

Avoidance the key

On the deal below, North opened 1C, East made a takeout double, and South responded 1H. This relieved West of the obligation to answer the double but there was no reason not to show the spades anyway, as the bidding was still at the 1-level. North's jump raise showed a heart fit and 16-18 total points, so South accepted the invitation to game.

NORTH			
♠ Q3			
♥ A532			
♦ AQ			
♣ KJT98			
WEST		EAST	
♠ JT982		♠ K654	
♥ 4		♥ K76	
♦ 862		♦ KJT9	
♣ 7632		♣ A4	
SOUTH			
♠ A7			
♥ QJT98			
♦ 7543			
♣ Q5			
WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
	1♣	Dble	1♥
1♠	3♥	Pass	4♥
All pass			

West leads the ♠J, and declarer tries dummy's ♠Q, but is not surprised when East contributes the ♠K. What are your prospects? How should you proceed?

Declarer is now staring at a spade loser, and there is the obvious club loser. On the bidding, you expect the ♥K to be with East so that is a third loser.

Therefore, you cannot afford to lose a diamond. Luckily you do not need the diamond finesse; instead, three diamonds from hand can be discarded on dummy's long clubs, once the ♣A has been knocked out.

The natural play is to win the ♠A at trick one, then draw trumps – but consider what would happen then. East would gain the lead with the ♥K, and lead a spade to West, who would then make the obvious switch to a diamond, through dummy's strength, setting up East's ♦K as a winner, and the contract will be defeated.

The key is to prevent West from regaining the lead, so a simple **avoidance play** is needed. At trick one, declarer must hold up the ♠A, so the inevitable spade loser is given to East, the safe hand – the player who can not profitably lead diamonds.

East will lead a second round of spades, won by South's ♠A. Now dummy's diamond stopper will still be intact as trumps are drawn and the clubs are then established, and South's diamond losers will eventually be discarded on dummy's clubs.

Just as well you paused to plan the play at trick one.