

## MALENY CONTRACT BRIDGE CLUB

This is the sixth bridge article for members of our club.

### Solution from last week

Consider the following hand:

South Deals	♠ 8 6 5						
None Vul	♥ K 10 9 7						
	♦ J 8						
	♣ K Q J 9						
		♠ 4 3					
		♥ A 3					
		♦ 9 7 3 2					
		♣ A 10 8 5 2					
		<table style="margin: auto; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #008000; color: white; padding: 5px;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 5px;">N</td> <td style="padding: 2px 5px;">E</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px 5px;">W</td> <td style="padding: 2px 5px;">S</td> </tr> </table>		N	E	W	S
N	E						
W	S						
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>				
			1 NT				
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦				
Pass	3 NT	All pass					

You are East and your partner, West, leads the K♠. See if you can answer the following questions. The answer may or may not be precise but could be a range of possibilities. It could even be, "There is no way to tell."

1. How many HCP does West have?
2. Who had the Q♠?
3. Who has the J♠?
4. Who has the A♦?
5. Who has the K♦?
6. Who has the Q♦?
7. How many spades does West have?
8. How many hearts does West have?

1. 5-7 HCP. You have 8 HCP, dummy has 10 HCP, declarer has 15-17 HCP so your partner has what's left: 5-7 HCP.
2. Your partner. He would not lead the K♠ without the Q♠.
3. We don't know. If declarer has the J♠, your partner should have the 10 or he would lead a small spade.
4. Declarer. Your partner has at least 5 HCP in spades, so he can't have more than 2 HCP outside of spades.
5. Declarer. Same reason.
6. We don't know. Our partner's high cards could be K♠, Q♠ and Q♦.
7. 5 or 6. South has denied 4 spades, is balanced, so has 2 or 3 spades. You see 2 spades in your hand and 3 spades in dummy and that leaves West with 5 or 6 spades.
8. 3 or 4. Similar reasoning to 7.

Coming up with these inferences is not too difficult when there is lots of time and perhaps a piece of paper to do the necessary calculations. Coming up with them while playing bridge and deciding how they help your defence takes some practice.

Now, let us take this hand one step further. Our aim is to see if we can defeat 3 NT. West has led K♠, North played the 5, you played the 3 and South played the 2. West now leads 6♣. See if you can answer the following questions. The discussion for question 4 is fairly advanced.

1. Who has the J♠?
2. Who has Q♦?
3. Dummy plays K♣. What do you play?
4. Is South going to make 3 NT?

1. South. If West had the J♠, he would have continued spades. He knows South can have at most 3 spades, so with J♠, he can safely set up the spade suit by continuing. So South has AJ of spades remaining.
2. We still don't know. West could have Q♥, J♥, Q♦ or none of these.
3. A♣ and then lead 4♠. This is not the time to duck.
4. It depends on whether West has Q♦ or not. If South has Q♦, he has 4 (or 5) diamond tricks, 2 club tricks, a trick in spades and can safely establish at least 2 more in hearts by finessing against West's possible Q or J if necessary. West cannot get in to cash the winning spades. If West has 3 diamonds including the Q, South will only have 8 tricks (a spade trick, 3 heart tricks, 2 diamond tricks and 2 club tricks) before your partner can get the lead in diamonds and take his spade tricks. If West has only 2 diamonds including the Q, South will have to guess whether to take the diamond finesse. The odds favour the finesse, but the finesse will fail for South in this case and he will go down.

Why was it necessary to win A♣ on the first round of clubs? Nothing is gained by ducking. If we had ducked and West had Q♦ and South 10♦, South could (and should) take the diamond finesse. West would win but would never get in to take any more spade tricks and the defence would only take your aces, plus the 2 tricks already won, for a total of 4 tricks before South had established his 9. Why should South take the diamond finesse at trick 3 if he was missing Q♦ but had 10♦? He needs 3 diamond tricks and should make sure he loses any diamond trick to West while he is unable to productively lead spades. At this stage, West is the safe hand and East the danger hand. However, had East won the A♣ at trick 2 and led 4♠, the spades would be established, East would be the safe hand (no more spades) and West the danger hand.

How did West know that South had the J♠ and not continued spades at trick 2? If you had the J♠, you should have played it to the first trick. West led the K♠, which has to be from KQJ or KQ10 (or West would lead a small spade without either J or 10) with 5 or 6 spades. East would know the spades can be set up, but not West, if South ducked. By playing the J, East lets his partner know that continuing spades is safe. The only reason East would not play the J is if he did not have it.

So far, we have seen that a defender can obtain valuable information to help in finding the best defence. This information can come from:

- the bidding (e.g. where are the high cards, how many cards does each player hold in a suit),
- the opening lead (e.g. fourth best or top of sequence),
- the fact that a certain suit is led or not led (e.g. West did not continue spades in the above hand),
- whether a certain card is played or not played (e.g. East did not play J♠ at the first trick) or
- when someone runs out of cards in the suit led and discards.

Another source of information is defensive signals.

## Defensive Signals

Signalling is an important part of partnership communication, just like your bidding system. Sometimes you have a choice of cards you can play to a trick (e.g. you are following suit with small cards). It is possible to signal some information about your hand by playing one card rather than another. Like bidding systems, different partnerships have different signalling systems; some are simple, and some are elaborate. What is summarised here is a standard simple system although some variations will be mentioned.

1. Leading fourth highest in a suit without enough high honours gives your partner some information and, in that sense, is a signal. Leading the top of a sequence is a signal that you have the honour below the one you played (unless you have a singleton or doubleton) and that you don't have the honour one above the one you led.
2. High encouraging. When your partner leads a suit for the first time and RHO plays a card you cannot beat, you may have a choice of several small cards you can play. If you choose the highest of those small cards, you are encouraging your partner to lead that suit again when they get in. If you play your lowest card, you are discouraging your partner from leading the suit when they get in.

If you are first discarding and have a choice of small cards, the play of the lowest card indicates you do not want your partner to lead that suit and the play of a high card in amongst those small cards indicates you would like your partner to lead that suit.

The question of whether a card is a low card or high card from your small cards is sometimes ambiguous. A 3 is a high card if your choice is a 2. An 8 is a low card if it is the smallest you have. Hopefully, your partner can work it out most of the time.

3. Count. When you are following suit that an opponent has led with a choice of small cards, playing the smallest first and then a larger card implies you originally had an odd number of cards in that suit. Playing a higher card, then a lower card implies an even number of cards in that suit. Do not use this signal (or reverse it) if you think the information will be of more benefit to the opponents than your partner. This includes if your partner never looks at the cards you play anyway.
4. McKenny suit preference. This applies in a very specific situation. You are leading a card you know your partner will trump. Leading a low card indicates you want him to lead the suit with lower ranking (ignoring the trump suit) after he trumps your card. Leading a high card indicates you want him to lead the suit with higher ranking. For example, if spades are trumps and your partner is trumping a diamond, a low card asks him to return a club and a high card asks him to return a heart. This is useful if you have an entry so he can trump the same suit again.
5. Honours. If you play a very high card (e.g. a Q) when following suit (and a higher card is already winning the trick) or discarding, it shows that you have a solid honour sequence below the card you played (e.g. you play a Q implies you have J109 and possibly others). This can be useful if your partner leads the A (implying the K) and you have QJ10 and want the lead. If you play the Q, your partner knows it is safe to underlead his K.

Let us look at a couple of hands that illustrate the use of defensive signals and other defensive tools.

North Deals ♠ 7 6  
 None Vul ♥ K Q J 10  
 ♦ 8 7 6 3  
 ♣ 7 4 3



♠ K 5 2  
 ♥ A 9 8 4  
 ♦ 9  
 ♣ Q 10 9 8 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	2 NT <sup>1</sup>
Pass	3 ♣ <sup>2</sup>	Pass	3 ♦ <sup>3</sup>
Pass	3 NT	All pass	

1. 20-21 HCP, balanced
2. Stayman
3. No 4 card major

Lead: ♠ J

You are East and West leads J♠ against 3 NT by South. North plays the 6. What card do you play?

You play the K (in case West has led from AJ10, possible since West has 4-5 HCP). South plays the 3. You lead the 5♠ and South wins with the A, West playing the 4. Now South plays the 2♥, West the 3♥ and North the K♥. What card do you play?

You play the 9 (even number). You aim to take your A when South has played his last heart to minimize the number of heart tricks the opponents make. West's lowest heart shows an odd number. He must have 3 (and South 2); with 1, South would have 4 hearts and he denied that in response to Stayman; with 5, there would be 14 hearts.

North leads the Q♥ and you know it is safe to play the A as South is now out of hearts.

You lead 2♠ and South wins the Q. West has 3-4 HCP in the minor suits and South can only take 8 tricks before West gets in to take his two established spades for one down. This assumes South does not have 5 diamonds. If he has, at least you did your best.

Notice that you knew to take the second heart, only because your partner routinely gives you a count and could rely on him having 3.

Notice also that South had a heart higher than the 2 that he could have led at trick 3. If he had led it instead of the 2, West's 3♥ would have been ambiguous. It could have been from 3-2 doubleton or 3 small. You would have to guess whether to take the second or third heart.

North Deals ♠ J 7 6  
 None Vul ♥ J 5 3  
 ♦ K 7 6 2  
 ♣ K 10 9



♠ 8 4  
 ♥ Q 9 6  
 ♦ J 10 5  
 ♣ J 8 5 4 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	1 ♥
Pass	2 ♥	Pass	2 ♠ <sup>1</sup>
Pass	3 ♥	All pass	

1. This is a game try in hearts showing some length in spades and asking North to up-value high cards in spades. North bids either 3♥ or 4♥ depending on whether he accepts the game try or not.

Lead: ♠ A

You are East defending 3♥ by South. West leads the A♠ and North plays the 6. What card do you play?

Play the 8. West probably has the K and you want to encourage him to continue spades. West leads the K♠. He knows you want to continue spades (either because you have a doubleton or the Q). West now leads the 2♠. You trump with the 6♥ and South plays the Q. What do you play now?

Lead a club. West's 2♠ asks you to lead the lower ranking of the other suits (diamonds and clubs in this case). Your partner takes the A♣ and leads another spade. You overtrump dummy, South follows suit and you have 5 tricks.

Notice that North resisted the temptation to bid 4♥ in response to South's game try despite having 8 HCP (near maximum for his 2♥ bid) because his holding in the key suit, spades, was not useful. South had 17 HCP

(Q♠, AK♥, AQ♦, Q♣) and NS has a combined 25 HCP.

Here is a hand for you to try (solution next week). This hand is like the problem from last week because it is possible to determine everything about the distribution and high cards in the closed hands at an early stage. What makes it different is that, although it is possible to defeat the contract, you need to think about the information you have to defeat the contract.

East Deals ♠ K 10 7  
 None Vul ♥ K 6 5 4  
 ♦ J 2  
 ♣ K J 9 6



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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	2 ♣ <sup>2</sup>	Pass	1 NT <sup>1</sup>
Pass	3 NT	All pass	2 ♠ <sup>3</sup>

1. 15-17 balanced
2. Stayman
3. 4 spades, denies 4 hearts

Lead: ♣ 2

You are East defending 3 NT and West leads 2 ♣.

North plays the 6 ♣ on the first trick. Do you play the Q? Yes, of course. Your partner may have the ace in which case the Q will win. Otherwise your side will not get any tricks in clubs whether you play the Q or not, so you may as well play the Q. Third hand plays high unless there is a reason not to.

The Q♣ wins and South plays 3 ♣.

See what you can tell about how the cards in each of the suits are distributed and where all the high cards are.

See if you can use some or all of this information to work out a plan of how to defeat 3 NT. What do you lead at trick 2?

### Postscript

The suggestion in the second last hand in the series of opening lead problems (solutions last week) was to lead fourth highest club (the 3) from five small. Different partnerships have different agreements as to which card to lead from several small cards. Some lead fourth best and others the top card (“top of nothing” is an old bridge maxim). Others play second highest (like middle-up-down with three small). Whichever approach you like, it is useful to have a partnership agreement so that you can take advantage of the information available from the lead. The suggested answer to the problem should have been: lead whichever club that is consistent with your partnership agreement.