

Alan's analyses.

I first saw bridge being played in the Student's Common Room at Sir John Cass College London sixty years ago. I could see the resemblance to Whist which my mother had taught me and when I was invited to fill an empty chair I did so. And immediately discovered that it was a very passing resemblance to Whist. Eventually my exasperated partner suggested that I go away and learn a system. Down to the library where I got a book by Charles Goren which I devoured from cover to cover. Armed with this I returned to the Common Room where I had some modest success. And thus began a lifelong fascination with this beguiling card game.

I looked at Culbertson and Blue Club systems but soon switched over to Acol which lasted for many years before converting to Benji Acol in the eighties. Over the years I have read most of the books published which kept my interest alive during a fallow period when work got in the way of playing.

Posted to the Met Office Headquarters in Bracknell in 1989 though got me playing regularly and I started my habit of collecting and analysing interesting hands. I have been lucky enough to have had a few published in the old Bridge Plus magazine and Andrew Robson has also made mentions of some in his Times column.

Here are a few (60 – one for each year but not in chronological order) of them.

A classic example of counting your winners.

7 out of 10 cats at our club failed to do just that and went one off in this simple contract.
Teams, dealer North, all vul.

♠AQ1043	♠82
♥982	♥AKQ1065
♦A6	♦1098
♣J105	♣A4

N	E	S	W
P	1H	P	1S
P	2H	P	4H

There are 6 heart tricks plus the 3 outside Aces which makes 9.

Where is number 10 coming from ?

They obviously looked no further than the spade finesse

What are the possibilities ?

- 1) a simple spade finesse
- 2) ruff the third diamond in dummy.

In percentage terms one could say that the finesse is a 50% chance whereas the diamond ruff is much much better than that.

So the play should go :-

Win the club lead and draw one round of trumps only (this shows the 3 – 1 split and means you have no heart losers. Then cash the Ace of diamonds and play another diamond. You will lose the second round of clubs but then you can win the next lead and trump your losing diamond in dummy. Cross back to hand and draw the outstanding trumps and if you wish you could try the spade finesse for an overtrick. It doesn't work but you have made your contract.

As a footnote, a full analysis shows that you can make 5H. This is done by crossing to hand with a trump and finessing the 10S. It loses but you can throw all your losing diamonds away on the remaining top spades.

The full hand

	♠K76	
	♥4	
	♦KQ32	
	♣98763	
♠AQ1043		♠82
♥982		♥AKQ1065
♦A6		♦1098
♣J105		♣A4
	♠J95	
	♥J73	
	♦J754	
	♣KQ2	

A fatal discard

Holding ♠K8542

♥103

♦Q107

♣AQ8

not vulnerable against vulnerable, I decided to open a weak NT, mainly for the pre-emptive value as much as the paucity of the spade suit. Pass from LHO and partner bids 2C Stayman, doubled by RHO. Over my response of 2S, partner leaps to 4N, I show two controls and partner bids 6S.

LHO leads C5 and dummy goes down.

♠AQ106

♥AJ876

♦K853

♣void

♠K8542

♥103

♦Q107

♣AQ8

Not brilliant but there is a slim chance for the contract. If the diamonds break 3 – 3 and I can set them up with one loser I can ditch the second heart on the long diamond. Winning with the AC, having thrown a heart from dummy I take three rounds of trumps ending in dummy with RHO throwing the C9 and then the D2. They are playing revolving discards. Which I interpret as showing firstly the DA and secondly confirming the clubs.

But the diamond discard is the one that really interests me.

I lead a small diamond from dummy and go up with the QD which wins. A small diamond from me – planning to duck in dummy if nothing interesting appears. However the DJ pops up from LHO and I cover with the KD losing to the AD. But I am now home and dry thanks to that fatal discard.

The full hand

♠AQ106

♥AJ876

♦K853

♣void

♠973

♥K954

♦J4

♣10765

♠J

♥Q2

♦A962

♣KJ9432

♠K8542

♥103

♦Q107

♣AQ8

A fatal discard (2)

Partner holds ♠J10764
 ♥32
 ♦A104
 ♣Q104

You hold ♠AK
 ♥AQ108
 ♦KJ5
 ♣9652

and open 1C (I had actually put the 8H with my diamonds)
Partner responds 1S and over your 2N goes to 3N.

Lead was the 3S, 9S from East and after winning the AS I cashed the KS, East discarding a McKenney style 7C.

With no hope of 2 more spade tricks and encouraged by the 7, I led a club. The JC pops up from West, covered by the QC and won by the AC.

East now leads the 7H. Because of the McKenney signal I played the 10H which won. Another club to the 10 saw West discarding the 2D and East took his KC, then exited with the KH. Winning the AH, I now took a losing diamond finesse into East who this time exited with another diamond. Running this round to dummy, I now finessed the 8C, cashed another winning club plus the QH and KD for my contract.

The full hand

	♠J10764	
	♥32	
	♦A104	
	♣Q104	
♠Q8532		♠ 9
♥9654		♥KJ7
♦632		♦Q987
♣J		♣AK873
	♠AK	
	♥AQ108	
	♦ KJ5	
	♣9652	

A fatal lead to start and another to follow

Not Vulnerable against vulnerable the bidding has gone

N	E	S	W
1D	X	1H	1S
4H	P	P	P

The lead is the CJ

♠void
♥A42
♦AJ973
♣Q7542

♠7543
♥K1073
♦5
♣K1096

How would you play this hand?

Playing the C2 from dummy, I drop the CK under RHO's CA. He is not fooled though and returns the C3 for LHO to ruff – I played the C10. LHO has a think and decides that the C3 is suit preference for a diamond so rather than removing a trump from dummy, returns the QD at trick 3, hoping to create an entry to partner's hand. This is the only lead to give away the contract. In theory it will drive out the Ace and allow partner's K to win the next round of diamonds – fair enough if the AD was with South - but in practice this is fatal. I rise with the DA and ruff a diamond, all following. Now the KH and over to the AH with RHO playing the 6H then the QH. I ruff another diamond bringing down RHO's KD, so dummy's diamonds are now good. I now lead the C9 to dummy's CQ and run the diamonds. Opponents cannot now beat the contract whoever has the last trump.

A forcing defence by leading spades at every opportunity will of course beat the contract.

	♠void	
	♥A42	
	♦AJ973	
	♣Q7542	
♠A986		♠KQJ102
♥J985		♥Q6
♦Q642		♦K108
♣J		♣A83
	♠7543	
	♥K1073	
	♦5	
	♣K1096	

An involuntary ruff.

Dlr: West

Vul: None

N/S are in 6S – lead is D3

♠865

♥AQ1084

♦Q8

♣KQ9

♠Q

♥K762

♦J6532

♣873

♠A92

♥95

♦10974

♣10642

♠KJ10743

♥J3

♦AK

♣AJ5

W	N	E	S
D3	D8	D9	<u>DA</u>
H6	H4	H9	<u>HJ</u>
H2	<u>H10</u>	H5	H3
H7	HA	S2	<u>S3</u>
C3	<u>CK</u>	C4	C5
HK	H8	C2	<u>S4</u>
C7	<u>CQ</u>	C6	CJ
SQ	S5	S9	??

Crunch time. At this point we are missing the AS and the QS.

Our opponents are honest players and by giving count to each other they have also given us the count. We now know that West started with 4H, 5D and 3C. Therefore just the one spade. And therefore E started with 3S. East is also a good enough player to duck the AS at this trick.

If one was missing just the QS, the odds would be that it is with East, but that is not the case here.

One final clue perhaps.

If East had held 3 spades to the Q, he would surely not have ruffed the AH. In point of fact, South did not have a loser to throw on the AH but East's ruff was probably a reflex action which from A92 does not look like costing anything at that time.

However, it is perhaps the pointer to South going up with the KS for the contract.

One from Yateley & Hawley BC.

Dealer: East

Vul: N/S

	♠Q 10 7 2	
	♥9 3	
	♦A J 9 2	
	♣K 9 5	
♠K		♠AJ65
♥K Q J 7		♥1052
♦Q 5 4 3		♦6
♣Q J 6 3		♣A10872
	♠9 8 4 3	
	♥A 8 6 4	
	♦K 10 8 7	
	♣4	

E	S	W	N
P	P	1D*	P

*Hoping partner can bid hearts

1S	P	1N	P
3N*	P	P	P

*Pushy but partner should have 16HCP and with my 5 card suit

North leads the H9, 2H from dummy, AH from South and West drops the QH.

South thinks long and hard. Although it is a strange card to lead from a holding of J to five hearts it does look as though declarer has got the KQ of hearts doubleton. (South has obviously never heard of Andrew Robson's "high for hate") Hopefully with a singleton club then partner may just have a club stopper and entry so rather than switch to the inviting diamonds, South decided to clear the hearts. Declarer duly won with the KH, ran the QC and then finessed the C10. The CA was cashed plus the H10. Back to hand with the KS and declarer now played his last winning heart.

Poor North, now somewhat bemused, fatally discarded two spades and declarer was able to cross to dummy with his last club and cash two more spades to emerge with 12 tricks.

As it was the last board of the round E/W were able to move away before the recriminations got to the point of bloodshed.

Guess who dropped the Queen of Hearts?

Defensive thinking.

Dealer: South, nobody vulnerable.

I am sitting in the East seat, you are West and although it is just a part score hand, you need to be wide awake.

Vul: N/S

	♠AQ10653	
	♥AK9	
	♦J3	
	♣A3	
♠J		♠K982
♥Q 106542		♥3
♦A10		♦Q9854
♣K865		♣J42
	♠74	
	♥J87	
	♦K762	
	♣Q1097	

The bidding had gone

S	W	N	E
P	2H	2S	3H
P	P	3S	end

I led the H3, you correctly played the H10 and declarer won with the HK.

At this point an alarm bell should have gone off for you rather loudly.

West's thinking:

East has supported me and has not got either the Ace or King (If he had the Ace, he would surely have lead it) so declarer has the HA.

Partner has also led the H3 and you have the H2 - he is not able to play HiLo to show a doubleton - that H3 must be a singleton. Would he support me with a singleton? You bet he would, especially at this favourable vulnerability. And looking at dummy's two spades and your singleton SJ, partner is quietly holding several spades plus he must have outside values as well. Things are looking up for the defence.

Anyway, declarer now leads at trick 2, a small diamond from hand and goes up with the DK which you take with the DA.

You return a diamond to partners DQ and he sends back the 8 of diamonds which you brilliantly ruff with the SJ - a nice little uppercut as declarer has to over-ruff with the SQ. And when he cashes the AS and you show out, he pulls a face. He then cashes the CA and leads up to the Q109, taking a long time before he plays the 9.

OK, more counting.

Declarer has shown up with 2 diamonds, probably 3 hearts (from the earlier thoughts) and he should have 6 spades - having bid them twice. Therefore he can only have 2 clubs and is not setting them up. Ergo it is mandatory to grab that KC now. And so one off.

But, it can be made – let's now look at it from declarer's point of view.
The previous hand as seen by declarer

Dlr: South

Vul: N/S.

	♠AQ10653	
	♥AK9	
	♦J3	
	♣A3	
♠J		♠K982
♥Q 106542		♥3
♦A10		♦Q9854
♣K865		♣J42
	♠74	
	♥J87	
	♦K762	
	♣Q1097	

The bidding had gone

S	W	N	E
P	2H	2S	3H
P	P	3S	end

To make 3 spades Declarer must win the first heart with the Ace, bang down the AS and exit with QS. East wins but is semi end-played. His best return is a spade but declarer wins and immediately puts E back on lead with his last spade. Now E is seriously end-played with no good exit. Best is a low diamond, ducked in dummy and won by North's DJ *. North now exits with a diamond to West's DA and this time it is West who is end-played. Note that a low club will allow declarer to make an overtrick so it has to be a heart to hold declarer to his contract. Also note that any other opening lead from East apart from the singleton heart will lead to the same result along a similar line of play.

* Should W take the DA and give his partner a heart ruff, E should now exit with his last spade to the following position

	♠653	
	♥K	
	♦J	
	♣A3	
♠ -		♠ -
♥Q6		♥ -
♦10		♦Q985
♣K865		♣J42
	♠ -	
	♥J	
	♦K7	
	♣Q1097	

North needs all the remaining tricks. He cashes the HK and runs his spades squeezing East down to a singleton CJ. He can then cross to dummy with the DK and lead the QC – pinning the CJ – to make the contract.

Fourth best seven

Every now and then we use a set of prepared hands at the club and we find that the movement has not used all of them. And in the unused hands there are sometimes some little gems which would have provided a real test.

How do you think you would have got on with this one ?

Partner opens the bidding with 1H and you bid 2S. Partner now says 3C and you bid 3D. I know this is fourthsuit but let's see what partner says. He bids 4D. OK, let us check him out with 4NT (RKCB). He replies 5S. Now, trumps have not been agreed so this response is geared towards diamonds and means he has the AH and KD plus the QD. Better and better. I wonder what else he has so 5NT. His response is 6D – one King, either hearts or clubs, probably the latter as he bid clubs. The diamonds should provide 5 tricks, the AH, AC, KC plus 4 certain spades adds up to 12. It ought to be possible to ruff the small spade if they don't break or perhaps we can set up a long club so a grand slam looks a fair bet. You bid 7D.

The lead is the H3 and dummy goes down to reveal :-

♠86

♥AQ985

♦KQ

♣KQ95

♠AKQJ4

♥7

♦A10873

♣AJ

Oh dear, perhaps not the best contract. If the spades behave then 7S or 7N is a better contract. But how do we play this 7D ?

Obviously a bad diamond break will kill you stone dead, especially if there are 4 or 5 to the J on your left.

But if the missing diamonds are on your right then is there anything you can do ?

Actually there are some possibilities here so we should plan our play with this in mind – a trump coup. We need to be able to lead from dummy so that we are sitting over the diamond holder. So the first thing we do, after winning the AH is to ruff a heart in hand. Now we must try the spades and see if we can cash three spade tricks. And all follow except dummy who ditches a small heart. Now we cash the A and J of clubs noting for what it is worth that your LHO plays high-low on the clubs (normally indicating an even number ie 2 or 4). Now we cross to the KD with the 9D appearing from your LHO. This surely is highly significant and implies that your RHO has all the rest of the diamonds. Now, if LHO was telling the truth about the clubs then your RHO has at least one more so we cash the KC and both follow while you discard the 4S. So, our plan might work out. We still need to reduce our length in trumps so we ruff another heart. We have reached the following position:-

♠ -
♥Q
♦Q
♣Q

♠J
♥ -
♦A10
♣ -

Nice and simple now. We ruff the JS with the QD and can now overruff our RHO with the AD and 10D.

Grand slam made.

The full hands

♠1095	♠86	♠732
♥K6432	♥AQ985	♥J10
♦9	♦KQ	♦J6542
♣10643	♣KQ95	♣873
	♠AKQJ4	
	♥7	
	♦A10873	
	♣AJ	

Guarantee

The bidding has gone

N	E	S	W
1C	1S	3NT	p
P	p		

West leads the 8S and dummy goes down

♠A6
♥J105
♦K5
♣A109743

♠QJ4
♥K74
♦A1083
♣K86

Plan your play.

First things first – count your winners.

5 clubs, 2 spades, 2 diamonds and 1 heart. So, what could go wrong?

Well, you could lose 1 spade, 1 club and possibly 3 hearts.

How can you guarantee your contract ?

What did you play at trick 1 ? The 6S ?

Oh dear. East wins with the KS and plays a heart which you let run to the QH. And West returns a heart which East ducks. Now, when West gets in with a club, another heart enables East to cash 2 tricks and beat your contract.

Say you win with the AS – you will still have the spades stopped but now you have the tempo – as it is called. You lead a small club from dummy and play the C8 from hand. West wins but now you can't be prevented from making your 9 tricks.

	♠A6	
	♥J105	
	♦K5	
	♣A109743	
♠83		♠K109732
♥Q93		♥A862
♦J9762		♦Q4
♣QJ3		♣2
	♠QJ4	
	♥K74	
	♦A1083	
	♣K86	

This actually occurred at Yateley weekly duplicate

♠A

♥1087

♦KQ8

♣A107642

♠KQ108653

♥2

♦AJ109

♣8

West is dealer and opens 1H. North doubles and East bids 3H.

South jumps to 4S. W passes.

North has a think.

As both W & E have bid hearts, South must be short in that suit. If S has the Ace of diamonds this is now looking good. Worth a look so North bids 4NT (RKCB).

South responds 5S showing two keycards plus the Queen of spades. Definitely looking good so North pots the slam – 6S.

West leads the AH and follows with the KH which S ruffs.

South's turn to think.

I can draw trumps and then I have four winning diamonds and the AC for my slam.

What could go wrong. The obvious answer is either E or W holding 4 spades to the Jack. And if so, what could we do about it. If it is W then nothing but if it is E then we have a chance.

How ? We need a plan B.

Well we need to be able to lead from the N hand with a winning card or two so that we can over-ruff E.

What can we lead from dummy to maintain this situation at the end of the hand. The answer must be clubs so we need to set up the clubs.

So, let's find out the lay of the land. Cross to the AS, cash the AC and then trump a club back to hand. Now cash the KS and, sure enough, we get the bad news.

Time to apply plan B.

Go back to dummy with the KD and ruff another club. Bingo, they break 3 – 3 so the clubs are now set up. Back to dummy with the QD and just run the winning clubs until E surrenders.

Slam made.

The full hand

♠A		
♥1087		
♦KQ8		
♣A107642		
♠4	♠J972	4
♥AKJ64	♥Q953	
♦7543	♦83	
♣Q95	♣KJ3	
♠KQ108653		
♥2		
♦AJ109		
♣8		

Simple really.

But the key is recognising the possibility of this trump coup play and shortening one's trumps very early in the play of the hand

Sadly no one bid the slam at Yateley and no one made 12 tricks either.

One from the text book.

With a 4 – 4 trump fit, you may need to delay drawing trumps until your side suit is established.

4S by East

The lead is KD, followed by small diamond to the Ace

	♠8	
	♥K983	
	♦A74	
	♣Q10943	
♠K532		♠AQ106
♥104		♥AQJ762
♦J82		♦3
♣A876		♣J2
	♠J974	
	♥5	
	♦KQ10965	
	♣K5	

S	W	N	E
<u>DK</u>	D2	D7	D3
D10	D8	<u>DA</u>	2C* * Key play
CK	<u>CA</u>	CQ	CJ
H5	H10	HK	<u>HA</u>
S4	S2	S8	<u>SA</u>
<u>S7</u>	H4	H3	HJ
C5	C6	C8	<u>S6</u>

At this point, East leads the 2 of hearts and South is fixed.

Whatever he does, declarer can ruff low (or over-ruff), draw any remaining trumps and claim with all winning hearts.

A ruff record – as published in the sadly now defunct Bridge Plus magazine.

It was the qualifying round for a County event at our club, and I heard my RHO, as dealer, open a weak 3C. My South hand was:

♠ -
♥AK8762
♦K1054
♣K107

Now, I have played with this gentleman and I know that he plays it by the book – his pre-empt is weak and normally based upon a seven-card suit. We usually play Fishbein for take-out, but I was pretty certain that partner would reply spades so I just bid a simple 4H. LHO now bids 5C and partner, with minimal pause for thought, leaps to 6H. This went round to LHO who doubled and led the AS.

♠1087643
♥Q1093
♦3
♣A2

♠ -	South	West	North	East
♥AK8762				3C
♦K1054	4H	5C	6H	NB
♣K107	NB	Dbl	End	

Looking at dummy, I apply Rule No 1: Count your tricks. I have eight on top, and need four more. Diamond ruffs in dummy - that's three. A club ruff in dummy? No, that's out, because West can have one club at most. Can I set the spades up? Well, nobody has bid them. Surely if West had five or six he would have bid them over 4H, so he probably only has three or four. And he must have the Ace of diamonds for his double. Similarly, East is known to have seven clubs. Give him the remaining three or four spades, and I can imagine a shortage of hearts there.

Anyway, I need four ruffs to set up the spades; have I got enough entries. Hopefully, trumps themselves will provide them, plus the AC which ought to stand up.

I start by ruffing the first spade in hand and immediately lead a small club. West plays the JC and I win in dummy and lead another spade for a second ruff, both opponents following. Having removed West's club, I cannot afford to let East in to lead one so I play the KD which West has to take. He now leads a heart, won by dummy's 9H with East showing out. I can see my way clear now, so I ruff another spade with the AH, both opponents following again, back to dummy with a diamond ruff, ruff out the last spade with my KH, lead a small heart to dummy finessing the JH, draw the last trump and claim.

The full deal was:

Dealer East

N/S Vul.

♠1087643

♥Q1093

♦3

♣A2

♠AK92

♥J54

♦A9762

♣J

♠QJ5

♥ -

♦QJ8

♣Q986543

♠ -

♥AK8762

♦K1054

♣K107

I have made dummy reversals before, but not with quite as many ruffs as that. And 6H doubled and made on a combined 19 count can't be all that bad either, can it?

Ruffing in too soon.

	♠J8	
	♥64	
	♦J10972	
	♣K932	
♠Q97		♠53
♥72		♥KQ985
♦853		♦KQ4
♣QJ1074		♣A86
	♠AK10642	
	♥AJ103	
	♦A6	
	♣5	

The bidding was short and sweet

E	S	W	N
---	---	---	---

1H	4S	Passed out	
----	----	------------	--

Plan the play after the 7H lead.

West dutifully led his partner's suit and after winning the Ace, declarer promptly led the C5. West put in the 10, ducked in dummy and East signaled possession of the Ace of clubs with the 8. West now plays his second heart to partner's King and East returns the 9 of hearts. Declarer plays the HJ and W has a brief think before ruffing in with QS – reasoning that they should be able to cash the AC for one off. Unfortunately for the defence, South ruffs this second club. Taking a deep breath, S now leads a small spade to dummy's 8 (Phew). Declarer now leads the C9 from dummy and ruffs the Ace, crosses back to dummy with the Jack of spades to discard his losing diamond on the established CK. Contract made.

West was guilty of not thinking deeply enough. Although his partner had signalled the Ace of clubs, declarer's shortage should have been apparent with West's 5 plus dummy's 4. Also, partner had led the H9, surely a suit preference for diamonds? But more to the point, his SQ was always going to make so what was the hurry?

By refusing the ruff, declarer must go one off.

Hi Andrew,

We have just come back from a fortnight in the sun in Tenerife. Do you think your readers would be interested to know that there is a friendly bridge club in Los Cristianos, next to Playa Las Americas in the south of the island. They play in the winter months from October to March at a hotel called the Commodore starting at 1:30 and there are normally about 8 to 10 tables. Google **bridge-club-tenerife** for details.

Standard of play a bit variable with a mixture of expats and holiday makers. Below is a hand where declarer showed a mixture of good technique and bad. You could say this is a case where signalling length to partner helps the opposition more than your side.

	♠9762	
	♥K76	
	♦Q	
	♣KQ1082	
♠V		♠AJ854
♥J1053		♥A4
♦K9876		♦10543
♣J975		♣63
	♠KQ103	
	♥Q982	
	♦AJ2	
	♣A4	

N/S have wound their way to 3NT and W leads the D7, won in dummy by the DQ.

For some reason best known to himself, declarer decided to cash his club tricks and duly crossed to the CA (instead of playing a spade) – East playing the C6 and West the C7. Declarer was alert enough to realise they were both showing an even number (with the 3 & 5 missing) so when he led the C4 with West completing the peter with the C5, he finessed the C10. Almost a no-lose situation really because if East has 4 to the CJ, he is always going to make it. But South is leaving himself wide-open to a diamond coming through and he has not got a sure re-entry to dummy. However, after cashing 5 club tricks and exiting with a spade from dummy, he is guaranteed his contract whatever the opposition do.

Regards

Alan

A 25 HCP Slam

♠A109

♥982

♦1063

♣AK65

♠KJ

♥AK10753

♦K85

♣103

An extremely pushy North had put his partner into 6H and the lead was the QD. East won the Ace and returned a diamond to the K, 4 and 3.

S cashed the AH all following low and crossed to the AC. The 9H was covered by the Jack and the QH fell under the KH.

Obviously the 8D could be thrown on a spade but which way to finesse the QS?

South had a think and realised that there was an extra chance with a squeeze play. So he cashed the KC and ruffed a club, the QC falling from West. With West now in charge of the diamonds and East with the master club, South ran his trumps to execute a perfect double squeeze.

Actually I was South and am pleased to say that I found this line at the table rather than in a post session analysis.

But the latter shows that 6N is also there on the same line of play.

The full hand

	♠A109	
	♥982	
	♦1063	
	♣AK65	
♠Q43		♠87652
♥Q6		♥J4
♦QJ974		♦A2
♣Q87		♣J962
	♠KJ	
	♥AK10753	
	♦K85	
	♣103	

How a signal unlocked a frozen suit.

♠AKJ
 ♥Q76
 ♦AJ4
 ♣K1096

 ♠Q10653
 ♥A108
 ♦7
 ♣A875

Bidding

W	N	E	S
P	1C	P	1S
P	3N	P	5C*

*I do not like being in NT with a singleton and I have excellent club support

P 5S*

* I don't like playing in a minor suit game – ignoring the jump – so your suit

P p*

* Hmm, perhaps North's 19 count isn't that wonderful. (It wasn't – only 18)

The lead, unsurprisingly, was the D5, taken by the AD, E playing an encouraging D8.

Declarer ruffed a diamond, crossed to the AS, cashed the KS and led a club to West's QC.

West played the KD, JD from N, 10D from E and ruffed by South. South then drew the last trump and W discarded the D5. Two top clubs were cashed with East discarding a small heart.

E/W's discard system was explained as "low for interest". On the last club from N, East now discarded the QD, West throwing his last diamond. Declarer led a small heart from dummy and put in the 8 won by West's 9. West exited with the 2H, but declarer knows that E must hold the KH as his "interest" and can play low from dummy. East is now fixed and declarer wins the last two tricks for his contract.

The full hand

	♠AKJ	
	♥Q76	
	♦AJ4	
	♣K1096	
♠42		♠987
♥J92		♥K543
♦K9653		♦Q1082
♣Q43		♣J2
	♠Q10653	
	♥A108	
	♦7	
	♣A875	

At the post-mortem, it was realised that a simple 6C had been missed. Perhaps if N had just jumped to 2N there might have been room to explore.

W	N	E	S
P	1C	P	1S
P	2N	P	4C
P	4D	P	4H
P	4N	P	5H
P	6C		

Doing it the hard way.

♠6
♥AQJ
♦A743
♣AK1072

♠Q107
♥9542
♦KJ
♣Q954

All vul dealer W

W	N	E	S
P	1C	P	3C*

*Playing inverted minors

P	3D	p	3H
P	6H**	P	P

** Having forgotten the system with a weak hand opposite.

Lead is the JC. Dummy goes down and I can see that we are in the wrong contract. Ouch.
Is there any chance at all?

Maybe.

I win the lead with the QC and finesse the hearts, dummy winning. Perhaps there is a God after all. Lead the 3D and finesse the JD – it wins. Another heart finesse and cash the AH, all follow. Now there are 12 tricks for an undeserved top.

A spade lead and continuation would have killed the contract stone dead of course.

The full deal

	♠6	
	♥AQJ	
	♦A743	
	♣AK1072	
♠K8543		♠AJ92
♥K86		♥1073
♦9862		♦Q105
♣J		♣863
	♠Q107	
	♥9542	
	♦KJ	
	♣Q954	

Going with the percentages

♠K10962

♥Q105

♦AK

♣K87

♠AQ8

♥A983

♦1043

♣A94

Dealer North all vul.

North opens 1S, South bids 2H* and N jumps to 4H. South, expecting to be in a 4 – 4 fit, bids 6H.

The lead is the Queen of clubs.

Actually, although we are in a Moysian fit, it would be just the same if the contract was 6S.

* N/S were not using the Jacoby 2NT convention. South considered he was strong enough to bid 2H as a forcing bid and await partner's response.

You have to get the hearts right. The percentage play must be to go for split honours in hearts (actually 67%) so after winning with KC I run the 10H which loses to the JH and back comes the JC. I win with the AC and cross to dummy to run the QH. Which loses to the KH and the 10C is cashed for two down.

The full hand

♠K10962	
♥Q105	
♦AK	
♣K87	
♠4	♠J753
♥KJ4	♥762
♦8765	♦QJ92
♣QJ1052	♣62
♠AQ8	
♥A983	
♦1043	
♣A94	

Would you have played it any differently?

Is there any good line of reasoning for you to make the winning play of leading up to the QH?
Unless you have a gut feeling and play by instinct rather than by the odds.

When you gotta go then go.

♠A932

♥52

♦QJ873

♣86

♠K10

♥KQ873

♦A96

♣AKJ

S	W	N	E	
2N	P	3C*	P	*Stayman
3D*	P	4D	P	*mental aberration
4N	P	5D	P	
6D	p	p	p	

Lead QS.

OK, a wheel or two has come off. Is there anything at all I can do to dig myself out of this very deep hole. Perhaps, just maybe.

The old saying that if the only way to make the contract is for the cards to be in just the right places then go for it.

I need the KD to be with East and the 10D to be with West. Oh, and the AH with East would be nice.

And would you believe the full hand was

♠A932

♥52

♦QJ873

♣86

♠QJ54

♥1094

♦1052

♣543

♠876

♥AJ6

♦K4

♣Q10972

♠K10

♥KQ873

♦A96

♣AKJ

Sometimes lead directing doubles are not a good idea

	♠Q	
	♥K1082	
	♦J108752	
	♣J9	
♠10954		♠8762
♥J93		♥Q754
♦4		♦KQ63
♣Q7432		♣10
	♠AKJ3	
	♥A6	
	♦A9	
	♣AK865	

South opens a Benji 2C, West passes and North bids a negative 2D. East doubles for a lead – well it seems like a good idea at the time.

South shows his 23 count with 3NT. North looks for a 4 card heart suit with 4C and hearing 4S bids 5NT on the strength of his long suits and South pushes on to 6NT.

Being a good boy, West leads the 4D and dummy plays small. East is in trouble. He can read the lead for a singleton and knows South's holding is A9. Damned if he does or damned if he doesn't so East decides to play a top honour. This is promptly crunched by the Ace of diamonds and the remaining honour is swiftly dislodged. South now has the rest of the tricks for his contract.

If East ducks the diamond at trick 1 it allows South to win with the 9D. He now has the tempo to set up the clubs by leading up to the JC in dummy. And again there are twelve tricks available for the taking.

Without the lead-directing double West would probably have come up with a lead of a neutral and safe -ish spade. Now, unless declarer makes an inspired play of finessing the 9D at trick 2, he will only garner 11 tricks.

Although to be fair, the only legitimate play for the contract is to play for a doubleton diamond honour in the East hand.

Hi David,

Ref the two slam hands.

I was right in that I can make both of them BUT only because the opposition made an error on both of them. Small errors and actually - from their point of view - fully understandable plays.

Hand 15 6H by N

Incidentally, I very nearly put you into 6N which is unbeatable and also a better score but after you had removed the 3N to 4H, I felt the slam was likely to be better in hearts.

♠J	
♥AQ9863	
♦AJ4	
♣J53	
♠Q986	♠432
♥K75	♥4
♦2	♦K108753
♣K10872	♣964
♠AK1075	
♥J102	
♦Q96	
♣AQ	

East led his 4th highest diamond - the 7. Not unreasonable but it did give me a chance.

I played the 6 from dummy. This was my error and cost me the contract. If I put in the 9D or the QD I am then home.

as follows

E	S	W	N
7D	<u>9D</u>	2D	4D
4H	<u>JH</u>	5H	3H
2S	<u>10H</u>	7H	6H
3D	2H	<u>KH</u>	AH
3S	5S	<u>QS</u>	JS

Whatever West leads at this point, North must make the rest of the tricks.

Actually, only a club lead will defeat the contract with the KH onside.

Hand 17 Another 6H by N

♠ -
 ♥ Q10965
 ♦ AQ106
 ♣ AQJ6
 ♠ K10832 ♠ AJ964
 ♥ J82 ♥ -
 ♦ K5 ♦ J987
 ♣ 985 ♣ K1073
 ♠ Q75
 ♥ AK743
 ♦ 432
 ♣ 42

The lead was the AS which I ruffed and I then led the 6H to dummy's AH. East made the fatal mistake of discarding the 7C - again understandable as they play HELD (High Encourage - Low Discourage). This told West and me that East had the KC. The play now goes

E	S	W	N
AS	5S	8S	<u>5H</u>
7C	<u>AH</u>	2H	6H
7D	2D	5D	<u>QD</u>
3C	2C	5C	<u>AC</u>
<u>KC</u>	4C	8C	QC
JS	7S	2S	<u>9H</u>
10C	3D	9C	<u>JC</u>
8D	4D	KD	<u>AD</u>
9D	<u>KH</u>	3S	6D
6S	3H	8H	<u>10H</u>
9S	4H	JH	<u>QH</u>
JS	QS	10S	<u>6C</u>
JD	<u>7H</u>	KS	10D

Apologies for not finding these plays on the night.

Alan

Key plays (1) – I'm sure you would do the same

	♠AQJ1096	
	♥10764	
	♦J53	
	♣ -	
♠74		♠K8532
♥KQ983		♥AJ52
♦K4		♦8
♣AQ53		♣1097
	♠ -	
	♥ -	
	♦AQ109762	
	♣KJ8642	

6D* by South

After some fireworks in the auction,

S	W	N	E	
2D*	2H	2S	4H	*Benji style – game force opener
5D	5H	5S	X	
6C	X	6D	P	
P	X	P	P	

Not surprisingly if not very hopefully W led the KH.

Now the first of 3 key plays – I ruff with the 10D – preserving that little deuce.

Second key play I lead the QD, won by West.

Slightly banjaxed W exits with another heart which I ruff high.

Crossing to dummy with the JD I make the third key play by taking the ruffing finesse in spades. When this works I am home and dry.

Key plays (2)

The bidding has gone

N	E	S	W
-	-	1C	1D
2D	3D	P	P
4S	P	P	5D
6C	P	P	Double

West leads the AD, dummy plays small, East plays the 9D and you drop the QD
West continues with KD, dummy follows with the 10D, East plays the 6D and you ruff.
You now play the AC, West plays the 6C, dummy the 4 and East drops the 9C
You now lead the 3C, West plays the 7C.....
Do you finesse ?

♠AKQxxx

♥J

♦10x

♣K1054

♠xxx

♥A10xx

♦Q

♣AJ832

41% of the time the missing 4 cards will break 2 – 2, 49% of the time they will break 3 – 1. This rather belies the old adage “Eight ever, nine never”.

In this particular case we have an extra piece of information – West has doubled the final contract. Could that be because he is holding the QC? Surely he did not double on the possibility of 2 diamond tricks?

Although holding the KQ of hearts as well might be enough for the double.

However, I think a real expert has one extra card to play which might just tip the balance. It would cost nothing to lead the JC from hand – and watch West like a hawk. Unless he/she is a very good player and has thought about this possibility, they will be hard pushed not to give some reaction.

The slightest hesitation would indicate the presence of the Queen and were it not so then the Director would deal with him accordingly.

A simple 4H contract

After an uncontested auction, South ends in a slightly pushy 4H. The lead is the KC and dummy goes down

♠KQ2

♥Q542

♦AQ73

♣72

♠854

♥AK103

♦865

♣A95

Definitely a count your winners time, assuming everything is lying favourably.

2S + 4H + 2D + 1C + a club ruff. Possibly a long diamond but that may be stretching things a bit too far.

Win the CA and lead a small spade to the QS which wins. Exit with a club, won by East's 10C. East leads a small heart, won by the 10H, West following. Your last club is ruffed, both opponents following and cross back to hand with a top trump.

Now finesse the DQ which wins and cash the AD, then exit with a small diamond. West wins with East following.

Now E/W can only take one more trick – the AS – so contract made.

Seems simple enough but it is all a matter of timing. Declarer has so few entries to his hand that he must maximize them to lead through West and definitely a case for not drawing trumps immediately.

The full hand

♠KQ2

♥Q542

♦AQ73

♣72

♠AJ10

♥J96

♦K109

♣KQ83

♠9763

♥87

♦J42

♣J1064

♠854

♥AK103

♦865

♣A95

Keeping East off lead

♠AJ1065
♥1086
♦86
♣AK10

♠987
♥KJ7
♦AQJ73
♣J9

The bidding has gone

W	N	E	S
1H	1S	P	2N
P	3N	P	P

After much thought, West leads the 4H won in dummy with the 10H, East playing the 9.

A small diamond from dummy is won by the QD.

My turn for a long think.

Obviously I must keep East off lead just in case the hearts are 5 - 2 but I need to develop the spades. A pound to a penny that the diamonds do not break 3 – 3. For his opening bid West should have all the remaining missing points but with AQ of hearts plus the QC and the KS he might just open. The main point is that I dare not finesse W for both the K & Q of spades. A slender chance but one that might work is that East can be induced to duck with the lead through him and also that W might have the KS doubleton.

I lead the 9S and West plays low in tempo. OK, up with the AS and a spade back – East discards a small club (Shame, running the 9S would have been good) and West wins with the QS.

However, West now has a problem. If he allows me to clear the spades I will make overtricks, so he correctly cashes the AH and exits with a heart. I win and lead the JC. West shrugs and covers with the Q. I can now take 3 club tricks, plus 2 hearts and 1 spade and take another diamond finesse for my contract.

The full hand

♠AJ1065
♥1086
♦86
♣AK10

♠KQ32
♥AQ542
♦54
♣Q2

♠4
♥93
♦K1092
♣876543

♠987
♥KJ7
♦AQJ73
♣J9

A fifty-fifty Grand.

♠KQ75
♥85
♦52
♣KQJ54

♠A8
♥AQJ963
♦AK8
♣A3

Bidding was

N	E	S	W
1C	P	1H	P
1S	P	4N*	P
5D	P	5N*	P
6C	P	6D	P
6S*	P	7N**	end

* RKCB
* Asking for Kings (up the line)
* Denies KH
** Needing a top so bids 7 knowing it is a 50% chance (reasonable odds ?)

Lead is the 10D, 2 from North, J from East and won by the Ace.

It is a 50% slam needing only the KH onside. But perhaps a little discovery play first.

Run 5 clubs. East discards a small heart, South discards 3 hearts and West 3 diamonds.

Pause for thought.

Why did East (not a strong player) discard a heart? Surely, holding the KH, one would not discard a heart even if holding 3 or 4 of them.

Therefore, if West has the KH the Grand is doomed unless it is a singleton. There is a way to find out if West has a singleton by cashing the top 3 spades. If West has 4 spades (plus 2C & 6D) then it is a singleton and you have to play for the drop. But you have lost the opportunity to take the two heart finesses needed if it turns out not to be the case.

So, you are in dummy, finesse the heart now or play on the spades to confirm the distribution ? This latter course could however lead to two off.

That heart discard has to be significant though.

One final thought. If a heart is lead to the Ace now, then if it does not drop the King you will only be one off.

Go for it.

The full hand

	♠KQ75	
	♥85	
	♦52	
	♣KQJ54	
♠J652		♠1094
♥K		♥10742
♦Q109764		♦J3
♣96		♣10872
	♠A8	
	♥AQJ963	
	♦AK8	
	♣A3	

One cannot entirely blame East for the revealing discard. If partner has 4 spades he needs to keep the 3 of them. Declarer's hearts are likely to be solid anyway so his holding is immaterial. However perhaps he should have discarded the diamond.

Rescue from a double or how to snatch defeat from

The bidding has gone

Dealer E Vul E/W

E	S	W	N
1S	2D	2H	P
3C	P	4C	P
4N*	P	5D	P
6C	X	P	P
6H	X	end	

* Intending to pass 5C if no ace

♠109654

♥J10

♦842

♣1064

♠V

♥Q8743

♦AQ53

♣9872

♠AKQ32

♥K95

♦7

♣AJ53

♠J87

♥A62

♦KJ1096

♣KQ

6H by West

Lead is a friendly diamond, South playing the KD.

Win with the AD and lead up to the KH - noting the 10H from North.

South wins the AH and will lead the KC.

Win with the AC, cash 3 top spades and discard 3 clubs from hand.

Now lead a small club and ruff the QC.

Cash your QH noting the fall of the JH from North.

Cross back to dummy by ruffing a small diamond.

Cash the JC and discard your other small diamond

Now back to hand by ruffing a spade with the 7H, draw the last trump with your master 8H and that leaves you with the winning QD.

Sometimes it doesn't pay to double and this is a case in point but to be fair to South he has the Ace of trumps and a certain club trick with no club shortages in the E/W hands for that to be ruffed. And also it is only due to the fact of the doubleton J10 of hearts in the North hand that allows the slam to be made.

Snippets page

Classic splinter

Dealer West

♠K8	♠A1052
♥KJ4	♥AQ5
♦1065	♦7
♣AKQJ6	♣108752

1C – 3D*^{splinter} – 4N – 5S – 6C

With this sequence the small slam can be bid with confidence.

Otherwise

1C – 1S – 3C - ?

5C a bit chicken

4N will commit to to at least 6C

In this case it will get you 5S (2 + QC) and you have to sign off in 6C. Given the AD and AC with say the QC and a 5/6 card suit the grand might well be on.

But say it goes 1C – 1S – 3C – 3H

Having bypassed 3D then this denies a diamond control.

West can ask but again this will commit to 6C and there might be two diamond losers so West will have to settle for 5C. East would be justified in punting the slam with his controls but it's all a bit hit and miss.

I'll take the splinter route thank you.

You don't have to use a convention because it is on your card.

♠A	
♥K94	
♦QJ84	
♣QJ863	
♠K954	♠QJ8763
♥AJ5	♥Q873
♦A109	♦532
♣A105	♣V
♠102	
♥1062	
♦K76	
♣K9742	

Teams E/W vul dealer East

East opens 2S. South passes and West bids ?

West has a tempter but think about it. What can East have that makes a slam possible?

QJ spades KH plus one of KD or KC, possible QJ of either minor. No, it's asking too much.

It's teams – just bid 4S.

If you ask via 2N, then you are letting North into the auction and N/S can find a good save in 5C.

Three in a row – or when you are hot, you're hot.

During a Green point event, after some indifferent results, the next stanza produced these three hands in a row.

	♠QJ10	
	♥9653	
	♦J5	
	♣J653	
♠83		♠64
♥AQJ7		♥K4
♦Q93		♦A108742
♣9872		♣K106
	♠AK9752	
	♥1082	
	♦K6	
	♣AQ	

The bidding had gone

E	S	W	N
1D	1S	2D	2S
3D	4S	P	P

The lead was the 3D, won by East who tamely returned a diamond to my KD.

Crossing to the QS, I took the club finesse and cashed the AC. Back to dummy with another spade and I can ruff the KC high, cross back to dummy with another spade, discard a losing heart on the established JC and concede two hearts for my contract. As East, would you have led a heart ?

Next hand

	♠J6	
	♥KQ9	
	♦QJ53	
	♣10954	
♠9		♠A43
♥753		♥A864
♦AK8762		♦1094
♣K82		♣QJ6
	♠KQ108752	
	♥J102	
	♦V	
	♣A73	

From the South seat I opened 1S. West bid 2D and partner said 2N. East contributed 3D and I jumped to 4S, passed out.

West unsurprisingly led the AD which I ruffed. I then led the 10H to dummy's KH which was won by East's AH.

No doubt inhibited by dummy's 109 of clubs, East decided to protect his partners hand by leading a small diamond. End of story really as I can discard a losing club, knock out the AS and later discard my second losing club on the established QD.

And the third one

	♠J8	
	♥AQ4	
	♦Q43	
	♣AJ854	
♠10973		♠Q542
♥K		♥J532
♦AJ985		♦102
♣KQ7		♣962
	♠AK6	
	♥109876	
	♦K76	
	♣103	

East no bids, I passed (reluctantly) and West bids 1D. North doubled and East passes. I jump to 3H and partner raised to 4H. The lead was the 10S. The knave was covered by the QS and I won with the AS. On the lead of a heart the King pops up from West and is duly beheaded. Pause for thought. Leading a small club from dummy, my 10 is beaten by West's KC. West now leads the 9S which I win with the KS. I could play West for the QC – a reasonable shot in light of the bidding but I can now see a better way. I lead a small diamond and West wins with the Ace and exits with another diamond, won by the QD and with East following. After cashing the AC I ruff a small club in hand felling the QC. I ruff my last spade in dummy with the 4H and lead an established club. East ruffs in with a small trump and I over-ruff. Now I can draw East's penultimate trump with the QH and claim, losing only one more trick to the JH. So there we are, three in a row, admittedly with a little help from the opposition.

When you need a certain distribution

♠62

♥AKQJ1073

♦4

♣J73

♠AQJ1087

♥4

♦A1083

♣AQ

Following Andrew Robson's principle of opening big hands slowly, I bid 1S and West came in with 2NT. Partner bid 4H and with my minor suit controls I bid an optimistic 6S, passed out. The lead was the KD.

Time for some serious thinking.

West has shown 5 – 5 in the minors and therefore is short in the majors so I can't just play hearts immediately for discards. And trumps are going to break at best 3 – 2.

I could win trick 1 and then ruff a diamond to get to dummy for a spade finesse. Even if this works I may not be able to pick up the KS and I am now open to diamond losers. Scrub that idea.

I could lead the QS and hope that the KS will appear. If it does then it all depends upon what the owner of the KS returns. A heart at this point takes out my entry with some trumps still outstanding, ditto a diamond. Too risky so scrub that idea.

I can lead a heart and hope to get at least two discards before they ruff but I still have the problem of the KS and another minor suit loser. And not forgetting that W is short in hearts.

Ah, wait a minute, this has given me an idea.

If West has a singleton spade I am sunk. There is no way I can pick up the KS.

Therefore for my contract to succeed West must have two spades – and by default a singleton heart.

Also I need West to have King doubleton in spades. (The old adage, if you need a certain distribution for your contract you must assume it and play for it.)

I can cash the AS, cross to dummy with my heart and then run the hearts, discarding the QC on the KH. W will ruff the second round with his master KS but that is it. I can get back to dummy with a diamond ruff and now cash two more hearts to get rid of my last two diamonds, cross to the AC and claim.

The full hand.

	♠62	
	♥AKQJ1073	
	♦4	
	♣J73	
♠K5		♠943
♥9		♥8652
♦KQ972		♦J65
♣K9654		♣1082
	♠AQJ1087	
	♥4	
	♦A1083	
	♣AQ	

Note that had West led his singleton heart at the start, then a similar logic will apply. Obviously a club lead makes life very simple.

Partners can be a bit pushy.

Holding

♠A653

♥Q962

♦AQJ8

♣9

I opened 1D and over the (totally expected) 2C I bid 2H.

Partner now bids 2S (FSF). Just in case, I now bid 3S.

Partner has a long think and emerges with 6D – passed out.

LHO leads the Ace of hearts – not unreasonably – and switches to the 10S. I am faced with this dummy.

♠A653

♥Q962

♦AQJ8

♣9

♠J7

♥K83

♦K107

♣AK1054

Gulp. Pushy is not the word for it, she only has a 14 count and just 3 trumps.

(Ah, but you reversed partner and you must have 5 diamonds and good values. I refrained from pointing out that my bidding surely showed my 4-4-4-1 distribution rather than a strong hand but never mind. If I had bid 1NT we would have quietly ended in 3N and there would be no story to tell).

Can I make anything out of this? Perhaps a reverse dummy might gain a trick or two. So, winning with the AS, I cross to the AC and ruff a small club with the AD, go back to dummy with the 10D and ruff another club, bringing down the JC. Good. I now cash my remaining top trumps and lead a heart, LHO playing the 10. Winning with the KH, I now draw trumps with the KD, giving a large thankyou for the 3 – 3 break, and discarding a small spade. Cashing the K and 10 of clubs gets rid of my last two spades, LHO discards a small spade and RHO discards two spades. We have reached the moment of truth now and time for a think. Another 3 – 3 break, this time in hearts, will see me home but.

Why did LHO play the 10H when I led over to the King? He does not need to force me to rise with the King as it is obvious what I am doing. So to play the 10H he either has it bare at this point or has the Jack of hearts as well. Now, holding AJ10 of hearts surely he would not have led the Ace at the start when he has a potential two tricks in his hand, especially sitting over my heart bid. Deep breath, finesse with the 9H and I'm there. One of the thinnest slams I will ever make.

	♠K1092	
	♥A10	
	♦942	
	♣Q872	
♠A653		♠J7
♥Q962		♥K83
♦AQJ8		♦K107
♣9		♣AK1054
	♠Q84	
	♥J754	
	♦653	
	♣J63	

A defensive choice

	♠J42	
	♥AQ96	
	♦AJ3	
	♣J54	
♠Q65		♠A10987
♥J		♥K854
♦K7542		♦Q10
♣K932		♣76
	♠K3	
	♥10732	
	♦986	
	♣AQ108	

Love all dealer West
North is in 1N

East leads the 10S, dummy the 3 and West wins with the QS. West returns a spade, East wins and clears the spades with the 9S – suggesting the entry is in hearts.

North now runs the JC, ducked once by West who takes his K on the second lead of clubs. West knows that East's entry is in hearts but surely his singleton JH and dummy's 10H makes this a dangerous lead.

Key point – West must lead a diamond. Result 2 off. Leading a heart admittedly lets East win to cash two spades but declarer now just ditches his two losing diamonds and can win the AD plus winning hearts & clubs for his contract.

Spoilt for choice.

Every so often, a hand comes along where the permutation of bids is almost endless. Here is one of them from a teams match.

Dealer South, non vulnerable. N/S playing Benji style.

♠QJ87	
♥54	
♦AKQ102	
♣54	
♠654	♠AK106
♥QJ82	♥10
♦54	♦6
♣J1063	♣AKQ9872
♠92	
♥AK9763	
♦J9873	
♣ -	

South has 3 choices as to an opening bid. Let's take these in turn.

A.	S	W	N	E	
	2H	P	2N*	3C	*asking for further info. As in an earlier hand, I think there is a case for going direct to 4H. E will still bid 5C though.
	3S*	4C	4H**	5C	*Showing 2 of top 3 honours and near maximum points ** 4D is a much better bid. S can always bid 4H anyway and knowing that there are diamond values available, can now sacrifice over 5C if necessary. However ...?*
					* Should S show the diamonds? Perhaps not. Should S bid 5H?
					No.
					Partner has made an enquiry. He knows about (most of) S's hand so the decision should be left to N.
	P	P	P*		* worried by the potential losers in the black suits.

And thanks to the favourable spade position, 5C makes. Advantage E/W.

Let us consider the options along the way.

If N does bid his diamonds then S will support over 5C. E now has the problem of whether to bid 6C – almost certainly one off or whether to pass and hope his spades are enough to beat 5D. As one can see, they are not.

5D made – advantage N/S.

If S does decide to bid his diamonds over 5C, N might even be tempted to bid 6D. Doubled of course by E.

Now W has to decide whether this is a "Lightner" type double – asking for a spade lead or just a double on general principles. If the latter, and he leads a club then thank you very much. 6D made – advantage N/S.

If N had blasted straight to 4H, E will still bid 5C. Now S will probably bid 5H – bad news all round.

B.	S	W	N	E	
	1H*	P	2D	X**	* Rule of 19. ** Other two suits – there is just a chance that partner might have some spades.
	5D	P	P	?*	*Although now shut out, 6C is probably a good sacrifice.
C.	S	W	N	E	
	P*	P	1D	X**	* Can afford to pass at this point- there will almost certainly be a chance to come into the auction later. ** still hoping for some spades.
	5D*	P	P	?**	*Could have splintered but why let the opposition in. **To sacrifice or not – that is the question. And the answer really ought to be Yes.

Needless to say that on our table N passed 5C. In the other room our teammates allowed them to play in 5D – a double game swing. Ouch.

Bid big hands slowly

Or so says Andrew Robson, and I agree with him one hundred percent.

Take this monster of a hand – actually dealt by people at the Los Christianos Bridge Club in Tenerife.

♠5

♥ -

♦A3

♣AKQJ1098765

Nine out of ten cats that I showed this hand to said they would open the bidding with 4NT. This of course just asks partner to bid their ace if they have one and 5C if not. And these nine cats said that's OK, I can just pass 5C and that's that. If they show an ace then they would bid 6C.

Every partnership must have a forcing-to-game opening bid so surely that must be a better route?

We play a Benji 2D opener as game forcing.

That way you can find out if partner has just the right cards to get to the grand. (Having said that, one of my pet dislikes is the fashion for responders to do a simple relay of 2D or 2H after a 2C or 2D opening.)

Far better in my view, is to play the 2D or 2H as a simple negative and then a positive bid will be able to show controls at an early stage.

The sequence 2D – 2S – 3C – 3S can only mean one thing – partner has the A and K of spades and therefore one can bid 7C with certainty.

Partner in fact had

♠AKJxxx

♥xxxx

♦Kx

♣x

Spectacular disasters

You are holding at love all

♠KQxx

♥A

♦10xx

♣76432

And hear partner open a gambling 3NT. (Long solid minor suit with little outside)
RHO passes. Partner's suit must surely be diamonds and you may have 3 tricks so you bid 5D.
LHO comes in with 5H. Partner passes. RHO passes. Defensively you might beat this but 6D
must be a good sacrifice so you bid it. And get doubled. Dummy goes down to reveal

♠x

♥xx

♦Qx

♣AKQJ10985

Oh dear. We are both to blame. I should have bid 5C – for a pass or convert and similarly partner should have bid 6C for the same.

Big hands.

A certain tall person recommends taking big hands slowly and I do agree with him. But when you get a 3 loser hand including a six card major suit the temptation to open a Benji 2D game forcing bid is almost irresistible. Take the following –

♠AKQ1064

♥A2

♦KQJ106

♣ -

You do just that and almost inevitably partner gives a negative (denying an Ace and a King) with 2H. RHO comes in with 3C- unsurprisingly. You now bid 3S, LHO bids 4C and partner bids 4H. RHO passes. The question is how good are partner's hearts. He must have at least five of them and if they contain the K & Q then a slam must be odds on, otherwise if it is just the King then 6S is still possible.

As the trump suit has not been agreed then 4N should clarify the heart position. So you bid 4N (RKCB) and get 5C as an answer, doubled by RHO.

A shame that, neither of the top hearts present. Normally a bid of the unbid suit requests partner to sign off in 5N but with the clubs bid by the opponents then surely 5D can only indicate a second good playable suit.

But partner bids 5N anyway. Doubled by RHO. So you bid 6D. Doubled by LHO. This is getting ridiculous, more so when partner bids 6H, promptly doubled by RHO.

You half reach for the 6S card but finally stop and think. Partner must have at least 7 hearts to bid like that. We are in serious trouble anyway but perhaps with my ace rag of hearts we might get out for just one or perhaps two off. So you pass.

RHO leads the AC, and after placing your hand down as dummy, you go and peer at partners hand to see

♠ -

♥J1097543

♦72

♣Q1053

Partner ruffs the opening lead and cashes the AK of spades throwing 2 diamonds from hand. He now leads the KD which is covered by the Ace and ruffed. On a small heart from hand, the KH appears and is taken by the AH. Two more top diamonds dispose of two more clubs and the QS takes care of the last club, West having shown an even number but unable to ruff. All that remains is to lose one trick to the QH. Doubled contract – undeservedly - made.

Taking the tall person's advice should see an auction like this.

1S – 2H – 3D – 3H – 3S – 4H or possibly 1D – 1H – 2S – 3H – 3S – 4H, making 5 against best defence.

The full hand

♠AKQ1064

♥A2

♦KQJ106

♣V

♠82

♥K

♦954

♣AK98762

♠J9753

♥Q86

♦A83

♣J4

♠ -

♥J1097543

♦72

♣Q1053

An intra-finesse with a difference.

You have arrived in 6H with the lead of the 9D.

♠A987

♥KQ

♦AKJ

♣A654

♠Q3

♥A109432

♦8732

♣K

Eleven tricks on top, where is the twelfth coming from. Obviously the diamond finesse – if it works – will do it but the lead of the 9 rather suggests a singleton or doubleton in the West hand so that is probably out. The club pips are too small to be any good and a squeeze doesn't really look on. If the KS is with East then we may be able to promote the QS. Looks like the best hope.

So win the AD and immediately lead the 7S from dummy. East plays low. Pause for thought. Surely if E had the KS he could not afford to duck so we must now assume it is with West. No point in playing our QS so we also duck and West wins with the 10S and exits with the QC. Winning with the KC and another pause for thought. That 9 and 8 of spades in dummy might now be very useful. We might be able to set one of them up with a ruffing finesse. So we lead the QS which is covered by the KS, taken by the AS and lo and behold down comes the JS. Bingo, slam made.

The full hand

♠A987

♥KQ

♦AKJ

♣A654

♠K10654

♥865

♦9

♣QJ108

♠J2

♥J7

♦Q10654

♣9732

♠Q3

♥A109432

♦8732

♣K

West apologized to his partner for making the bad lead which really gave away the distribution and led us to the best play. A normal lead of the QC might well have seen us taking the losing diamond finesse.

Hope springs eternal.

You pick up this hand after RHO deals and passes.

♠ -

♥AKQJ9

♦KJ1072

♣AQ9

E	S	W	N	
P	1D	P	1S	
P	2H*	P	3S	*amply strong enough to reverse
P	3N	P	4D	
P	4N	P	5H	
P	6H*	X	END	*it should score better than 6D

West leads the JS and dummy goes down

♠AQ87652

♥3

♦A4

♣873

♠ -

♥AKQJ9

♦KJ1072

♣AQ9

Ah, a tad optimistic. Looks like I need two finesses plus a large slice of luck.

It's unlikely to win but it's a free finesse so I try the QS. Not surprisingly covered by the KS and I ruff with the 9H and then take four rounds of trumps with East discarding the 2C on the fourth round. I am told this is giving count – an odd number of clubs.

What do I know about the enemy hands?

E has produced 3 hearts and has either 3 or 5 clubs. W has shown 4 hearts and has 2 or 4 clubs. He may have had a doubleton spade with the lead of the JS and therefore is left with 3 or 5 diamonds. If the latter then perhaps I can assume the QD is there with the length, which, along with the KC and four trumps would be enough for the double.

I really don't know what to do now but with vague thoughts about a Vienna Coup and/or a throw-in I cash the Ace of clubs, both following. Time to put the diamond theory to the test so I lead the JD which wins, East playing the 8D.

Over to the AD, East discarding the 9S. I cash the Ace of spades, discarding the 7D, and West completes his peter with the 3S.

West's hand is now an open book. Two spades, four hearts, five diamonds and two clubs, one of which must be the KC. So, I can exit from dummy with a club, West wins and is end-played to lead away from his Q9 of diamonds round to my K10. Dodgy contract made. Note that 6D does not make.

The full hand

♠AQ87652

♥3

♦A4

♣873

♠J3

♥10762

♦Q9653

♣K6

♠K1094

♥864

♦8

♣J10542

♠V

♥AKQJ9

♦KJ1072

♣AQ9

An easy one to get wrong.

Dealer North

♠AKQ
♥AQ8
♦KQ2
♣K7643

♠J109 A simple bidding sequence of
♥K76 2D – 2NT – 4NT – 5D – 6NT
♦109654
♣AQ

So 6NT by South - the lead is the JH.

If we can get the diamonds right this is easy. We have enough entries to lead up to the KQ and if West has the AD we are home and dry.

So we win the lead in hand with the KH and lead a small diamond, West plays low and the KD wins. Back to hand with the QC and lead another diamond. This time West goes up with the Ace. There we are, the rest are mine you say. West gives an evil smile and leads a small club. Oh dear. We can clear the diamonds but we do not have another entry to hand. East is now going to make a club trick for one off.

It's a classic really. How many times did your old teacher say to you "Stop and think before playing to trick 1".

Yes you have enough entries to hand but it is the order in which you play them that counts. Win the opening lead in dummy then cross to the QC for your first entry. After leading to the KD you come back to hand with the AC. Now you can set up the diamonds whatever West does and you still have the KH as your last entry to hand.

The full hand

♠AKQ		
♥AQ8		
♦KQ2		
♣K7643		
♠852		♠7643
♥J10952		♥43
♦A73		♦J54
♣108		♣J952
♠J109		
♥K76		
♦109654		
♣AQ		

A waiting game.

Both East & West missed the opportunity to make life a bit more difficult in the bidding of the following hand, the former could have pre-empted with a 6 card minor and the latter with a 6 card major suit overcall.

As it was, N/S had a clear run at the final contract of 4S by South.

♠J762

♥K

♦86542 Dealer North none vul.

♣AK2 N E S W

P P 1N P

♠AK1083 2C P 2S P

♥A86 4S END

♦Q93

♣98

The lead was the 4H.

With 3 diamond losers and possibly the QS as well, this must surely be a hand to be played slowly, ie not rush into finding the QS.

So, win the KH, cross to the AS – nothing useful appearing – and cash the AH, discarding the 2C from dummy (key play). Now ruff the last heart in dummy and cash the AK of clubs – two suits ie hearts and clubs eliminated from the hand.

Now exit from dummy with a small diamond and just cover whatever East plays.

West will win and hopefully will now be end-played into setting up the diamonds or giving a ruff & discard or leading a trump to kill the QS.

The full hand

♠J762

♥K

♦86542

♣AK2

♠Q94

♠6

♥Q97432

♥J105

♦AJ

♦K107

♣76

♣QJ10643

♠AK1083

♥A86

♦Q93

♣98

Six level sacrifice.

After a very competitive auction your partner, who felt that 5S could not be defeated, has dumped you in six clubs, fortunately not doubled.

♠ -				
♥Q54				
♦AJ962	E	S	W	N
♣KJ1043	2S	3C	3S	5C
	5S	P	P	6C
♠109	END			
♥AJ				
♦753				
♣AQ9875				

Phantom fiery frying pans spring to mind when you see dummy after the lead of the QS. With the opening bid from East, that may show the KH but you still have diamond tricks to lose. Speaking of which, can we make anything out of the diamonds? If the outstanding honours are split then we are in business and also get a long diamond for the heart discard. But we need a bit of luck also with West to hold the 10D. So, we cross to hand with a top club and ruff off our last spade. Back to hand with another club and lead a small diamond intending to finesse the 9D. As it happens, West plays the QD which you take with the Ace, and then, after crossing back to hand with yet another club to lead up to the JD, West plays the KD and that is that.

The full hand

♠ -		
♥Q54		
♦AJ962		
♣KJ1043		
♠QJ543	♠AK8762	
♥K10632	♥987	
♦KQ	♦1084	
♣6	♣2	
♠109		
♥AJ		
♦753		
♣AQ9875		

A risky double.

The first half was pretty flat apart from one hand - I am North - n/v v vul - dealer East

♠ A75	
♥ A5	
♦ Q1064	
♣ AKQ9	
♠ J93	♠ KQ108
♥ 8643	♥ KJ7
♦ AJ72	♦ K98
♣ 108	♣ 542
♠ 642	
♥ Q1092	
♦ 53	
♣ J763	

Dealer East opens a weak NT. P - P to me and I double.

East passes as does South.

They are wriggling so redouble from West shows a 4 card suit somewhere.

I pass, East bids 2C, South passes and West bids 2D which I double.

East bids 2S and it is passed back to me.

Slightly risky but I double.

We misdefended and only took it one off but a swing of 6 gave us a first half lead of 11 to 6.

Big distributional hands again.

Dealer is North Vulnerable against you as E/W non-vulnerable.
you are holding

♠v
♥108
♦Q42
♣KQJ98765

and RHO opens 1S.

My preferred technique in this sort of situation is to bid slowly hoping to sacrifice at not too high a level although prepared to go to 5C eventually.

So,

N E S W

1S - 2C - 2H - 2D

3S - 4C - 4S - P

P - 5C - X all pass.

The full hand

♠ AKQ109876	
♥ 42	
♦ 9	
♣ 42	
♠ 52	♠ -
♥ KQ9	♥ 108
♦ J107653	♦ Q42
♣ A10	♣ KQJ98765
♠ J43	
♥ AJ7653	
♦ AK8	
♣ 3	

As you can see, I go one off on a spade lead. Best defence will take me 3 off.
In the other room, teammates open 4S (quite rightly) and over 5C bids 6S.
Which is a laydown against any lead - swing of 16imps.

How high should you pre-empt?

My personal view is that the weaker you are, the higher you should go and in first or second seat I think the vulnerability should be ignored. OK, with the latter case you are going to catch a cold sometimes but on balance the gains will outweigh this.

For example, holding VUL V N/V in second seat

♠2
♥K10986543
♦2
♣Q94

You bid 4H.
LHO bids 4S which is passed out.

Say you only bid 3H. LHO bids 3S, partner passes and RHO bids 4S. You pass, LHO bids 5H and RHO jumps to 6S.
Or, LHO doubles for t/o. RHO will probably bid 4S and 6S is automatic.

The full hand

♠AKQ94	
♥AQ	
♦AK1043	
♣7	
♠2	♠107
♥K10986543	♥7
♦2	♦QJ96
♣Q94	♣K86532
♠J8653	
♥J2	
♦875	
♣AJ10	

6S is a laydown - just losing one diamond.

Have you ever been end-played before you lead to trick 1 ?

As South you are holding

♠A
♥QJ97
♦AK85
♣J732

dealer East, E/W vul.

E	S	W	N	
1C	1N*	P	2H^	*Double might be better ^transfer to spades
2N	P	P	3S	
P	P	3N*	END	* If partner has something in diamonds this should be a doddle and the QS has got to be a useful card.

What can you do?

Assuming you start with the AS and switch to a heart. Any other lead will give away a trick. Then East will cash 3 clubs and throw you back in with the JC. End-played again.

The full hand.

♠ J1097652	
♥ 843	
♦ 92	
♣ 9	
♠Q8	♠K43
♥652	♥AK10
♦QJ1064	♦73
♣1054	♣AKQ86
♠A	
♥QJ97	
♦AK85	
♣J732	

An optimistic Grand.

Dealer South, E/W vul and the bidding has gone

S	W	N	E	
1N	P	2C	2D	
2H	P	3D*	P	*Cue bid agreeing hearts
4C^	P	4N	P	^ Cue bid
5H	P	7H*	End	* From the diamond overcall, North can assume no wasted values in Diamonds so to make up the NT South must have values in clubs and spades to make the grand a reasonable shot.

The lead is the 8D and dummy goes down to reveal

♠AK542

♥KQ764

♦A6

♣6

♠J6

♥AJ83

♦J103

♣AQJ3

It could be a lot worse and, like North in the bidding, I think I have to assume East must hold most of the missing high cards. Therefore an immediate finesse of the QC wins and I can ditch the 6D on the AC, East following with the 9C. Time to test the spades now and on the AS, East plays the 10S and West the 7S. On the KS, East drops the QS and West completes his peter with the 3S. It's beginning to come together now so I lead a small spade from dummy, East discarding a diamond and I ruff low. It's safe enough to lead the 3C and ruff low in dummy and down comes the KC. Another spade from dummy ruffed with the 8H and it's now time to draw a couple of rounds of trumps – East showing out – and cross to dummy with a diamond ruff, draw the last trump and claim.

The full hand

	♠AK542	
	♥KQ764	
	♦A6	
	♣6	
♠9873		♠Q10
♥1095		♥2
♦8		♦KQ9754
♣108742		♣K95
	♠J6	
	♥AJ83	
	♦J103	
	♣AQJ3	

Careless.

In teams, all vulnerable and having jumped to 4S over an opening heart bid, you see the following after the lead of the 9C.

♠1084
♥86542
♦7
♣Q1053

♠AKJ963
♥V
♦AKJ86
♣76

You cover with the 10C, the trick is won by the JC, and East now cashes the AC and tries the KC which you ruff with the 9S, West following.

You now cash the AD and lead a small diamond, ruffing with the 4S, and promptly over-ruffed with the 7S. Another club from East and West, holding Qx of spades must now take you one off.

OK, a 6 – 1 diamond break is perhaps unexpected but it costs absolutely nothing to ruff with the 8 or 10 of spades. East cannot over-ruff now and you are able to ruff another diamond with the other big spade, draw trumps and concede a diamond for your contract.

Careless with brain in neutral.

The full hand

♠1084		
♥86542		
♦7		
♣Q1053		
♠Q5	♠72	
♥AQ	♥KJ10973	
♦Q109432	♦5	
♣984	♣AKJ2	
♠AKJ963		
♥ -		
♦AKJ86		
♣76		

Hi Andrew,
The latest from YHBC

South good, North bad - as long as East is awake.

Dealer South, N/S vul.

The bidding has gone

S	W	N	E	
1S*	P	4S	P	* Playing weak NT and 4 card majors
4N	P	5C	P	
5S	P	6S	End	

♠AKJ73

♥6

♦A97

♣9532

♠Q1065

♥AQ2

♦K83

♣AJ6

The lead is the 4S.

It's a bit thin but not hopeless. If the heart finesse works I can ditch a diamond and eliminate the red suits and perhaps engineer a throw-in for an end-play.

So I win with the AS and immediately take the heart finesse which wins. I cash the AH and throw the 7D from dummy. Now I ruff my last heart and draw the remaining trumps which break kindly – both opponents following. I cash the AC – key play – and eliminate the diamonds ending in dummy. When I lead a small club from dummy East plays the QC – and that is it for the defence. East now has to give ruff & discard or if West overtakes with the KC it will promote the JC. Slam made.

Had East been awake he might have seen this endplay coming and dropped his QC under the AC but very hard to do. Had I not cashed the AC when I did then on the lead from dummy it is much easier for East to go up with the QC and beat the end-play. West could also beat the slam by leading a club at trick 1 but you can't really blame him for not doing so.

The full hand

	♠AKJ73	
	♥6	
	♦A97	
	♣9532	
♠94		♠82
♥108753		♥KJ94
♦Q2		♦J10654
♣K1087		♣Q4
	♠Q1065	
	♥AQ2	
	♦K83	
	♣AJ6	

Had N/S been playing a strong NT the bidding would probably have gone

S	W	N	E
1N	P	2H	P
2S	P	3D	P
3H	P	4N	P
5S	P	6S	End

And everything going as before.

But if N/S were playing weak NT and 5 card majors then the bidding might well go

S	W	N	E
1C*	P	1S	P
4S	P	4D	P
4H	P	4N	P
5S	P	6S	End

* Opening hand, no 5 card major

Now, with the South hand exposed it is relatively easy for East to play the QC on the lead of a small club from the closed hand on the principle of "Second hand plays high".

But it would take a lot of imagination to drop the QC under the AC when declarer plays his pseudo Vienna coup.

Falling from grace.

It is teams and we are n/v against vul.

RHO passes and I open 1N to hear partner raise it to 3N.

The lead is the 7H and I am looking at

♠53
♥A43
♦AJ10853
♣A5

♠A8
♥10962
♦Q2
♣KQJ96

Naturally I play the Ace – this is SOP. (Standard Operating Procedure)

(If the lead is from a 4 or 5 card suit with broken honours then RHO must have the remaining honour which is either doubleton or singleton. If the former then the suit is blocked: if he unblocks, and also in the latter case when it drops, then you will now have another stop.)

And down comes the QH. My mind actually slipped into pairs (and neutral) mode at this point. I have a small problem with entries so I now cash the Ace of clubs and cross to hand with the JC to lead the QD. LHO plays the 9D, small from dummy and the 4D from RHO.

Pause for thought. I now have 9 tricks on top so I cash the remaining clubs getting the 8H, JS and 10S discarded from LHO and 2S from RHO. I now lead my last diamond and LHO completes his peter with the 6D. So, LHO has got the KS plus xS and 3 hearts to the KJ plus 2 clubs and therefore only 2 diamonds. I told you brain was in neutral, this distribution did not register. And I am in pairs mode and the overtrick from another diamond finesse would be nice. So I finesse the 10D and now RHO wins his KD. Definitely a fall from grace. However, RHO leads a spade and I win with the AS to make sure of only going one off. LHO does not unblock his KS and after I throw him in with the 10H to his JH, he can only cash the KS and the KH before giving me the last trick with my 9H. Perhaps it is better to be born lucky.

The full hand

♠53	
♥A43	
♦AJ10853	
♣A5	
♠KJ107	♠Q9842
♥KJ875	♥Q
♦96	♦K74
♣84	♣10732
♠A8	
♥10962	
♦Q2	
♣KQJ96	

But consider what would have happened if I had just led a small diamond to the Queen and then continued diamonds to knock out the King. I would have ended up with 12 tricks.

Moysian fits do work – when everything is in the right place.

Dealer East – E/W Vul.

The bidding has gone

E	S	W	N
P	1C	1S	2D
2S	3H	3S	4H
All pass			

The lead is the 9H.

♠Q32
♥A105
♦AJ7642
♣8

♠A
♥KJ72
♦108
♣KQ5432

Having grossly overbid my hand, I now have to play well enough so that partner will not disown me on the spot. Having escaped a spade lead I have got to do something with one of the minor suits. I need either split honours in the diamonds or a 3 – 3 club break plus I need the heart finesse to be working. At least the lead tells me the position of the QH so that is something.

Plan A. I can win the heart in hand and start on the diamonds.

Plan B. I can win with the AH (knowing I can finesse the QH later) and start on the clubs.

Trouble is I can only afford one club ruff in dummy so the clubs need to be 3 – 3.

The diamonds need to be 3 – 2 which is perhaps more likely.

So Plan A then.

I win the lead with the JH – East withholding his QH - and run the 10D, which loses to the King. Then I win the inevitable spade return with the Ace, lead the King of clubs, equally inevitably losing to West's Ace. Unless he leads a small spade which I can win in dummy, West will have a problem. His best bet is another heart which I can win in hand and finesse the QD. Now I can run the diamonds and discard small clubs. Sooner or later, East will ruff and I either over-ruff or discard again. Now I am in the driving seat and either take the rest if he has ruffed in with the QH or give up a spade at the end if he ruffs low for me to over-ruff.

The full hand

♠Q32
♥A105
♦AJ7642
♣8

♠KJ1097
♥98
♦Q53
♣AJ10

♠8654
♥Q643
♦K9
♣976

♠A
♥KJ72
♦108
♣KQ5432

Just because it's there, don't do it.

The bidding

N	E	S	W
1C	P	1S	P
2S	P	4S	P
P	P		

The lead is the Ace of diamonds and dummy goes down.

♠Q74
♥AKJ5
♦9
♣K8542

♠K8653
♥7
♦Q10854
♣A9

West switches to the 9S, ducked in dummy, won by East's AS and another spade comes back to be won by North's QS.

I have seen this scenario many times. Because the opposition have reduced the number of diamond ruffs in dummy, declarer just can't wait to get a ruff before it runs away.

So they cross to the Ace of clubs and ruff that diamond. And now there is no way to make the contract.

As always, one must look to set up the side suit. So declarer should ignore the diamond ruff and play Ace and King of clubs and ruff a small club in hand – East discarding.

One more ruff will establish the fifth club so now is the time to take the diamond ruff in order to lead a fourth club from dummy, which is ruffed. Cash the KS, drawing the last opposition trump, and cross to dummy with the Ace of hearts to take the KH and the established long club for 10 tricks.

The full hand

♠J9	♠Q74	♠A102
♥1063	♥AKJ5	♥Q9842
♦AK73	♦9	♦J62
♣J1076	♣K8542	♣Q3
	♠K8653	
	♥7	
	♦Q10854	
	♣A9	

The curse of Scotland strikes again.

♠10763

♥4

♦AQJ4

♣Q854

♠A4

♥AKJ9

♦K10863

♣A3

South opened 1D and, rather than bid his 4 card major, North jumped to 3D. South, with his black suit controls and a fifth trump just went straight to 6D.

The lead was the 9S.

Well, the lead places the KQJ of spades with East and no chance of establishing a spade for a club discard. If East also holds precisely the Q10x of hearts then declarer has 3 spade discards from dummy but that must be one of the longest shots possible. Perhaps there is a squeeze and throw-in available so that East has to lead away from his King of clubs. It's probably the only chance. But entries are at a premium.

So win the first trick with the AS, cross to hand with the AH and cash the King of hearts, throwing a spade from dummy. The 9H is ruffed with the AD and East discards a club. The QD (key card) is led to the KD and the JH is ruffed by the JD, East now discarding the 2S.

West can be counted for 6 hearts and probably 3 spades – the lead being top of nothing and could well be short in diamonds so when the 4D is led from dummy, declarer can take the calculated risk of finessing the curse of Scotland. The 10D now captures the 9D and declarer runs two more diamonds. East can spare one more club but is squeezed on the last diamond having to choose from the KQ of spades and the KJ of clubs. He has to hold onto the two clubs so away goes the QS. He is now thrown in with the KS to lead away from his KC and slam made. The full hand

♠10763

♥4

♦AQJ4

♣Q854

♠985

♥Q107632

♦7

♣1062

♠KQJ2

♥86

♦952

♣KJ97

♠A4

♥AKJ9

♦K10863

♣A3

PS. The "Curse of Scotland" is a nickname given to the Nine of Diamonds.

Spotlight on South.

♠AKJ2	♠64	♠Q873
♥K962	♥AQ753	♥-
♦KJ10	♦A7543	♦Q62
♣63	♣9	♣J108752
	♠1095	
	♥J1084	
	♦98	
	♣AKQ4	

In Room 1, the bidding has gone

W	N	E	S
1N*	2H	X	4H
4S	P	P	X

All pass

In Room 2, it was

W	N	E	S
1N*	2C^	X	4H

X All Pass

* Although both West's were playing a weak 12-14 NT, they both opened 1N with a 15 count, largely because of the rebid problem in opening 1H and neither playing a prepared club.

^ Astro convention – hearts and a minor.

In Room 1, North naturally led his singleton 9C, covered by the 10 and won by the QC. South continued with the AC, North discarding a McKenney7H. Not wishing to help declarer to set up the clubs, and worried about giving him a free ruffing finesse in hearts, South then made what turned out to be the fatal mistake of switching to a diamond. On West's 10D North was completely fixed. If he ducked, declarer would draw trumps ending in dummy and then ruff out the KC and knock out the AD to claim his contract. If he won with the AD, declarer can win any return and ruff out the KC with the QD as an entry to the master clubs.

In Room 2, West kicked off with the AK of spades and then led a diamond. South was having thoughts about a cross-ruff so ducked this and then won the continuation. He crossed to hand with a top club and made the fatal mistake of ruffing his small club. There was no way back from this. Although he could ruff a diamond in hand – setting them up – he was now unable to pick up West's trumps and went one off.

Find the Lady

The bidding was short and sweet :-

Dealer North

1N – P – 3C – P – 4C – P – 4N – P – 5C - 6C all pass.

♠A97

♥97

♦A84

♣K8532

♠KQ6

♥8

♦KJ102

♣AQJ74

Well, it was the penultimate board and we had been doing rather badly so here was a chance to maybe salvage something.

The lead was the QH, I played the 7H and RHO the 10H, I followed with my singleton 8. Another heart was duly ruffed and I drew trumps in two rounds.

It all comes down to the QD, where is she?

Let us test our opponent's reactions by leading the QS. Not a flicker from LHO and I run the QS which of course wins. I now lead the JD and watch LHO like a hawk. Once again, not a flicker so I go up with the AD and finesse the 10D on the way back. And it wins. Slam made.

The full hand

♠A97

♥97

♦A84

♣K8532

♠1085

♥QJ6532

♦976

♣6

♠J432

♥AK104

♦Q53

♣109

♠KQ6

♥8

♦KJ102

♣AQJ74

Timing

Dealer West, N/S vul.

The bidding had gone :-

W	N	E	S
P	P	1N	X
XX*	2D	P	4H**

* Showing a 4 card suit somewhere
Partner to bid clubs if possible.

** Ever the optimist !

West leads the JC and dummy goes down to reveal

♠K10
♥7
♦A9652
♣Q9874

♠ AJ853
♥A8632
♦K7
♣A

Oh well, serves me right I guess. Perhaps I can make several of those small hearts of mine. So, win the AC and lead over to the KS. Ruff a small club back to hand. Cash the KD and cross over to the AD. And ruff another club back to hand, felling the KC. Now the AS and ruff a spade with dummy's solitary trump, incidentally setting up the spades. As I can't ruff any more clubs it has to be a diamond ruff this time. Some quick arithmetic and I find I have got nine tricks with the Ace of trumps still to come. Contract made.

	♠K10	
	♥7	
	♦A9652	
	♣Q9874	
♠976		♠Q42
♥1095		♥KQJ4
♦Q83		♦J104
♣J1052		♣K63
	♠ AJ853	
	♥A8632	
	♦K7	
	♣A	

North or South ?

Dealer South, all vul:

♠J9865	
♥AK964	
♦A3	
♣6	
♠Q3	♠ -
♥J753	♥Q1082
♦QJ10765	♦9842
♣10	♣AK742
♠AK10742	
♥ -	
♦K	
♣QJ9853	

How should these hands be bid?
(Assuming Benji style with splinters & RKCB)

a) most probable sequence:

S	W	N	E
1S	P	4C	X
4D	X	4H	P
4N	P	5D	P
6S	all pass		

b) quite likely

S	W	N	E
1S	P	6S	all pass

c) possible

S	W	N	E
2C	P	2H	P
2S	P	3D	P
4C	P	4H	P
4S	P	4N	P
5D	P	6S	all pass

d) taking it slowly – well relatively so

S	W	N	E
1C	P	1S	P

4S	P	4N	P
5D	P	6S	all pass

The play.

For a, b & c.

West will probably (definitely if East doubles clubs) lead his singleton 10C and East will win with the KC. Now here is the interesting bit. Obviously a club return will allow West to score his QS. But it is difficult to read South for 6 clubs despite his club bid and East is likely to assume that West has a doubleton. It is just possible that West has a trump trick and so a diamond winner has to be set up immediately. And that is the end of the story.

But in case d).

Now North is declarer and East will lead his AC. When both West & North follow he knows there are no more clubs out and it is safe enough to lead another one. (There is no point in leading a diamond, North must have the Ace to go slamming) And, lo and behold, West has the only trump big enough to defeat the contract.

And there we are, 60 hands, one for each year I have been playing bridge.

I hope you have enjoyed them and perhaps I may have give you a tip or two for your own use next time you play.

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