

Play & Learn



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Failing forward

Many newer players refuse to plan their play at trick one. Those players are likely to remain lackluster declarers. Players who make a plan may not always play well but will “fail forward” toward success: By making and attempting to execute a plan, they will improve their play.

Cover up the East–West hands on the deal below and test your planning skills. West leads the ♠Q. Read on once you’ve developed a plan.

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

West	North	East	South
	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	1NT	Pass	4♥
All Pass			

1. You’re in a suit contract so count losers from the long trump hand: two fast spades losers and three

clubs. Two losers must be eliminated.

2. Dummy’s only shortness is in trumps, so forget about ruffing losers. There are no finesses, but there are diamond winners in dummy that can provide a place on which to discard losers.

3. Plan the sequence of plays, deciding which suits to play first and watching out for entries. Notice that the diamond suit is blocked. Your entry to use North’s good diamonds must be in a suit other than diamonds. You win the ♠A at trick one (East follows with the 8) to avoid losing a spade and three clubs off the top. With the ♠A gone, what is the needed entry? The ♥K. With only a doubleton trump in dummy, the secret to making 4♥ is to unblock the ♦A before drawing two rounds of trumps ending in dummy.

It’s reasonable to play for the missing diamonds to split 5–3, which allows you to discard two black-suit losers to make 4♥.

In a duplicate pair game, overtricks matter. With the diamond distribution above, you score the most match-points if the first three tricks are won with the ♠A, the ♦A and one of South’s high trumps. Next lead to dummy’s ♥K and play the remaining top diamonds, discarding three losers. You’ve drawn two rounds of hearts, depleting West of trumps, so the fourth diamond wins and you make that precious overtrick.

You are in 4♠ on the next deal. West leads the ♦Q, continuing until you take the ♦A.

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

West	North	East	South
	2♠	Pass	1♠
Pass	All Pass	Pass	4♠

1. South’s losers are one spade (fast), two diamonds (fast with the opening lead) and one club (slow). One loser must be eliminated.
2. At first glance it appears that you have two options: a club finesse or discarding a loser on the ♥Q.
3. A closer look tells you that the heart suit is blocked. Furthermore, the opening lead has removed dummy’s only entry. Without help from your opponents, you can’t get to dummy to win the ♥Q! The club finesse is your best hope for making 4♠ and the only time you are sure to have an opportunity to take it is while you are in dummy with the ♦A. Take the 50% chance of making your contract and take the club finesse now.

Planning can seem tedious. You might stumble often in the beginning, but you will gradually improve. In the words of the Irish writer Samuel Beckett, “Try again. Fail again. Fail better.” □