

CHALLENGING HANDS—an Analysis  
(September 6, 2021)

The following hands were taken from **A Great Deal of Bridge Problems** by Julian Pottage.

**Hand One**

The first hand comes from the chapter on **Sensational Slams**. One thing that can make slams easier to play than games is that you usually have the entries to cross back and forth between the hands. One thing that makes them harder is that you have less clues from the opposition bidding. While intervention can cause you problems in the auction, it frequently helps you when it comes to the play.

AKQ		Bidding:	E/W Passes
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AJ9732			1H 2D
QJ87			3C 5N*
			7C
J853	107642		
K10952	Q		
Q	K108654	* = Grand Slam Force (pick a slam)	
652	4		
		Contract: 7C	
9			
AJ87643		Opening lead: 6 of clubs	
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AK1093			

West leads the six of clubs. With a long suit in each hand, you might try to set up the hearts or the diamonds. Does one suit offer a better bet than the other? Is there an even better plan?

One line of play would be to win the opening lead in dummy and try to set up the diamonds. You will succeed on a normal 4-3 break. You will need four entries to the dummy. You have them with two trumps, one spade and one ruff. If the diamonds do not break 4-3 but you have cashed the ace of diamonds early, you will be able to fall back on a crossruff.

Another line of play is to win the club in your hand and play on hearts. On a 3-3 break, you need only two more entries to hand and can survive a 3-1 trump split. On a more normal 4-2 break, you need a 2-2 trump split because you need dummy's three remaining trumps for ruffing. Therefore, all your other three entries to hand need to be by ruffing. This line is inferior to playing on diamonds. You need more friendly breaks. Also, you cannot so readily combine your chances with a crossruff.

As you have already guessed, the best way to play this hand is via a crossruff. Recall from our lesson on how to play a crossruff (see June 7<sup>th</sup> lesson) that you first need to cash your three spade winners, ace of diamonds and ace of hearts before proceeding to crossruff hearts and diamonds.

## Hand Two

The second hand comes from the chapter entitled **Crafty Continuations**. You are West and the opening leader. In making your decision about which card to lead, you often try to form a picture of the unseen hands. The accuracy with which you can do so depends partly on your hand and partly on how much the auction reveals. If you have a strong holding in declarer's side suit, you might lead a trump to cut down on dummy's ruffing power. If dummy has bid a suit and you fear its establishment, you might attack in an unbid suit. In a notrump contract, or if you hold four trumps, you might lead your longest and strongest suit, trying to set it up. (Review opening leads lessons: January 11/18/25 and February 1/8.)

The appearance of the dummy may either confirm or contradict your initial ideas. Frequently, you can tell whether you have hit a weak spot. Often your partner can give you an attitude signal, playing a high card to encourage the continuance of the suit or a low card to discourage. Remember, however, that a signal is just that—a signal, not a command. Perhaps your partner will give you a count signal whenever the declarer is leading a suit.

**NOTE: All defensive problems revolve around counting points, tricks and distribution to resolve the most difficult decisions. There is no other way.**

	Q98		Contract: 3NT
	A1097		
	Q3		Opening Lead: King of Diamonds
	QJ32		
64		J7532	Bidding: 1N 3N
65		KQ832	
AKJ1064		-----	
1076		954	
	AK10		
	J4		
	98752		
	AK8		

On your lead of a top diamond partner discards the eight of hearts (or whatever card in your methods would encourage a heart switch). How exactly do you continue?

Note: When your partner leads a top honor, he is asking you to play an honor should you hold one.

Suppose you cash your three remaining diamond winners before switching to a heart. You will find that declarer has nine tricks: 3S, 4C, 1H and 1D. With a little counting you, you could predict this result. If partner has good hearts and declarer has at least 15 HCP, where do you expect to find the A/K of clubs and the A/K of spades? Unless South's opening is a bare minimum and East has neither the queen nor the jack of hearts to support the king, they must all be on your right.

To defeat the contract you **must cash exactly two more diamond tricks before switching**. Now, so long as partner has the queen of hearts to back up the king, you expect to make either three diamonds and two hearts or four diamonds and one heart.

### Hand Three

Hand three comes from the chapter entitled **Notrump Niceties**. The scoring table makes it attractive to play in a notrump contract. You need only nine tricks for game compared to ten or eleven in a suit. At matchpoint games, the extra points available in a notrump contract are significant whatever the level. Other reasons for playing without any trumps include a lack of an eight-card fit, a very weak potential trump suit or the desire to protect a tenace from the opening lead. At the slam level, you want to play with notrumps if a ruff on the opening lead is the only thing that could beat you or if you have two long suits and do not know which one will break badly.

In recent years, it has become widely known that a 5332 type facing a 4333 usually produces as many tricks in a notrump contract as it does in a 5-3 trump fit. This has increased the number of notrump contracts played. Players are tending to open 1NT when holding a five-card major.

The absence of a trump suit means that both sides possess fewer weapons. This works to the defenders' advantage, especially as they have the opening lead and can start working to set up their long suit. The declarer's main advantage is that the defenders normally hold the minority of high cards and may have difficulty maintaining communication with each other.

	962		Contract: 3NT
	AJ3		
	QJ1082		Opening Lead: 7 of spades
	Q6		
K10873		J	Bidding: 1N 3N
654		Q1087	
AK4		765	
85		J10943	
	AQ54		
	K92		
	93		
	AK72		

West leads the seven of spades and East plays the jack. How do you play to the first two tricks?

You should start by **ducking** the first trick! (Refer to July 19<sup>th</sup> lesson for more information on the **ducking play**.) If the jack of spades is a singleton, as it is in the diagram, East will be unable to continue the suit. This gives you plenty of time to knock out the A/K of diamonds.

How should you play to the second trick? A club switch should be won in your hand in order to conserve dummy's club entry. You then play on diamonds.

Now suppose East has a spade to return. No problem: you go up with the ace. If East can win the first diamond and produce another spade, you can play the queen in confidence. Either the queen holds or the suit has divided 3-3.

## Hand Four

The fourth hand comes from the chapter entitled **Riveting Returns**. After dummy comes down, the single most important defensive play must be the first lead by the defender not originally on lead. When you are in this position, you have many issues to consider. Unless the play to the first trick has left you with a tenace in the suit, you must think whether to return it. You know that notrump contracts often involve a race between the two sides to set up their long suits. This may well make it right to continue your partner's suit. The knowledge that breaking a new suit frequently gives the declarer an unearned trick is another reason to stick with the originally led suit.

You must decide whether you need to defend actively or passively. A threatening suit in dummy or the belief that the cards sit well for declarer may suggest a bold move, hoping to catch partner with just the right card. Maybe you need to set up a winner quickly or cash out. Perhaps you need to knock out an entry or attack the opposing trump holding. (See *Attacking Leads*, January 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> lessons.)

If it looks like declarer's finesses are wrong and suits are breaking badly, you may just want to sit back and avoid giving anything away. A flat dummy or a dummy with a long weak suit and few entries generally indicate that you should defend passively. (See *Passive Leads*, January 11<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> lessons.)

Partner leads the ten of diamonds. Playing standard leads this might be from a 10-high suit or an interior sequence. What do you play on the first trick after dummy plays low? If you put up the ace, what do you return.

	J963		Contract: 3NT
	Q		
	Q4		Opening lead: 10 of diamonds
	AKQJ73		
K2		AQ108	Bidding:
J7632		854	N      S
10982		A63	1C    1H
94		862	1S    2N
			3N
	754		
	AK109		
	KJ75		
	105		

You must first decide whether the lead is from the king. If it is, then South would not have jumped to 2NT with Jx of diamonds for a stopper or with only nine points. Your side can make but two diamonds and a spade. It is a similar story if partner has a high heart instead of the king of diamonds. This gives declarer six club tricks together with the potential for two diamonds, at least one heart and a spade.

The most useful value partner might have is the king of spades. In this case, your side can take the first five tricks. You should put up the ace of diamonds at trick one and return the eight of spades. Your side takes the first five tricks and sets the contract.

## Hand Five

Hand five is taken from the chapter entitled **Trump Teasers**. Trumps give you power to stop the opponent's suit. They give you extra tricks through ruffing in the short hand. They help you to set up a long suit either with simple ruffing or via a ruffing finesse. Trumps also help you to eliminate suits and to take advantage if a defender leads a suit of which both you and dummy are void.

Less common uses of trumps include crossruffing, reversing the dummy and setting up or executing a squeeze. Their special power enables you to escape seemingly sure losers with a trump coup, a trump endplay and other such plays. Perhaps 70% of all contracts have a trump suit, suggesting that you can regularly make more tricks with the benefit of a trump suit than you will without one.

Although the defenders usually possess fewer trumps than the declaring side, they can threaten your side winners with a ruff and your trump winners with a promotion. To guard against such threats you might draw some or all of their trumps. Your biggest decision is whether to draw trumps early or to delay drawing trumps. The play when one defender holds four or more trumps can prove troublesome; if you ruff too many times, you may find you run out and lose control of the hand.

52		Bidding: 1S 1N
K9863		4S
K954		
J6		Contract: 4S
A873	6	Opening lead: 6 of diamonds
AQ	J104	Holding 4 trumps, West should
J8763	AQ102	make a forcing lead (January 11th
102	97543	and 18 <sup>th</sup> lessons.)
	KQJ1094	
	752	
	-----	
	AKQ8	

West leads the six of diamonds (presumably fourth best). How do you proceed? Refer to April 19<sup>th</sup>, April 26<sup>th</sup>, and May 3<sup>rd</sup> lessons on **playing of trump suit contracts**.

Suppose you begin your plan by ruffing the diamond in hand and laying down a top trump. West takes the ace on the first or second round and continues with the jack of diamonds, which you ruff. East shows out on the second round of trumps. You find that you started with six trumps to West's four. Now that you have ruffed twice, you have the same number. After you draw the missing trumps, you will have none left. When you play a heart towards dummy's king, West hops up with the ace and continues with another diamond.

Playing as above meant you did not anticipate the 4-1 trump break. Before you play to the first trick, you should think what you might do about it. Assuming that West has not made a tricky lead away from the ace, can you see a way to avoid having to ruff twice? Cover with dummy's nine and discard a heart from hand. East wins with the ten but cannot continue diamonds without setting up dummy's king. Note that you need to cover in dummy or East, using the rule of 11, may work out that you cannot beat the six of diamonds and let it ride.

## Hand Six

Hand six comes from the chapter entitled **Watch and Wait**. See if you can spot where you think the declarer went wrong. The failing line he took in playing the hand gives a major clue about the layout(s) against which declarer needs to guard against. Of course, it is always easy to do a post mortem when you can see all four hands—**Double Dummy**.

	KQ96		Bidding: 1D	1S
	K87			3S 4S
	KQJ63			
	9		Contract: 4S	
A42		8	Opening Lead: Q of hearts	
QJ102		963		
75		A984		
Q863		AJ542		
	J10753			
	A54			
	102			
	K107			

Total Losers: Spades = 1 (Unavoidable)  
Hearts = 1 (Avoidable)  
Diamonds = 1 (Unavoidable)  
Clubs = 1 (Unavoidable)

West led the queen of hearts. Declarer won with the ace, knocked out the ace of diamonds and won the heart return in dummy. All followed to the next diamond but, when South threw a heart on the third diamond, West ruffed. The defenders scored both black aces later. Where did the declarer go wrong?

South should win the opening heart lead in the dummy and lead a club toward his king. In this case, East has the ace of clubs. Your king of clubs sets up for a heart discard from the dummy. If the king does not set up for a heart discard, then play the hand as above, hoping to discard a losing heart on the diamond suit.

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Next Week: We will start a four/five week series on competitive bidding strategies.