

We had no slams last night, but perhaps the most exciting hand was board 11:

♠ 96	
♥ AQ982	
♦ 4	
♣ A7653	
♠ -	♠ AK743
♥ J106543	♥ 7
♦ 9873	♦ AKQJ62
♣ J108	♣ 9
	♠ QJ10852
	♥ K
	♦ 105
	♣ KQ42

This was played five times, and each contract was doubled! With South dealer at love all, three North/South pairs reached 4Sx, by South, while the other two tables played 4Dx and 5Dx by East.

Against 4Sx, West can lead a Diamond, after which East can take two top Spades and cash another Diamond. But in practice 8, 9, or 10 tricks were made.

Defending 5Dx, North/South might take their top tricks in Hearts and Clubs. They could then try another heart, hoping for a trump promotion. That would allow Declarer

to ruff high, and then to cross ruff:- Spade, Club, Spade, Club, Spade. Finally Declarer would draw trumps and claim the rest for 11 tricks. A similar plan works if the defence try a Club at trick 3. However if they lead trumps twice, Declarer is restricted to 10 tricks.

Hand 18 is also worth a closer look.

♠ K743
♥ K5
♦ J1085
♣ A42
♠ AJ1086
♥ AQ3
♦ K76
♣ J9

This was played in Spades by South on all 5 occasions. At our table South opened 1S, West overcalled 2C, and North/South ended in 4S.

How would you plan the play, when West leads ♣K?

In particular, how would you play the trumps?

West's overcall suggests that he has the majority of the outstanding high card strength, and so perhaps is more likely to have ♠Q. But the overcall also shows length in clubs, so that West is likely to have fewer Spades than East. This is inconclusive, but you decide to win the opening lead and tackle trumps by taking the ♠K and finessing the ♠J in hand. This is successful, and you draw the last trump to leave:

♠ 7
♥ K5
♦ J1085
♣ 42
♠ 108
♥ AQ3
♦ K76
♣ J

You have taken 4 tricks. You have 3 more in Hearts, and 2 in Spades - and the Diamonds will provide at least one more. How might you get another?

Have a think now before reading on.

You take 3 rounds of hearts, discarding a Club from Dummy, and exit with ♣J. West wins the trick - the opening lead was ♣K, from KQ – and is now on lead in this position:

♠ 7		
♥ -		
♦ J1085		
♣ -		
♠ -		♠ -
♥ J		♥ 8
♦ A32		♦ Q94
♣ 6		♣ 10
	♠ 108	
	♥ -	
	♦ K76	
	♣ -	

West is end-played. A Heart or Club can be ruffed in Dummy, discarding a Diamond from the South hand. Declarer can then lead ♦J, finessing against East's ♦Q. Alternatively, if West tries a Diamond it goes to the J, Q, and K, and then Declarer can play another Diamond towards the 10 in Dummy for the extra trick.

But Deep Finesse says that only 10 tricks are available. Did you spot the mistake in the analysis above?

In the diagrammed position, when West leads ♦2 and Dummy inserts ♦J, East should duck, and now Declarer can only take one Diamond trick.

Roger Heath-Brown