

Test Your Declarer Play

Here's a hand to test out your playing skills and highlight the value of spot cards and the need to keep a careful eye on them in key suits. Here are the hands:

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♠ 5 2
♥ A 7 4 3
♦ Q J 8
♣ Q T 6 2

♠ A J 7 3
♥ K Q 8 6 2
♦ A K
♣ A 5
    
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You are South and the dealer and both you and your partner have stretched a bit in the bidding to be in the contract of 6♥ on the following aggressive sequence.

West	North	East	South
			1♥
1♠	2♠	Pass	6♥!

2♠ by your partner was a cue-raise showing ♥ support and 10+ points counting distribution and you have launched straight to slam.

Your LHO leads the K♠ and RHO plays the 9♠ (opponents play high encourage). Plan the play.

You can see that you have one ♣ loser (which can be discarded on the Q♦, after unblocking in that suit), and three ♠ losers. The hand would be an easy claimer if the trump suit divides 2-2, in which case, after conceding a ♠, your two additional ♠ losers could be safely ruffed in dummy. But it turns out after you win the opening lead with the A♠ and play K-Q of trumps from your hand, LHO annoyingly shows out. This leaves RHO with a ♥ ready to over ruff one of your hoped-for ruffing tricks. The bidding clearly marks RHO with at most a doubleton ♠. What to do? Over to you ... think before reading on.

Solution

I hoped you noticed East's 9♠ on the opening lead and the now important 7♠ in your hand.

After playing just two rounds of trump, cash your two top ♦s and the A♣. Now cross to the A♥ in dummy, discard a ♣ on the Q♦ and lead a ♠. If East plays low (or shows out) insert the 7♠. After West takes the trick, she can't now lead a ♠ without giving both tricks to your A-J holding, and if she leads a ♦ without giving you a ruff and sluff (ruffing in dummy and sluffing your J♠), so the best West can do is lead a ♣. Given the bidding, however, you should play West for the K♣ and play the Q♣.

If East plays the 8♠ on the second lead of the suit, you should cover with the J. Again, you should be able to see that 7♠ proves to be a huge card! West cannot safely continue ♠s, and you know what to do if West switches to a low ♣.

Here's the whole hand:

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♠ 5 2
♥ A 7 4 3
♦ Q J 8
♣ Q T 6 2

♠ K Q T 6 4
♥ 5
♦ 10 7 6
♣ K 9 8 7

♠ A J 7 3
♥ K Q 8 6 2
♦ A K
♣ A 5

♠ 9 8
♥ J T 9
♦ 9 5 4 3 2
♣ J 4 3
    
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[Hand courtesy of the great bridge teacher and writer, Eddie Kantar.]

John Kelly