

144. Dealing with no-trumps

By Ron Klinger

Dealer South : East-West vulnerable

North
♠ J10952
♥ KJ
♦ KJ94
♣ 92

South
♠ Q7
♥ A108
♦ Q8765
♣ AK4

West	North	East	South
Pass	2♥ ⁽¹⁾	Pass	1NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	2♠

(1) Transfer to spades

1. West leads the ♣6: nine – queen – ace.
2. You play the ♦5: two – king – ten.
3. You play the ♦J: ♥4 – ♦6 – ♦A.
4. West returns the ♣J: two – ten – four.
5. West then plays the ♣8: ♠2 – ♥3 – ♣A.

How would you continue?

This problem was sent to me a while ago by Roland Wald, who was a regular commentator on BBO. Roland passed away last May 25. Here is his account:

‘You have arrived in a pretty good 3NT on modest values after South opened 1NT and North showed five spades. West leads the six of clubs (fourth best) to the queen and your ace. Three heart tricks, four diamonds and two clubs will see you home, so it's likely a matter of locating the queen of hearts.

At trick two you play a diamond to the king, West following with a small card and East with the ten, and when the jack is advanced, East discards a heart. West wins the ace and continues with the jack of clubs. East contributes the ten and you duck. Another club from West reveals that he started with six of them when East pitches another heart.

Here we are. Who has the queen of hearts? Due to some entry problems we have to decide very soon. From the beginning (a priori) it is a pure guess as to which defender has a specific card, but sometimes probabilities change, depending on which cards we see from the opponents during the play.

What do we know? West started with three diamonds and six clubs, so four of his cards are unaccounted for. East had one diamond and two clubs, so he has ten cards in spades and hearts. In other words, there are ten vacant spaces in his hand where the queen of hearts can be to West's four vacant spaces. Here is the logic:

When the distribution of one or more suits is known, the probability that an opponent holds a particular card in any other suit is directly proportional to the number of vacant spaces in their respective hands. Consequently, the odds for the heart queen being with East are 10:4, and accordingly you should finesse through him.

We cannot issue guarantees, of course, but if you play with the odds, you are a winner in the long run. Here is the full deal, played in a team game on Bridge Base Online:’

Teams: Dealer South : East-West vulnerable

	North	
	♠ J10952	
	♥ KJ	
	♦ KJ94	
	♣ 92	
West		East
♠ A4		♠ K863
♥ 95		♥ Q76432
♦ A32		♦ 10
♣ J87653		♣ Q10
	South	
	♠ Q7	
	♥ A108	
	♦ Q8765	
	♣ AK4	

Yesterday's second problem:

Teams: Dealer North : East-West vulnerable

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♦
1♠	Pass	Pass	2NT
Pass.....			

What would you lead as West from:

♠ AQ754
♥ Q7
♦ AK93
♣ 92

- (a) If 2NT is passed out?
- (b) If North raises to 3NT?

You hold 15 HCP. South's 2NT shows about 11 points, from a good 10 to a bad 12. That gives the opponents about 23 points, leaving partner with 2-3 points on a good day. If North raises to 3NT, you can expect partner to have very little in terms of high-card values. Your choice?

The deal arose at the New South Wales Bridge Association in the qualifying rounds for the 2018 Grand National Open Teams. It was passed on to me by Nick Hughes of Sydney. One of his themes is that when you are on lead against 3NT and you can tell that partner has very little or almost nothing in high-card strength, it can pay to lead an ace in your long suit provided you have at least one entry outside. That idea would have worked very well here:

Dealer North : East-West vulnerable

	North ♠ J3 ♥ AK62 ♦ 864 ♣ KQ108	
West ♠ AQ754 ♥ Q7 ♦ AK93 ♣ 92	East ♠ 1062 ♥ J9543 ♦ 52 ♣ 754	
	South ♠ K98 ♥ 108 ♦ QJ107 ♣ AJ63	

There were 11 North-South pairs in 3NT. Two made it on the ♦A lead and one on the ♣9 lead. Four were one down (♠5 lead x 3, ♣9 lead), three were two down (low spade lead) and one was three down (♥Q lead). One was in 2NT making eight tricks, +120, on the ♠5 lead.

Hughes: ‘Any spade lead shoots 3NT. Two made 3NT when West began with the ♦A. Now 3NT is cold. Although North will usually push on to 3NT at teams, let’s say South plays 2NT, perhaps after:’

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♦
1♠	Pass	Pass	2NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

Hughes: ‘Anyway, West places partner with no picture card and hopes for the ♠10 or similar opposite. Now West has to lead the ♠A or the ♠Q to beat 2NT. The fact that this temporarily blocks the suit is not an issue. As you see, no Wests led a spade honour.

It was a bit surprising that no Norths declared. After a 12-14 no-trump by North, if South could invite with 2NT at once, North would bid 3NT and +600 is on the cards. East is not going to find the spade lead and again West cannot afford to switch to a low spade when in with ♦K. Not easy.’

Problems for Tomorrow:

1. Teams: Dealer East : Nil vulnerable

West	North	East	South
		1♣	Pass
1♦	1♥	Pass	?

The bidding is natural. What would you do as South with:

♠ A109
♥ J6
♦ A753
♣ J764

2. With both sides vulnerable there are three passes to partner, who opens 1NT, 15-17. Pass on your right. What is your plan of bidding with:

♠ QJ5
♥ QJ854
♦ J6
♣ J106

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

Why are we so obsessed with trying to find intelligent life on another planet when it's hard enough to find intelligent life on this one, given the evidence around the world at the present time.