

Planning the Play

Having 'won' the auction, the first step to making your contract is to plan the play *before playing to the opening lead*. Far too often a player will automatically call for a card from the dummy without stopping to think about how to make the contract. Frequently this leads to a failure to make the contract, because by the time that declarer realises he is in trouble it is too late to do anything about it. It is astonishing how many contracts are defeated not by good defence but by careless declarer play. This can usually be avoided by answering two questions before playing to the first trick. The first question is: "How many tricks can I guarantee to make?" The second question is: "In what order should I play the suits to give myself the best chance of making the maximum number of tricks?"

This procedure should become a habit that you learn, even on the hands that are straightforward. Unless you teach yourself to count your tricks and evaluate which order the suits should be played in, you will find it much more difficult to make a constructive plan on hands that are not so simple. Initially, you should count winners as being the tricks you can win *without losing the lead*. Once you have done this you will know how many tricks you need to develop in order to make your contract. From this it becomes clearer in which order you should play the suits, since it should be obvious that the suit which develops the greatest number of tricks should be played first, so long as the communications between your hand and the dummy is properly maintained. Here is an example of the importance of this process:-

Example 1

♠ A J 5 ♥ Q 10 9 4 ♦ Q 7 ♣ K J 6 3	W	E	♠ 10 9 4 ♥ K 6 ♦ K J 9 4 2 ♣ A 8 5
	N	E	S
			W
			1NT
	P	2♣*	P
	P	2NT	P
	P	P	P
			3NT

* East/West were playing transfers, which meant that a 2NT response to an opening 1NT bid would be a transfer to ♣s. Therefore the only

method to show a balanced 2NT raise (11-12 HCP) was to bid it via Stayman.

The lead was the ♠3. Before reading on, take a moment to plan how to make this contract.

At first sight the contract does not look particularly difficult. Although there are only three tricks that you can cash immediately, the lead has developed a trick in the ♠ suit. Three tricks can be developed in the ♥ suit if the finesse of the ♥J works. Four tricks are available in the ♦ suit if the ♦10 appears within three rounds. Four tricks in the ♣ suit if the finesse of the ♣Q works and the suit breaks 3-3.

The problem arises if in developing any of these suits, a finesse does not work and/or the suit does not break kindly, in which case you will develop tricks for the opponents while giving them the time to set up their long ♠ suit. So which suit do you play first?

The temptation on this kind of hand is to attempt the ♣ finesse first. If it works and the suit does break kindly, you will easily have the time to set up three tricks in the red suits to make the contract. But if it fails it is a disaster, because you will not have the communication between the two hands to develop the rest of your tricks. By losing the ♣ finesse you will have deprived yourself of an essential entry to the table (the ♣A) before you have developed the required ♦ tricks. You must develop your ♦ tricks *before* cashing your ♣A. Here are all four hands:-

	♠	Q 8 7 3																											
	♥	8 7 3 2																											
	♦	A 10 3																											
	♣	Q 4																											
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">♠</td> <td style="width: 15%;">A J 5</td> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 15%;"></td> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">♠</td> <td style="width: 15%;">10 9 4</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">♥</td> <td>Q 10 9 4</td> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td> <td style="text-align: center;">E</td> <td style="text-align: center;">♥</td> <td>K 6</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">♦</td> <td>Q 7</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">♦</td> <td>K J 9 4 2</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">♣</td> <td>K J 6 3</td> <td style="text-align: center;">S</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">♣</td> <td>A 8 5</td> </tr> </table>						♠	A J 5	N		♠	10 9 4	♥	Q 10 9 4	W	E	♥	K 6	♦	Q 7			♦	K J 9 4 2	♣	K J 6 3	S		♣	A 8 5
♠	A J 5	N		♠	10 9 4																								
♥	Q 10 9 4	W	E	♥	K 6																								
♦	Q 7			♦	K J 9 4 2																								
♣	K J 6 3	S		♣	A 8 5																								
	♠	K 6 2																											
	♥	A J 5																											
	♦	8 6 5																											
	♣	10 9 7 2																											

With a sight of all four hands, you can see that the ♣ finesse is a disaster. Not only do you lose a trick to the ♣Q, you also establish an additional ♣ trick for the opponents if you play for the suit to break. By starting on the ♦s first you will have ample time to set up your ninth trick in the ♥ suit, without having to worry about the ♣ finesse. Note that if neither the ♦A nor the ♦10 has appeared in two rounds of the suit, you should switch to the ♥ suit immediately. This is because there is a strong possibility that a ♦ continuation in these circumstances will establish a second ♦ trick for the opponents, which you cannot afford.

The hand is a useful illustration of the principle of losing your losers early. *Never* take an early finesse unless you need it to make your contract or losing the finesse will not cost you your contract. And *never* deprive yourself of entries that are essential before you have set up the tricks you need in the other suits. This principle of maintaining the communication between the two hands is a vital consideration in any contract you play, and one to which we will be returning again and again.

The final point about this hand is to note the decision about which of the red Aces you should knock out first. You should have chosen the ♦ suit because you have a longer combined holding in ♦s than you do in ♥s. You are more likely to develop a greater number of tricks in the ♦ suit than the ♥ suit, which is the final criterion for making the choice. There are occasions, however, when this would be an error...

Example 2

♠ A Q 7 ♥ K J 9 3 ♦ Q 10 7 2 ♣ K 4	W		E	♠ 9 8 ♥ Q 10 7 ♦ A J 9 6 3 ♣ A 6 5
N		E	S	W
P		3NT	1♠	1NT
P			P	P

North leads the ♠2, showing his partner an odd number in the suit. Once again, take a moment to plan how you would play the contract before reading any further...

You can count two ♠ tricks, three ♥ tricks once the ♥A has been knocked out, four ♦s (five if the finesse of the ♦K succeeds) and two ♣ tricks. The temptation is to take the finesse of the ♦K at trick two, of

course. If it works you will have nine tricks on top, even without knocking out the ♥A. This would be a bad mistake, however, since South is virtually certain to hold the ♦K for his bid and he will have the time to knock out your ♠ guard before you have eliminated the ♥A. But surely you need the ♦ finesse to make your contract?

Well, no! Not if you can persuade South that he needs to guard the ♦s and possibly the ♣s as well. What you must do is knock out the ♥A first and then wait and see what South discards on the long ♥(s) before deciding how to play the remaining suits. Let's see what happened...

	♠	5 3 2																															
	♥	8 5 2																															
	♦	8 4																															
	♣	J 10 9 8 2																															
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">♠</td> <td style="width: 15%;">A Q 7</td> <td style="width: 15%;"></td> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 15%;"></td> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">♠</td> <td style="width: 15%;">9 8</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">♥</td> <td>K J 9 3</td> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">E</td> <td style="text-align: center;">♥</td> <td>Q 10 7</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">♦</td> <td>Q 10 7 2</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">♦</td> <td>A J 9 6 3</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">♣</td> <td>K 4</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">S</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">♣</td> <td>A 6 5</td> </tr> </table>						♠	A Q 7		N		♠	9 8	♥	K J 9 3	W		E	♥	Q 10 7	♦	Q 10 7 2				♦	A J 9 6 3	♣	K 4		S		♣	A 6 5
♠	A Q 7		N		♠	9 8																											
♥	K J 9 3	W		E	♥	Q 10 7																											
♦	Q 10 7 2				♦	A J 9 6 3																											
♣	K 4		S		♣	A 6 5																											
	♠	K J 10 6 4																															
	♥	A 6 4																															
	♦	K 5																															
	♣	Q 7 3																															

Having won the opening ♠ lead, declarer played a ♥ to the ♥Q, which South took with the ♥A. South continued with the ♠K, taken with the ♠A. Three more rounds of ♥s were played. Both dummy and South discarded a ♣ on the last ♥. Declarer now played a ♣ to the ♣A and a ♣ to the ♣K before (of course!) exiting with his last ♠. South could cash his three ♠ tricks but then he had to exit with a ♦, thus providing declarer with his ninth trick.

South would have done better to discard a ♠ on the last ♥, but this would not have actually made any difference since declarer would now have been able to afford to take the ♦ finesse.

The technique illustrated by this hand is called an end-play. Essentially your plan is based upon the need to force one of your opponents to make a crucial discard – either of a winner or of a safe exit card – before throwing him in with a known loser to force him to lead into a finesse position (or sometimes a ruff and discard position). These situations are very common but the difficulty is not in the execution of

the end-play, but in recognising that the possibility exists in the first place. Here is another example of the technique...

Example 3

<p>♠ 10 9 8 7 ♥ K J ♦ J 10 5 ♣ Q J 6 5</p>	<p>W</p>	<p>E</p>	<p>♠ A Q J 6 5 ♥ A 6 5 ♦ A 8 7 ♣ A 8</p>
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South leads the ♥10 against East's contract of 4♠. At first sight there do not seem to be any problems, but take a moment to decide what the worst possible distribution might be and then try and concoct a plan based upon this assumption.

Firstly, consider the lead. South may simply have elected to make a safe lead because he holds something in both of the minors and doesn't want to give anything away. On the other hand it is just possible that the lead is a singleton, which raises the ugly spectre of a bad break in the trump suit. If you can no longer be sure of being able to trump your losing ♥ can you still make the contract?

You must assume that the ♠K is wrong (i.e. held by South) and that South also holds the ♣K. You also have two potential ♦ losers, regardless of the position of the ♦K and ♦Q. In order to make your contract despite this worst possible distribution, you must eliminate one of your losers. To do this you must be able to discard a loser on an extra winner that you have already established. The only possible extra winner is the ♣Q on which you can discard a losing ♦, thus reducing your losers to one ♠, one ♣ and one ♦. You must also keep an entry to the table so that you can cash your ♣ winner(s) after you have drawn the trumps. This entry card must be the ♥K.

You should cover the ♥10 with the ♥J and win the ♥A if North covers with the ♥Q. You must then establish the trump position by laying down the ♠A. If both South and North follow your problems are over, since you can simply draw trumps and later ruff a ♥ after setting up your ♣s to discard losing ♦s. If North shows out on the first ♠, however, you must continue with the trumps to force out the ♠K and hope that South has at least one of the ♦ honours. If South returns a ♥ when in with the ♠K your problems are solved, since you will be able to ruff your losing ♥ before drawing the last trump(s) but after establishing your extra ♣ winner for a ♦ discard. If South returns a ♦ when in with the ♠K you must hope that he holds at least one of the ♦ honours and play the ♦J and

cover whatever North plays. Now you will draw trumps and then play ♣A and another ♣. If South has the ♣K your ♣Q J can subsequently be used to discard two losers. If South now plays another ♦, you are on a guess as to whether to go up with the ♦10 or finesse the ♦9. Here is the full deal:-

	♠	-----			
	♥	Q 9 8 7 4 3 2			
	♦	6 2			
	♣	10 9 4 2			
♠	10 9 8 7	N		♠	A Q J 6 5
♥	K J	W	E	♥	A 6 5
♦	J 10 5			♦	A 8 7
♣	Q J 6 5	S		♣	A 8
	♠	K 4 3 2			
	♥	10			
	♦	K Q 9 4 3			
	♣	K 7 3			

Although it may not seem reasonable to play for such outrageous breaks, when you can make a plan that caters for such an eventuality you should always play for it. Sometimes the worst will happen and it is tremendously satisfying to make your contract in spite of it, simply because you have had the foresight to protect yourself. The ability to plan ahead will sometimes enable you to manipulate your tricks in order to establish additional winners. Consider the next hand:-

Example 4

	♠	K 9 8 4 2			♠	A Q 7
	♥	Q 8 6 5 4 3	W	E	♥	-----
	♦	-----			♦	K Q 10 7 4 2
	♣	4 3			♣	A K 7 6
	N		E	S		W
	P		1♦	P		1♠
	P		3♣	P		3♥
	P		4♠	P		P
	P					

North leads the ♥A. At first sight it seems that you have too much to do to make this contract, but in fact it becomes very simple once you decide where your ten tricks are coming from.

Assuming the trumps break, you have five ♠ tricks and two ♣ tricks. You can establish a ♦ by playing the ♦K and letting it run, but this only provides a total of eight tricks. The only possible chance of making ten tricks is by attempting to make all of your trumps separately. As soon as you recognise this possibility the hand simply becomes a question of timing the play correctly. You must reduce the trumps in the long hand to the same length as the trumps in the short hand. Thus you must ruff the lead and ruff a ♦ back to hand. Now you play a ♣ to the ♣A rather than ruffing another ♥, since otherwise there is a danger that (later) one of the opponents may be able to discard a ♣ before you have cashed your ♣A K, thereby ruining the timing of the hand.

After winning the ♣A, ruff another ♦ and play your last ♣ to the table and ruff a third ♦. You have now reduced the trumps in both hands to two and you can embark on a ♥/♣ cross-ruff to make your contract. Provided North started with at least three ♣s, you cannot be defeated.

The only point at which this contract could have been defeated was on the opening lead. On the lead of a trump you can no longer ruff enough losers to make the contract. This cross-ruffing technique can sometimes be applied to pull in some improbable contracts.

Example 5

♠	A Q 4 2			♠	9 5																				
♥	A Q 7 6	W	E	♥	K J 10 4 2																				
♦	A 8 5 2			♦	9																				
♣	9			♣	A Q 8 5 3																				
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 25%;"></td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">E</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">S</td> <td style="width: 25%; text-align: center;">W</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">1♥</td> <td style="text-align: center;">2♦!</td> <td style="text-align: center;">4NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">5♦!</td> <td style="text-align: center;">5♥*</td> <td style="text-align: center;">P</td> <td style="text-align: center;">7♥</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">P</td> <td style="text-align: center;">P</td> <td style="text-align: center;">P</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>							N	E	S	W			1♥	2♦!	4NT		5♦!	5♥*	P	7♥		P	P	P	
	N	E	S	W																					
		1♥	2♦!	4NT																					
	5♦!	5♥*	P	7♥																					
	P	P	P																						

*East/West were playing Roman Key-card Blackwood and DOPI/ROPI over interference, which meant that East's 5♥ response over the 5♦ nuisance bid showed two of the five key-cards (i.e. four Aces and the King of trumps). The 7♥ bid is best described as of the TTASL variety (i.e. Teach Them A Sharp Lesson).

The lead was the $\heartsuit K$. You should be able to see quite quickly that thirteen tricks can only be made if the \spadesuit finesse is right and if all nine trumps can be made separately, giving you one \clubsuit trick, one \heartsuit trick, two \spadesuit tricks and nine ruffs. The lead gives you the opportunity to equalise your trump holding in both hands. Accordingly you should win the $\heartsuit Ace$ and ruff a \heartsuit immediately. At trick three you should take the \spadesuit finesse and cash the $\spadesuit A$ if the $\spadesuit Q$ holds the trick. All that remains is to cash your $\clubsuit A$ and then embark on a cross-ruff, only making sure that you ruff a \spadesuit rather than a \heartsuit after the first \clubsuit ruff, since South is more likely to hold a shortage in the \spadesuit suit and he may be able to discard his last \spadesuit on the third \clubsuit .

The only remaining point to be made about this hand is that North should have made a disciplined pass over the 4NT bid, since there is no way that West could consider bidding the grand slam if he is not made aware of the \heartsuit shortage in his partner's hand.

There are many other occasions when it is too dangerous to draw trumps immediately. This usually happens when a particular position has been revealed by the auction. Consider the following hand:-

Example 6

\spadesuit	Q J 8 4 2			\spadesuit	K 10 9 6
\heartsuit	A 8 4	W	E	\heartsuit	J 10 6 2
\diamondsuit	A Q 4			\diamondsuit	7 6
\clubsuit	J 9			\clubsuit	A 10 3
	N	E	S	W	
					1 \spadesuit
	2NT*	X**	P	P	4 \spadesuit
	P	P	P		

*North's 2NT overcall was 'Unusual', showing at least 5-5 shape in the minors and approximately an opening hand. **East's double was also conventional, showing a poor raise to 3 \spadesuit (8-9 HCP). West's bid of 4 \spadesuit was speculative, to say the least, but he had decided that there must be a good chance that game was on and that taking a penalty against North/South was unlikely to gain enough to compensate. He regretted the decision as soon as he saw his partner's hand, since it was obvious that a 3 \clubsuit /3 \diamondsuit contract by North/South was likely to be at least three off.

North led a \heartsuit . See if you can do as well as West and make the contract. West decided that the only hope was that North had led his

singleton and that he would not find the killing ♠ switch when he was in, assuming that he would be too eager to get a ♥ ruff. Therefore it might be possible to deceive him into returning what was required, while protecting himself in the ♥ suit. Accordingly he played the ♥J from the table and won South's ♥Q with the ♥A. At trick two he laid down the ♣9, naturally planning to let it run if North played low. North covered with the ♣Q and declarer won with the ♣A and exited with a ♣ to North's ♣K. North then obligingly fell into the trap and played his partner for one of the honours. Declarer cashed his two ♦ tricks and ruffed a ♦. He was then able to discard a losing ♥ on the 10 of clubs, before forcing out the ♠A. South cashed his ♥K when in with the ♠A, but declarer was then able to ruff the next ♥ high and draw trumps. Here is the full deal:-

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

North should have been very suspicious when West declined to draw any trumps. Since he can see the ♠K on the table it should have been obvious that West could not hold the ♠A, otherwise there would have been no reason not to draw them. If West did not hold the ♠A then he must hold the ♦A for his bid and quite possibly the ♦Q as well. Therefore it was much too risky to play on the ♦ suit. This kind of negative inference is a very common occurrence in both declarer play and defence. You must be sure to look for them and adjust your plan of campaign accordingly.

The final point to note about this hand is how much easier it becomes to make an 'impossible' contract when the opponents have obliged you by feeding you clues about the distribution during the

auction. Another example of this is those occasions when an ill-considered double can guide you to the winning line.

Example 7

<p>♠ A K 7 ♥ 9 7 3 ♦ A K 8 4 ♣ K 8 3</p>	<p>W E</p>	<p>♠ J 9 ♥ A Q 6 2 ♦ Q J 10 3 ♣ J 7 2</p>	
	<p>N E S W</p>		
	<p>P 1♥ P 1♦</p>		
	<p>P 3NT X! 2NT</p>		
	<p>P XX! P P</p>		
	<p>P</p>		

North obeys his partner's demand and leads a ♥. West cannot fault his partner's confident re-double and yet there are only seven sure tricks on top. While it is certain that South has good ♥s (probably ♥K J 10 X or better) this is certainly not enough to justify a penalty double. He must also hold the ♣A and at least one if not both of the black Queens. Thus it should be possible to end-play him for the ninth trick, providing the eighth could be established.

When faced with this kind of problem it is a good idea to restructure the hand in order to see what must be done. There are a certain four ♦ tricks and two in ♠s, with no chance of establishing an extra trick in either suit (since your ♠ pips are not good enough to consider a finesse). The only chance on this hand is to make three tricks from the ♥/♣ holding. To do this you must create a menace position while eliminating suitable exits from the South hand.

You must duck the first ♥ into the South hand. South wins with a deceptive ♥J and returns the ♠10. It is tempting to duck this round to the ♠J, but the ♦ position must be established quickly and it is extremely unlikely that South has led away from the ♠Q when the ♠J and the ♠9 are both visible on the table. Therefore you must win with the ♠A and play three rounds of ♦s. On the third round, South discards a ♠. You cash your ♠K and South discards a ♣. When you play your last ♦ to the table, South discards yet another ♣. You have now arrived at the position you wished to achieve.

You play a small ♥ from the table towards the ♥9. South wins with the ♥10, but he is well and truly end-played in ♥s and ♣s. If he exits with a small ♣ you will run it round to the ♣J and play another ♣ from the table up towards your ♣K. South must win the ♣A immediately and exit with another ♣, otherwise he will be end-played again to provide the overtrick. Here is the full deal:-

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

Although South's double does achieve the lead that holds the contract to nine tricks, it still concedes a top to East/West. It cannot be considered as anything other than stupid. The contract will still make if the ♠10 is ducked, of course, since the ♠K and the ♦ suit will squeeze South out of his long ♣ or long ♥. After North wins the ♠Q, you can simply duck the ♥ return again. You will then win whatever South continues and force him to reduce either his ♣s or his ♥s. Whichever he chooses, you will play on that suit.

As often as not, of course, you will not have the benefit of revealing information supplied to you during the auction. You may have to make a tricky decision about which suit to play first and it is wise to try and understand some guidelines that can be applied on these occasions. Here is a hand that looks particularly difficult, but is in fact very simple once you have reasoned through the alternatives.

Example 8

♠ Q 9 ♥ A K J 10 5 ♦ A 4 ♣ K Q 9 6	W	♠ A 10 7 4 ♥ Q 8 6 ♦ Q J 6 ♣ A 8 7	E
N	E	S	W
P	1♠	P	1♥
P	4NT	P	3♣
P	6♥	P	5♣*
P		P	P

*5♣ = 0 or 3 of the 5 key-cards.

North leads the ♥7. Plan the play... There are a number of possible lines on this hand. Many people would simply try the ♦ finesse at trick two. Even if it doesn't work they can discard the losing ♠ from hand on the established ♦J, followed by ruffing two ♠s in hand and discarding the last ♠ on the fourth round of ♣s. This line may well work but it is distinctly anti-percentage, since it relies upon the ♣s breaking 3-3. This will happen only about 30% of the time.

An alternative line is to run five rounds of trumps and watch the discards. The ♣ suit can then be used to force more discards and it may then be possible to play one or the other opponent for both the ♠K and the ♦K. If this is the case you will be able to end-play that opponent for the twelfth trick by cashing either the ♠A or the ♦A and simply exiting in that suit. Once again, however, you may well get into trouble if the ♣ suit does not break or if the ♣ position is not revealed by the discards.

A far superior line is to play South for at least one of the missing ♠ honours. Of the 128 possible distributions of the seven missing cards, South will hold either the King or the Jack or both honours in 96 of these distributions (i.e. 75% of the time). Since this will retain the option of taking the ♦ finesse if North holds both the ♠ honours, it must be a superior line. There is also the additional chance that if it proves

necessary to ruff a ♣ before drawing the last trump, the hand with short ♣s may also hold no more than two trumps.

Your plan should be to cover the ♥7 with the ♥8. If this holds you will lead a low ♠ towards the ♠Q 9 and play the ♠9 from hand unless South covers with the ♠J. If South wins with the ♠K you will win whatever he returns in hand; cash the ♠Q; cross to the ♥Q (or the ♣A if South exited with a trump at trick three) and lay down the ♠A. If the ♠J appears you no longer need to ruff a ♣ and can draw the last trump before cashing the ♠10 to discard your low ♣. If the ♠J does not appear on the third round you will have to decide whether to try and ruff a ♣ or take a ruffing finesse in ♦s to dispose of your long ♣. Let's take a look at the full deal:-

	♠	K 7 3 2																															
	♥	7 4																															
	♦	K 10 7 5 3																															
	♣	5 3																															
<table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 15%; text-align: center;">♠</td> <td style="width: 25%;">Q 9</td> <td style="width: 10%;"></td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: center;">N</td> <td style="width: 10%;"></td> <td style="width: 10%; text-align: center;">♠</td> <td style="width: 25%;">A 10 8 4</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">♥</td> <td>A K J 10 5</td> <td style="text-align: center;">W</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">E</td> <td style="text-align: center;">♥</td> <td>Q 8 6</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">♦</td> <td>A 4</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">♦</td> <td>Q J 6</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">♣</td> <td>K Q 9 6</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">S</td> <td></td> <td style="text-align: center;">♣</td> <td>A 8 7</td> </tr> </table>						♠	Q 9		N		♠	A 10 8 4	♥	A K J 10 5	W		E	♥	Q 8 6	♦	A 4				♦	Q J 6	♣	K Q 9 6		S		♣	A 8 7
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	♣	J 10 4 2																															

Notice how North has found the good lead of a trump, which is the only lead to leave the contract in doubt. Had South held the ♠K without the ♠J, it would have been very good defence to duck when declarer played small from the table. I doubt if there are five players in a hundred who would do this (and even fewer who would duck without flinching first!) Notice too that if North had held both ♠ honours it would have been very difficult to know what to exit with had declarer drawn a second round of trumps. The tempting ♠K would allow declarer to park his losing ♦ and ♣ on the ♠10 8 and a low ♣ gives declarer a good chance to get the ♣ suit right.

Next we come to a hand that demands careful consideration of allowing the wrong hand to be on lead.

Example 9

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

After East opens with a pre-emptive 3♥, West raises to game. South leads the ♣J. It is almost instinctive to cover this, but on this hand it would be a poor error, since North will win the ♣A and switch immediately to a ♠. South will win and cash a second ♠ before exiting with a ♦ and you will be defeated before you have started if the ♦ finesse does not work.

This debacle can be avoided simply by ducking the opening lead. North can overtake and switch to a ♠, but now you can afford to go up with the ♦A at trick four, since you can park your losing ♦s on the ♣K Q after drawing trumps. If North does not overtake the ♣J you can still afford to go up with the ♦Ace if South switches to a ♦, since now you can take a ruffing finesse against North in ♣s. If he refuses to cover the ♣K, you will discard a ♠. The losers have been reduced to one ♠, one ♣ and one ♦. When you are in the unhappy position of having one too many losers, you must try to perceive a way whereby one can be parked on a winner. Planning ahead like this is the essence of successful declarer play.

The ability to apply logic is an essential tool when planning the play. Determining the location of a crucial card is often (simply) a matter of using one's brains rather than just hoping for the best. It is remarkable how often many players will moan that a contract could not have been made when really it was just a question of focussing on the play rather than thinking about anything other than the cards!

This next example graphically illustrates the difference between the two types. The deal arose in a Teams match and shows why the result was not even close!

Example 10

♠	K 8 6 3 2			♠	7 4
♥	Q 6 4	W	E	♥	A J 8 3
♦	K 10 3			♦	A 7
♣	K 7			♣	A Q 8 4 2

N	E	S	W
	1♣	P	1♠
P	1NT	P	3NT
All pass			

At both tables East was declarer in 3NT and South led the ♦5. At the first table declarer won North's ♦9 with the ♦A and played out three rounds of ♣s. On the third round South showed out, discarding a small ♠. Declarer continued with a fourth ♣, discarding a ♠ from the dummy after South discarded a small ♥. North won the trick and returned the ♦J, continuing the suit when declarer ducked in dummy. On the third ♦ declarer discarded a small ♠ from his hand. Declarer then switched to the ♥Q and let it run when North played low. South won with the ♥K and cashed two more ♦s. Declarer discarded a ♥ and a ♠ from both hands, while North discarded the ♥10 9. South then switched to the ♠9. By this time declarer was getting desperate to take some tricks and so he went up with the ♠K. Inevitably North covered with the ♠A and returned the ♠J. South gratefully overtook this with the ♠Q and cashed the ♠10. Thus the defence took a total of eight tricks (three ♠s, one ♥, three ♦s and a ♣). Since East/West were vulnerable, the result was a net score of 400 to North/South.

The play went very differently at the other table. The first thing that declarer did was count his certain tricks. He had only six top winners (one ♥, two ♦s and three ♣s). At least one more trick could be gained by playing on the ♥s – possibly two if *South* held the ♥K. He recognised immediately that there was no valid finesse position in ♥s since if North held the ♥K he would simply cover the ♥Q. Because both the ♥10 and ♥9 were missing the defence was certain to take at least one ♥ trick.

If the ♣s broke 3-3 there would be no difficulty. Declarer would be able to take at least two ♥s, two ♦s and five ♣s before the long ♦s could be established for South to cash. If the ♣s did not break and South held five or more ♦s, then it was more likely to be North who held the long ♣s. If this was so, then the only hope to make the contract was that North also held the ♠A and that he would be end-played when in with the fourth ♣.

In case South had underled the ♦Q J, declarer played the ♦10 from dummy at trick one. When North covered with the ♦J, declarer *ducked!* North naturally continued with the ♦9. Declarer won with the ♦A and played a small ♥ to the ♥Q. Not unreasonably South hopped up with his ♥K and continued ♦s, on which declarer discarded a small ♠ from his hand. Declarer then drew three more rounds of ♥s, discarding a ♠ from

dummy on the last round. On the third and fourth rounds, South discarded two small ♣s. Four rounds of ♣s followed, with South discarding his two winning ♦s and two ♠s. At this point declarer was certain that it was North who held the ♠A, *since South would not have needed to discard his winning ♦s if he had held it.* North won the fourth round of ♣s but then could only cash his ♠A and concede the last ♠ trick to the dummy. So declarer made his nine tricks (one ♠, three ♥s, two ♦s and three ♣s) to bring home the contract for a score of 600 to East/West. The full deal:-

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

South would have done better to switch to the ♠5 when in with the ♥K. At least this would have given the declarer a chance to go wrong by going up with the ♠K on the first round, rather than playing for the doubleton ♠A.

When the pairs got together to tot up the scores, the second declarer could not believe that his team mates had managed to defeat the contract by four tricks. The South player did his best to claim the credit, intimating that the fact that he had bared his ♥K had a lot to do with it. In fact the play neither gains nor costs, since if the first declarer had laid down his ♥A to fell the ♥K he would still have had to lose a ♥ trick eventually. The real difference was that the second declarer played the hand constructively, deciding *early* what his losers were likely to be and refusing to commit himself to playing out a particular suit until he had dealt with the problems in the hand. He took into account the probability that the ♣ suit would not break kindly and also determined the best chance for taking three tricks in the ♥ suit. Finally he was able to

determine the location of the ♠A by drawing the logical inferences from the preceding play. By making the effort to consider the likely problems in advance and deciding how to deal with them, the second declarer gave himself the best chance to make a difficult contract. Even if he had been defeated he would have achieved a better score than the first declarer, who simply played out his cards and hoped for the best. This is the essence of successful declarer play.

Frank Groome
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