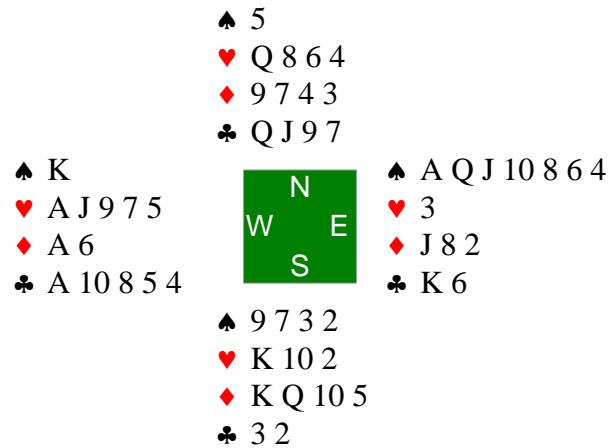


**Board 2**  
 East Deals  
 N-S Vul



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♠	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	2 ♠	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	4 ♠	All pass

**Auction Commentary:** Once West shows the values for game by bidding 3 ♣, East jumps to game in their self-sufficient suit.

**Opening Lead:** ♦ K


**Play Commentary:** Declarer's play at trick 1 depends on how many tricks you are trying to take. You could win the ♦ A, draw trump, and cash the ♣ AK and ruff a club. If the clubs are 3-3, you can return to dummy with the ♥ A and cash the last two clubs, pitching your remaining diamonds, and take 13 tricks. However, if the clubs don't split, you'll have to lose those last two diamonds and only make 11 tricks.

The clubs will split 3-3 less than 50% of the time, so it is probably better to play for 12 tricks. In that case, we only want to avoid losing two diamonds, which means we can lose one diamond. If we win the ♦ A at trick one and play another diamond, the defense can play a trump, and we are again forced to rely on the clubs splitting.

If we are planning to lose a diamond, why don't we lose the first one? The defense can still switch to a trump, but the vital difference is that the ♦ A remains in the dummy as an entry. After we finish drawing trump, we play ♣ AK and ruff a club as before, play a heart to the Ace and ruff the 4th club. Now, we still have the ♦ A as an entry to cash the 5th club, pitching a diamond, making 12 tricks.

**Takeaway:** Whenever you are going to have to lose a trick, it is often advantageous to lose it immediately. You will be able to keep your entries intact, which might be necessary to get to the dummy late for a crucial discard.

**Board 7**  
 South Deals  
 Both Vul

♠ J 8 6 ♥ 10 7 2 ♦ A 7 ♣ J 9 7 5 3	♠ K 9 4 ♥ 8 5 3 ♦ Q 9 6 3 ♣ A Q 4	♠ Q 10 3 2 ♥ Q J 9 4 ♦ 4 2 ♣ K 10 8	
			
	♠ A 7 5 ♥ A K 6 ♦ K J 10 8 5 ♣ 6 2		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	3 NT	All pass	1 NT

**Auction Commentary:** With 15-17 HCP and a balanced hand, open 1 NT. You don't need a stopper in every suit to open 1 NT; you're simply describing your hand to your partner.

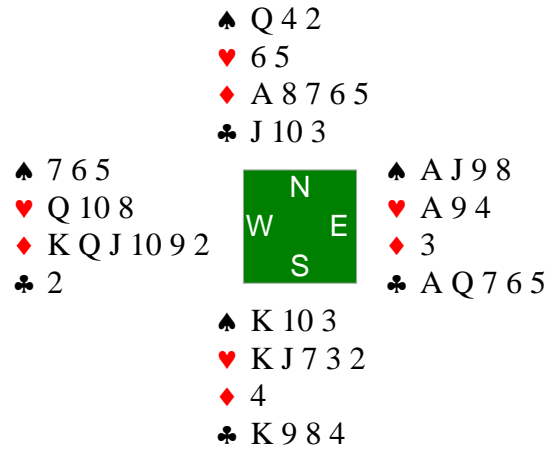
**Opening Lead:** ♣ 5.

**Play Commentary:** When you take the finesse at trick 1, it loses to East's King, and East continues clubs. You correctly hold up until the third round, hoping the player with the ♦ A has at most 1 more club, in which case you will still make your contract. Unlucky! Or...was it?

Why, oh why, did we take the finesse at trick 1. Look at what happens if we simply play small from the dummy? East can win, but he can no longer continue clubs, and the contract is secure.

**Takeaway:** Remember when we talked about making a plan at trick 1? Don't make reflexive plays until you have taken the time to reflect on them. With two spades, two hearts and four diamonds, we don't need two club tricks. If you don't need a finesse, and taking it could be dangerous, don't finesse.

**Board 12**  
 West Deals  
 N-S Vul



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

**Auction Commentary:** East's 2 NT bid is forcing and asks West for more information about their hand. West's 3 ♥ bid says they have more than a minimum and some values in hearts.

**Opening Lead:** ♥ 3.

**Play Commentary:** After dummy's ♥ 8 wins the first trick, declarer starts on the diamonds.

Just like that, it was too late. Dummy's diamonds are essential. After we win the first trick with the ♥ 8, how will we get back to them after they are set up? South will win the ♥ K and prevent us from getting back to the dummy.

In order to get back to the dummy, we have to win the first trick with the ♥ A! When we later lead hearts toward the dummy, South will not be able to stop us from getting there.

So, after carefully considering our lack of entries to the dummy, we win the ♥ A at trick 1.