

North 09-10-12

♠ K 10 8

♥ A 6 5 3

♦ J 8 7 4

♣ 6 2

West

♠ J 9 6 4

♥ K Q 10 7 2

♦ K

♣ A 9 8

East

♠ 7 5 2

♥ J 9 4

♦ 3 2

♣ K 7 5 4 3

South

♠ A Q 3

♥ 8

♦ A Q 10 9 6 5

♣ Q J 10

Dealer: West

Vulnerable: North-South

South	West	North	East
	1 ♥	Pass	Pass
3 ♦	Pass	5 ♦	All pass

Opening lead: ♥ K

Remember what did and did not happen

By Phillip Alder

Confucius said, "I hear, I know. I see, I remember. I do, I understand."

He would have made an excellent bridge player. A top performer listens to the bidding to get a good idea of who has what. He watches the cards being played and remembers the bidding to place the unseen key cards. And by doing that, he understands what to do next.

To illustrate, how should South plan the play in five diamonds in today's deal? West leads the heart king.

The dealer's opening suit-bid is followed by two passes. If the fourth hand makes a jump overcall in a suit, it is intermediate, showing 14 to 16 points and a good six-card or longer suit.

North was then tempted to gamble on three no-trump, but decided that it was unlikely he could run nine tricks immediately. Instead, he made an aggressive jump to five diamonds.

After winning the first trick with dummy's heart ace, South took the trump finesse. It failed, and he also lost two club tricks for down one.

South suggested that his partner's five-diamond bid was too optimistic. And in a way, he was right. But North had realized that South should have got the trump suit right. Why?

If West had had the ace and king of clubs, he would have led one of them, not the heart king. And if East had a high club, he could not also hold the diamond king, because if he did, he would not have passed over one heart.

Whenever a player bids or passes, remember what that tells you about his hand.

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North 09-11-12

♠ 9 8 2

♥ 3

♦ A K J

♣ A Q J 9 7 4

West

♠ Q 4

♥ A 10 8 5 4

♦ 7 6 4 3

♣ 5 2

East

♠ J 6 5 3

♥ J 7 6 2

♦ 5 2

♣ K 6 3

South

♠ A K 10 7

♥ K Q 9

♦ Q 10 9 8

♣ 10 8

Dealer: North

Vulnerable: East-West

South	West	North	East
		1 ♣	Pass
1 ♦	Pass	3 ♣	Pass
3 NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening lead: ♥ 5

To finesse or not to finesse?

By Phillip Alder

Rex Todhunter Stout, a writer of detective fiction who created Nero Wolfe, said, "To read of a detective's daring finesse or ingenious stratagem is a rare joy."

At the bridge table, a finesse might be daring, or an ingenious stratagem, or a no-cost try for an extra trick, or an out-and-out blunder.

In this deal, should South be taking any finesses in three no-trump? West leads the heart five: three, jack, king. On another subject, if you had been South, would your response to one club have been one diamond or one spade?

I agree with one diamond when you have game-forcing values. Skip a minor to show a major with a weak hand or when the major is much stronger than the diamonds.

South had eight top tricks: two spades, one heart (given trick one), four diamonds and one club. He was tempted to take the club finesse at trick two. If it had won, he would have collected overtricks. But he paused to ask what would happen if that finesse lost. East would have returned a heart through the queen-nine and the defenders would have taken four or five tricks in that suit to defeat the contract. Was there something better?

Yes. If East had at least one spade honor, the contract was guaranteed. South played a diamond to dummy's king and ran the spade nine. West won with his queen and ingeniously shifted to a club, but declarer won with dummy's ace and finessed the spade eight, ending with nine tricks: three spades, one heart, four diamonds and one club.

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North 09-12-12

♠ A Q 2

♥ J 9 8 5

♦ 7

♣ A Q 7 6 4

West

East

♠ J 8 7 4

♠ 10 9 5

♥ A 3

♥ K 7 6 2

♦ A Q 10 6 5

♦ J 4 3

♣ K 10

♣ J 9 3

South

♠ K 6 3

♥ Q 10 4

♦ K 9 8 2

♣ 8 5 2

Dealer: West

Vulnerable: East-West

South	West	North	East
	1♦	Dbl.	Pass
1 NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening lead: ♦ 6

Quickly or slowly, which is better?

By Phillip Alder

Arthur Ashe said, "A wise person decides slowly but abides by these decisions."

That is interesting from someone who had to make split-second decisions on a tennis court. However, in each deal, declarer and the defenders must decide whether to strive quickly to take the number of tricks needed to make or break the contract, or to act more leisurely, slowly developing the necessary winners.

Which applies in today's deal? South is in one no-trump. West leads his fourth-highest diamond, East puts up the jack, and South wins with his king.

These days, many Easts would have responded one heart over North's takeout double. But it consumes no space and cannot even be considered a useful lead-director.

South starts with five top tricks: three spades, one diamond (trick one) and one club. It looks tempting to play on clubs, where surely West has the king. But note what happens. If declarer plays a club to the queen, cashes the club ace, and plays a third club, East takes the trick and returns a diamond. Then the defenders can collect one club, four diamonds and two hearts for down one.

Is there a better way to get the two extra tricks?

Yes, if South is willing to go slowly by attacking hearts. He loses two tricks in the suit, but he also establishes two winners. The defense is held to two hearts and four diamonds, while declarer takes three spades, two hearts, one diamond and one club.

Losing tricks early to establish winners is a common no-trump strategy.

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North 09-13-12

♠ 6 5 2

♥ K Q 6 3

♦ 10 8 5 2

♣ A Q

West

♠ A Q 8 4

♥ 10 8 5

♦ Q 7 3

♣ 9 4 3

East

♠ 10 9 7

♥ J 9 2

♦ 6 4

♣ K J 10 7 6

South

♠ K J 3

♥ A 7 4

♦ A K J 9

♣ 8 5 2

Dealer: South

Vulnerable: Both

South

1 NT

West

Pass

North

3 NT

East

All pass

Opening lead: ♠ 4

Find a play to avoid a guess

By Phillip Alder

Walt Disney said, "I don't like formal gardens. I like wild nature. It's just the wilderness instinct in me, I guess."

That's an interesting observation, especially considering that he owned property in the Napa Valley with orderly rows of vines.

However, moving to the bridge table, you sometimes cannot avoid having to guess what to do. But maybe there is a line of play that might eliminate an apparent guess.

That is relevant to today's deal. How should South plan the play in three no-trump after West leads the spade four: two, nine, jack?

Note North's decision not to use Stayman to try to find a 4-4 heart fit, because his doubleton was so strong. And here it worked even better, because if North had responded two clubs, East might have thrown in a lead-directing double. After a club lead, three no-trump cannot be made.

It looks natural to cash the diamond ace, cross to dummy with a heart, and run the diamond 10. Here, though, West will win with his queen and might shift to a club. What does South do then?

If the hearts are breaking 3-3, declarer has nine tricks: one spade, four hearts, three diamonds and one club. But if the hearts are 4-2, declarer will need two club tricks and should finesse now. He has to guess what to do.

Now go back. Instead of crossing immediately to dummy in hearts, first take all three top hearts. Are they 3-3? If so, cash the last heart, then take the diamond finesse. If not, later try the club finesse.

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♠ 3

♥ K Q J 10

♦ A Q J 10 9 8

♣ 7 4

West

♠ 6 2

♥ 9 5 4

♦ 7 5 3 2

♣ K J 9 2

East

♠ J 10 9 8

♥ A 7 6 2

♦ 6 4

♣ A 8 3

South

♠ A K Q 7 5 4

♥ 8 3

♦ K

♣ Q 10 6 5

Dealer: South

Vulnerable: Both

South	West	North	East
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♦	Pass
2 ♠	Pass	3 ♥	Pass
3 NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

Opening lead: ♣ 2

Play the right card; read that card

By Phillip Alder

Winston Churchill said, "This report, by its very length, defends itself against the risk of being read."

This column, by its very shortness, increases its chance of being read. But "read" also applies to the card played by East at the second trick and West's ability to interpret it correctly.

The auction proceeded along natural lines. Note that, because South denied four hearts when he rebid two spades, North might have rebid three hearts with a strong three-card suit, especially if he was hoping to get into three no-trump when South had a club stopper. Three no-trump is the best game. Four spades, with three top losers in hearts and clubs, requires spades to break 3-3.

West leads the club two, showing exactly a four-card suit. After East wins with his ace, what does he do next?

It is clearly correct to return a club, and he leads the eight, the higher of a remaining doubleton. (If he had returned the three, he would have been showing that he started with two or four clubs.)

West takes South's 10 with his jack, but what does he do now?

West must realize that South still has two clubs left, the queen and one other. To get two more club tricks, West must put East on lead for another club play through South.

This means that West should shift to a heart. (If East's entry is the diamond king, he will get in early enough.) Then, East takes the trick with his ace and leads his last club, giving the defenders the first five tricks.

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North 09-15-12

♠ J 8 6 5 3

♥ A K 7 2

♦ A 6 5

♣ K

West

♠ A 4

♥ 8 6 3

♦ K 10 7 4 3

♣ 5 3 2

East

♠ Q 10 9 7

♥ Q J 10 9

♦ 8 2

♣ Q 7 6

South

♠ K 2

♥ 5 4

♦ Q J 9

♣ A J 10 9 8 4

Dealer: North

Vulnerable: North-South

South	West	North	East
		1 ♠	Pass
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
2 NT	Pass	3 NT	All pass

Opening lead: ♦ 4

From A to Z that started at B

By Phillip Alder

A few years ago, an English newspaper printed an article titled "The A to Z of American Football." Since the first entry was Blitz, maybe the headline should have been amended slightly.

In bridge, the play runs from A to M. It is particularly important to pay attention to A.

In today's deal, how should South try to make three no-trump after West leads a fourth-highest diamond four?

In the auction, South might have rebid three clubs or three no-trump. It is a matter of personal preference.

South sort of starts with five top tricks: two hearts, one diamond and two clubs. The opening lead provides at least one more diamond trick, and if West has led from the king-10, declarer can take three diamond tricks. However, he must somehow establish and run the clubs. How can he do that?

South will have to overtake dummy's king with his ace and continue with the jack to drive out the queen. You've no doubt seen that play before. But what is South's re-entry card?

East might have the spade ace, but there is a guaranteed entry in diamonds ... unless declarer makes the mistake of running the first trick around to his hand.

With this layout South must win with dummy's diamond ace, overtake the club king with his ace, and play clubs from the top until the queen appears. Suppose then that East shifts to the heart queen. Declarer wins on the board and plays a diamond. He must end with two hearts, two diamonds and five clubs.

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