

A COUPLE OF INTERESTING HANDS

The following two hands come from the SA Online Teams League #2, semi final. They were the two hands I found particularly interesting (in a 16-board match).

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			Pass
2♥ (1)	Pass	4♠	Double (2)
All Pass			

- (1) West's 2♥ bid showed less than an opening hand with at least 4-4 in hearts and spades.
- (2) This is a particularly unwise double, revealing the spade position!

South led the ♦7 to the 8 – Queen – King.

Declarer now led the ♠3 – 4 – Queen, North showing out. I can only assume that East was worried that South would ruff a diamond, otherwise his play is inexplicable. South's double was surely based on a trump stack, and ♠A-J-10 would not be sufficient for the double. Hence, South has ♠A-J-10-4, and you should finesse on the first round.

Suffice to say, 4♠ X now failed by a trick. Strangely enough, declarer failed in 4♠ X at the other table too.

Why was the hand of interest to me? Assuming you are not fearful of any ruffs, at teams (where overtricks are not a concern, but making your contract is the priority) this spade suit involves a classic safety play.

Q 7 6 5	K 9 8 3 2
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You are only concerned about spades if they break 4-0. This means that you should NOT lead a high spade or play a high spade immediately. In the scenario at the table, East was on lead. He can lead the ♠2, although I would probably lead the ♠9, and when South plays the ♠4, you just cover it. Once South has followed, he is the only person who can hold 4 spades, so you play accordingly.

If South shows out, you play the ♠Q, but finesse North's ♠J-10-4 on future rounds of trumps.

On the other hand, if West is leading the suit, you also play a small spade. If North plays the ♠4, now North is the only person who can hold 4 spades, so you simply cover whatever card they have played, holding your spade losers to two tricks. Should North show out, then you play the ♠K, and subsequently you finesse South's ♠J-10-4.

All these safety plays (card combinations) are fascinating to me. I also find that, although you can read about them in a book, it is not until you encounter a particular holding 'at the table' (even a virtual table) that you realise the power of the situation. I'm not sure I'd have recognised this as one of those particular holdings!

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

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	<i>B Travis</i>		<i>A de Livera</i>
			1♣
Pass	1♥	Pass	2♥
Pass	2NT (1)	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

East led the ♦2 to West's King. West returned a small diamond to his partner's Queen, and now East opted to lead a spade.

As this defence was progressing, I started to think about my prospects with a 4-1 heart break. (For some reason, the defence 'felt' like the hearts were breaking badly.) The spade spots made life awkward, because I had to play low to ensure (South) dummy's spades would be winners. With the spade return, I now needed West to win the Ace, leaving me communication (for my discards).

Fortunately, West won his ♠A and played the ♦A, forcing dummy to trump. However, now I could draw trumps and discard my club losers on dummy's spades: 1 ruff, 4 hearts, 3 spades, 2 clubs. Here's the hand:

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

If West had ducked the spade switch, I would have failed in the contract. I would have led a second spade which West would win to lead the ♦A again. With dummy's trumps shortened, I can't draw trumps and cash the spades, and the contract goes off.

It was interesting, because West seemed to be on the right path to defeating the contract but failed at his final hurdle. If they had led three rounds of diamonds immediately, the defence would have been more obvious – being the only real chance to defeat the contract.

This second hand wasn't that difficult as long as the defenders (primarily West) thought about what was needed to beat the contract.

Never stop thinking and analysing, trying to work out what cards are needed for your desired outcome.

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