TIPS FOR TOPS

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All boards referred to in this article were played in the 299er game at Bridge Centre of Niagara on August 10th, 2021, (Game #57583). Full results and game schedule at www.bridgecentreofniagara.com.

- Trump Promotion

Bd: 6 Vul: E/W Dlr: East	♠ J ♥ J532 ♦ A98652 ♣ T5	Optimum NS 5Dx: -300
♠ K852 ♥ 7 ♦ Q4 ♣ AKJ963	N W 6 E S	♠ A9764 ♥ K9864 ♦ T ♣ Q4
6 13 HCP 9 12	♠ QT3 ♥ AQT ♦ KJ73 ♣ 872	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - 3 1 - - S - 3 1 - - E 4 - - 4 - W 4 - - 4 -

I noticed an interesting defensive situation on **Board 6**. At half the tables, this board was played in Spades EW; at the other half, it was played in Diamonds from the South. In Diamonds, every West led the AK of Clubs to take the first 2 tricks; on the second trick, East followed with the Q. At this point, West knows that there is only one more Club outstanding, and it's in the South hand. Most Wests switched to a Heart, probably hoping for a ruff, but their partner didn't have the A. In fact, there was a better opportunity to set up a trump trick by a process called promotion. If West just leads the CJ on trick 3, it presents South with a dilemma; if she ruffs with the A, she won't be able to pick up the Q - the Q is "promoted". And if she ruffs with anything smaller, she risks an overruff. For this to work West just needs East to hold a trump that's higher than the 9 - either the 10 or J. And needing one of two cards in partner's hand is better odds than needing one exact card (the HA). Look for the possibility of a promotion when you have a trump holding like West's. Of course, if East was the one with the last Club, you would have to make a switch; the last thing you want to do is give declarer a ruff-sluff.

This hand also has a pointer for those who played in Spades in the West. After the DA lead, declarer has only one more obvious loser - the Heart. (Some opponents took their Heart on the 2nd trick; others switched to a Club.) You can draw trumps, leaving trump in the East hand to ruff your Diamond loser, and still have six good Clubs. Of course, when declarer played on trumps, she found she had a loser in that suit, but that's ok - you can afford one loser there and still make ten tricks. A few declarers went wrong, in slightly different ways, but with a common theme. Some had been forced to ruff a Heart, and others chose to do that themselves, but then, after the A and K of Spades, they had only one trump left in the West hand. And, if they played that last Spade to "give" South her trick, they not only were vulnerable in the Heart suit, but some had lost transportation to the Club suit. The point here; with all those good Clubs, just just play on that suit until South ruffs, but you will still have a trump left in your hand to regain the lead and cash the rest of your Clubs. When there is only one trump left outstanding, and it's bigger than yours, leave it out and let them ruff with it. That's better than letting it capture two of your trumps.

Bd: 4 Vul: All Dlr: West	♠ Q97 ♥ KJ954 ♦ KJ3 ♣ 83	Optimum NS 4S,NS 4H: +6
♠ T63 ♥ 3 ♦ T976 ♣ KQT42	N W 4 E S	♠ K5 ♥ Q762 ♦ Q842 ♣ AJ9
10 5 HCP 12 13	♠ AJ842 ♥ AT8 ♦ A5 ♣ 765	♣ ♦ ♥ ♠ N N - - 4 4 2 S - - 4 4 2 E 1 1 - - - W 1 1 - - -

Board 4 was played in Spades from the South, after East had opened the bidding in Diamonds, supported by West. Several defenders led their H3. Declarer must strongly suspect a singleton - why else would they lead a suit where you have eight good cards, instead of leading their partner's suit? So the first order of business is to draw trump. Who has the K? With East having opened, the odds strongly favour the K being in that hand. So, go to dummy with the DK and lead the Spades from there to capture the K. Low to J is best; then the A; even if the K doesn't fall, you can leave it out, as described above, and play on Hearts. You can afford to lose one Spade trick, along with two Clubs and still make your game contract.

Leading a low Spade at trick 2, as some did, was a no-win play. If West had the K, they would take it and lead to their partner to get that Heart ruff. And, giving the second trick to East gave the opponents the timing for 2 Heart ruffs; along with their Club AK, that's a total of five tricks. Note that, if you didn't have an entry to the dummy, you should cash the SA before playing low to the Q. At least that way, there's a chance that West will run out of trump and not get her ruff, or - as today - get only one ruff instead of two.

One final comment on the defence of this hand. Some Wests chose to lead a Diamond - the suit that partner opened. This is a valid choice, but be sure to lead the right Diamond - the 10, top of a (broken) sequence. To see why, consider the situation from East's perspective. With the 10 lead, East knows they don't need to play the Q unless dummy's J gets played. With any other lead, that's not clear; not wanting to lose to the 10 in South, E will probably play the Q, which sets up a second Diamond trick for declarer. "Maybe" East can figure out the holdings if you lead the 6, but you make it clear when you lead the 10. And, nothing in bridge is appreciated more than a partner who makes things clear.