

Hi everyone – It’s Roger Heath-Brown here. I’ve chosen two of last night’s hands to write about. Here’s the first, Board 2, with NS vulnerable. EW can make 4♥ easily, but not 5♥, and NS can make 4♠ easily, so EW should attempt to sacrifice in 5♥. Maybe NS will then try 5♠, played by South. Sometimes East opened with 2♥ (weak), and sometimes they passed, leaving South to bid 1♠ and West to overcall 2♥. Let’s think about playing 5♠.

♠ Q96
♥ -
♦ A98742
♣ 9742
♠ AK75432
♥ A4
♦ J63
♣ 10

West leads ♣K followed by ♣Q, which declarer ruffs. The ♥4 can be trumped in dummy, so Declarer only needs to worry about the Diamonds. In order to get an idea how the EW hands are distributed it might help to play out the Clubs. So we take ♠ A followed by ♠Q, finding that West started with two Spades, and then ruff Dummy’s third club. This is followed by a heart ruff and another club ruff, which reveals the defence’s Clubs to have been 4-4. We now have a count of the black suits, and the bidding will suggest how the Hearts might be distributed. With luck this will tell us whether East or West, if either, is the more likely to be short in Diamonds.

So now, how might we tackle the Diamonds? The missing cards are K, Q, 10, and 5, and we can afford to lose only one Diamond trick. If they split 2-2 things will be straightforward. If we think West is the more likely to be short we can hope for something like this layout.

♦ A98742	
♦ K	♦ Q105
♦ J63	

Here we can lead small from hand towards Dummy’s ♦A, capture West’s ♦K and be able to lead back through East’s remaining ♦Q 10 towards our ♦J 6. The situation is similar when West has the singleton ♦Q. This play will still produce two tricks if the Diamonds split 2-2.

Alternatively, if we think East is the more likely to be short we can hope for something like this layout.

♦ A98742	
♦ KQ5	♦ 10
♦ J63	

This time we lead the ♦J from hand, letting it run if West does not cover. This manoeuvre will “pin” East’s ♦10, if it is singleton. And if the diamonds are 2-2 we will again get a second trick when the ♦A is played.

In fact the Diamonds were 2-2, so none of this mattered!

Here is something rather different. It is Board 3, played in 3NT by South every time.

♠ 8542	
♥ QJ6	
♦ AK1093	
♣ K	
♠ J106	♠ K97
♥ 10985	♥ 7432
♦ 6	♦ 8754
♣ AQJ76	♣ 108
♠ AQ3	
♥ AK	
♦ QJ2	
♣ 95432	

South opened the bidding with 1♣ at each table, but that didn't stop West leading a low club in some cases, presenting declarer with a free trick. Elsewhere West started with a Heart.

Declarer now has nine top tricks, and the question is, should one risk the spade finesse? If it wrong there could be four club tricks to lose. This is a situation one faces repeatedly at match point scoring, and I usually get it wrong – and I don't have a good answer for the present hand.

One strategy, if the opening lead was a Heart, is to lead Clubs oneself. Maybe this apparent show of strength, coupled with the opening 1♣ bid, will deter the defence from playing further rounds of clubs? Maybe the defence will take 3 club tricks and set up your ♣ 9?

A second approach is to cross to dummy with a Diamond and try the Spade finesse immediately, before the defence has had time to see how the land lies.

A third line would be to cash the red suit winners and watch the discards. Perhaps the defence will throw so many Clubs and Hearts that there is negligible risk of losing too many tricks if the Spade finesse fails. Or maybe West will throw lots of Spades, while East keeps theirs - suggesting East has the King.

There is no Right Answer. What do you think?