

Board 1

North Deals
None Vul

♠ A K J 10 8		
♥ K 9		
♦ K Q 6		
♣ A Q 10		
♠ Q 9 6	N	♠ 7 4 2
♥ Q 3	W	♥ A J 8 2
♦ A J 10 8 7	E	♦ 5 4 2
♣ J 5 2	S	♣ 6 4 3
		♠ 5 3
		♥ 10 7 6 5 4
		♦ 9 3
		♣ K 9 8 7

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦
Pass	2 NT	Pass	3 ♦!
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	3 NT
All pass			

Auction Commentary: North's balanced 22 HCP is too strong to open 2 NT. A 2 ♣ start with a plan to rebid 2 NT will complete the description. Rebidding 2 ♠ is possible but it pays to get our strength and shape across as soon as possible. Systems are still "on" here, so South bids 3 ♦ to show hearts. Opener should bid 3 ♥ -- responder may be absolutely broke with long hearts. South only has 3 HCP but with opener showing 22-24, that is enough to try for game. South bids 3 NT and shows 5 ♥ and enough for game. Without 3 ♥s, opener passes. *West could double the 3 ♦ transfer to direct a lead. But with a strong balanced hand behind us there is some risk, and with some helpful cards in other suits, no double was chosen.*

Opening Lead: 6 ♣ -- East does not have an appealing lead. 4th best from longest/strongest is typical, but that's the opponent's suit. With a super strong hand to our right, that is the first lead we should eliminate. No appealing sequences either, we should to try to "hit" partner's suit. We should think about not only what did happen in the bidding but what didn't happen. With good ♦s, partner might have doubled 3 ♦. With long/strong ♠s, partner might have ventured a 2 ♠ overcall over 2 ♦. It would be less appealing to show ♣s, as that requires bidding to the three level. A small edge at best but something to go on.

When leading from a holding such as East's club suit, the "top of nothing" card is chosen. Leading low will confuse partner as to the strength of our suit. This concept generally applies to leads from three small cards against a notrump contract.

Planning the Play: Counting winners in NT, there are 3-4 ♣s and 2 ♠. The ♠s are the most appealing to set up. This is a complicated deal, and communication is key. We need to lead towards honors and establish/cash winners. Dummy only has one entry in ♣s, we must use it wisely.

Declarer can use the K♣ to take a ♠ finesse but that is not a good plan. It's the only entry to dummy which we might wish to use to do something else. Even if the ♠ finesse wins, we won't necessarily have gained anything. Best to just drive out the Q♠ here. Four ♠ tricks might well be sufficient for our needs. We hope to take 4 ♠s, 4 ♣s, and at least 1 ♦. A ♦ shift will look mighty enticing if RHO wins the ♠. *(continued on next page)*

(hand #1 continued)

Defender's Plan: The "rule of 11" is another handy rule that applies to fourth best leads. Both the defenders and declarer can use this rule. It works thusly. Take the spot card led and subtract from 11. If the lead is fourth best, the remaining number is how many cards higher in the suit remain. It sounds fancy but it's actually simple math. Here $11-6=5$. West can see exactly five cards higher than the C6 in their hand/dummy but rather than blindly play the CJ, consider the bidding. If the C6 is fourth best, partner has C AQT6, highly unlikely given the auction. The club lead may well be from "top of nothing" and withholding the CJ might cause declarer to misread the suit.

Say West plays low on the club with declarer winning the ten and declarer plays AKJ of spades. East follows with the S2, S4 and S7. West S6, S9, SQ. Count signals by the defenders are one tool for helping each other out. In "standard" signals playing up the line with an odd number while an initial high low shows an even number.

Thus each defender can be pretty sure declarer has five spades when both EW show an odd number. Declarer might have preferred to play 4H with a three card holding thus 5233 is a likely shape. Picturing declarer's shape is paramount to effective defense, it can work wonders. It takes some practice to hone this skill but give it a try. It's amazing how a little bit of detective work combined with help from partner can steer us to a winning play.

West can see declarer has 4S and 4C tricks coming, thus the defense needs to take four tricks immediately. Partner rates to have only one significant high card, remember declarer has shown at least 22 hcp. Our only chance is for that card to be the DK. Lead the DJ hoping to trap declarer's queen. We must retain the DA to avoid blocking the suit. No luck this time but this kind of thinking pays big dividends in the long run.

Takeaways:

Top of nothing Versus notrump, we will occasionally lead from a poor holding as the least of evils. With xxx (the highest card lower than the ten), consider leading the highest card to alert partner that we are leading a weak suit.

Rule of 11 A handy tool for deducing the exact number of cards above the spot led.

Communication Declarer must consider the ability to take finesses and cash winners when formulating their plan. Use limited entries to one hand or the other wisely.

Defensive Clues The declaring side has the advantage of seeing their combined assets right away. The defenders must learn to use signals and factor in clues from the bidding to create a mental picture of declarer's hand (and thus partner's as well).

Board 4

West Deals
Both Vul

♠ A K Q 9 4	♠ J 10 8 6 3	♠ 5																
♥ A K Q 10 3	♥ —	♥ J 9 6 2																
♦ K 6	♦ A 9 3	♦ 10 8 7 4																
♣ Q	♣ J 10 9 7 4	♣ 8 6 5 3																
<table style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">♠ 7 2</td> <td style="padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> <table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center; width: 60px; height: 60px;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W</td><td style="padding: 2px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> </table> </td> <td style="padding: 5px;">♠ 5</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">♥ 8 7 5 4</td> <td></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">♥ J 9 6 2</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">♦ Q J 5 2</td> <td></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">♦ 10 8 7 4</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;">♣ A K 2</td> <td></td> <td style="padding: 5px;">♣ 8 6 5 3</td> </tr> </table>			♠ 7 2	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center; width: 60px; height: 60px;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W</td><td style="padding: 2px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W	E	S	♠ 5	♥ 8 7 5 4		♥ J 9 6 2	♦ Q J 5 2		♦ 10 8 7 4	♣ A K 2		♣ 8 6 5 3
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<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦	Pass
2 ♠	Pass	3 ♣!	Pass
3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥	All pass

Auction Commentary: Responder doesn't have much. With opener bidding ♠s, the East hand might be worthless, thus the second negative 3 ♣ is used (cheaper minor). West need not panic. A new suit is still forcing, East should not pass 3 ♥. East is charmed to find a fit and raises to game. *West must remember they have shown this type of hand and respect responder's signoff.* Note that if opener had rebid 2 ♥ immediately over 2 ♦, the East hand is too good for a negative response with such a great fit and ruffing potential. An immediate 3 ♥ raise is warranted (set trumps early). The ♥ support and singleton ♠ might be all that is needed for slam.

Opening Lead: J♣ (top of a sequence)

Planning the Play: Declarer may be disappointed at first with dummy's meager assets but closer examination shows there are some valuable cards. The goal is 10 tricks. Declarer sees 5 ♥s in hand and 3 ♠s off the top. If the A♦ is with South, the K♦ might take a trick. Most critical is deciding what to do with the little spades.

In a suit contract, declarer's first thought should be can I afford to draw trump? Remember those two little ♠s. Dummy has short ♠s and declarer can ruff them, but we need to make sure we have trumps in dummy remaining.

Now that we know to postpone drawing those trumps, that steers us in the right direction. Say the opponents play two rounds of clubs we can ruff low and set about ruffing those spade losers. Look at our ♥suit: dummy has the J9♥, we have AKQT. We have an almost foolproof plan available. Cash the A♠. Once that wins we are home. Ruff a ♠ with the 9♥. Use dummy's high trumps for safety. Low trump to hand, ruff low ♠ with the J♥. We can finish drawing trump in hand and then enjoy our spade winners. 10 tricks almost guaranteed.

There are several traps on this hand. A 4-0 trump split can cause a big headache if we are not careful. While this is unlikely, it does happen. We must ruff our ♠s safely, using the J and 9. We can afford to do so with the AKQT in hand. Leading towards the K♦ is a red herring as well. If the A♦ is offside, not unlikely with South holding the AK♣, a bad trump split will be problematic. Our goal is 10 tricks and we have an almost certain path to get there. When you have a sure path, take it.

Defenders' Plan: South likes partner's ♣ lead. The J♣ places the Q♣ in declarer's hand so South should play the K♣ (lowest of equals). The Q♣ appears immediately. We can't be sure of the ♣ situation, declarer might be fooling us from Qx♣. Holding four trumps our minor suit tricks are not going anywhere so South can continue ♣s. Forcing West to ruff might cause problems for them. Leading a trump to cut down ♠ ruffs is a consideration but with four trumps in dummy one round is not likely to be sufficient.

Declarer is in control this time, our only hope is if they make a mistake.

Takeaways

The 2nd negative. This refers to responder's second bid. It's not mandatory to play but it can be helpful for responder to announce when they have a potentially trickless hand. Cheapest minor is one such methodology and is used here.

Rarely should 2 ♣ auctions stop short of game. We won't make every game we bid but we cannot afford to bid in fear that partner will pass when we don't want them to. It's too difficult.

The 2 ♣ opener must remember they have shown a powerful hand already and not continue bidding past game without undisclosed assets. (Change the above hand to AKQ9x AKQxx AKx and opener should bid slam once a ♥ fit is established with 12 likely tricks available).

Board 8

West Deals
None Vul

♠ Q 10 7
♥ K J 9 5 4
♦ 8 6 5
♣ 10 7

♠ A	N W E S	♠ J 9 8 6
♥ —		♥ 7 6 3
♦ A K Q J 7		♦ 10 9 4
♣ A K J 6 5 4 3		♣ Q 9 2

♠ K 5 4 3 2
♥ A Q 10 8 2
♦ 3 2
♣ 8

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♦	Pass
4 ♦	Pass	5 ♣	Pass
6 ♣	All pass		

Auction Commentary: South has an amazing hand. Imagine worrying that partner is going to pass us out with this hand. South can start with 2 ♣ confidently knowing that responder will not do that now. North issues a waiting response. This is a deal where NS are likely to encounter opposing bidding. *Many 2 ♣ defenses exist (similar to NT opening defenses) but double showing majors and NT showing minors is one option (known as Mathe).* The double would come from South after the 2 ♦ waiting bid.

After a 3 ♣ bid by opener 3 ♦ is called -"2nd negative" a waiting bid asking partner to bid again as the 2 ♣ opening is forcing to game after a suit rebid.

4 ♦ shows longer clubs and is game forcing. Responder shows a preference for the 1st bid suit and it could be a doubleton. Therefore opener may or may not bid 7 clubs.

Opening Lead: 5 ♥

Planning the Play: An easy one for a change. This one was all about bidding. Regardless of the lead declarer can count 13 easy tricks. No need to avoid drawing trumps, South's hand is high thanks to the Q♣ and T♦ in dummy. Draw trump before something bad happens and claim. 6C bid with an overtrick!

Defenders' Plan: Dummy doesn't have much but declarer has bid strongly. East can plan to signal something in hearts but otherwise at the mercy of declarer's hand.

Takeaways: If the opponents intervene, bidding naturally is a simple and effective way to proceed. And showing a fit early often leads to good results.

Don't expect partner to visualize freak hands (extreme shape) as they are extremely rare. Make practical bids based on what you know from the auction.