

370. The tenth trick

By Ron Klinger

This was yesterday's puzzle:

Dealer North : Nil vulnerable

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

(1) Playing 5-card majors
(2) Strength raise to 3♠

What would you do as South with:

♠ KQJ1087
♥ 4
♦ AJ74
♣ J5

Partner is a passed hand and you have 12 HCP. That would indicate that you do not have enough for game and so 3♠ is enough. But wait a moment. High-card points are not everything. Length / shortages and shape should also be part of your hand valuation. Partner figures to have about 10-11 HCP. You have 12 HCP + 3 for the singleton and 1 for the doubleton, total 16. The combined total is 26-27 and that is enough to bid 4♠.

If you are into counting losers, a good idea when you have found a trump fit, you have 6 losers (2 clubs, 1 heart, 1 spade and 2 diamonds). Partner's 10-12-point hand is usually 8 losers. Applying the Losing Trick Count formula, adding your losers and partner's losers = 14 and $24 - 14 = 10$ tricks expected. Therefore, bid 4♠.

When the deal arose on BBO, 5 Souths signed off in 3♠, the others bid 4♠. These were the North-South hands:

North
♠ 654
♥ A532
♦ 953
♣ AK10

South
♠ KQJ1087
♥ 4
♦ AJ74
♣ J5

Suppose you have reached 4♠ and West leads the ♥6: ace – queen - four. What does the ♥Q tell you? You start on trumps, the ♠K winning trick 2. You continue with the ♠Q. East takes the ♠A and plays the third spade, West discarding two clubs. Plan the play.

Have you made up your mind? If so, consider your play after this beginning. West leads the ♣6. You take the ♣A and your ♠K wins the next trick. When you play the ♠Q, East takes the ♠A and switches to the ♦K. How would you handle that development?

Dealer North : Nil vulnerable

North	
♠ 654	
♥ A532	
♦ 953	
♣ AK10	
West	East
♠ 2	♠ A93
♥ K96	♥ QJ1087
♦ Q1062	♦ K8
♣ 98764	♣ Q32
South	
♠ KQJ1087	
♥ 4	
♦ AJ74	
♣ J5	

Making 4♠, +420, was worth +6.5 Imps. Making 10 tricks in 3♠, +710, scored +1.1 Imps. Making 9 tricks in 3♠ for +140 was a flat board. Going one off in 4♠, -50, meant -4.6 Imps. One went two off in 4♠, -100, -6.1 Imps.

Some of those who went off in 4♥ took the club finesse. North-South have 23 HCP. That means East-West have 17 HCP. East's ♥Q implies hearts headed by the Q-J. That places the ♥K with West. That is consistent with West's lead of the ♥6, which you can see is West's lowest heart.

If West has the ♥K and ♣Q, 5 points, then East will have ♦K-♦Q and you do not need the club finesse. If West has the ♦Q or ♦K, East will have the ♣Q and the club finesse is doomed to failure.

In the first scenario, where West leads the ♥6 and you take the ♥A, win with the ♠K at trick 3, East taking the ♠A at trick 3 and returning the ♠9, you win, cross to the ♠A and play the ♦3. When East plays the ♦8, you play the ♦J. West wins with the ♦Q and you ruff the heart return, play to the ♣K and continue with the ♦5, king, ace. Dummy is left with ♦9, you have ♦7-4 and West has ♦10-6. When you play a low diamond, West wins with the ♦10 and your ♦7 is the tenth trick.

As East began with five hearts and three spades, it is quite likely that East has a doubleton diamond. The suggested line works if East began with ♦K-8, K-10, Q-8, Q-10, K-Q or if diamonds are 3-3. If East began with ♦K-Q-x, you will make an overtrick.

In the second situation, where East switched to the ♦K at trick 4, you take the ♦A, draw the missing trump, play the ♣J to the ♣A (just in case you might want to finesse the ♣10 later) and play the ♦5. You hope that East began with ♦K-Q-x, but if East plays the ♦8 or ♦10 or ♦Q, you have an easy path to your tenth trick.

Surprisingly, where East did switch to the ♦K, a number of declarers still went one down when they opted for the club finesse.

Problem for Tomorrow:

Dealer West : North-South vulnerable

West	North	East	South
Pass	?		

What would you do as North with:

♠ AKJ96
♥ 86
♦ K654
♣ 104

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

I am not saying your after-shave is too strong. I am just saying that our canary was alive before you arrived.