

# 91. Taking the high ground

*By Ron Klinger*

East dealer : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
Pass	?	Pass	1♠

What would you do as North with:

♠ 9842  
♥ K1086  
♦ AK976  
♣ --

You have decent support for opener, a void outside and only six losers. Even though you have only 10 HCP, you need to take some strong action. The hand is far too good for a jump to 4♠. Ideal is a 4♣ splinter bid to show 4+ spades, the values for game and 0-1 club.

*What do you do now if partner bids 4♠?*

You have done enough with 4♣. If partner is minimum with wastage in clubs, you will not want to be higher than 4♠. Pass.

*What do you do if partner bids 4♥?*

Partner's 4♥ shows interest in slam with control in hearts and denies control in diamonds. You certainly want to co-operate if partner has slam interest. There is little value in bidding 4NT. You will not be sure which aces partner has if partner shows two or three key cards. A better move is to bid 5♣. Having shown shortage in clubs with 4♣, your 5♣ bid now shows a void.

West	North	East	South
Pass	4♣	Pass	1♠
Pass	5♣	Pass	4♥
Pass	?	Pass	5♣

*Now what?*

You have a 6-loser hand. Partner has shown some slam interest, hence extra values, either extra strength in high-card or 6 losers or fewer. If partner does have 6 losers then  $6 + 6$  (your losers) = 12 and  $24 - 12 = 12$  tricks are likely (Losing Trick Count formula – see *The Modern Losing Trick Count*). You might as well bid 6♣. After all, you do not have to play it.

Ooops, I was wrong. You do have to play it. West leads the ♣A, ruffed in dummy. Plan your play.

North  
♠ 9842  
♥ K1086  
♦ AK976  
♣ --

South  
♠ AKJ103  
♥ AQ4  
♦ J52  
♣ Q6

East dealer : North-South vulnerable

North  
♠ 9842  
♥ K1086  
♦ AK976  
♣ --

South  
♠ AKJ103  
♥ AQ4  
♦ J52  
♣ Q6

After ruffing the ♣A lead, you might as well tackle trumps. You play ♠A, ♠K, all follow, with West starting with ♠Q-5. Good that you did not take the spade finesse.

*What next?*

From here you are coasting. Twelve tricks are sure. Worst case is you lose a diamond. It costs nothing to play for the overtrick. Ruff the ♣Q with dummy's last trump, cash ♦A, ♦K (maybe the ♣Q drops). When it does not drop, cross to ♥A and play off the ♠J, ♠10. These will be your last four cards:

North  
♠  
♥ K108  
♦ 9  
♣ --

South  
♠ 3  
♥ Q4  
♦ J  
♣

You play the ♠3 and discard dummy's ♦9. Then play ♥Q and ♥K. You make the extra trick if the ♥J falls doubleton or hearts are 3-3 or an opponent with ♥J-x-x-x also began with the ♦Q. That opponent will now be down to ♥J-x-x and ♦Q. When you play the ♠3, that opponent will have to discard the ♦Q or a heart. Either way, you make all the tricks. This was the whole deal:

	North	
	♠ 9842	
	♥ K1086	
	♦ AK976	
	♣ --	
West		East
♠ Q5		♠ 76
♥ 532		♥ J97
♦ Q103		♦ 84
♣ A9432		♣ KJ10875
	South	
	♠ AKJ103	
	♥ AQ4	
	♦ J52	
	♣ Q6	

Note that North has only 10 HCP, South has 17, of which the ♣Q is useless, yet 6♠ makes comfortably and would have made even if you have a spade loser, as long as something good happens in the red suits. Shape beats points.

East dealer : North-South vulnerable

	North	
	♠ 9842	
	♥ K1086	
	♦ AK976	
	♣ --	
West		East
♠ Q5		♠ 76
♥ 532		♥ J97
♦ Q103		♦ 84
♣ A9432		♣ KJ10875
	South	
	♠ AKJ103	
	♥ AQ4	
	♦ J52	
	♣ Q6	

The deal was played on BBO against robots. It was the replay of a deal from segment 3 of the quarter-finals from the 2019 Spingold (USA Knockout Open teams) match [VERBEEK](#) vs [ZIMMERMANN](#).

West	North	East	South
<i>Molenaar</i>	<i>Helness</i>	<i>Verbeek</i>	<i>Martens</i>
		3♣ <sup>(1)</sup>	3♠
5♣	6♣	All Pass	

(1) At favourable vulnerability, anything goes

West led the ♣A, ruffed in dummy. South played ♠A, club ruff, ♠K, ♦A, ♦K and made 13 tricks, +1460.

West	North	East	South
<i>Klukowski</i>	<i>Drijver</i>	<i>Gawrys</i>	<i>Nab</i>
		3♣ <sup>(1)</sup>	3♠
4♣	4NT	Pass	5♦ <sup>(2)</sup>
Pass	5♠ <sup>(3)</sup>	Pass	5NT <sup>(4)</sup>
Pass	6♣	All Pass	

(1) As above

(2) 0 or 3 key cards for spades

(3) In case it is 0

(4) I have 3 key cards, but no ♠Q.

The play began the same way as at the other table. South made 13 tricks, +1460, no swing.

West dealer : East-West vulnerable

North  
♠ --  
♥ Q965  
♦ AQ874  
♣ KQJ10

South  
♠ AK72  
♥ K8732  
♦ 92  
♣ A4

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	4♥	Pass	4NT
Pass	5♦ <sup>(1)</sup>	Pass	6♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

(1) One or four key cards for hearts

You might not like the auction, but that is not your concern. West leads the ♦3. Plan the play.

Should you take the diamond finesse? It might work, but it is at best a 50% chance. Players are generally reluctant to lead away from kings in a trump contract or to lead a suit bid by dummy. Of course, West might be trying to dissuade you from a finesse in diamonds, but leading from K-x-x or similar here is risky for West in case you do not have a choice of play with ♦A-x-x-x opposite ♦Q-x. I would be more inclined to suspect that the ♦3 is a singleton than it is low away from the ♦K

In any event, the odds are better to ditch the diamond loser on the clubs. The chance of a 4-3 club break is about 63%, much better than the 50% for finessing the ♦Q.

You take the ♦A and, of course, play clubs before touching trumps. ♣A, ♣K, ♣Q, discarding your second diamond. All is well. Everyone follows.

*What now?*

It is certainly time to tackle trumps. Your trump suit is fragile, but there are many combinations where you succeed. You play the ♥5: ten – king – ace. West returns the ♦5: seven – king – ♥2. You continue with the ♥3: ♥4 from West . . .

*Which heart do you play from dummy?*

Nothing comes with guarantees. West might have started with A-J-4 and East with 10 singleton or West might have started with A-4 and East with J-10. In a sense it is a guess, but the Rule of Restricted Choice says that if an honour appears on the first round of a suit, it is more likely to be a singleton than from two touching honours.

Therefore, you finesse the ♥9, hold your breath and . . . East discards. You cash the ♥Q and claim your 12 tricks.

These were the East-West hands:

West	East
♠ QJ4	♠ 1098653
♥ AJ4	♥ 10
♦ 10653	♦ KJ
♣ 762	♣ 9853

West dealer : East-West vulnerable

	North	
	♠ --	
	♥ Q965	
	♦ AQ874	
	♣ KQJ10	
West		East
♠ QJ4		♠ 1098653
♥ AJ4		♥ 10
♦ 10653		♦ KJ
♣ 762		♣ 9853
	South	
	♠ AK72	
	♥ K8732	
	♦ 92	
	♣ A4	

The preceding play took place on BBO against robots. It was a replay of a deal from the 2020 English Bridge Union Olympiad Trials, Segment 5 of the **BLACK** vs **PHOENIX** match. Both sides reach 6♥, but both declarers were less fortunate.

One table bid this way:

West	North	East	South
Pass	1♦	Pass	1♥
Pass	3♥	Pass	3♠ <sup>(1)</sup>
Pass	4♣ <sup>(1)</sup>	Pass	4♠ <sup>(2)</sup>
Pass	4NT	Pass	5♦ <sup>(3)</sup>
Pass	6♥	All Pass	

(1) Cue-bid

(2) First- and second-round spade control

(3) 0 or 3 key cards

West led the ♠Q. Declarer ruffed in dummy, crossed to the ♣A and led the ♥2: four – queen – ten and now had two trump losers, –50.

At the other table, it also began 1♦ : 1♥, 3♥ : 3♠ cue and ended in 6♥. I would have bid 1♦ : 1♥, 3♠ splinter. The North hand has only 4 losers and the spade shortage might help partner value the hand. If we get too high, because of that, I will apologize.

West led the ♠Q. South won with the ♠A and played the ♥3: four – queen – ten, also one down, –50, no swing. There is no perceivable reason to play low heart to the king or low heart to the queen. Either way you make if second hand plays the ♥A or plays a singleton ♥J / ♥10 and you finesse on the next round.

## Problems for Tomorrow:

1. West dealer : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
Pass	?		

What would you do as North with:

♠ K107  
♥ J94  
♦ AJ109763  
♣ --

2. West dealer : Nil vulnerable

West	North	East	South
Pass	?		

What would you do as North with:

♠ AJ  
♥ A73  
♦ A10542  
♣ J97

Suppose you have chosen to open 1♦ and partner responds 2♣. What would you do now as North?

**Why not phone or email your bridge partners and compare your answers and your reasoning?**

*When we reach the tail end of the coronavirus, there should be an extra parliamentary sitting to determine who had a role in loo paper looting. Should blame be sheeted home to those who took home the sheets? Speeches must be made, tissues of lies exposed, motions must be passed.*