

We had three slam hands last night, and as usual rather few pairs bid them. On hand 5 only two pairs reached 6 Spades, making an overtrick and scoring 94%. Similarly only two pairs bid to 6 Spades on board 8, also scoring 94%. But it's hand 11 that I've decided to discuss this time.

♠ A5
♥ KQ5
♦ 1095
♣ AJ762
♠ Q873
♥ AJ53
♦ AQJ
♣ KQ

Three pairs bid to 6 No Trumps, twice by South (making 13 and 12 tricks) and once by North (one down). How should one plan the play as South, if West leads ♠J?

We can count 4 tricks in Hearts and the Aces of Spades and Diamonds. With luck we will have 5 tricks in Clubs, giving a total of 11. So we run the opening Spade lead round towards our Queen, expecting this to give us our 12<sup>th</sup> trick. East takes ♠K and returns another Spade, to the 7 from dummy, West's 9, and Declarer's Ace.

All is well now unless the Clubs break badly. We play ♣K Q, and discover that West started with 5 Clubs. So now we have only 11 tricks.

♠ -
♥ KQ5
♦ 1095
♣ AJ7
♠ Q8
♥ AJ53
♦ AQJ
♣ -

We need all the remaining tricks in this position, and it looks as if we will have to rely on the Diamond finesse now. As it happens the ♦K is with East, so all is well.

But wait! Did you remember that West led ♠J? And that they followed with the ♠9 on the second round? Perhaps their initial holding was the trebleton ♠J 10 9. In any case there is little harm in trying Dummy's ♠Q before risking the Diamond finesse. Sure enough West's ♠10 falls, and our ♠8 provides the twelfth trick irrespective of the position of ♦K.

At one table 6 NT was played by North, and this time a Heart was led. We can count 10 top tricks. If the Clubs break they will provide the 11<sup>th</sup>, and the Diamonds will yield at least one further trick. But if the clubs only produce 4 tricks we will probably need ♦K to be with East. There are many ways to play the hand, but one has to be careful with entries. The simplest line seems to be to win the opening heart lead in the North Hand and take an immediate Diamond finesse. When this wins one can test the Clubs, and then cross back to North with a top Heart to repeat the Diamond finesse. One then has enough winners and merely concedes a Spade at the end.

Well done to everyone who made a slam, and for the rest of us, keep on trying!

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