

MALENY CONTRACT BRIDGE CLUB

This is the Number 13 bridge article for members of our club.

Last Week's Problem

You are East. The bidding given last week was incorrect. North chose not to use Stayman. This is important, so you may need to try the hand again.

South Deals
None Vul

♠ K 2
♥ K 10 6 4
♦ J 7 5 3
♣ K Q 2

	N		♠ 8 7 3
W		E	♥ Q J 9 2
	S		♦ A 4
			♣ J 10 9 8

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	3 NT	All pass	1 NT ¹
	1. 15-17 HCP, balanced		
	Lead: ♠ Q		

West's Q♠ wins the first trick. West continues with 4♠ and North's King wins. How many tricks can you count for the opponents? What is your plan?

North has 12 HCP so your opponents have 27-29 HCP. You have 8 HCP and you partner has shown 3 HCP in spades. This leaves a possible additional 2 HCP from West. The only high card that West could possibly have is Q♦.


South has 2 spade tricks, 2 heart tricks, 3 club tricks and needs 2 diamond tricks for his contract. If South has the Q♦ along with all his other high cards, we can't stop him making 3 diamond tricks and at least one overtrick. So, assume that West has Q♦ to give our side any chance.

South will probably try to establish the two diamond tricks by leading the 3♦ from North and finessing the 10 if he has it. West will win the Q♦ and clear South's A♠ but will have no entry to his established spades. When you get in with the A♦, you will have no spades to lead.

When North led 3♦, you should play the A♦ and lead your last spade to clear South's A♠. South can take his K♦, but to get a second diamond trick, South needs to let West in with the presumed Q♦. West will then be able to cash his spade winners and defeat the contract if he started with 5 spades.

The hands today will be about entry plays by defenders i.e. to organise to be in the right hand at the right time or to stop declarer from being in the right hand at the right time. In this case, it was necessary that West won his diamond trick after the A♠ was cleared. For this to happen, East had to play second hand high (contrary to the maxim second hand low which is usually the best option).

Have a look at some more hands. On each hand this time you are West. Your aim is to beat the contract. Overtricks or extra undertricks are irrelevant.

South Deals None Vul	♠ 10 9 8 ♥ 9 6 ♦ K J 9 4 3 ♣ A J 10	♠ Q 7 6 4 ♥ K 10 8 5 ♦ 8 ♣ 9 8 7 5	
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 NT
Pass	3 NT	All pass	
	Lead: ♥ 5		

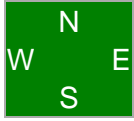
What would you have led against 3 NT? You have 3 four-card suits. Since North did not try Stayman, you probably should pick a major suit. You lead a heart because that suit is stronger but either suit could be right.

East won the trick with the A♥ and returned the 7♥. Declarer plays Q♥. Take it from here. Did you win the K♥ and return the 10♥ to set up a third heart trick? That would be OK if you ever got in again.

To beat the contract, your side will need two additional tricks to go with the three heart tricks. It is quite likely that it will be your partner that will win those tricks and you won't get in again.

Instead of winning with the K♥, you should play 8♥. When your partner gets in, he can play another heart (he must have one since South has at most 4 for his 1 NT opening bid). Note also that East would not return the 7♥ if he had the J♥. He would return the J♥ (with 3 initially) or a lower heart if he started with 4 or 5 hearts. (the usual convention is to return the card that was your original fourth best).

Now consider this hand:

South Deals None Vul	♠ 7 6 5 ♥ 5 4 ♦ A J 10 9 2 ♣ 9 7 5	♠ J 10 9 8 3 ♥ K Q 3 ♦ K 3 ♣ 8 6 3	
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♣
Pass	1 ♦	Pass	3 NT
	All pass		
	Lead: ♠ J		

You lead the J♠ against South's 3 NT contract. East plays the 4♠ and South wins with the A♠. South leads 7♦. Take it from there.

Who has Q♦? You don't know. If it is South, he will have at least 3 (or he would have led Q♦). There's nothing you can do but watch while South cashes North's 5 diamond tricks, and almost certainly another 4 or more tricks in his own hand, to easily make the contract.

What if East has the Q♦?

If you follow with the 3♦, North will play the J♦. Now, if East wins the Q♦, South will eventually be able to win 4 diamond tricks in North's hand no matter how many diamonds South started with (except in the unlikely event he only has one diamond in which case it doesn't matter what you do; dummy's diamonds can only produce 1 trick since there are no outside entries).

If East has 3 diamonds, he will win the Q♦ since he would look silly if he ducked and South had the K♦. Even if he were clairvoyant and didn't win the Q♦, South would just duck a round of diamonds and still have the A♦ in North's hand as an entry for the other diamond winners.

If East has 4 diamonds and is awake, he will hold up the Q♦. From East's point of view, this will limit South to 3 diamond tricks if South started with the remaining diamonds (K♦ and 2 other diamonds); or to 2 diamond tricks if he started with only 2 diamonds. This is again because there are no entries in North's hand outside diamonds.

See the difference if you play K♦ at trick 2 after South leads 7♦ (ignoring the Second Hand Low maxim) and East has the Q♦ and two or three other diamonds. If North plays the A♦, East can hold up his Q♦ till South's diamonds are exhausted and South will make at most 2 diamond tricks. If South has 3 diamonds, he can counter to some extent by ducking your K♦ and ducking again on the next round, preserving the A♦ in North's hand as an entry to win the last three diamonds. Your side would have scored 2 diamond tricks and 2 opportunities to play your suit.

If East has the Q♦, by playing the K♦ on the first round of diamonds, you have gained at least one trick compared with playing the 3♦, and you may have gained more. If South has the Q♦ or 4 small diamonds, you have lost nothing. It may be that the contract still makes, but you have done your best.

South can't have 5 diamonds since he opened 1♣ so there is no danger that East's Q♦ is singleton.

This was an example of a hand where the defence did their best to stop the declarer from being in the right hand at the right time. Have a look at this hand:

South Deals ♠ A 3
 None Vul ♥ 8 6 3
 ♦ K Q 10 9 8
 ♣ 5 3 2

	N	
W		E
	S	

♠ K J 10 9
 ♥ A J 4
 ♦ A 6 4
 ♣ J 6 4

West North East South
 1 NT¹

Pass 3 NT All pass

1. 15-17 HCP, balanced

Lead: ♥ 2

What is your plan for the defence?

You have 14 HCP and the opponents have 24-26 HCP between them. That leaves at most 2 HCP for your partner. Wherever those 2 HCP may be, South seems to have lots of tricks. Your partner has 4 hearts, but you can't say much about the distribution of the other suits except South is balanced.

You could assume that West had the Q♥ and play the J♥ on the first trick. This forces South to win the first trick with the K♥ and not hold up, since he doesn't know who has the A♥. When you get in with the A♦, you would play A♥ and then 4♥ to take some heart tricks if West has Q♥. However, this will win at most 3 heart tricks and that isn't enough. South will have at least 1 spade, 1 heart, 4 diamond and 3 club tricks, which is enough for his contract.

What about taking the A♥ and then leading the J♠ in the hope that West's 2 HCP are the Q♠. (The J♠ is the standard lead from this holding.) You will then be able to take 5 tricks, 3 spades, 1 heart and 1 diamond when South plays diamonds and you win the A♦. That is certainly better than playing the J♥ at trick 1.

If South is not able to run North's diamonds, he may not have enough tricks. If South has the Q♠, he will simply play it on the J♠, and the A♠ will still be an entry once your A♦ is knocked out.

What about taking the A♥ at trick 1 and leading the K♠? This will knock out the A♠ entry to the clubs (if North ducks, you can just play another spade). South may not have enough tricks if you hold off playing your A♦. This play will give South an immediate extra trick if he has the Q♠. It will save 2 or 3 diamond tricks since you will be able to cut South off from North (unless South has 4 diamonds). You hope the hand is something like:

South Deals ♠ A 3
None Vul ♥ 8 6 3
♦ K Q 10 9 8
♣ 5 3 2

♠ 6 4 2
♥ Q 7 5 2
♦ 5 2
♣ 10 9 8 7

N
 W E
 S

♠ K J 10 9
♥ A J 4
♦ A 6 4
♣ J 6 4

♠ Q 8 7 5
♥ K 10 9
♦ J 7 3
♣ A K Q

South will only be able to take 8 tricks (2 spades, 1 heart, 2 diamonds and 3 clubs) with no other prospects and the contract will go down.

This sacrificial play of an honour (that loses a trick) to remove a vital entry (that gains 2 or more tricks) is called a Merrimac Coup. There are a number of plays in bridge that are called Coups. They usually date back to the days of Whist where these plays were made by defenders without the benefit of seeing dummy and were played with far less information than East would have with this hand. The name comes from the name of an American steam ship, the Merrimac, that was deliberately sunk by the Americans during the Spanish-American War in 1898 in an attempt to block the harbour at Santiago de Cuba.

Next week it is back to declarer play. See how you go on this hand. You are South.

South Deals ♠ A Q J
None Vul ♥ 9 7 4
♦ 8 6 5 4
♣ Q J 8

N
 W E
 S

♠ K 10 9 5 3
♥ Q 8 6 3
♦ —
♣ A K 9 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 ♠
Dbl	Rdbl ¹	2 ♦	Pass
Pass	2 ♠	3 ♦	3 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	All pass	

1. 10+ HCP, any distribution
Lead: ♦ A

You stumble into 4 ♠. What is your best chance to make the contract?