

135. Improving the odds

By Ron Klinger

Dealer South : Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♠	Pass	1♠
			?

What would you do now as South with:

♠ AKQJ8
♥ K763
♦ A
♣ 843

This should be a routine 4♠ rebid. If you count points, partner is showing 6-9 points. You have 17 HCP, plus 3 for the singleton diamond, so 20 points + 6-9 = 26+ and enough to bid game. If you count losers (recommended) you have 5 losers. With one trick = 3 points, partners 6-9 points will usually produce 2 tricks, occasionally 3. Your 5 losers – 2 tricks = 3 losers only, i.e., ten tricks, so 4♠

North
♠ 763
♥ A42
♦ J742
♣ A52

South
♠ AKQJ8
♥ K763
♦ A
♣ 843

After 1♠ : 2♠, 4♠, all pass, West leads the ♣K. Plan the play.

Today's deals come from the [Polish Bridge](#) website.

North has 10 losers, one more than expected for the raise to 2♠, but partner does have two clear winners. You cannot expect more.

You have nine tricks on top. You are bound to lose two clubs and a heart. Where will you find the tenth trick?

It will have to come from the hearts. You can hope for a 3-3 break in hearts. Is that more likely or less likely than a 4-2 split in hearts? The 3-3 split is about a 36% chance. The 4-2 break is about 48%. Can you improve your chances beyond 36%? What if hearts are 4-2 and spades 3-2. Can you still make it?

Here is the full deal:

Dealer South : Both vulnerable

	North		
	♠ 763		
	♥ A42		
	♦ J742		
	♣ A52		
West		East	
♠ 105		♠ 942	
♥ 95		♥ QJ108	
♦ Q8653		♦ K109	
♣ KQJ6		♣ 1097	
	South		
	♠ AKQJ8		
	♥ K763		
	♦ A		
	♣ 843		

If you capture the ♣K lead and play ♥A, ♥K and a third heart, you survive if hearts are 3-3. In the above layout, East wins the third heart and plays the fourth heart. West ruffs and cashes two clubs. One down.

If you capture the ♣A and play ♠A, ♠K, before playing ♥A, ♥K and a third heart, you make with hearts 3-3, but fail with a 4-2 break. If the hand with 4 hearts began with 2 spades, the fourth heart will allow partner to ruff. In the above deal, after ♣A, ♠A, ♠K, ♥A, ♥K and a third heart, East plays a trump and eliminates the heart ruff.

The solution is easy enough once you see it. Take the ♣A and play a low heart from each hand. They can take their two club tricks. You win whatever is played next, say, a diamond. Now you play ♠A, ♠K, ♥A, ♥K. If hearts are 3-3, draw the last trump and claim. You still make ten tricks if the position is as above. Having given up a heart at trick 2, when you regain the lead and play ♠A, ♠K, ♥A, ♥K, West is out of trumps. You play the fourth heart and ruff it in dummy as East has to follow. Return to hand via a diamond and draw the last trump.

Dealer North : Nil vulnerable

	West	North	East	South
		1♥	Pass	1♠
	Pass	3♥	Pass	?

What would you do as South with:

♠ AJ1098
♥ 93
♦ AQJ
♣ AQ2

North's jump to 3♥ shows c. 15-17 HCP and 6+ hearts. You have 18 points and so slam is likely. You have control in every suit outside hearts and so it is sensible to bid 4NT to check on key cards.

	West	North	East	South
		1♥	Pass	1♠
	Pass	3♥	Pass	4NT
	Pass	5♥ ⁽¹⁾	Pass	5NT ⁽²⁾
	Pass	7♥	Pass	7NT
	Pass	Pass	Pass	

(1) 2 key cards (clearly the ♥A ♥K), no ♥Q

(2) South should have settled for 6NT at this point. The 5NT bid promised that no key cards were missing and implied that South had the ♥Q.

When North jumped to 7♥, South corrected to 7NT. As the ♥Q was missing, 7NT would be as good as 7♥.

North
 ♠ K43
 ♥ AKJ1065
 ♦ K4
 ♣ K6

South
 ♠ AJ1098
 ♥ 93
 ♦ AQJ
 ♣ AQ2

You have landed in 7NT and West leads the ♦10. Plan the play.

You have ten tricks on top and so you will need to bring in either the hearts or the spades for the extra three tricks. Which one? Both include the ace, king, jack and ten. You can finesse in either one. If that succeeds, you are home, but if it loses you are down.

In these situations, one usually cashes the ace and king in the longer suit in case the queen drops. If not, you finesse in the other suit. That is no help here, since both suits have eight cards. About now you wish you had settled for 6NT.

Let's look at the options. If you play ♠K, ♠A first and the queen does not drop, you set about the hearts. If you come to hand and run the ♥9, you lose to ♥Q singleton with East. If you cash the ♥A, cross to your hand then take the heart finesse, you lose any time East began with ♥2, ♥4, ♥7 or ♥8 singleton, since West then began with four hearts. The percentage play in hearts is a first-round finesse. It covers four low singletons with East and loses only to singleton Q.

If we play ♥A, ♥K first and the ♥Q does not drop, we tackle the spades. Which way should we finesse? If you come to hand lead the ♠J and let it run if West plays low, you lose to a singleton ♠Q with East. If you play ♠A and then run the ♠J you lose whenever West began with ♠Q-x-x-x.

The best sequence of plays is win ♦J or ♦Q and play ♥A, ♥K. If the queen drops you are home. If not play the ♠K, followed by a low spade to the jack. This play in spades will pick up a singleton ♠Q and also caters for East holding ♠Q-x-x-x, the same chance as West having ♠Q-x-x-x. If West shows out on the second spade, return to dummy via the ♦K or ♣K and repeat the spade finesse. This line (♥A, ♥K, ♠K, spade finesse) is about 3% better than ♠K, ♠A and running the ♥9. Yes, I know, 3% is not much, but it is certainly enough to warrant playing this way.

Problems for Tomorrow:

1. Dealer North : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	Pass	2♥ ⁽¹⁾	?

(1) Weak two, 6 hearts, 6-10 points

What would you do as South with:

♠ KQ98542
 ♥ 7
 ♦ 2
 ♣ J743

2. Dealer South : Both vulnerable

West	North	East	South
?			1♥

What would you do as West with:

♠ AKJ2
♥ 10
♦ QJ54
♣ 9853

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

Advice for Seniors #9: No doubt you have already noticed that people your age are so much older than you.