

KEN'S KONUNDRUM CORNER

Number 1

♠J76

♠A9843

West leads S2 against your 4S contract. Your goal is to have just one trump loser! What card do you play from dummy?

You should play S6. The SJ only works if West started with KQ2 in which case S2 would be a crazy lead.

Having played S6, East produces SQ which you grab with the SA. What is your next play?

♠J7

♠9843

You should play small towards S7 or run the S9. Why?

Because there is one trump that you can be sure East doesn't hold. That is ST. Holding that card, East would have played it rather than the SQ because he can see SJ in dummy.

You will still be in the soup if West started with KT52, giving him two trump tricks no matter what you do. However, your play is rewarded when the layout is

♠J76
♠T52 ♠KQ
♠A9843

Notice how much tougher it is if East plays SK at trick one. You should still take the same line as a tough East holding KT will not part with his SK. If West hadn't started trumps for you, SA should be your first play. Note that East drops an honour and then play the same way. If he has the other top honour, it will "beat the air". If he shows out, you are no worse off.

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Number 2

What do you make of this auction?

1D (1H) 3NT (P)
4S (P) ?

What can you conclude about the shape of opener's hand?

When responder bid 3NT over 1H, he denied having a 4 card spade suit. He could have shown it first in a natural and forcing auction. Responder would be able to revert to 3NT on the next round of the bidding.

Yet, opener was prepared to bid spades at the 4 level! After the spade denial by responder, this must surely be a five card suit.

So, opener has 5 spades yet opened 1D. Why would he do that?

The inescapable conclusion is that opener has a SIX card diamond suit.

At the table, responder passed 4S and played in a 5-3 fit making comfortably.

Ethical Note:- The opponents asked for an explanation of the bidding before the opening lead. Responder divulged that the auction must show 6-5. However, this was a conclusion based on bridge logic and not a systematic agreement. As such, the defenders are on their own and are not entitled to the conclusion. However, they are entitled to know that the 3NT bid denied 4 spades. An appropriate explanation would be to say

"Opener is prepared to bid spades on his own at the 4 level, even though I have denied that suit. You will have to decide what sort of hand he must hold"

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Number 3

Spades are trumps. How do you plan to handle these holdings for one loser:-

♠Q2

♠K76543

You need a lot of luck. Lead S3 towards SQ. If the queen holds, you then play low from both hands hoping that west started with ♠Ax and the ace will beat the air. No other layout will allow you to escape for one loser.

♠Q432

♠K765

Again, you will need some luck. However, this time you must guess which of your opponents might hold ♠Ax. After that, it is the same as last time. Of course, if you can cajole one of the opponents to lead the suit, you might escape for one loser by following the familiar doctrine "second-hand-low". Say west leads a spade. You play low and perhaps east will pop the ace. Even when they don't pop the ace, the body language may convince you of its location!

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Number 4

How will you play these suits in order to make a trick?

Dummy

♠Q2

♠J43

Dummy

♠QT2

♠543

If you have to play the suit, you will need a lot of luck. Your best chance is to lead towards one of the hands and hope that AK is onside. Say you lead towards the queen. You hope west has AK. You have one more chance, particularly if this is a side suit against a trump suit contract. West may have king only. Thinking you may be leading away from the ace, west may pop the king to make sure of a trick in the suit.

Here your best chance is to lead towards the ten, hoping that LHO has the jack. If LHO plays low, insert the ten.

Putting up the queen will only work when LHO has AK and not the jack.

This will happen half as often as LHO holding the jack, with or without a top honour.

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Number 5

♠AQ86

♥K92

♦K2

♣J943

♠K9

♥AJ543

♦Q5

♣QT85

You are declarer in 4H after your LHO opened a strong 1NT, always 4-3-3-3 shape.

Plan your play after west cashes ♣AK and ♦A

You can lose no more tricks. So, the trumps must be brought home without loss. West is marked with ♥Qxx.

Contrary to all logical finessing play, the winning line is to lead ♥J. West must cover or you will duck in dummy, giving no trump loser. So, west covers and you win ♥K. Now, you play ♥2 from dummy and hope that East started with ♥Tx. West's 3rd trump will fall under ♥9.

♥K92

♥Q86

♥T7

♥AJ543

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Number 6

♠Q5
♥KQ2
♦QJT6
♣KJ97

♠K8
♥AJ6
♦A543
♣A842

After a crisp 1NT – 3NT, west leads a low spade. Plan your play.

Despite all those high cards, you need a finesse in one of the minors. Which one?

The first move, is to put up the CQ. Why? Because, if it holds the trick, west will probably not know that your CK in your hand is now bare! If you play low from dummy, the stiff queen will be there for all to see. So, the SQ holds the trick. Now what? If you enter hand to take the club finesse and it fails, the spade return will come through you so fast that it will make your eyes water.

For that reason, you should play on diamonds, not the clubs. When that loses, west will pause for thought while you hold your breath. Chances are, he will try to get to east's hand with a club or heart so that the spade can be led from that side. Now, you grab your tricks.

♠Q5
♥KQ2
♦QJT6
♣KJ97

♠AT732
♥864
♦K9
♣T63

♠J964
♥T973
♦872
♣Q5

♠K8
♥AJ6
♦A543
♣A842

Tip: When experienced pairs play :- *“When the opening leads is won in dummy with an honour, partner gives count”*. Here, east plays S9, ready to

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play high-low to show an even number of cards in the suit. West considers all four cards before turning over his card and quitting the first trick. He will be thinking :- "*Where are the small cards? Partner must be preparing to play high-low!*" If he has four, my ace will deck the SK.

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Number 7 - Teams

	S	W	N	E
♠				
♥A9876	1S ¹	2D	2H ²	3D
♦QT92	4C	P	5C	all pass
♣K643	¹ Too good for 2S (weak) or a multi ² Negative free bid. 8-11 HCP and 5 card suit			
♠KJ7632				
♥2	Opening lead is Dx to DA and a trump return			
♦4	Plan your play			
♣AQT75				

Even without a trump return, there aren't enough tricks on a cross-ruff. You have 9 trumps and HA. One short. With the predictable trump return, you will now be *two* short.

Since it is teams, you want to make this contract! One or two off makes little difference because their 3D was probably failing. Your only way home is to establish the spade suit before you run out of trumps.

You must win that trump return in *hand* so that you can immediately start ruffing spades.

t3: ruff a low spade

t4: ruff a diamond to hand

t5: ruff another spade in dummy. Both opponents follow low.

t6: ruff another diamond to come to hand.

t7: ruff another spade with dummy's last trump. The good news is that the spades were 3-4 with west holding Axx. Your spades are established!

t9: trump s heart to return to hand.

t10: Bang down your CA. They break 2-2. You needed that too!

Your hand is now high. Making 12 tricks!

Notice that partner's HA wasn't needed!

Why play it that way?

It's true that you could draw a 2nd round of trumps and give up a spade to the bare ace making 11 tricks.

West holding ♠Axx is the key. He didn't have much of a suit for his two level overcall, did he? So, he is likely to hold SA if he held ♠Axxx and a lousy suit, he would probably remain quiet. So, we don't play for east to hold Qxx and "smother" the queen by leading SK at the third lead of the suit.

Notice that if west has the highly-likely combination of ♠Ax, we can still survive on the suggested line. When that ace pops on the second lead, we can return to hand with a trump and give up a spade to east's queen, making 11 tricks.

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Number 8

These are your trumps:-

♠AJ43

♠Q652

How do you plan to play trumps?

You should lead ♠2 to the ♠J.

Your trumps are not good enough to lead ♠Q planning to run it. You have no "stuffing" in the suit. For that play, you would need ♠T also. If you lead ♠Q here, west, holding the ♠K will simply cover it promoting the ♠T or ♠9 in either his own or partner's hand.

If ♠2 to the ♠J holds the trick, things are looking better. Now, bang down the ♠A and on a good day, ♠K will drop from west's hand giving no loser in the suit. The layout which you seek is

	♠AJ43	
♠Kx		♠xxx
	♠Q652	
or		
	♠AJ43	
♠K		♠xxxx
	♠Q652	

Here, your thoughtful play holds the suit to one loser.

Notice that the declarer play is the same for:-

♠AJ4	or	♠AJ74
♠Q6532		♠Q6532

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Number 9

♣QJ9642
♣A73 ♣K84
♣T

After opening one-of-a-suit, South became declarer in 3NT. There was one outside entry. In the mid-game, declarer led his ♣T. Both players ducked and that was declarer's 9th trick.

So, whose fault is this debacle?

(Scroll down for solution)

♣QJ9642
♣A73 ♣K84
♣T

West reasoned that, in such a situation, he will be giving count. So, East knows that West has three clubs and the exact layout. So, it is ok to take the first club.

East countered that West would have still ducked with this layout:-

♣QJ9642
♣A3 ♣K84
♣T7

This is because taking the first club would allow the king to be driven out without wasting that precious outside entry in dummy.

Quite so. There is *no* right answer to this problem.

However, there are a few strategies involved :-

- On an ethical note, West should not need a big think before playing ♣3. It is the mid-game and West has had plenty of time to observe dummy and decide his carding in advance.
- Declarer should make sure that he is almost home before making this play. Do it too early and the defence may have time to recover and get their club tricks when they get the lead in another suit. Do it too late and the defence will realize that two club tricks will defeat the contract.
- Don't waste East's energy on a post-mortem of this hand during playtime. You will just drain his batteries for a board that has already gone. Do it after play.

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Number 10

These are your trumps:-

Dummy Ax

Declarer QJ9xx

You lead the Queen which holds the trick. What next?

Scroll down for solution

Ax

J9xx

If west had started with Kx, he would probably have covered your queen. This will provide his partner with a trick when she holds T9x.

So, west probably started with Kxx and his partner started with Tx.

(You were never going to avoid a loser if west started with KTx)

So, you should now run your jack, hoping to *smother* east's ten. This makes your nine the winner of the 3rd trick and avoids having a trump loser.

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Number 11

These are your trumps:-

Dummy

♠Axx

♠QJ9xxx

West has made a takeout double of your spades as a passed hand. The opponents are unaware of the 6th trump in your hand. You need to bring in the suit without loss.

Plan your play.

(Scroll down)

You obviously need to find west holding the King. Without the nine, you would simply lead the queen, hope it would be covered and that the suit breaks 2-2. The suit needs to break Kx xx. The light takeout double makes you think that the suit may break K Txx. Now, if you play for the 2-2 break you will lose the 3rd trick to the ten. Is there any way that you might pick the 3-1 break?

One psychological suggestion is that you lead the *Jack*. If the King appears without a heartbeat, then finesse the nine on the way back. Leading the queen will not give you any clue. It will certainly be covered as west hopes his partner has T9x.

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Number 12

This time, you are defending, sitting South.

Partner leads ♥2 and declarer plays low from dummy.

Which card do you play?

♥2

♥AT6

♥Q97

You should play ♥9

Usually, it's "Third Hand High". Not this time. Partner almost certainly has an honour – either ♥J or ♥K. Same for declarer.

If declarer has the ♥J, he will win the first trick cheaply and still has the ace to come making *two* tricks in the suit. If you had risen with the ♥Q, you would have won the first trick but declarer will now finesse your partner for the "marked" ♥K. Again, declarer makes *two* tricks in the suit.

Look what can happen if you play ♥Q and declarer has ♥K. Declarer will swallow your ♥Q and then finesse ♥T against partner. Now, he makes *three* tricks in the suit.

Occasionally, there may be a reason to rise ♥Q and hope partner has ♥K. This is when you have a really important lead to make and no other entry. e.g. Your partner has overcalled 1S and you hold ♠QJx. There is nothing in dummy in spades and you suspect declarer, in No Trumps, has ♠Kxx. That would explain partner's failure to lead his own suit. You want to grab the lead with ♥Q, and bang down ♠Q. If you insert ♥9 and declarer wins ♥J, that may be his 9th trick.