

MANAGING ENTRIES

Here are a couple of interesting hands for you to practise your declarer play.

HAND 1

♠ J 10 2
♥ 9 2
♦ A J 10 6 4 3
♣ A 6

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

You are South and playing in 6♥ on the lead of the ♣5.

This hand comes from the SA Online Teams League (set up during lockdown). Given it was a teams match, it is simply about making the hand rather than making overtricks. In fact, the other table played in 4♥ (though you wouldn't know that), so you can appreciate that making the contract is critical.

Declarer won the club lead in hand, and cashed the ♥A, West dropping the Queen. With only one entry to dummy, you must decide whether you plan to take the heart finesse (restricted choice) or whether to take the spade finesse. Which finesse would you take, and why?

He crossed to dummy with the ♣A, discarded a spade on the ♦A, then finessed the heart. Curtains! West won the Jack, and now declarer was stuck in hand, unable to take the spade finesse. One off.

Whilst finessing the heart is essentially the correct line when the honour falls, what declarer should have done was combine his finessing options. There is no need to cash the ♦A. Instead, you lead the ♠J and finesse. If West wins the King, you have the ♠10 as a second entry to dummy to try the heart finesse. If the spade finesse wins, take a spade discard on the ♦A now, then finesse the spade again. [If West has ducked with the ♠K, well done to him.]

♠ J 10 2
♥ 9 2
♦ A J 10 6 4 3
♣ A 6

♠ 9 8 6 5
♥ Q J
♦ K 9 7
♣ Q 10 7 5

♠ K 3
♥ 6 4
♦ Q 8 5 2
♣ 9 8 4 3 2

♠ A Q 7 4
♥ A K 10 8 7 5 3
♦
♣ K J

Making 6♥ would have gained the team 11 IMPs. Instead the team lost 11 IMPs. That's a big swing. (If you are unfamiliar with teams bridge, 6 IMPs is about the equivalent of a goal (6 points) at AFL football. Yes, I live in South Australia, although I didn't grow up here!)

So, my earlier suggestion that you had to decide which finesse to take was misleading. You need to think about how to manage your entries to maximise your prospects. Making a plan is important, but it is even more important to stop and double-check that your plan is the best option.

HAND 2

This hand comes from a top-level online game and was provided to me by an overseas team-mate.

♠ A 7 5
♥ J 3
♦ K Q
♣ Q J 8 7 5 4

♠ Q J 6 4
♥ Q 8 6 5 4
♦ A 4 3
♣ K

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♥
Pass	2♣	Pass	2NT (1)
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

(1) There is no need to show your 4-card spade suit, because North has already denied 4 spades with his rebid. Therefore, rebidding an invitational 2NT is a superior action. (Rebidding 2♠ would be a reverse, showing 4-5 in the Majors, but forcing to game – a mild overbid.)

West leads the ♦J. Obviously, you win the ♦Q, then lead a club to your King, which holds. Good defence involves making communications between the defensive hands difficult, so ducking the ♣K is standard good play. How would you plan the play?

My friend grilled me on what my line of play would be, so it seems fair to share the lesson...

Basically, it seems like you need clubs to break 3-3 (or a 10-9 doubleton, discounted by neither of those cards appearing on the second trick). However, you also have entry issues. If you simply rely on clubs behaving, you may end up with only 8 tricks – 5 clubs, 2 diamonds and the ♠A – unable to reach your ♦A in hand.

My solution was to lead the ♠Q at trick 3. My friend asked me what I hoped would happen, and this was my response:

If it was covered by the King, then I had the ♠J as an entry to my hand (10 tricks). If it was ducked, I already had a ninth trick and could revert to clubs. And if East won the ♠K, then I would have communication between the two hands once more. (Note: the defenders can count most of declarer's HCP now: ♦A, known by West at least, ♣K, ♠Q-J. Just a reminder!)

In other words, I didn't really care whether the ♠Q won or lost the trick – but I needed to lead it immediately.

The ♠Q actually held the trick, so now I could cross to dummy with the ♦K to continue with high clubs. When the clubs broke 3-3, there were 9 tricks.

I asked about the significance of the hand, i.e. why he was asking me so many questions about it. His partner, a very sound player in the US, had erred. At trick 3, he crossed to dummy's ♠A. Let's look at what happened.

He continued with the ♣Q, which the defenders won, to continue with another diamond. Now he was stuck in dummy, plus he had to cash his four club winners since he had no more entries to dummy. Those five discards on the club suit destroyed his hand. If he discarded three hearts, the opponents had 3 heart winners. If he discarded two spades, the ♠K would bring down his Queen. And obviously he needed to hold onto his ♦A.

When you are defending, it is always a joy to watch declarer get squeezed, but even more so when dummy squeezes declarer!

Declarer was a victim of what I call the 'play too fast' syndrome. He found a line but failed to check it through before committing to the play.

So, remember to keep planning, but keep checking those plans for flaws. Try to play the rest of the hand through in your head – not easy, I know. (As declarer, my daughter actually moves the cards around in her hand as she mentally plays the hand through. It may look unusual, but it obviously works – based on her results!)

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