he cashes the ♠K while you throw your diamond. Partner gives you a spade ruff, which you didn't really need. Now what?



Lead another heart. You should take out dummy's last trump. This way, declarer can never ruff any clubs in dummy.

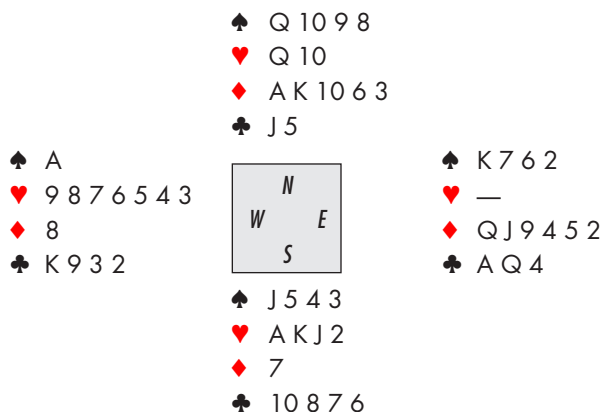
Declarer wins the heart in hand and plays a club. Over to you.



If declarer has the ♣Q, you can't ever stop him from getting it. You might as well play low. Partner produces the ♣Q and starts to think. Presuming you kept a poker face, it's not likely partner fully understands the heart distribution. But maybe declarer gave the show away at Trick 1, when he almost fainted. Partner completes the slaughter by working out to play another club. This ends any suspense. Declarer has been held to only his four trump tricks.

The Result

EW Vul



Declarer is down five and you are +1400 for a clear top. Unfortunately, this +1400 was our only good board of the day. Not a memorable event, but certainly a memorable deal!

43. The Rest of The Story



Jeff Meckstroth

This deal was embarrassing. To me. Your author.

Playing in the 1993 US Team Trials, I learned a valuable lesson: be judicious when doubling Meckstroth. It wasn't even Meckstroth and Rodwell. It was Meckstroth playing with Howie Weinstein.

The Auction

♠ 5 ♥ Q ♦ K Q J 10 8 7 6 2 ♣ 9 8 7

At unfavorable vulnerability I was dealer with the West cards as shown.

Using Standard methods, what should I open?



In general, six-card suits are for two-level preempts, seven-card suits for three-level preempts, and as here, an eight-card suit should be opened at the four-level. So 4♦ it was.

LHO (Jeff Meckstroth) overcalled 4♠. RHO (Howie Weinstein) bid 4NT, Roman Keycard Blackwood for spades. The response of 5♦ showed one keycard. In 1993 it wasn't popular yet to invert the meanings of the 5♣ and 5♦ responses. When

Roman Keycard Blackwood was first invented, 5♣ showed zero or three keycards and 5♦ showed one or four. Later, mostly due to campaigning by Eddie Kantar, those responses were reversed. The theory is that zero won't come up too often and it is better to use 5♣ for the more likely answer of one. That leaves more room for further exploration (or stopping in 5♣).

Weinstein now bid 5♥ to ask for the ♠Q. When using Roman Keycard Blackwood, the 'next step' over the first response always asks for the trump queen. And here is where I got my (not so) brilliant idea. 'Partner will be on lead against some spade contract (5, 6, or 7). A diamond lead won't accomplish anything (I have too many). If partner has the ♥A, I'd like him to lead that (and then give me a ruff). Even if he has the ♥K (and maybe a side entry), a heart lead should be good. I don't want him to lead the ♣A or away from the ♣K. So how can it hurt to suggest a heart lead?

I made a lead-directing double. North's redouble was the answer to the question, 'How could it hurt?' That's right, Meckstroth took out his blue card to redouble, ostensibly for business. This was passed back to me. Nowhere to run, nowhere to hide. Well, I suppose I could have run to 6♦, but that wouldn't be the macho thing to do. How can these guys be playing in hearts after Roman Keycard Blackwood in spades? Sheesh!

West	North	East	South
4♦	4♠	pass	4NT
pass	5♦	pass	5♥
dbl	redbl	all pass	

The Play

What a mess I had got myself into! Some lead-director. Now, I found myself on lead, with zero defense. What should I lead?



I led the ♠5. Maybe partner had the ♠A and I could get a spade ruff and hope for another trick (maybe a trump trick(s) from partner). Besides, I adhere to Garozzo's rule, 'When a singleton is a possible opening lead, then go for it!' Of course, Garozzo might not want his name associated with this debacle.

Jeff Meckstroth

♠ K Q J 7 4 3

♥ J 9 7 2

♦ 9

♣ Q J

L. C. the Goat

♠ 5

♥ Q

♦ K Q J 10 8 7 6 2

♣ 9 8 7



Dummy didn't have much for his 4♠ overcall, but he does have nice heart 'support'. Declarer plays dummy's ♠K and partner wins the ♠A, declarer following with the ♠8. Well, that's a good start!

Partner returns the ♠6 as declarer follows with the ♠9 and you ruff. At least there won't be any overtricks. Were you watching the suit-preference spots in spades? If you answered, 'Yes,' that's good news. I'm glad you are paying attention. Unfortunately, it doesn't matter. Whatever I play next, declarer is going to win and claim the rest.



Howie Weinstein

The Result

EW Vul.

Jeff Meckstroth

♠ K Q J 7 4 3
♥ J 9 7 2
♦ 9
♣ Q J

L. C. the Goat

♠ 5
♥ Q
♦ K Q J 10 8 7 6 2
♣ 9 8 7



Innocent bystander

♠ A 6 2
♥ 10 5 4
♦ 5 4 3
♣ 10 6 5 4

Howie Weinstein

♠ 10 9 8
♥ A K 8 6 3
♦ A
♣ A K 3 2

What's the score for that, you ask? Exactly -1000. A nice round number (300 for game, 150 x 4 for 600 more, plus 100 for the insult). And I sure did feel insulted. Had I run to 6♦, we would have been doubled for -1100. Had I not led my singleton, they would have made an overtrick for -1200. It takes a special kind of talent to put yourself in a position to go -1000, -1100 or -1200. Fortunately, our teammates reached 6♠ on this deal and made it for +980.

When we compared scores, they read off, 'Plus 980'. We replied, 'Lose 1.' That is the IMP score for the difference of $1000 - 980 = 20$ points. To this day, they have never asked. I wonder though, how did they think they could lose 1 IMP for +980? Were we -1010? Did they think we somehow didn't score our ♠A? As the late Paul Harvey would have said on the radio, 'Now they know... the rest of the story.'

44. Timing Is Everything

I played this deal in a local knockout event in 1991, in Westchester County, New York. Take my South cards and see how you do.

The Auction

♠ K J 7 6 4 ♥ K 8 6 ♦ 5 4 ♣ 7 6 5

You are vulnerable against not. The dealer on your left opens 1♠ and your partner doubles. After RHO's pass, what is your call?



Not 'pass' — defending against a one-level contract with your trumps in front of declarer isn't too appealing. Meanwhile, you have a very descriptive bid available: 1NT. This shows spades stopped, a relatively balanced hand and approximately 6-10 HCP. Many intermediate (and lower-level) players are not aware that 1NT in this auction promises values. With a three-count you can't respond 1NT to a double, you have to come up with some other call.

The rest of the auction is short and sweet. Partner raises to 3NT and everyone passes.

The Play

♠ 8 2
♥ A 4 3 2
♦ A Q 6 3
♣ A K Q

♠ K J 7 6 4
♥ K 8 6
♦ 7 4
♣ 7 6 5

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

West leads the ♠10, you play low from dummy and East contributes the ♠3. Should you win or duck?



You win the ♠J. If you can find some appealing reason to duck, please write a letter to the author explaining why. Now that you've won a spade trick, how do things look?

At notrump, I like to count winners. You have one spade, two hearts, two diamonds (with the opening bidder expected to have the ♦K) and three clubs; that makes eight pretty sure ones. How will you get your ninth?

There are three possible sources:

- 1) Hearts are 3-3
- 2) An endplay against West (where he has to lead spades)
- 3) A squeeze

Which suit should you try first?



If hearts are 3-3, your problems are over. That should be a good starting place. However, you want to keep the ♥K in hand, so you play a low heart at Trick 2 and West plays the ♥9.

Which heart should you play from dummy?



Play low. There is no rush to take the ♥A. A good general rule in notrump is if you are going to lose a trick anyway, lose it early. Here you maintain better control by retaining both high hearts for later in the play.

West's ♥9 wins and he exits safely with the ♣J, which you take in dummy.

♠	8
♥	A 4 3
♦	A Q 6 3
♣	A K
<hr/>	
♠	K 7 6 4
♥	K 8
♦	7 4
♣	7 5

Should you test the hearts now?



No. What's the hurry? If they are 3-3, they will always be 3-3. You have properly conceded a heart, now you can develop other chances. If you cash the top hearts and they are not 3-3, you lose a lot of power. As soon as the defense gets in, they can cash the long heart. It is better for you to keep that losing fourth heart for later in the play, maybe for a throw-in.

For example, if West started with 5-4 in the majors, you can strip him of minors and then play all the hearts, tossing him in to give you a spade trick at the end. However, if you cash the hearts now and find West with four, you are not home free. You have to strip his minor suits first. Suppose he started with three diamonds and one club, for example. If you finesse in diamonds, cash the ♦A and a top club, and exit with a heart, West can get out safely in diamonds (after unblocking his ♦K under the ace, of course).

No, it is better to postpone the hearts. So what will it be, instead?

- a) ♠8
- b) ♦A
- c) ♦3
- d) ♣A



Play the ♦3. This was a real toughie! However, I think you'll agree it is right when you read the logic. You are cold if hearts are 3-3. If West has four hearts, you can succeed by throwing him in later. This low diamond play caters to West holding three diamonds. You can win any return, play the ♥K, finesse in diamonds, cash the ♦A, then the clubs, then throw West in if he has the long heart. He will be down to only spades.

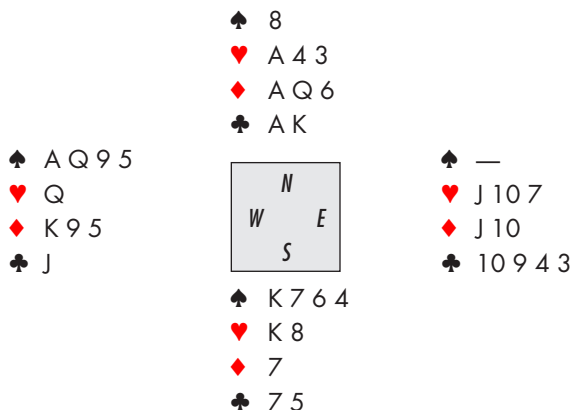
What if East has four hearts? Then maybe West will have the fourth diamond! Just as good. In that case, you can win any return, play the ♥K, finesse in diamonds, take all the winners and if West has only two hearts and only two clubs, you can throw him in with the fourth diamond.

What if West started with 5-2-3-3? Also good! After you cash the ♥AK, ♦AQ and ♣AKQ, you will see that West followed to two hearts, three diamonds and three clubs. Then you know he has nothing left but spades. You play a spade and he will have to win and give you a spade trick at the end.

By timing it this way, you make the hand whenever West started with:

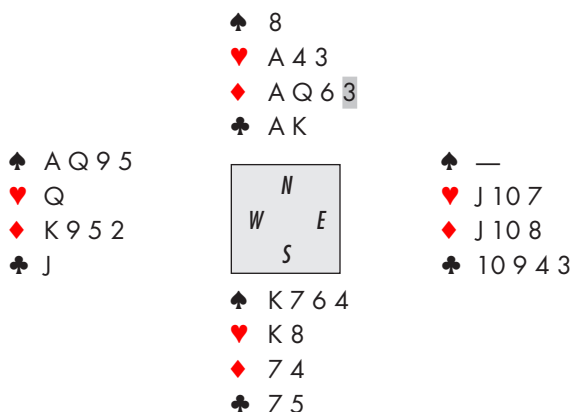
- 1) three hearts
- 2) four-plus hearts
- 3) four-plus diamonds
- 4) two hearts and three diamonds.

Have a look at the position after you give up the diamond trick. Whatever East plays, you are home free.



You will take your ♥K, finesse in diamonds and cash your eight winners. West shows out in clubs and hearts, so you will play the fourth round of diamonds. West will give you your ninth trick in spades at the end.

Let's go back to the point where you played dummy's low diamond.



Any other play would not have allowed for all possibilities. If you cash the clubs first, you set up East's clubs. He would cash them when he got in with the first diamond. (Remember, to set up the endplay on West you have to lose an early round of diamonds.)

If you cash the hearts first, you also set up too many winners for East. He would cash his heart when in with the first round of diamonds. In the ending, when you throw West in, the defense would already have four tricks and the ♠A would be the fifth.

Lastly, playing three rounds of diamonds without ducking one first would also fail. West would cash all his diamonds and have a heart or club to exit with, so no endplay.

The Result

NS Vul.

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

By giving up the diamond trick at Trick 4, you get the best of all worlds. This double duck (first the heart, then the diamond) was a play I had never seen before; thus, it made it into My Favorite 52.

If you found the correct line, take a bow!

45. A Big Reward

♠ A K Q J 10 8 ♥ 3 2 ♦ J 2 ♣ 7 6 4

This deal was played in the 1986 World Championships in Miami. In the Rosenblum Teams, Marty Bergen held the hand shown as South, with North-South vulnerable.

The Auction

I was his partner and started proceedings with a 4♣ opening. We were playing Namyats, a popular convention to show (artificially) a strong four-of-a-major opening. With a so-so preempt, you open 4♥ (or 4♠). With ‘more’, you open two steps under (4♣ with hearts, 4♦ with spades). This allows you to preempt on medium hands and also to open four-of-a-major (via two-under) with a really good trick-taking hand. At this vulnerability, a Namyats (notice that it is ‘Stayman’ spelled backwards) opening would tend to be an eight- or nine-trick hand.

When responding to Namyats, you usually just bid four of partner’s known suit. If you have slam interest you can bid the in-between step, here 4♦. What would you do?



Bid 4♥. You have excellent spades, but they probably won’t be enough to make a slam. Yes, if partner somehow has spade length, something like

♠ x x x ♥ A K Q J 10 x x x ♦ K x ♣ —

you could have a slam, but that’s a long shot.

Partner bids 5♣ now. This is surprising. Usually a Namyats opener doesn’t forge on like this. He must have a really special hand, probably seven or eight hearts and a club suit on the side. And now?



Bid 5♥. Sorry, but whatever partner needs, you probably don’t have it. Some club help probably would have been better. If you had the ♦A, you could control-bid 5♦, but your spades are probably not worth much — thus the retreat to 5♥.

Everyone passes. Now you get to play it!

The Play

L. C.

♠ —

♥ A K J 10 9 8 4

♦ K

♣ A K 10 5 2

Marty Bergen

♠ A K Q J 10 8

♥ 3 2

♦ J 2

♣ 7 6 4

West	North	East	South
	4♣	pass	4♥
pass	5♣	pass	5♥
all pass			

The opening lead is the ♦10. Partner had quite a hand! He could have opened 1♥ (big underbid) or 2♣. I like this auction (after all, I was the perpetrator). I thought I had conveyed a huge hand with lots of hearts and some clubs.

You might as well falsecard with the ♦J under East's ace at Trick 1. (East knows from the ♦10 lead that you have the jack, so play the card you are known to hold.) East shifts to the ♥Q which runs to dummy's king. This was not unexpected. From the defense's point of view, the only way you could score extra tricks is by ruffing clubs in hand.

What's the plan now?

- a) ♥A
- b) ♣A
- c) ♣2



The right card is the ♣2! I'm guessing that not many found this play. Some might have even laughed at my offering it as a choice (thinking the decision was between the two aces). It's the play that Marty found at the table and I'm sure you'll soon agree with his reasoning.

This is a team match. The goal is to make this vulnerable game (don't worry about overtricks or undertricks). If clubs are 3-2 you can't go down. If clubs are 5-0 you are dead. So, the question is, 'How can this contract be made if clubs are 4-1?' If the defender with one club has no hearts left, you have a chance — but only if he can be forced to take the club trick.

For example, let's presume East has no hearts left. (East would not shift to the

♥Q from ♥Qxx, so we know that West is not out of hearts.) If East has four clubs, you have no chance. He'll win a club and West will also score a club ruff (or over-ruff). But what if East has a singleton club? If it is a spot-card, you have no chance (West will overtake and lead another trump). But what if East has a singleton ♣J or ♣Q? There is your slight extra chance. And Marty played for it at the table.

He was rewarded big time, for East did have the ♣J singleton and no more hearts. What could the defense do? If West overtakes, declarer's clubs are all good. If he leaves East on lead, declarer gets to ruff a club in hand. Either way, it's eleven tricks.

The Result

NS Vul.

	L. C.	
	♠ —	
	♥ A K J 10 9 8 4	
	♦ K	
	♣ A K 10 5 2	
♠ 9 5		♠ 7 6 4 3 2
♥ 7 6 5		♥ Q
♦ Q 10 9 7		♦ A 8 6 5 4 3
♣ Q 9 8 3		♣ J
	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	
	Marty Bergen	
	♠ A K Q J 10 8	
	♥ 3 2	
	♦ J 2	
	♣ 7 6 4	

Any other line of play would fail. Try laying down the ♣A. Now what? West will get in and lead another trump, and you have to lose two clubs and the contract. By finding a slight extra chance, Marty made his +650 and found his way into print.

46. Five-Card Majors

♠ 9 6 5 ♥ A 7 4 ♦ K 10 9 7 5 4 2 ♣ —

I held these South cards opposite David Berkowitz on our way to a victory in the National Open Pairs in Philadelphia in 1996. To win a National pairs game, you need some lucky things to happen along the way. This deal also falls into the ‘bizarre’ category. You’ll see what I mean when the dummy comes down.

The Auction

West opened 1♠, my partner passed and East responded 1NT, semi-forcing. Vulnerable against not, what would you do?



I bid 2♦. This bid is dangerous, but I believe it is correct. You have a nice hand for offense, and you can’t let them steal from you. (Really venturesome players might even jump to 3♦ with this hand.)

Opener and partner pass, and RHO competes to 2♠. And now?



You pass. I can’t stand to defend against two of a major, especially when the opponents have found a fit. However, I can’t see bidding again with this marginal hand. Partner is still alive, though, and when it is passed to him he comes to the rescue with 3♣. Well, not really to the rescue. This isn’t what you’d hoped for. East’s double doesn’t make it any more fun. Should you sit for it?



Hell, no! Partner couldn’t bid over 1♠, nor on the next round. How good can his clubs be? Certainly not good enough to do business in 3♣ doubled opposite your hand! When you bid 3♦, West doubles. However bad it is, this has to be better than tabling your hand in a doubled club contract; too bad that you have to play it. Oh well.

The Play

David

♠ K 8 4 2
♥ J 5 2
♦ Q
♣ K Q 8 5 2



Larry

♠ 9 6 5
♥ A 7 4
♦ K 10 9 7 5 4 2
♣ —

West	North	East	South
1♠	pass	1NT*	2♦
pass	pass	2♠	pass
pass	3♣	dbl	3♦
dbl	all pass		

The opening lead is the ♦6 and this dummy isn't easy to digest. There is something very strange. Do you see it?

What is he doing with all of those ♠s? Didn't East-West bid and raise spades? If they have an eight-card fit, why do we have more spades than they do? Hmm. This will definitely throw the LAW of Total Tricks into chaos. Poor David. He figured that I was short in spades and therefore would fit his clubs. That's why he made what looks to be a poor decision to balance over 2♠. Meanwhile, here we (you) are in this somewhat silly contract.

It looks like at least two (maybe three) spade losers, two heart losers and maybe two diamond losers. Against doubled partials, it is somewhat normal to receive a trump lead, even from the ace. So it's not a surprise when dummy's queen holds, East playing the ♦3. What should you play to Trick 2?

- a) ♠2
- b) ♥2
- c) ♣K
- d) ♣2



If the ♠A is with opener (as you suspect), you should be able to reach dummy with the ♠K. In that case, why not set up a club discard? You play the ♣K now and you aren't surprised when East produces the ♣A, which you ruff. All of a sudden, things don't look so bleak.

You suspect the $\heartsuit A$ and $\spadesuit A$ are with West, so the play to this trick makes sense. What now?

- a) $\spadesuit 5$
- b) $\heartsuit A$
- c) $\heartsuit K$
- d) $\heartsuit 10$
- e) $\heartsuit 5$



Play the $\heartsuit K$. As I've preached throughout this book, 'if there is no reason not to draw trumps, then draw trumps'. Why the $\heartsuit K$? It seems West has underled his $\heartsuit A$. What is he more likely to hold, $\heartsuit Ax$ or $\heartsuit Axx$? Not only the lead, but the bidding as well, points toward the latter.

Sure enough, West wins the $\heartsuit A$ and East pleases you by following with the $\heartsuit J$. It would have been nice to see the $\spadesuit A$ now, but West produces the $\spadesuit Q$. What card are you going to call from dummy?

David

\spadesuit K 8 4 2

\heartsuit J 5 2

\diamondsuit —

\clubsuit Q 8 5



Larry

\spadesuit 9 6 5

\heartsuit A 7 4

\diamondsuit 10 9 7 5

\clubsuit —



The $\spadesuit K$, of course. West opened the bidding and doubled you in 3 \diamondsuit . He had $\heartsuit Axx$ and no top clubs. He is a strong favorite to hold the $\spadesuit A$, so don't let him talk you out of the normal play in spades. Furthermore, you don't want a heart shift that could knock out your $\heartsuit A$ before you can make a discard on the good club in dummy.

Hallelujah! The $\spadesuit K$ wins the trick. You are in dummy to take a discard on the $\clubsuit Q$. There is one trump outstanding, but you can get to hand to draw it. Be careful not to ruff a club with a low trump in case they are somehow 6-2. You can cross to the $\heartsuit A$, but the 100% line is to ruff a club with the $\diamondsuit 9$ and then draw the last trump.

The Result

NS Vul.

			David					
♠	A Q J 10		♠	K 8 4 2		♠	7 3	
♥	Q 10 8		♥	J 5 2		♥	K 9 6 3	
♦	A 8 6		♦	Q		♦	J 3	
♣	J 10 9		♣	K Q 8 5 2		♣	A 7 6 4 3	
			<div><div></div><div>N</div><div>W</div><div>E</div><div>S</div></div>					
			Larry					
			♠	9 6 5				
			♥	A 7 4				
			♦	K 10 9 7 5 4 2				
			♣	—				

So, with this lucky lie of the cards, we scored +670 and received 51 out of 51 match-points. What was up with the East-West spade bidding?

Well, even though they were playing five-card majors, West decided to open 1♠ with his super four-card suit. It wouldn't be my style, but it's not the worst bid I've ever seen. When 2♦ came around to East, he didn't want to sell out. He chose to bid 2♠, presuming a 5-2 fit. And then the real fun began.

47. Never Give Up



Marty Bergen

This deal was written up in the New York Times in 1991. It was played by Marty Bergen during a selection process for the World Championships that year. The top teams from the USA compete in the Team Trials to decide a team (sometimes two teams) to represent the country.

Take Marty's South cards and play along.

The Auction

♠ Q 5 3 ♥ A 9 8 7 6 2 ♦ A ♣ A K 5

Not vulnerable against vulnerable opponents, you start with 1♥ and LHO passes. Your partner bids 4♣, a splinter bid. This shows at least four-card heart support and a singleton or void in clubs. Typically, the range for such a bid is roughly 10-12 HCP. With more, a splinter bid should be avoided.

What would you do?



Marty's choice was 4NT, Roman Keycard Blackwood. I suppose he could have control-bid 4♦, but for once I prefer the 'indelicate' approach. Bidding 4♦ is a sure way to invite a spade lead (the opponents will know you have diamonds controlled, and they know dummy is short in clubs).

By driving to slam (assuming partner has a keycard), you have two ways to win. For one, it could be cold on any lead. Two — even if you are off the ♠AK, you might make it anyway on a non-spade lead. Besides, for his 10-12 HCP, partner rates to have a spade card.

Why not just jump to 6♥? Because it might have no play opposite something like:

♠ K J 10 x ♥ J 10 x x ♦ K Q x x ♣ x

Using Roman Keycard Blackwood, you can make sure he has either the ♠A or the ♥K. You are playing 1430, so partner's 5♣ shows one keycard. Your bid.



I hope you just bid 6♥ and didn't do any more asking. What's the point? Why ask when you know the final contract (surely you don't care about seven off a keycard)?

Surprisingly, RHO doubles. If you want to redouble, be my guest. I'd be happy enough to make this doubled.

The Play

Larry

♠ J 10 6 2
♥ K Q J 4
♦ K J 8 3
♣ Q

Marty

♠ Q 5 3
♥ A 9 8 7 6 2
♦ A
♣ A K 5

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	4♣	pass	4NT
pass	5♣	pass	6♥
pass	pass	dbl	all pass

The opening lead is the ♦6. Bad news: you are off the ♠AK. Good news: they have led a diamond. I like partner's splinter bid (I should like it, since I was 'partner'). It is unfortunate that your side has so many wasted values. The ♣K and/or ♦K would serve you better if they could be traded for the missing ♠K.

What do you think the double was all about? Looks like the ♠AK — however, West hasn't led one. What's your plan?

- a) Strip the hand, then play a spade
- b) Give up
- c) Other



In such situations (where you need help), you should begin by stripping the hand. But if you answered (a), you'll see why you still didn't get it quite right.

You want to get rid of all the side suits. When the opponents get the lead, you want them to help you. So you want to void them of all side suits so that they might have to give you an advantageous ruff-sluff. First draw trumps. Marty played the ♥K and ♥Q throwing the ♥6 and ♥7 from hand. West showed out on the second round playing the ♣2.

Next play the ♣Q to get it out of the way. Unfortunately, your ♣AK won't provide any useful discards, but you do have to get rid of them. So you ruff a diamond to hand and cash one high club.

Larry

♠ J 10 6 2

♥ J 4

♦ K J

♣ —



Marty

♠ Q 5 3

♥ A 8 2

♦ —

♣ A K

What should you play from dummy on the top clubs?



Discard a spade, and another on the next club. The ♦J could come in handy. If either player started with ♦Qxx, the queen will fall under the king, and the jack will set up. On the third club East shows out, throwing a spade. This is an amusing development. RHO started with only two clubs, LHO with seven clubs.

Now what?

- a) ♠Q
- b) ♠3
- c) ♥A
- d) ♥8



First of all, notice that South kept ‘fluidity’ in the heart suit. It is a good practice (when you have lots of trumps) to keep low cards and high cards in both hands so that you can enter either hand at will. Secondly, you want to play a heart now to reach dummy so you can test diamonds. So play the ♥8 to the ♥J and cash the ♦K. No luck there, the ♦Q doesn’t fall (both opponents follow low).

Larry

♠ J 10

♥ 4

♦ J

♣ —



Marty

♠ Q 5

♥ A 2

♦ —

♣ —

Should you give up now? What should you play?



Lead the ♦J. You still have some arrows left in your quiver. Are you thinking you can ruff the diamond and throw them in with a spade for a ruff-sluff? Maybe one defender has a singleton spade honor and they will be stuck — that would certainly be amusing. East throws the ♠8 when you lead the ♦J. This is also amusing. Actually, it is more than amusing. You have a complete count on the hand. How can you make sure of your contract?



Throw a spade on the ♦J. Were you tempted to ruff? If so, you would no doubt play a spade next, but that wouldn’t work. If you were really a show-off, you could claim instead. By now, you know RHO’s complete shape (and LHO’s). RHO started with two hearts. He followed to only two clubs and three diamonds. Thus he started with 6-2-3-2 distribution. Subtracting from 13, that means LHO started with 0-1-5-7 shape. That’s right, LHO started with a spade void. (No wonder you didn’t get a spade lead!)

Accordingly, you know West will have to win the diamond trick and he doesn’t have any spades! Whichever minor he plays now, you will ruff in dummy and throw

your last spade from hand. You lost zero spade tricks! East is left staring at his last two cards (the ♠AK!) and not looking too pleased.

The Result

EW Vul.

Larry

♠ J 10 6 2

♥ K Q J 4

♦ K J 8 3

♣ Q

♠ —

♥ 3

♦ Q 9 7 6 5

♣ J 9 8 7 6 3 2

Marty

♠ Q 5 3

♥ A 9 8 7 6 2

♦ A

♣ A K 5

N

W E

S

♠ A K 9 8 7 4

♥ 10 5

♦ 10 4 2

♣ 10 4

It turns out that on this layout, 6♥ from your side was 100% cold; no lead could beat it. Better to be lucky than good. Another lesson is ‘never give up’. Marty gets full credit for paying attention and finding the winning line. Sometimes, experts make their own luck.

FALL NATIONALS

48. Make Them Pay

This is one of those painful deals that will haunt me forever. It comes from the 2002 Life Master Open Pairs in Phoenix. I screwed it up, and it cost us first place (we finished second). I was playing with my good friend, Steve Weinstein. I invite you to take my South cards and see if you can make the right decisions to win the event. This deal would have done it!

The Auction

♠ 10 ♥ 10 6 2 ♦ A 3 2 ♣ A K 10 8 7 4

Vulnerable against not, my partner passes and RHO opens 1♥. What do you bid?



I'm normally a bit of a chicken at these colors, but this is a good six-card suit and an opening bid, so you should bid 2♣. Passing is not the way to win at matchpoints. My regular partner (David Berkowitz) might have passed with this hand; he is a big believer that holding three small (or 10xx or Jxx) in RHO's opened suit is a serious negative (it surely is), and it tends to make him cautious. Well, I wasn't playing with him, so I figured nobody would complain if I made the red-blooded (and red) overcall.

LHO makes a negative double and partner passes promptly. Meanwhile, RHO, a rather elderly lady, is thinking for a long time and surprises you by passing! Are you going anywhere? Well, where can you go? This is it, for better or for worse (just like a marriage).

The Play

Steve Weinstein

♠ J 9 4 3
♥ J 9 7
♦ K 10 9 5
♣ 5 2



Larry

♠ 10
♥ 10 6 2
♦ A 3 2
♣ A K 10 8 7 4

West	North	East	South
	pass	1♥	2♣
dbl	all pass		

LHO leads the ♥8 and a not-so-bad dummy comes down. A bad partner would have a club singleton, or worse, a void. Furthermore, this dummy has some help in diamonds and not too much wasted in spades.

East plays the ♥Q and as is my style (I don't always play honest cards) I played the ♥6. Sometimes there is a method to this falsecarding, but here it isn't likely to make any difference. East takes the top three hearts, West discarding the ♠6 on the third round.

While they are taking the first three heart tricks, what should you think is going on here? East started with five decent hearts and presumably neither four spades nor four diamonds (or she would have taken out the negative double into one of those suits).

Now she lays down the ♠A (that's thirteen prime HCP so far) and she continues with another spade, which you ruff as West follows. Even if RHO has ♣QJ9x, you can't pick them up by crossing to dummy just one time, so to start, you lay down a top club. Nothing spectacular happens as they both follow low.

Steve Weinstein

♠ J 9
♥ —
♦ K 10 9 5
♣ 5



Larry

♠ —
♥ —
♦ A 3 2
♣ K 10 8 7

What should you play next?

- a) ♦A
- b) ♦2
- c) ♣K
- d) ♣7



The winner this time is the ♣7. I hope not too many of you found this difficult play — you wouldn't want to make the author look bad, would you? I wish I had found this (correct) play at the table. Winning an event is better than finishing second! To see why a low club was right, let's first duplicate what I did at the table, the wrong play of the second top trump.

To my surprise, both opponents followed to this trick (LHO played the queen, RHO played low). Yes, I was pleased to see the 3-2 break, but I had failed to take advantage. I had lost the first four tricks and still had a trump to lose. Barring a diamond miracle, my only chance now was a spade-diamond squeeze. This could work only if LHO had to protect both suits. For the squeeze to operate, I first had to rectify the count and lose the fifth trick. So I played another trump to East and she exited with a heart, which I ruffed.

Steve Weinstein		
♠ J		
♥ —		
♦ K 10 9		
♣ —		
♠ K		♠ Q
♥ —		♥ 5
♦ J 8 7		♦ Q 6
♣ —		♣ —
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	
Larry		
♠ —		
♥ —		
♦ A 3 2		
♣ 10		

But as you can see, there was no squeeze. When I led my last trump, West protected diamonds and East could (and did) keep her ♠Q. I lost a diamond trick at the end for down one. Down one (–200) was a bottom. Most of the East-West field was in 4♠ going down (although 3NT can make).

Let's go back to that critical point again where I went wrong. The defense started with three top hearts, the ♠A and another spade, which I ruffed. Now I played the ♣A, and that left the following position:

Steve Weinstein

♠ J 9
 ♥ —
 ♦ K 10 9 5
 ♣ 5

♠ K 8
 ♥ —
 ♦ J 8 7 4
 ♣ Q



♠ Q
 ♥ 5 3
 ♦ Q 6
 ♣ J 9

Larry

♠ —
 ♥ —
 ♦ A 3 2
 ♣ K 10 8 7

It was okay to lay down one top club. But this was the position where I (and you) had the chance to be a hero. You and I should have played a low club. If East had all three of the remaining clubs, nothing would have mattered. If clubs were originally 3-2, surely East had three (nobody would leave in a takeout double with a doubleton).

If West's doubleton trump did not include the ♣Q then nothing would have mattered. East would now be on lead (she could overtake the ♣J) and could exit safely with a club or a heart. Down one you'd go. However, if West was dealt the ♣Q doubleton, and he actually was, success was right around the corner. After West wins the next trick with the ♣Q, what is he to do? The sad fact (for him) is that he is on his way to -180 for 2♣ doubled and making.

If he plays a low diamond, you have no diamond loser. (Dummy's ♦10 forces East's ♦Q, and then you have a finesse set up against West's ♦J.)

If he breaks diamonds with the unlikely ♦J, it's possible you would go wrong, but who makes such plays? So West would likely not play diamonds at all. He'd exit in spades (low, of course) and you would ruff. But do you see what has happened? As they say in the business, West has 'isolated the menace'. Now West will get squeezed in spades and diamonds.

You cash the ♣K, arriving at this position:

Steve Weinstein

♠ J
♥ —
♦ K 10 9
♣ —

♠ K
♥ —
♦ J 8 7
♣ —

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ —
♥ 5 3
♦ Q 6
♣ —

Larry

♠ —
♥ —
♦ A 3 2
♣ 10

East no longer has spades guarded. She never had diamonds guarded. Now, when you play your last trump, West is finished. He can't throw a spade, because that sets up dummy's ♠J. But a diamond discard sets up the last three tricks in diamonds for the good guys.

So the key to making this contract was to avoid a diamond loser. You always had to lose four top tricks in the majors and a trump trick. By making the crafty play in clubs at the key moment, you forced West to help you set up the squeeze. West had to exit in spades, and that took away East's ability to guard spades in the ending.

By misplaying it (as I did), you let East retain her spade guard, and the contract goes down one. The defense can always prevail, of course, if East doesn't start you on your way to success. If she stays off spades and just exits in clubs (after taking the top hearts), you will never be able to set up a squeeze.

The Result

East really did me in with her pass of the negative double. In retrospect, maybe it wasn't such a bad call. However, I should have made her pay for it.

NS Vul.

Steve Weinstein

♠ J 9 4 3
♥ J 9 7
♦ K 10 9 5
♣ 5 2

♠ K 8 6 5 2
♥ 8 4
♦ J 8 7 4
♣ Q 6



♠ A Q 7
♥ A K Q 5 3
♦ Q 6
♣ J 9 3

Larry

♠ 10
♥ 10 6 2
♦ A 3 2
♣ A K 10 8 7 4

49. This Game Is Too Tough



Ron Gerard and Larry Cohen

This deal comes from a special event in my career. I was twenty-two years old and playing in the prestigious Blue Ribbon Pairs. This six-session National Championship Pairs event is held once a year and is open only to players who have finished first or second overall in events at Regionals. (There are a few other ways to qualify.) This deal is from the 1981 event held in San Francisco.

This was before it was popular for the top experts to play with paying clients. Meckstroth played with Rodwell (and finished third overall). Martel played with Stansby (and finished second overall). It was indeed an honor and unforgettable experience to finish first overall with my partner at the time, Ron Gerard. He held the South cards with both vulnerable; see if you can duplicate his actions.

The Auction

♠ K Q 9 7 ♥ 5 ♦ A 9 2 ♣ A K 10 8 5

The dealer on your right opens with a weak 2♥ bid. The start is easy: you make a takeout double. West raises to 4♥, passed back to you.

And now?



You have enough to double again. This is not a penalty double, it just shows ‘extras’. You would have doubled 2♥ with the same hand if the diamonds were ♦1092. You have an ace more than that, so it is worth another double. Could it work out badly? Sure. However, you should take your chances that you can beat them (if partner passes), make something (if partner pulls) or find a good save (if partner pulls and they were making it).

Partner pulls to 4NT. What’s that?

Expert bidding often uses a 2NT or 4NT bid as takeout, and this is one of those instances. Partner can't want to play in 4NT (if his hearts were good enough to do that he would have just passed the double). It can't be Blackwood (logic of the auction). Most of the time, when a double at the four-level is pulled to 4NT, the 4NT is intended for takeout. In this case, partner is asking you to choose a minor. And what should you do?



Your call is 5♣. You choose clubs, of course, but it would be greedy (and quite an overbid) to bid 6♣. Everyone passes. This leads you to believe that West wasn't bidding 4♥ to make, but was probably just following the LAW. If he had lots of high cards, he probably would have doubled you.

The Play

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

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

West	North	East	South
		2♥	dbl
4♥	pass	pass	dbl
pass	4NT	pass	5♣
all pass			

West leads the ♥J, and you buy a reasonable dummy. At suit contracts, you should count losers. You have to lose one spade for sure, and probably two diamonds.

Can you do anything about the diamonds? Maybe. It is possible that the spades will provide discards. But you would need to get rid of two diamonds from dummy to show any gain. Also you have to decide if you should go all out to make the contract, or play it safe for down one. Which should it be?



You have to ask yourself what will be happening at other tables. Some will certainly defend against 4♥. I'd expect to defeat 4♥, but that doesn't matter. If you make 5♣,

great. If you go down one or two it won't make any difference against all the North-South pairs that are on defense. Whether you are -100 or -200, your score will be worth the same number of matchpoints when compared to the pairs that defended (and went -620, -790, +100, +200, +500, etc.). Some other North-South pairs will be in 5♣, yes, but again, the difference between down one and down two isn't likely to be huge.

In any event, you will surely win the ♥A, and then you can play the ♠10 from dummy. There is no need to draw trumps yet; the opponents aren't likely to get a ruff and you may need your trumps for entries later on. East plays the ♠3.

What will you play: the ♠K or the ♠7?



Play the ♠7. This isn't 100% clear: it does risk down two. If West wins this trick with the ♠J, he might switch to diamonds and set up four defensive tricks. However, if East has the ♠J, you can make the contract by letting the ♠10 run, and that is what Ron Gerard did. West won the ♠A, and the rest was easy.

Ron was able to draw trumps, repeat the spade finesse, and throw two diamonds from dummy. For +600 Ron got a near top, and I'm sure you did too. (Applause from the kibitzers.)

But hold everything a moment. This was the Blue Ribbon Pairs. It was the final day, no less, when the field had been cut to the cream of the crop. When Ron played dummy's ♠10, East probably should have covered. You know, 'Cover an honor with an honor!' So let's see what would have happened with the proper defense. Back to Trick 3, but this time East covers the ♠10 with the ♠J.

You play the ♠K and West wins (more on that later). After winning the ♠A, West forces you with a heart. The time has come to draw trumps. Clubs split 2-1 and trumps are drawn using the expert technique of keeping multiple entries to each hand in the trump suit (for example playing the ♣10 to the ♣Q).

♠	5
♥	—
♦	10 7 4 3
♣	J 7 3
	<div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100px; height: 15px; margin: 2px 0;"></div>
♠	Q 9 7
♥	—
♦	A 9 2
♣	8 5

What is your next card from dummy?



Play the ♦3. This was a tough one! Remember that the ♠10 was covered by the ♣J and the ♠A. The ♠8 has become an important missing card. If East has the ♠8, you can either hope it drops or finesse the ♣7. In that case, you would make your contract by discarding two diamond losers from dummy on the spades.

On the other hand, if you were to finesse in spades and it lost to the ♠8, you'd be going down (you still have a diamond to lose). And if you played spades from the top and the ♠8 didn't fall, you'd still be a trick short (unless a squeeze developed, but we are about to discuss that).

However, before doing anything with the spades, it can't hurt to play diamonds. When you play the ♦3, East plays the ♦8; which diamond should you play from your hand?

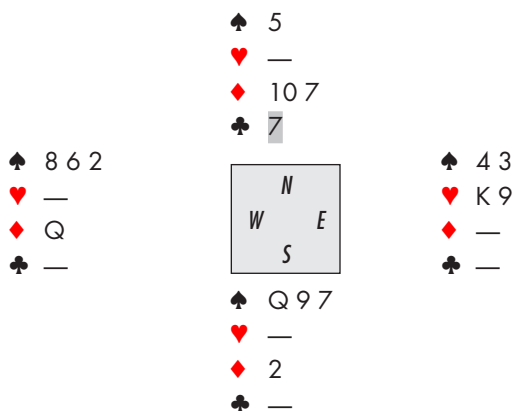
- a) ♦A
- b) ♦9
- c) ♦2



Play the ♦9. You have to lose at least one diamond trick no matter what, and it is best to lose it now. Proper technique is to lose early the tricks that you'll eventually lose anyway. You obviously couldn't win the ♦A and then give up a diamond; they'd take two diamond tricks to beat you! By giving them their diamond trick now, you have strengthened your position. For one thing, West might have a problem here. If he exited in hearts (giving you a ruff-sluff) or spades (giving you a free finesse for the ♠8), you'd have a claim for the rest. If he started with, say, ♦KJxx, he might have been worried that a diamond play was into your ♦AQ — and he might have led away from the ♠8 hoping his partner had some kind of spade help (like the ♠7 or ♠9).

In fact West wins the ♦J and returns the ♦5; you play the ♦4 and East plays the ♦K. So West hasn't helped you. This diamond play doesn't give you anything you weren't entitled to. However, you still have a good thing going. You have driven out a diamond honor from each opponent. Only one opponent can now protect diamonds. How can you capitalize?

You have rectified the count by losing the diamond trick. When you run your trumps, you can expect good things to happen. You lead the ♣8 and both defenders throw hearts. When you lead the ♣5 to dummy, West throws the ♦6 and East a heart. Now play the last club from dummy, throwing a diamond from hand. Do you get the feeling that West is in trouble? Let's take a look.



West has an impossible discard to make. Whatever he throws gives you your eleventh trick. If you hadn't ducked the diamond, this squeeze wouldn't have worked. Let's say that, instead, you made the error of running the trumps. The opponents won't come under pressure. West can throw away a diamond without difficulty. There is no way to succeed. Go back to the start and try it for yourself

So Ron's contract was always cold? Not quite. Let's review. They led a heart against 5♣. The contract seemed to need a favorable spade lie. If the ♠J8 were both onside, you could always make it. On the actual spade layout, when you led dummy's ♠10, East should have covered. You saw that when West took his ♠A, he couldn't play more spades, but he exited safely. You were able to draw trumps, duck a diamond to him and squeeze him for your contract. However, if you think this hand should always make, think again. In fact the defense can always prevail. Not only must East cover the ♠10 with the ♠J, but West must duck! Now the squeeze doesn't work because you don't have the communication you need in the spade suit.

Yes, this can indeed be a tough game at times.

The Result

Both Vul.

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

If West ducks that first spade, he now has the timing to foil any squeeze attempts by declarer. The positioning and timing just won't work. Try it yourself. When East didn't cover the ♠10, it was easy. Gerard made eleven tricks for +600 and a near top. This was one of the key deals in the final that led to our victory.

50. A Game of Logic

This deal also comes from the Fall Nationals in San Francisco, but fifteen years later in 1996. The ACBL rotates the three National tournaments. Each year there is usually one in the east, one in the west and one in central North America. Popular sites such as Las Vegas and Toronto see action more often than others.

This was a rare occasion when my regular partner, David Berkowitz, was unavailable, so I was playing with my friend Jerry Sosler, one of the best vascular surgeons in the country. I invite you to hold my hand (the South cards, that is!) with both sides vulnerable.

The Auction

♠ K 9 4 ♥ Q 9 6 2 ♦ A 10 ♣ K 10 7 4

This was matchpoints, the two-day Life Master Open Pairs. Partner opened 1♣ (Standard) and RHO overcalled 1♦. How should I start?



Bid 1♥. A negative double in this exact auction should promise at least 4-4 in the majors. With only one four-card major, you should not double.

LHO now doubles. They are playing an animal called Snapdragon, wherein this double shows five-plus spades and diamond ‘support’. The ‘support’ might be only two cards, but could be longer. Partner raises to 2♥. Since we are playing support redoubles (and therefore he would have redoubled with only three hearts), this promises four-card support.

What now?



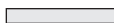
Bid 4♥. You jump to game for several reasons:

- 1) With your good club fit, you should upgrade your hand.
- 2) Even though you have only 12 HCP (and partner might be a little light), it is a great twelve: good prime cards and two tens.
- 3) You are playing it 😊

The Play

Sosler

♠ A 5 2
♥ A J 7 4
♦ Q 9
♣ Q 6 5 2



Larry

♠ K 9 4
♥ Q 9 6 2
♦ A 10
♣ K 10 7 4

West	North	East	South
	1♣	1♦	1♥
dbl*	2♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

West leads the ♠Q. The dummy is blinding. I say that because you can be blinded by looking into a mirror, and when both hands have identical shape, it is referred to as ‘mirror distribution’. This is not a good thing.

Barring a heart miracle (a doubleton ♥K inside), you seem to have at least one sure loser in every suit. On a bad day you could lose two trump tricks and/or two club tricks. On your worst day, you could even lose three club tricks.

How should you begin?



Your initial plan is to draw trumps. You don’t want the defense to get a club ruff, and I see no reason to postpone the trump drawing. Since you want to start the trumps from hand, that’s where you should win the first trick with the ♠K.

How should you start the trumps?

- a) ♥Q
- b) ♥2



The ♥2. Leading the queen and hoping they won’t cover would work only against beginners. Here you should take your legitimate chance of a singleton or doubleton ♥K on your left.

East wins your ♥J with the ♥K and returns the ♠10 which you win in dummy. Ah well, so much for that chance. Things aren’t going so well. Aren’t you glad I talked you into bidding 4♥? Things are getting desperate. What now?



As planned, you continue working on the trumps. You lead the ♥A so that if West shows out, you can still pick up the suit. (If they both follow, any heart would have sufficed.) West does show out, throwing a spade (the ♠6). Things keep getting worse.

Sosler

♠ 5
♥ 7 4
♦ Q 9
♣ Q 6 5 2



Larry

♠ 9
♥ Q 9
♦ A 10
♣ K 10 7 4

Can you attach any significance to the spade discard? Usually, players tend to discard first from their five-card suits. Here, with West showing five spades in the auction, you already suspected the suit was breaking 5-2. So what now?



Lead the ♣2 from dummy. This was a real tough one! After I explain it, I hope you'll agree it's the right play. And it is what I did at the table.

You know from the bidding that East has at least five diamonds. He has also shown up with four hearts and two spades so far. He has at most a doubleton club. You can also assign East the ♣A and ♦K for his vulnerable overcall. So you expect that East started with either ♣Ax or the singleton ♣A. When you play the ♣2 from dummy East follows with the ♣9, so it is not a singleton ♣A. Are you with me?

What card do you play?

- a) ♣ K
- b) ♣ 10



You expect that East started with ♣Ax at this point and that West started with ♣Jxx so you play the ♣K. As expected, West doesn't have the ♣A — he produces the ♣3.

Now what?



Now you are ready to do some business with East. You play the ♣7 from hand and retain the ♣4. If you can see why, I congratulate you. If not, I will explain it in a few tricks when it will be clearer. If you're with me, this one is easy — you play a small club from dummy. As planned, you are playing for East's ♣A to fall on this trick (on air).

And it does!

Now you can see not only why you played clubs this way, but also why you didn't have to finish drawing trumps first. For one thing, had you finished trumps a few tricks ago, you would have ended in the wrong hand to start the clubs.

Meanwhile, East will have to play trumps for you (you think). You expect him to be out of spades, and you also expect he has the ♦K which he can't lead from. Sure enough, he plays a heart. Isn't bridge fun when you can 'see' all fifty-two cards?

Sosler

♠ 5

♥ 7 4

♦ Q 9

♣ Q 6



Larry

♠ 9

♥ Q 9

♦ A 10

♣ 7 4

It is like pulling strings on a puppet at this stage as you know that East started with something like:

♠ 10 x ♥ K 10 x x ♦ K x x x x ♣ A x

(he may or may not have the ♦J). This should be getting easier now. Do you play the ♥Q or the ♥9?



That was too easy. Of course, you take the marked finesse. I'll help you out here, by drawing the last trump without any quizzes. Let's take stock. You have lost two tricks, and have to lose a spade trick. Can you avoid a diamond loser?

Sosler

♠ 5

♥ —

♦ Q 9

♣ Q 6

Larry

♠ 9

♥ —

♦ A 10

♣ 10 4

You can if West started with the ♦J. If East started with both the ♦K and ♦J, you have no chance. Can you envision it? Let's say you play your two club winners. What will West keep as his last three cards?

West has to keep the ♦J guarded so he will keep ♦Jx as two of his cards. His other card has to be the high spade, so you can throw him in and force him to break diamonds. With West leading away from his ♦J, you will easily avoid a diamond loser.

Can anything go wrong? What if West keeps two spade winners and bares his ♦J in the three-card ending? Then you can't throw him in, because he would cash two good spades. However, you have an answer for that. Now you will see why you were careful to get rid of the ♣7 a few tricks ago.

You get the ♣10 out of your hand (collecting the ♣J) as you cross to dummy with the ♣Q. Now you can cash the ♣6 and the lead is still in dummy. Let's have a look at West's last four cards, as he is about to play.

♠ J 7

♥ —

♦ J 8

♣ —



If he throws a spade, you toss him in and he has to lead diamonds: whichever diamond he plays, you get two diamond tricks. If he keeps both spades, you can't throw him in, but you are in dummy to lead the ♦Q and take two diamond tricks on power.

The Result

Both Vul.

	Sosler	
	♠ A 5 2	
	♥ A J 7 4	
	♦ Q 9	
	♣ Q 6 5 2	
♠ Q J 7 6 3	<div> <div>N</div> <div>W E</div> <div>S</div> </div>	♠ 10 8
♥ 3		♥ K 10 8 5
♦ J 8 7 5		♦ K 6 4 3 2
♣ J 8 3		♣ A 9
	Larry	
	♠ K 9 4	
	♥ Q 9 6 2	
	♦ A 10	
	♣ K 10 7 4	

I played it this way at the table and was pleased to get a top board for +620. Most North-South pairs were down two or even three tricks. In retrospect, maybe I got a little lucky. Some players wouldn't overcall 1♦ with the East hand, so other declarers weren't able to draw all the same inferences.

I particularly enjoy this kind of deal. It doesn't fit any particular theme, it just shows how bridge is a game of constant logic and concentration. 'If A, then B. If B, then not C. If not C, then we have to do D...'

51. Not Dead Yet

This deal is from the 1985 Fall Nationals in Winnipeg, Canada. While Las Vegas and Toronto are the garden spots for Nationals, Winnipeg in November... well, I'll just say that it was cold. (I don't want to lose all my readers from Manitoba.)

Our team finished the prestigious Reisinger Teams tied for first place and won in a playoff. This was one of the key deals.

The Auction

♠ A Q 4 ♥ A K 9 8 7 3 ♦ 6 5 2 ♣ Q

You deal and open 1♥, both sides vulnerable. LHO bids 2♥, Michaels, showing spades and a minor. Your partner, Marty Bergen, jumps to 4♥. Unfortunately, RHO bids 4♠.

I could put in a bidding quiz here, but I don't think there is a clear right answer. The Reisinger is scored Board-A-Match. You either win, tie, or lose on each board depending on what the score is at your teammates' table. I decided that we probably would have a chance to make 5♥, so I bid it. RHO doubled, and everyone passed.

The Play

Marty Bergen

♠ 2
♥ Q J 5 4
♦ A 8 7 3
♣ J 5 4 3



Larry

♠ A Q 4
♥ A K 9 8 7 3
♦ 6 5 2
♣ Q

West	North	East	South
			1♥
2♥	4♥	4♠	5♥
pass	pass	dbl	all pass

West leads the ♠6, third and fifth best. Dummy is so-so, with one major problem: you seem to have one loser too many. It looks like two diamonds and a club to lose.

What is the overall plan?

- a) Strip the hand and throw them in
- b) Play clubs early



Stripping the hand isn't likely to do any good. Somebody should be able to arrange to get in and play diamonds with decisive effect. Dummy's clubs, however, offer an outside chance to get rid of a diamond loser from your hand. What should you play?

- a) ♥9
- b) ♣Q



Playing the ♣Q from hand won't work. How do you think the top club honors are sitting? If West has the ♣AK, surely he would have led a club. So East must have at least one top club honor.

You suspect West's minor is clubs (if it is diamonds, he would have led one, unless he started with exactly ♦KJ1094). He rates to be at least 5-5 in the black suits. That means East has at most three clubs and if he happens to have ♣AKx, you are in great shape (by ruffing, you can set up the jack). Even if East has only one of the top clubs, you have a good chance to pull off a swindle. You crossed to dummy so that you could start clubs in such a way as to make it necessary for East to play second hand high. If East started with ♣Axx or ♣Kxx, he might not realize the necessity of rising.

Everyone follows when you play a heart to the ♥Q. You lead the ♣3 from dummy, East plays the ♣2, and West wins the ♣A. This looks great. West switches to the ♦Q, and you play...?

- a) ♦A
- b) ♦3



Win the ♦A. Ducking could be fatal if West started with two hearts and one diamond (East would overtake and give his partner a diamond ruff for down one).

Marty Bergen

♠ —

♥ J 5 4

♦ 8 7 3

♣ J 5 4

**Larry**

♠ A 4

♥ A K 8 7 3

♦ 6 5

♣ —

What next?

- a) ♥J
- b) ♥4
- c) ♣4



Play the ♣4 and ruff it high in hand. You want to keep dummy's hearts as entries. Meanwhile, you want to see if the ♣J will set up. Everyone follows to this trick, so you draw the last trump while crossing back to dummy. You play another low club with high hopes.

Even if East doesn't produce the hoped-for ♣K, note that you are not quite dead yet. You'd ruff the club, take the ♠A, eliminate the spades and play dummy's last club, throwing a diamond. If West is now out of diamonds, he has to give you a ruff-sluff for your contract. However, that would mean West started with a singleton diamond which he might have selected as his opening lead way back at Trick 1.

Anyway, this scenario never comes to pass. When you play the third round of clubs, the ♣K appears from East. You can ruff a spade in dummy and throw a diamond loser on the good ♣J.

The Result

Both Vul.

Marty Bergen

♠ 2
♥ Q J 5 4
♦ A 8 7 3
♣ J 5 4 3

♠ K J 8 7 6
♥ 2
♦ Q 9
♣ A 10 8 7 6



♠ 10 9 5 3
♥ 10 6
♦ K J 10 4
♣ K 9 2

Larry

♠ A Q 4
♥ A K 9 8 7 3
♦ 6 5 2
♣ Q

A score of +850 is an easy win on the deal. At the other table, South played in 4♥ undoubled. Declarer also attempted the club swindle, but when he led a club from dummy, my teammate in the East seat, Jeff Meckstroth, went up with the ♣K at the key moment. This prevented South from setting up the clubs, and he made only ten tricks. If my East opponent had made Meckstroth's alert play, we would have been -200 and would have lost the board.



Jeff Meckstroth

PLEASANT DREAMS

52. The One that Might Have Been

♠ K 10 6 5 4 2 ♥ 5 ♦ 9 2 ♣ Q J 7 5

I held these South cards in 2003 in a Regional knockout event in Wilmington, Delaware. Play this hand with me.

The Auction

You deal with both vulnerable. Your choice?



I opened 2♠. Should you open this hand with a weak two-bid? It's basically a matter of style. A sound preemptor would pass, while an aggressive preemptor would routinely open. If the spade spots were a little better, I'd have no qualms at all. The 6-4 shape and the fact that all the points are in the long suits would get me to overlook the poor spade suit and open 2♠.

Your partner (David Berkowitz) bids 2NT to ask for a feature. Should you show one?



A feature is normally an ace or a king, occasionally the queen. In any event, with a minimum hand, you should never show a feature (even if you have one). You rebid 3♠ and partner bids 3NT. Now what?



Bidding 2NT followed by 3NT offers you a choice of games. If partner was sure he wanted to play 3NT he would have jumped there directly over 2♠. With your 6-4 shape, it's probably best to play in a suit — besides, this is your last chance to shine, Deal 52 in the book. So you correct to 4♠, the final contract.

The Play

David

♠ A 9
♥ K 4 3 2
♦ A J 8 6
♣ K 6 4



Larry

♠ K 10 6 5 4 2
♥ 5
♦ 9 2
♣ Q J 7 5

West	North	East	South
			2♠
pass	2NT*	pass	3♠
pass	3NT	pass	4♠
all pass			

West leads the ♦K, and dummy is a disappointment. Partner must have expected a little more for your vulnerable preempt. What is your plan?

It looks as if you have losers in all four suits. Without this diamond lead, you could have hoped to build a discard for a losing diamond by playing hearts and finding West with the ace. Now you have to try the opposite tack: maybe you can throw your heart on the diamonds.

So you start by playing... which diamond from dummy?

- a) ♦A
- b) ♦6



The ♦6 — playing the ♦9 from hand when East plays the ♦3. Your best chance is to duck the first trick and hope West won't find a heart shift. Then you could cross to your ♠K and lead another diamond with high hopes. (You withhold your ♦2 so that maybe West will think East's ♦3 is encouraging from ♦32.) No such luck! West shifts to the ♥Q at Trick 2. Is it over?



Not quite — you're going to lose a trick in each side suit, so your only chance is a trump miracle. Which miracle?

A singleton honor with West is no good. That would leave East with ♠J873 or ♠Q873 and he would have a sure trump trick (he covers the ♠9). Your obvious legitimate hope is that one defender has the doubleton ♠QJ. Rather than relying on that long shot, is there anything else?

Yes, there is! Suppose you can arrange to be in dummy in this three-card ending.

			David		
			♠	A 9	
			♥	—	
			♦	8	
			♣	—	
♠	Q 7		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> N W E S </div>		
♥	—				
♦	Q				
♣	—				
			Larry		
			♠	K 10 6	
			♥	—	
			♦	—	
			♣	—	

Trumps have not been touched. If East's last three cards are ♠Jxx or ♠Qxx, you will take the rest. You lead dummy's diamond (West's last three cards are a diamond and a doubleton trump honor). If East ruffs low, you overruff and have the high trumps. If he ruffs high, you overruff and finesse against West's honor. This ending is called a Devil's Coup and it sure would be fun to bring one off. Can you do it here?

David	
♠	A 9
♥	K 4 3 2
♦	A J 8
♣	K 6 4
<div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 15px; width: 100px;"></div>	
Larry	
♠	K 10 6 5 4 2
♥	5
♦	2
♣	Q J 7 5

Well, why not try? Back to Trick 2, you will need to score some ruffs in your hand. This is where you were before my daydream. You may need a little help from the defense and the best way to tempt them is to cover West's ♥Q at Trick 2 with dummy's king.

Sure enough, East takes the ace and plays another heart, which you ruff.

Now what? You'll need clubs 3-3 and you'd like to use dummy's ♣K as an entry. So you lay down the ♣Q, tempting the defense to take the ace. RHO cooperates by taking his ace. He continues to help you by playing another heart, forcing you again. Defenders are trained to tap declarer, since usually this defense can't hurt.

They are falling into your trap. You cash two more clubs, ending in dummy as everyone follows.

David

♠ A 9

♥ 4

♦ A J 8

♣ —



Larry

♠ K 10 6 5

♥ —

♦ 2

♣ 7

Your heart starts to beat faster as you play dummy's last heart and everyone follows as you ruff. Could it be happening? You still have a little club in your hand, but that's no problem. Because your plan is to play... what next?

- a) ♠6
- b) ♦2
- c) ♣7



You play a diamond to dummy's jack and it holds. You cash dummy's ♦A and everyone follows as you throw your club. Not only that, but LHO forgets to make a mandatory falsecard ("play the card you are known to hold"). He follows low on the diamond and you know he still has the ♦Q.

You have reached the desired ending! This was your plan from way back at Trick 2. You triumphantly lead dummy's low diamond.

East ruffs with the ♠8, you overruff with the ♠10 and claim the last two tricks with the ♠AK. Your trump loser has vanished into thin air! This is exactly what happened to me in Delaware and +620 won our side 10 IMPs.

The Result

Both Vul.

		David			
		♠ A 9			
		♥ K 4 3 2			
		♦ A J 8 6			
		♣ K 6 4			
		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> NE</div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; width: 100%;"> WS</div> </div>			
		Larry			
		♠ K 10 6 5 4 2		♠ 8 7 3	
		♥ 5		♥ A 10 9 8	
		♦ 9 2		♦ 5 4 3	
		♣ Q J 7 5		♣ A 9 8	

Okay, now for the sad truth. The play went exactly as I described. But in the Real Deal, West's spades were not quite as shown before. In fact, West started with the ♠QJ doubleton and East's spades were ♠873. Any old line of play would avoid a trump loser and gain your side 10 IMPs. The Devil's Coup wasn't needed! The Great Shuffler in the sky was just teasing us all.

So early in my career ([see Deal 1](#)) I had the unique opportunity to open 5♠. More than twenty years later (here on Deal 52) I thought I had my first Devil's Coup. Perhaps I will have to wait twenty more years for that. If all goes well, please look for my next Favorite 52 sometime around the year 2029.

53. The Deal that Never Was

I didn't think I could really call this deal one of my favorite 52. So here I am calling it Deal 53, and it will be my parting shot. (We're already well over 52 deals anyway!) I was playing in the 1994 World Championship in Albuquerque, New Mexico. This was the first deal of our first match of the event. I was playing with David on a team captained by Rita Shugart, and we were facing a team from Ecuador, hardly a bridge powerhouse.

The Auction

♠ K Q 6 5 ♥ A ♦ 10 9 6 4 2 ♣ Q 9 5

I held these cards as East; North dealt and opened 4♥. I'd need a bit more strength to make a takeout double at this high level, so I passed. Ecuadorian *numero duo* bid 4NT, Roman Keycard Blackwood, and North responded 5♣. They were playing this response to show zero or three keycards. Would you expect that zero or three is the more likely number for a vulnerable 4♥ bidder? I'd have thought one or two would be the normal number. Zero is not enough and three seems like too many.

South now bid 5NT. This was strange. Usually a 5NT bid guarantees all the keycards and is used by a player looking for a grand slam. Since I was looking at the ♥A, I didn't understand how LHO could be bidding this way. RHO responded 6♦. This pair was playing 'specific kings'. Accordingly, this response showed the ♦K. LHO now bid 7♥! I'm told I use too many exclamation points in my writing, but I hope this one is warranted. That's the ♥A in my hand. Here I was, Board 1 of the World Championships and my opponents were in 7♥. Then David, my partner, doubled! South thought this over and ran to 7NT. David doubled again. Everyone passed (I wasn't really expecting anyone to redouble).

The Play

Ecuadorian Uno

♠ 8
♥ Q J 10 9 8 7 6 4 3
♦ K
♣ 7



Larry

♠ K Q 6 5
♥ A
♦ 10 9 6 4 2
♣ Q 9 5

West	North	East	South
	4♥	pass	4NT
pass	5♣	pass	5NT
pass	6♦	pass	7♥
dbl	pass	pass	7NT
dbl	all pass		

David led the ♠A and down came the dummy. In real life the hearts were thrown onto the table in a tumble. We took the first eight tricks for down eight and +2300.

The Result

Both Vul.

Ecuadorian Uno

♠ 8
♥ Q J 10 9 8 7 6 4 3
♦ K
♣ 7



Larry

♠ K Q 6 5
♥ A
♦ 10 9 6 4 2
♣ Q 9 5

David

♠ A J 10 7 3 2
♥ K 2
♦ 7
♣ 10 8 4 2

Ecuadorian Dos

♠ 9 4
♥ 5
♦ A Q J 8 5 3
♣ A K J 6 3

There was a lot of heated discussion going on in Spanish. All I understood was something like ‘*Tu esta bruto*’. So what had gone wrong? South couldn’t imagine a vulnerable preempt with zero keycards. He assumed three keycards for the 5♣ response. When he found about the ♦K as well, he bid the grand slam. As you can see, North had zero keycards but thought his long suit was good enough to open 4♥.

We played a few more deals and then the caddy came to take the boards over to be played at our teammates' table.

I watched to make sure this one was properly delivered. I didn't want anything to go wrong. Nevertheless, it appeared that something went wrong. A few moments later, the director came to our table with this board in his hand. 'This deal has twelve cards in North and fourteen cards in South,' he informed us. He was right. We had played the deal as shown. I had thirteen cards and David had thirteen cards (we always count) but North had only twelve. Count them. And South had fourteen. Why didn't we notice? Well, when dummy came down, there was lots of chaos (yelling). The hearts were thrown all over the table and nobody bothered actually counting them. We cashed our eight tricks and declarer threw it in for down eight. Nobody noticed.

So what's the ruling? The deal is cancelled completely. It didn't count (just like [Deal 38](#)). Why do these things always happen to me? We had to shuffle them up and deal them out again. On the redeal (I don't have a record of the exact hands), our opponents bid and made 2♠ for +110.

This one was gone forever.

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ONE of the most successful American bridge players of the last 20 years, Larry Cohen, presents a collection of his favorite personal bridge moments. Using an intimate ‘over-the-shoulder’ presentation, Cohen takes readers through more than 60 deals (no, not just 52!) – deals that are important to him in some way, or technically interesting, or just plain fun. The book’s interactive style allows readers to follow the bidding and play, and even to make their own decisions at key points. Cohen discusses the pros and cons of different options at each critical moment, explaining the reasons for his own choice and why the winning action is also the correct one. Read this book for fun, or study it in depth and learn from it – whichever you choose to do, you will find it hard to put down.

My Favorite 52 was originally published as interactive software, and won the American Bridge Teachers Association ‘Software of the Year’ award in 2005. This is its first publication in book form.

LARRY COHEN (Boca Raton, Florida) won his first National Championship at age 22 and went on to collect 25 more titles before retiring from competition in 2009. Director of the prestigious *Bridge World* Master Solvers’ Club and a frequent contributor to bridge magazines around the world, he is a popular bridge lecturer on land and at sea. His book *To Bid or Not To Bid: the Law of Total Tricks* is one of the all-time best sellers on the game. Aside from bridge, his passions are playing golf and watching sports, especially his beloved Yankees.

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