

Declarer Play Mini-Lesson

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Declarer Play I

- Plan before the first play – losers (suit contract), then winners if useful
- Assessing strong and weak suits
- The “danger hand”
 - The opponent hand that can take a lot of tricks when on lead; **or**
 - The opponent hand that will lead through your weakness when on lead
- Use of a long suit for discards
- Clues from the bidding

Detailed Planning Questions

- Which suits are strong?
- Which suits are weak?
- Which suits have length (combining both hands)?
- Which suits have shortness (either hand)?
- Which opponent's hand would I like to be on lead?

Hand #1

4 Spade contract

♠A9763 ♥A3 ♦K8 ♣K962

North

South

♥Q led by East

♠KQJ ♥862 ♦J7 ♣AT753

Bidding:

| <u>N</u> | <u>E</u> | <u>S</u> | <u>W</u> |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1S | 2D | 3S | pass |
| 4S | all pass | | |

Hand #1 – Analysis

- Hand evaluation

- North's hand is minimal (14 high card points) with a 5-card spade suit (1 length point). South's hand is medium (11 high card points) with 3-card spade support. East overcalls 2D with 5+ diamonds (headed by the KJT or better) and 10 – 17 points. After South's limit raise (3S with 10 – 12 points), North raises to 4S game.
- In a suit contract, count your losers first: no losers in spades, one loser in hearts, 2 possible losers in diamonds, and one possible loser in clubs. You can afford to lose only 3 tricks, so you have one potential loser to eliminate.
- Declarer's spades (trump) and clubs (long) are strong. They will be the source of many tricks.
- Declarer's hearts and diamonds are both weak, but the diamond suit is weakest. If West gets the lead, they will lead diamonds through the King of diamonds. East probably has the Ace and Queen – the King will be trapped.
- **So, West is the danger hand. We must keep West from winning a trick and getting the lead.**

- Plan

- Hold up playing the Ace of hearts on the first trick unless West plays the King. If East wins the Queen, they have to again lead toward the North hand – good!
- If East leads diamonds, your King becomes a winner (one loser eliminated). With any other lead, Declarer wins and draws trumps in three rounds.
- It is now time to play the club suit (long suit). To ensure your contract, play the Ace of clubs and then lead the Ten. If West can't beat that Ten, finesse – play a low card from North. East wins, but again can't lead any card that threatens you.
- Upon regaining the lead, take the King of clubs and the 9 of clubs, and then lead the 6 to South's 7. Win the remaining club and you have 10 tricks. Contract made!

Declarer Play II

- Plan before the first play – winners (NT contract)
- Assessing strong and weak suits
- The “danger hand”
 - The opponent hand that can take a lot of tricks when on lead; or
 - The opponent hand that will lead through your weakness when on lead
- Choice of finesses
- Hold-up play – choosing not to win a trick to sever opponent communications

Detailed Planning Questions

- Which suits provide a source of tricks?
- Which opponent's hand would I like to keep away from the lead?
- How do I keep the danger hand from winning more tricks than I can afford?

Hand #2

3 No Trump contract

♠A32 ♥KJ73 ♦AQJT ♣87

North

South

♠654 ♥AQ64 ♦87 ♣AQJT

Bidding:

| <u>N</u> | <u>E</u> | <u>S</u> | <u>W</u> |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 1NT | pass | 3NT | all pass |

♠K led by East

Hand #2 – Analysis

- Hand evaluation
 - North's hand has 15 high card points and is balanced; therefore, North opens 1NT. South's hand has opening hand strength (13 high card points) and balanced; therefore, the 3NT response. East leads the King of spades.
 - In a No Trump contract, count your winners : 1 winner (the Ace) in spades, 4 winners in hearts, 1 winner (Ace) in diamonds, and 1 winner (Ace) in clubs. Needing 9 tricks for your 3NT contract, your immediate 7 winners are two winners short. You need to develop 2 additional winners.
 - Declarer's spades are weak – only 1 “stopper” (the Ace) and there are only 6 total spades between N/S. The spade suit is potentially most dangerous to declarer., especially if one of E/W holds 5 cards. How do we confirm this?
 - Both clubs and diamonds provide the opportunity to win at least two additional tricks by finessing. But which finesse to take?
 - **So, spades is the danger suit, but we don't yet know which is the danger hand. We will find out.**
- Plan
 - Hold up playing the Ace of spades on the first trick. Hold up playing the Ace on the second trick as well! If East continues spades (best), you'll take the Ace and also get a count of the spade suit. Were you counting the cards played in spades? Spades is the most important suit in this hand, so that's the most important suit to count.
 - On the third round of spades, you notice that West discards. That means West held 2 spades; East must hold the remaining 2 spades. You now know that **East is the danger hand**. If East gains the lead, they'll win the two spade tricks, giving their team 5 total tricks. Your contract fails.
 - But, after winning the Ace of spades, in which suit do you finesse? In clubs of course – lead a small club. You want to lead through the danger hand (not toward it).
 - If East holds and plays the King, you take your Ace and then play your Queen and Jack and have at least 9 tricks. If East doesn't play the King (as in this case), play the Queen from South and let West win their King. (If West doesn't take their King, play a heart back to North and try the finesse again).
 - If West returns a diamond, **absolutely do not finesse!** If the finesse were to lose to East, East will cash those two spade tricks. Instead, take the Ace of diamonds, and then win the remaining club tricks. Your contract is safe.