

Hi everyone – It's Roger Heath-Brown here. As I often do, I've chosen to write about a hand where I went wrong, and as usual that leaves me plenty of choice! Let's look at board 9.

♠ Q
♥ KQ8
♦ AKQ72
♣ A964
♠ J94
♥ A965
♦ J43
♣ K103

I was South, and ended up in 4H with the following hands. Other pairs might play in Diamonds, and will probably lose a Spade and a Club, so I should get a decent score if I can make the contract.

If the trumps break things will be easy, but even if they are 4-2 it looks as if I could take three Hearts, five Diamonds and two Clubs. So how can I ensure nothing goes wrong?

Let's first look at the wrong way (in other words, my way). A Diamond was led, won in hand, and I took three rounds of trumps, finding that West started with four, and leaving him with the Jack. (Him? It was a robot, so maybe I should say "It"?)

♠ Q
♥ -
♦ AKQ7
♣ A964
♠ J94
♥ 9
♦ 43
♣ K103

Here's where we have got to, and I have foolishly left the Spades open. But if I take the top Diamonds, hoping to throw one of my Spades, I will still survive if West has to follow twice.

So I cash the Ace of Diamonds, but West ruffs the King and plays a Spade to East's Ace.

I've already lost two tricks, and when East leads a small spade through my J,9 it gives me an awkward decision. If East still has the King and 10, or if West has both, then it doesn't matter what I do. Of the other scenarios, is it more likely that East started with A, K and small Spades, or with A, 10 and small Spades? I think the first situation is less likely, since then he/she/it might have taken both the Ace and King before leading a small one. So I try my 9, and down I go – In fact West had both King and 10, so I was doomed either way.

So how should I have played the hand to guard against a 4-2 trump split?

It's time for you to think before reading on.

♠ Q
♥ 8
♦ AKQ7
♣ A964
♠ J94
♥ A9
♦ 43
♣ K103

Here is the situation after the Diamond opening lead and two rounds of trumps. If I leave the remaining two trumps outstanding and play on diamonds until someone ruffs, they will not be able to attack spades while dummy still has a trump. If they return a Club lead, for example, I can draw the final trump, cross to the Club Ace, and continue with the Diamonds.

Yes, it is possible that West, say, ruffs the first Diamond and puts partner in with a Spade for a second Diamond ruff, but I think this line is definitely superior to the one I tried.

Must do better next time.