

HOW WOULD YOU PLAY (4)

You are playing Pairs and end up in 4♥, South, on these hands (no opposition bidding). How would you go about the play on the lead of the ♦K?

♠ A J 9 8 7 3
♥ A 3
♦ A 10 7 5
♣ 7

♠ 2
♥ K J 10 8 5 2
♦ 4
♣ A 9 8 6 5

If you have a quick count of your winners, you'll find you are short of tricks, even if you find the ♥Q (perhaps because you lack HCP, but have shape). You have 3 aces and 5 or 6 trump winners if you draw trumps, although you may be able to create club winners.

This is the sort of hand where you have to put aside the drawing of trumps; your more urgent need is to make more tricks with your trumps by ruffing.

You win trick 1 with the ♦A, then trump a diamond with the ♥2. Cash the ♣A and ruff a club with dummy's ♥3. Trump another diamond to hand, then ruff another club with dummy's ♥A. Now you can trump a fourth diamond, everyone following, cross to dummy with the ♠A and trump a spade. That is already 9 tricks, and you still have ♥K-J in hand – at least one more trick. If you can place the lead with West, you will make another trick with your hearts, so you now with one of your two clubs. West plays the King... East should trump, then lead a heart (trump!). If not, South will have to ruff the next trick and lead a heart into your K-J, for 11 tricks. That overtrick could be a massive difference in the score on the hand.

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

By the way, imagine the auction had been:

West	North	East	South
	1♠	Pass	1NT
Pass /Double	2♦	Pass	2♥ (long hearts, weak hand)
Pass	3♥ (invite)	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

On these auctions, where three suits have been bid, one of the 'recommended' leads is a trump. North has marked themselves as two-suited with heart support, indicating club shortage. Therefore, you should lead a trump, even from Q-x-x (it will usually come back to you in the later play). That restricts declarer to one club ruff in dummy – if it's with the ♥A, you still have a heart winner; if declarer flies with the ♥A at trick 1, you still have your heart trick.

You are playing in 4♥, South:

♠ 8 7 2
♥ K J 2
♦ A 6 5 4
♣ 6 3 2

♠ A K
♥ A Q 10 9 6
♦ 7 3
♣ A 7 5 4

West leads the ♠Q. Are there any problems for which you should plan? You seem to have to lose 2 clubs and 1 diamond. What could go wrong?

The other way to look at the hand is to count your sure winners – 5 hearts, 2 spades, 1 diamond and 1 club. Only 9 top tricks. That should make you think twice. Unless you have an outside suit as a source of winners that should make you consider whether you need to do any trumping.

The issue is, in fact, the club suit. You have 2 losing clubs, but if you draw trumps you may well have 3 club losers! Let's put dummy's trumps to work.

You win the first spade, then cash the ♣A and exit with a club. An astute defender should now switch to trumps, though many might continue with spades. It doesn't matter; you win the continuation and lead the third club, losing the trick. When clubs prove to be 4-2 (as they were), you are quietly content, because you can trump the fourth club with one of dummy's high trumps, ensuring your 10 tricks.

It really does pay to take a few seconds longer at trick 1, ensuring that your plan will work. Sometimes what looks like an easy contract may have hidden traps, such as a 'deep loser' if a suit doesn't break as you would like.

Remember, 3-3 breaks only occur 35.5% of the time. I prefer 100% lines, where possible!

I'm writing this column whilst we are practising social distancing. Along with many others, I've been doing some cleaning up around the home. I found the first hand that I wrote up about my daughter, Lauren – from October 2005. She was 12 years old and had been playing bridge for two or three months, when we entered a congress! (*We were put in A Grade – not even B Grade, when there was C Grade too – and finished in the top half of the field. No wonder she's so good now!*)

Anyway, here's the hand, though I don't have the full layout:

♠ Q 9 3
♥ A 10 8 3 2
♦ A
♣ A 9 8 3

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

There's no record of the auction, but I bid rather enthusiastically, and she played in 4♠. Undaunted, she spent some time planning at trick 1, then won the heart lead with dummy's Ace, discarding a small club. She trumped a heart in hand, took the club finesse, then led the next club to the Ace. The ♦A was cashed, then she trumped a club back to hand. She now cashed the ♦K, then led a diamond – ruffed in dummy with the ♠9 and over-trumped by East with the ♠J. She trumped the heart return, which meant she had already collected 8 tricks. She led another diamond, trumping with dummy's ♠J, East winning the ♠K. Now her ♠A-10 were high, though she had to lose the last trick to a long diamond.

I told her I was very impressed with her line of play, particularly since I hadn't taught her about cross-trumping. Her response was simple: "Well, I didn't have enough tricks if I drew trumps!"

It's pretty obvious really, but so easy to fail to see if you haven't developed a sound plan before playing to trick 1. *Keep thinking about using those trumps wisely.*

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