

## 221014ThePlayOfTheCards

(Planning the play of the hand)

As declarer always think carefully when dummy goes down as to how you are going to play the contract. Make a plan.

Make a **SWOT** plan

**S**trengths (how many tricks can we take at once)

**W**eaknesses (how many tricks are we short of our target/how many tricks can opponents win)

**O**pportunities (which suit(s) provide opportunities for extra tricks)

**T**hreats (where are the dangers coming from)

### **Strengths**

Start by inspecting each suit in turn. Count how many guaranteed, sure-fire tricks each suit will produce without you losing the lead.

Sometimes that will be enough to succeed in your contract, but usually this will not be the case. You will need additional tricks, and this leads us to the next step.

### **Weaknesses**

This is how many tricks you are short of your required total – in other words, how many more tricks you need to make. Also think about how many tricks the opposition can cash/win.

### **Opportunities**

Look at each suit again and see if there is the potential to make extra tricks – that is, more than the certain winners that you identified in the first step (“strengths”).

### **Threats**

What can go wrong? Try and anticipate what may go wrong on the hand you are playing.

How might you make extra tricks in a suit?

Possibly by driving out opponents top card(s) in a suit.

e.g. If you have K J T 4 opposite Q 7

then there are three tricks available in this suit once you have driven out the Ace

Possibly by taking a finesse (or finesses)

e.g. If you have A Q J T opposite 4 3 2

then if the King is in the right place you can take four tricks

in this suit by repeated leading towards the high cards.

Possibly by ruffing losers (in a suit contract)

e.g. If you hold A 5 3 2 opposite 4

then you do not have to lose any tricks in this suit

(assuming you have enough trumps to ruff all the small ones)

Possibly by setting up small cards in a suit after the big ones have all gone.

e.g. If you have A K Q 3 2 opposite 5 4

then the 3 and 2 become winners if all the other cards in the suit are gone

♠ A K 6 3

♠ 5 4 2

♥ A 5 4

♥ 6 3 2

♦ A K 5 3

♦ 7 5

♣ 7 4

♣ A K Q 3 2

West plays in 3NT. North leads ♦Q

Many people will try and cash their tricks and end up with 10 if the clubs break 3-3.

Unfortunately they will only end up with 8 if the clubs break 4-2.

Is there anything to be done? A good club can be set up in dummy, but how do you get there?

The answer is to play a low club from each hand on the first round, and then you can cash four good club tricks.

How do we know if a suit will break?

Unless the bidding from the opponents, or the play to earlier tricks, has given us the information we need, we don't.

However, there is a good general guide:

If there are an **even** total number of cards in a suit held by the opponents, they probably **won't break** evenly

If there are an **odd** number of cards outstanding, they probably **will break** as evenly as possible.

## Threats

What could go wrong in a hand?

What will happen if a suit where the opponents have five cards between them that you expect to split 3-2 is actually 4-1 (or even 5-0)?

Is one of the opponents able to **ruff** one of our tricks? Can we **draw his trumps**?

What will happen if one of the **opponents has established winners** in his hand and then gains the lead? Will he be able to cash enough tricks to defeat your contract? How can I **avoid him gaining the lead**?

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

West plays in 3NT. North leads ♠8, South plays ♠Q

S: 8 tricks on top

W: 1 extra trick required

O: Possibly a 3-3 diamond break, possibly a club finesse

T: Opponents can cash spades when they get in if the finesse loses

It looks as though North has the spade length, but who knows? We hold up the Ace of spades and only play it when we are forced to on the third round. By then someone may have shown out of spades so we know which way to take the finesse.

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

West plays in 4♠. North leads ♣Q

S: 8 tricks on top

W: 2 extra tricks required

O: A diamond ruff in dummy and setting up a low diamond.

T: Suits may not break. The diamond might be over-ruffed

Hope the 6 spades and 6 diamonds out each break no worse than 4-2.

No point covering the Queen of clubs (North wouldn't have led away from the Ace).

When you get in, presumably by ruffing a club, play a diamond to the King and a diamond back to the Ace. Then play a small diamond, ruffing with the Ten (to avoid over-ruff). A spade back. Draw trumps and hopefully your Queen and small diamond are now good for two tricks.

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

West plays in 3NT. North leads ♥5 and South plays ♥J

S: 8 tricks on top (which become 9 when you can win the first heart)

W: 1 extra trick required (none after South's play on the first trick)

O:

T: Care must be taken not to block the black suits. Many people lead to the Queen and Jack of clubs first, and then cannot reach the King of spades. You must cash Ace and Queen of spades before you lead a club to the dummy.

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

West plays in 4♠. North leads ♦K

S: 5 tricks on top

W: 5 extra tricks required, but only 5 potential losers (one spade, two diamonds and two clubs)

O: If the ♠K is held by South and ♣A is held by North we have only three losers

T: Those two cards are not in the right position.

Much better here is to win the first trick and discard the two diamonds on two top hearts. Then ruff a diamond low and play back a spade taking the finesse. If the finesse wins when then you ruff the other diamond with the nine of spades (so that it can only be over-ruffed with the King – a trick you were prepared to lose anyway).

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

West plays in 4♠. North leads ♦K

S: 9 tricks on top

W: 1 extra trick required

O: The club finesse

T: The opponents will be able to take three hearts and the King of clubs.

If the spades break 2-2 you will have a trump left in dummy to deal with your last heart. But what if they break 3-1 and you have to use all your trumps to deal with them?

If South has three trumps you have to take the club finesse and hope. If North has three trumps you have an extra chance. Win the ♦A and draw two rounds of trumps with the Jack and Ace. Then try a low heart from both hands. Opponents are likely to try to cash a diamond which you can ruff. Now try playing the club finesse. If it wins you are home, but if it loses, South cannot draw dummy's last trump. When you are next in try playing the ♥A followed by ♥J. Opponents may not be able to win this in the North hand so you can still use ♠Q in dummy to ruff your last heart.

♠ A K	♠ 8 7 6
♥ A Q T	♥ 7 6 3
♦ K Q 4 2	♦ 9 8
♣ A 9 8 2	♣ K Q 6 4 3

West plays in 3NT. North leads ♠Q

S: 6 tricks on top

W: 3 extra tricks required

O: Heart finesse(s); force out ♦A; clubs will make five tricks rather than three.

T: Heart finesse is dangerous as if it loses opponents will knock out your second spade stopper and cash spades when they get in with the ♦A

So count five club tricks (assuming they don't break 4-0), two spades, a heart and a diamond. The danger here is that you will cash the ♣A and then lead the ♣2 to the King. This is fatal as it blocks the club suit. You must play ♣9 to the King and drop the ♣8 under the Queen. Then ♣2 will fall under the ♣6 and you can eventually force out the ♦A for your ninth trick.

WHEN ALL LOOKS EASY LOOK OUT FOR THE HIDDEN DANGER!