

12		N North		W N E S	
		♠ AQ98543		P 1♠ 2♠ 2♠	
		♥ K1083		3♣ P P X	
		♦ 6		P 3♣ P 4♣	
		♣ 4		P P X P	
W West		E East			
♠		♥		♣6	
♥		♦			
♦		♣			
♣					
		S South			
		♠ 76			
		♥ AQ4			
		♦ Q9754			
		♣ A95			
		4x N		NS: 0 EW: 0	

Board 12 exhibits the modern style of bidding. North has a routine 1S opener, making up in playing strength what it lacks in high cards. South's double of 3C is a DSIP (do something intelligent, partner) double, as opposed to being for penalty. How do you approach the play when East expresses a negative outlook for the contract and leads the C6? More specifically, can you make if East has all four trumps?

One technique to deal with a bad trump break with high trumps out is to elope with small trumps. However, conditions for a successful elopement are rather stringent.

- The side-suit winners (here, the HA, HK, HQ and CA) have to be cashed safely without being ruffed. This is only possible if East is something like 4=3=1=5.
- There has to be enough entries to dummy. On this hand we need to elope with *four* small trumps (4 side-suit winners + 4 elopements + SA + SQ = 10 tricks). However, there are only three entries to dummy.
- The opponent has to be unable to overruff the elopements. If East is 4=3=1=5, they can overruff when we attempt to elope by ruffing diamonds.

The conclusion is that an elopement is not possible, and we cannot make if East has all four trumps. Simply win the CA and draw trumps.

It turns out to be our lucky day when West follows to the first round of trumps. The SQ loses the SK as East persists with another club. You ruff, draw two more rounds of trumps (West pitching diamonds), and East wins the SJ and plays a third round of clubs. Now, how do you play the hearts?

That was a trick question. You don't play the hearts, at least not immediately. Instead, play a few rounds of diamonds to clarify the distribution of the hand.

You have two trumps left at this point, which means you can give up a diamond, ruff the club return, cross to the HA, and ruff a diamond. East would have led a diamond from DAK, so assume the top honors are split. Now,

- If East doesn't drop the DA or DK, they've shown up with 3=x=3=5 and can have at most 2 hearts. The finesse is marked.
- If East drops the DA or DK, play to squeeze West in diamonds and hearts. Either the DQ or the long heart will be your tenth trick.

12		N North		W N E S	
		♠ AQ98543		P 1♠ 2♠ 2♠	
		♥ K1083		3♣ P P X	
		♦ 6		P 3♣ P 4♣	
		♣ 4		P P X P	
W West		E East			
♠ 10		♥ KJ2			
♥ J962		♦ 75			
♦ K1032		♣ AJ8			
♣ Q1072		♣ KJ863			
		S South			
		♠ 76			
		♥ AQ4			
		♦ Q9754			
		♣ A95			
		4x N		NS: 0 EW: 0	

7 0	N North	W N E S
	♠	P 2♠ P 1♥
W West	♠ A10542 ♥ KJ94 ♦ 64 ♣ 65	P 3NT P 3♣
		P 4♥ P 4♣
	S South	E East
	♠	♠
	♥	♥
	♦	♦
	♣	♣

On Board 23, you (as West) have less than your fair share of high cards, but you face decisions that will turn out to be critical.

The bidding is shown in the diagram on the left. It seemed like South thought about passing 3NT, but ended up bidding on. Do you double this contract?

You have a solid plan to beat this. It sounds like the opponents are in a 5-2 fit, and you are a favorite to score three trump tricks. You only have 8 HCP, so partner might be able to contribute a trick (or two!).

However, it is better to approach the problem with a balanced perspective. Did you consider the arguments against doubling?

- The opponents went through a game-forcing auction, as opposed to an invitational one. They might have extra values and partner might be broke.
- North might turn up with the HQ, leaving you with only two trump tricks.
- South might have a void in spades; the SA is not guaranteed to take a trick.
- Other tables might be playing and making 3NT with minor suit tricks. In that case, beating 4H is enough to guarantee a good board. In other words, if 4H is going down, doubling might turn 90% into 100%; but, if 4H is making, doubling could turn 50% into 0%.
- The opponents might run to 4NT and make it without relying on heart tricks.

Whether you choose to double or pass, nobody has anything else to say in the auction. The spotlight is still on you: what do you lead against 4H?

Did you give consideration to the lead of a *low spade*? Most people learn early in their bridge education that against suit contracts, you should never lead an unsupported Ace, and never, ever *underlead* an Ace, but this is one of the rare exceptions.

The underlead of an Ace fails most spectacularly when it presents declarer an undeserved trick with their singleton honor. It is fairly safe to assume that such is not the case on this hand; South might well have sat for 3NT.

Let us consider some other scenarios:

7 0	N North	W N E S
	♠ KJ63	P 2♠ P 3♣
	♥ Q5	P 3NT P 4♣
	♦ AQJ82	P 4♥ P P
♣ Q7	P	
W West	E East	
♠ A10542	♠ Q87	
♥ KJ94	♥ 108	
♦ 64	♦ 10953	
♣ 65	♣ J842	
	S South	
	♠ 9	
	♥ A7632	
	♦ K7	
	♣ AK1093	
	4♥ S NS: 0 EW: 0	

This is our target scenario. Declarer is *guaranteed* to go wrong (i.e. play the SJ), even if they suspect you are up to the task of underleading Aces.

Note that due to the threat of losing control, declarer is unlikely to play the SK even *without* the SJ. If East holds the SA, retaining the SK in dummy is effective in nullifying the defenders' spade attack.

7 0	N North	W N E S
	♠ KQ96	P 2♠ P 3♣
	♥ Q5	P 3NT P 4♣
	♦ AQJ82	P 4♥ P P
♣ J7	P	
W West	E East	
♠ A10542	♠ J87	
♥ KJ94	♥ 108	
♦ 64	♦ K1095	
♣ 65	♣ 10842	
	S South	
	♠ 3	
	♥ A7632	
	♦ 73	
	♣ AKQ93	
	4♥ S NS: 0 EW: 0	

This is the failing case. A low spade is inferior to a diamond lead (also a reasonable choice) and ties with everything else. Notably, on this layout it is on par with leading the SA.

7 0	N North	W N E S
	♠ K963	P 2♠ P 3♣
	♥ Q5	P 3NT P 4♣
	♦ AQJ82	P 4♥ P P
♣ Q7	P	
W West	E East	
♠ A10542	♠ QJ87	
♥ KJ94	♥ 108	
♦ 64	♦ 1093	
♣ 65	♣ J842	
	S South	
	♠	
	♥ A7632	
	♦ K75	
	♣ AK1093	
	4♥ S NS: 0 EW: 0	

This is the actual hand. Declarer elected to play low and retain the SK as some defense against further spade forces. Then, declarer drew two rounds of trumps, and had to guess whether or not to play for trumps to split 3-3. A misguess meant that West was able to draw declarer's last trump and cash the SA to prevent any overtricks.