Notes for my presentation given at the N&N.

Seeing the big picture: Viewing suits in the context of the whole hand.

I'm writing a longer document rather than just publishing the slides as most of the information was in the chat rather than on the slides.

<u>Introduction</u>

You play in 3N, you might have to lose the lead, you have Axx opposite xx in the suit that LHO leads, how many times do you duck ?

The answer is usually 2 ensuring that either they're 4-4, or the short hand has none remaining, or there was nothing you could do.

Why might you not duck twice ? A non exhaustive list would be:

1. You fear a switch to another suit
2. One of the opps has preempted so you're pretty sure a 5-3 break is not on the agenda
3. You're playing pairs and think you might make extra tricks if you win earlier
4. You're finessing into the hand that's bid the suit led, he's not going to be short
5. You think you might be able to block the suit if you win

<u>A simple example</u>

♠ KJ10xx
♥ Ax
♦ Kx
♣ AJxx

♠ A9xx
♥ Kxx
♦ AQx
♣ Kxx

So how do you handle the trump suit in 6♠ ?

This contract is in fact laydown if trumps are 3-1 or 2-2 and neither red suit breaks W6-E2 or worse.

What is the normal way of handling KJ10xx/A9xx ? You play for the drop as this is a little more likely to work then playing a top honour and then finessing.

What is the danger ? That W wins the third spade and plays a club, if the Q is offside, you will lose a club and a spade.

How do we prevent this problem ? Well if we ensure that E has to lead the club if he wins the spade, we hold the total losers to 1, so we play off the ace of spades to check they're not 4-0, 3

rounds of hearts ruffing with the 10, 3 rounds of diamonds then a spade to the J, if this loses to the Q, E must either lead a club or give a ruff and discard so either way we don't lose a club.

Now imagine that the clubs are N: Axxx S: KJx, what do we do, basically reverse the process and make W lead the club for us if he wins the second spade. So we finesse E for the Q after eliminating the reds.

Now imagine the clubs are N: AJxx S: K10x. Now we don't care who leads the club for us, so we go with the best odds and play for the drop in the trump suit, exiting with a third spade if they don't break 2-2.

<u>What is our goal ?</u>

Let's look at a suit combination I came across in real play:

N: Q1092 S: A87654

When I met this one, I was in a slam, this was the trump suit, and all I had to do was to avoid 2 losers, there are several ways of doing this, small to the Q (better in case W ducks K3, you then make the overtrick) or 10 or what I did, 2-3-4-show out.

But maybe we have to play this for 6 tricks not 5. Now we listen to the bidding if any. If W has opened 1N for example, E can only have one club, so we cash the ace and hope his only club is the K. If E has opened 1N, we can play the A and play W for the K, or we can lead the Q playing W for the J. The latter is better as it's both more likely that the 1N opener has the K as he will have more points than his partner, and it saves you losing 2 tricks when he has all 3.

A much more complicated example:

Ax

K1087xx

The book play for this suit for 5 tricks in isolation is not well known, you lead the 10, running it unless W plays the Q, J or 9, in which case you play the A and play small to the 8. The point is that you are fine on any 3-2 break, and of the singletons, you can cope easily with W holding Q, J or 9, but playing this way allows you to deal with a singleton 9 with E.

So what might cause us to deviate from this ? Quite a few things in fact:

1. We need 6 tricks not 5
2. The bidding tells us one of the hands is balanced
3. This is the trump suit which gives us other options
4. We are playing pairs so the overtrick matters

So let's look at a real hand and how these priorities affect our decision.

♠ Ax
♥ Axxxx
♦ xxx
♣ AKx

♠ K1087xx
♥ x
♦ AKQ
♣ Qxx

So how do you play:

1. 7N
2. 6N on a heart lead
3. 6N on a non heart lead
4. 7♠
5. 6♠
6. 6♠ after W opened an 11-13 NT
7. 6♠ after E opened an 11-13 NT

In all the spade contracts assume a heart lead.

7N or 6N on a heart lead, you have no choice, you have to find ♠ QJ doubleton.
6N on a non heart lead, you need 5 spade tricks, so you make the book play and run the spade 10
6♠ after W opened an 11-13 NT, only E can hold a stiff and the only one you can pick up is the 9 so again run the 10

7♠ you have an interesting choice, you have no chance unless an honour appears on the first round and it appears that if that honour appears from W, you have to play him for QJ doubleton. This is not the case, and the technique required is actually the same as the one used for 6♠ whether or not E opened an 11-13 NT although there you're looking for QJ9x rather than Qxxx/Jxxx. Note that singleton Q or J is nearly twice as likely as QJ doubleton, so this is probably the thing to play for, although the percentages are brought closer together in that you will see that you need E to follow to 3 diamonds and 3 clubs and have a number of clubs plus hearts equal to 6.

What you need to do is called a trump coup, and is a way of disposing of a trump loser that you can't pick up conventionally. Essentially by ruffing in hand to shorten your trumps, you engineer leading a plain suit from dummy at trick 12 holding ♠K10 if in 7 or 10x if in 6 with E holding Q9 or J9.

There are 2 keys for a trump coup to work, you need sufficient entries to dummy to take the ruffs and get back there at the end, and you need to play off winners that you can as early as possible so that an opponent can't discard on the suit you're ruffing from dummy to prevent you cashing them later.
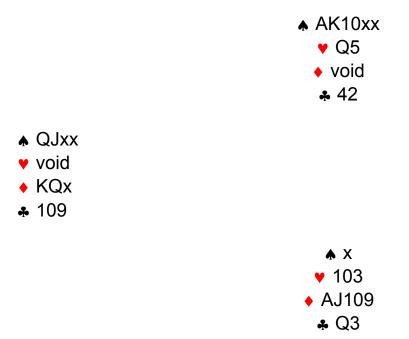
So we win the heart ace at trick 1 and key play, ruff a heart at trick 2, anything else and you don't have enough entries to dummy to make this work. Spade to the ace and a spade back. In 7 we will need the Q or J to appear under the A (from W, if it comes from E we need QJ doubleton), in 6 we will assume W plays a small one, now we return a spade, in 7 we will hook the 8, in 6 we will play the 10 if E plays the 9 and there's no further problem, so assume he plays the Q or J and we win. Now when W shows out we cash the three diamond winners, club to dummy, take our second heart ruff, Q and another club to the A and if all this has gone well, leading a heart picks up E's spades and we make 7 in the first case, 6 in the second.

One slight thing to note, at pairs, leading the 10 makes 6 when E has a singleton trump 9, but costs the overtrick if E has QJ, which is slightly more likely. So if you expect everybody to be in a slam (you have a combined 36 count for example), you will play the spade ace and another, but on the hand above you probably play safe as not too many people at club level will bid this one and dropping the overtrick shouldn't matter.

One final example

As a preface to this, it's not the sort of thing many mere mortals will spot at the table, but is one of the most beautiful end positions I've ever seen. You might think A42 opposite KQ3 doesn't have too many possibilities BUT …

The following is a hand where you need to play the club A and play the K under it at trick 1, I've stripped out 3 rounds of hearts from the whole hand, because the position varies slightly depending on the order in which E plays his hearts, but you've blundered into 6N when you should be in hearts because W used some multi way opening bid marking him with every remaining high card and sufficiently shape specific that you can diagnose when you see dummy that he needed to be 4045 to give you a chance, so you can play this effectively double dummy. The east hand contains only low diamonds and spades with one small club.

<div align="center">

♠ AK10xx
♥ Q5
♦ void
♣ 42

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♠ QJxx
♥ void
♦ KQx
♣ 109

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♠ x
♥ 103
♦ AJ109
♣ Q3

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W has painlessly discarded two small clubs and a small diamond on the first three hearts and S to lead plays the 3 of hearts, what can W discard ?

If he throws a spade, we win the heart with dummy's 5 and play 3 rounds of spades.

If he throws a diamond, we win the heart with dummy's queen, return to our 10 and play the diamond A then J.

So he throws a club and another club (anything else loses even more trivially) when we win the heart Q and return to the 10.

Now we lead the club Q, what can he discard ?

If a spade, we follow with the 2, play 3 rounds of spades and the 4 is an entry to cash them.

If a diamond, we follow with the 4, play the diamond A then J and the 3 of clubs is the entry to cash them.