

## PAIRS v. TEAMS

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

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

You are playing in 4♠, South, with East having overcalled in diamonds. West leads the ♦10 to his partner's ♦Q, then East cashes the ♦A, and leads the ♦K at trick 3.

Your play here should depend on whether you are playing Pairs or Teams!

At Pairs, where you must take as many tricks as possible, you would trump high, hoping for a 4-2 (or better) trump break. When that is the scenario, you will have 11 tricks.

However, at Teams, the safety of the contract is the most important consideration. Given that an overtrick is worth 1 IMP, but a game (vulnerable, in this case) can be worth 12 IMPs, your focus is on making the game, and avoiding unnecessary risks. The 'risk' on this hand is that spades may break 5-1. Whereas at Pairs you wouldn't worry about such a low percentage situation, you should at Teams.

John McMahon, playing for the NSW Youth Team, found the expert play on the third round of diamonds, discarding a heart. (If East now continued diamonds, dummy could take care of any ruff.) In due course, he was rewarded with the contract when the hand proved to be:

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

By the way, if South trumps low, West does best to discard. This will give him trump control so, when clubs are led, he can trump the third round and wait for two heart winners.

*(As it happened, at the other table, North-South had not reached game, so making the contract ensured a 10 IMP gain, rather than losing the part-score swing and 8 IMPs.)*

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

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

You have arrived in 6♥, South. West leads the ♠J and you have to play this hand.

Once again, your line of play would be determined by the form of game you are playing – Pairs or Teams. *(By the way, Butler Pairs is usually like Teams, with IMP scoring; Swiss Matchpoint Butler Pairs is like Pairs, where you are scored against the other Pairs, though later those results are converted to VPs.)*

Playing Pairs, there are two considerations:

- (1) Are you in an excellent contract that others will not reach?
- (2) Are you in a contract that everyone is likely to reach?

If (1) applies, then play safely for your contract. If (2) applies, then you try for as many tricks as possible, as is 'normal' with Pairs play.

On this hand, you would assume that most people would reach this slam, so (2) applies. Therefore, you would play for a 2-2 or 3-1 heart break (90%).

However, at Teams you have to think about the safety of the contract, not worrying about the overtrick – even if you expect the opponents to be in the same slam.

Your only concern should be if hearts break 4-0 (10%). The missing hearts are the Q-J-10-4. If East has all four hearts, you have two trump losers no matter what. But what if West has all four hearts? If you knew that was the case, you would lead the ♥9 and finesse it on the first round. If West covers, you can win, then finesse again. If West ducks, the ♥9 wins, and you are left with only one heart loser.

It can be difficult adjusting between the two forms of the game. Pairs is about making as many tricks as possible, unless you are in a sensational contract that you think others won't reach (when it's about safety). Teams is about safety first, and overtricks only once your contract is assured.

This last example comes from the Playoffs for the Australian Women's Team, held in December 2019:

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

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

You reach a sensible 5♣ contract as South.

If you are playing Pairs, you should just take the finesse in clubs, as everyone else will do.

However, if you are playing Teams, you want to make your contract, first and foremost. You have one spade loser, so it's about ensuring that you keep your club losers to only one. This means taking a safety play in clubs. After all, if you finesse the ♣Q and lose to West's King, you will face a nasty guess on the next round – if East follows with a second low club, do you play her for the J-x-x or x-x (and K-J offside)?

Instead of 'guessing', you look at the safest line of play. It may cost an overtrick if clubs break 2-2 with the K-x onside, but it will win in many other situations. The first club you play should be the Ace. If that drops an honour from West (or East), your contract is assured.

If West plays the King, you cross to dummy and finesse East's J-x-x.

If West plays the Jack, you just exit with a high enough club to draw trumps.]

If no club honour has appeared, you cross to dummy and lead towards your ♣Q-9.

*[Of course, you'll go down if West has K-J-x, but then you were always destined to fail in the contract.]*

That's how Elizabeth Havas, in the TRAVIS team, played the clubs in her 5♣ contract.

*[Unfortunately for my team, the opposition reached a poor 6♣ contract – with the ♣K-x onside – making.]*

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