MALENY CONTRACT BRIDGE CLUB

This is the ninth bridge article for members of our club.

Last Week's Problem

West Deals
None Vul

♠ A 9
♥ A K 9 2
♦ K 9 4
♣ A K 10 6

N
W E
S

♠ 8 3
♥ Q J 7 6 4
♦ A Q 10 2
♣ 9 7

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
2 ♠[1]	Dbl	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	4 NT[2]	Pass	5 ♦[3]
Pass	7 ♥	All pass	

1. Weak, 6 spades, 6-10 HCP
2. Blackwood, asking for number of aces
3. One (or four) aces

Lead: ♠ K

After South jumps to 4 ♥ in response to North's double and has the missing ace, North takes a slight gamble and bids 7 ♥.
At trick 1, North South wins the A♠. You win the next two tricks with A♥ and Q♥, both opponents following. What is your plan now to justify your partner's confidence in your play?

You have an obvious spade loser and the best way to get rid of it would be discard the remaining spade from dummy on the fourth diamond. How do you play the diamonds to maximise the chance of four winners? With no information about the opponents' distribution, the odds favour playing the A and then the K unless East shows out on the first round. Next play the Q unless West shows out on the second round. However, we do know something about the opponents' distribution. West has 6 spades and 2 hearts; therefore 5 unknown minor suit cards. Similarly, East has 8 unknown minor suit cards. Who is more likely to hold J♦? East. When the cards are dealt, they are just as likely to be in each of the 5 unknown cards in West as in the 8 unknown cards in East. The odds are 8:5 that East has the J♦. Given that, the odds now favour finessing on the third round; playing the 10 from South's hand if East follows low.

Is that the best we can do? We would do better if we knew how many diamonds each of the opponents had. Do we know? No. Can we find out? Yes. If we can find out how many clubs each opponent has, we can work out how many diamonds each has. We can find out how many clubs each opponent has by playing four rounds on clubs before trying the diamonds. Play the A and K of clubs and trump a club.
If West follows, he has at most 2 diamonds (since he has 5 minor suit cards). We can play the A then K of diamonds and know that the diamond finesse will work because West has no

more diamonds.
If West shows out on the third club, he will have 3 diamonds and we should play the A, K and Q.
If West shows out on the second club, he will have 4 diamonds. Now we can't be sure of what to do. Because West has 4 diamonds and East 2, the odds are 4:2 that the J♦ is with West. We should lead a small diamond from South and play the 9 if West follows small.
If West shows out on the first club, you know he started with 5 diamonds. Play the A♦ and lead a small diamond to the 9 unless West plays the J. This must win since East has no more diamonds.

As more information came to light, the odds of making 4 diamond tricks (and the grand slam) increased. The information came first from the bidding (West showed 6 spades), the play (both opponents followed to the two rounds of hearts) and finally from the discovery play in clubs. Congratulations to anyone who thought to play clubs before deciding how to play the diamonds.

Now look at some more hands:

East Deals
None Vul

♠ K 10
♥ 8 4 2
♦ Q 5
♣ Q J 6 5 4 2

♠ A J 9 7 5 4
♥ 9 7 3
♦ K J 8
♣ K

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		1 NT[1]	2 ♠
All pass			

1. 15-17 HCP, balanced

Lead: ♥ J

West leads the J♥ and East plays the 5. West continues with the 10♥, which East wins with the Q. East plays A♥ and then A♦ and 7 ♦. Your K♦ wins. What is your plan?

You need to avoid losing a trump trick. With 8 trumps in both hands, the percentage play is a finesse against the Queen rather than playing for the drop (i.e. Playing the A and K and hoping the Q is doubleton). It is a two-way finesse. You could lead a small spade from South towards North and play the 10 or play the K♠ and lead the 10 towards your hand. With no clues, it is an even guess. Do we have clues that will tell us what to do?

Who has K♥? It must be East for the opponent's play to make sense. So, East has 9 HCP in hearts, 4 HCP in diamonds and could have the Q♠ (making 15 HCP) or the A♣ (making 17 HCP) but not both. We don't know which yet. If we lead the K♣, we will find out. If West plays the A, East must have the Q♠ and we play the K and finesse against East's known Q. If East has the A♣, West must have the Q♠ and we lead a small spade from South and play the 10 if West plays a small spade.

Again on this hand we make a discovery play in one suit to decide on a critical play in another suit.

But was the play safe? Could this discovery play have cost us the contract? Yes. If East has only two diamonds, West has the A♣, East will be able to trump the third diamond. What should we do? If we don't make the discovery play, we have have about a 50% chance of guessing correctly and making the contract when spades are 3-2. If we do make the discovery play, we have a 100% chance of making the contract when trumps are 3-2 unless the problem distribution occurs where East can trump the third diamond (e.g. East has 3 spades, 4 hearts, 2 diamonds and 4 clubs). The chance of this happening is considerably less than the chance of mis-guessing who has the Q♠, so we should make the discovery play. It will work more often than not.

West Deals
None Vul

♠ A K 8 5
♥ Q J 6 4
♦ 8 7
♣ A 9 3

N
W E
S

♠ J 7 6 3 2
♥ K 10 5
♦ 4
♣ K Q 10 5

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
1 NT[1]	2 ♣[2]	3 ♦[3]	4 ♠
All pass			

1. 12-14 HCP
2. Shows 4-4 or better in the majors and opening values
3. Weak

Lead: ♦ A

Your opponents play a weak no trump. North's 2♣ bid shows at least 4-4 in the majors and 13+ HCP and you decide to bid 4♠. West leads A♦ and East plays the J♦. West continues with the K♦ and you trump the second diamond. What do you do next? Your aim is to give yourself the best chance to make the contract; overtricks or extra undertricks are irrelevant.

This seems easy. You have 3 club tricks and can establish 3 hearts tricks by knocking out the ace. You can draw trumps, losing one trump trick if they are 3-1 and still have 4 trump tricks you need for your contract. It is when it looks too easy that you need to ask yourself: What can go wrong?

West might have all 4 outstanding trumps. You are still OK provided you play a small trump from South's hand and, if West plays the 4, play the 8. This guarantees at most one trump loser. If trumps are 4-0 the 8♠ will win.However, if East is able to win the trick, spades are 3-1 or 2-2 and the opponents' remaining trumps will fall under the A and K when you get in. It doesn't help West to play the 9 on the first round of spades. You win the A and lead a small spade from North, playing the J. West can win the Q♠, but when you get in, you can lead a

small spade from South and finesse. West will just have the 10 and 4 left and dummy has the K and 8.

Can this play cost the contract? No. Having opened 1 NT, West won't have a void in clubs or a singleton diamond or heart. He won't be able to trump anything before you get in again.

This is an example of a safety play. It guarantees your contract—at the possible expense of an irrelevant overtrick you could have got by playing the A and K if trumps are 2-2 or East has the singleton Q. If trumps are 4-0 and you play the A, you will go down because West will win 2 trump tricks.

What should you do if you are playing pairs where overtricks matter? You should try to decide whether other pairs will be playing in 4 ♠. If you think very few pairs are in this contract, you should play as safely as you can. You've already won a good score from the bidding. Don't convert it to a poor score when spades are 4-0, and so make the safety play. If you think most pairs will be in this contract, you should not make the safety play. It will lose a valuable trick more often than it gains.

Finding the safety play was harder because it came after two hands about discovery play and we weren't expecting it. It is hard to keep 'on the ball' and think of the right thing at the right time. Mental energy can be wasted by thinking too hard when it doesn't matter. This improves with practice.

Before looking at the play, consider your bid with these cards as North.

♠ 10 9 6 3
♥ —
♦ K Q J 10 4 2
♣ A K Q

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		2 ♥	2 ♠
4 ♥	?		

East has bid a weak two, showing 6 hearts and 6-10 HCP. South bid 2♠ showing an opening bid and a spade suit. West has increased the pre-empt by jumping to 4♥. What do you, North bid?

You have 15 HCP and your hand is exceptional. You have good spade support, a void in hearts (most likely North has no wasted high cards in hearts) and lots of tricks in the minor suits (after you knock out the A♦). If your partner has 6 spades including the AK and A♦, thirteen tricks are likely. You don't have the bidding space to find out. Blackwood, asking for aces, won't tell you anything useful. Your choice seems to be to bid the safe 4♠ or the less pessimistic 6♠, hoping you didn't have a spade and diamond loser. Having 2 losers is unlikely if North has his bid, especially if he doesn't have wasted values in hearts. So suppose you bid 6♠. It is now up to South to make it. These are the North South hands:

East Deals
None Vul

♠ 10 9 6 3
♥ —
♦ K Q J 10 4 2
♣ A K Q

♠ A K Q 4 2
♥ 9 5
♦ 8 3
♣ J 7 4 2

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
		2 ♥	2 ♠
4 ♥	6 ♠	All pass	

Lead: ♥ A

South didn't quite have an opening hand, but the slam looks easy anyway. You trump in dummy and lead a spade to draw trumps. Fortunately, both follow; you would have no chance if spades were 4-0. Now you play the K♠ and East discards a heart. Right so far?

No. You are likely to go down. You can blame North for the optimistic bidding, but you should have made the slam. You just weren't concentrating at the right time (like at trick 1). Let's see how the play goes. If you draw trumps, dummy will have no trumps left when you knock out the A♦. The opponents will take a heart trick and you will be one down. So, after playing the A and K of spades, you must trump your heart loser with dummy's last trump. Now you are stuck in North's hand with no clear way back to your hand. You can try to trump the third diamond, but, unless West has 3 or more diamonds, you can't stop him from scoring his J♠.

What you had to do was come to your hand with the A♠ at trick 2 and trump the losing heart immediately, while you had a trump in dummy to lead back to the K and Q in your hand your hand to draw trumps. Now you knock out the A♦ and take your 12 tricks and congratulate your partner on his bidding.

Here is a hand to think about for next week:

North Deals
None Vul

♠ A K Q J
♥ A 9 8 5 3
♦ —
♣ K 7 5 2

♠ 10 9 8 7
♥ 7 2
♦ A Q 8 7 6 4
♣ Q

West	*North*	*East*	*South*
	1 ♥	Pass	1 ♠
Dbl	4 ♠	All pass	

Lead: ♠ 3

Hint:
Trick 1 is the time to think about what to do next to maximise your chance to make the contract.