

HHBC Pre-Game Talk 28/12/2024

Board 18 (from 21/12/2024)

Dealer: E

Vulnerability: NS

You are East and hold the following hand →

East	
♠	K 7 2
♥	Q J 9 2
♦	A J 3
♣	K 10 2

The auction around the table goes as follows:

East (You)	South	West	North
1C	1H	X*	Pass
1NT	2C	2NT	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

*Negative double showing exactly four spades

South leads the H5 - fourth best of longest and strongest - and a surprising dummy comes down...

West		East	
♠	A 8 6 5	♠	K 7 2
♥	A 7 6	♥	Q J 9 2
♦	Q 8 7 6	♦	A J 3
♣	5 4	♣	K 10 2

Before you start playing - and after thanking your partner for tabling a flat 10-count with no club stopper - you count your tricks. You have two spades, one heart, and one diamond for four tricks. You need five more.

You notice that your left-hand opponent has graciously led the suit you promised to have stoppers in, giving you a much-needed tempo. With a bit of luck, you might be able to generate a couple more heart tricks and a diamond trick to take you up to seven tricks.

This contract won't be easy. But rather than complain that you might be in the wrong spot, you think clearly and optimistically - "How can I play this hand to give me the best chance to make the contract?"

The way you think about the hand is as follows:

I have four tricks; I need five more. Where will those additional tricks come from?

The heart lead gives me at least one more trick there, and I can finesse a diamond for my sixth. If spades break 3-3 with my opposition, that will generate a seventh and, finally, if there is a way I can make South (who I know to have the majority of the outstanding points) play clubs for me, I can get out for one down.

A big job lay ahead of you so you got right to work!

You call for a low heart (the H6) from dummy and North follows with their singleton 4. You notice that, considering the plan you'd just came up with, this sneaky extra heart trick may just get you over the line for nine tricks.

Communication between the hands is a pain though. You could play HA followed by a small heart to the Jack to set up your Queen, but this may cause problems later on if you intend to endplay South. You may end up losing three hearts, a club, and something else and go down!

You know you need to take a diamond finesse at some point, so you hope that North's weak hand contains the DK and you call for a low diamond and, when North plays low, you stick in the Jack. It holds!

You now play the HQ, South covers, and you call for dummy's Ace - North discarding a low spade.

This is the importance of noticing discards. If North has discarded from either a three- or a four-card suit, you will now be able to take three spade tricks! Fingers crossed...

You call for a low spade from dummy and duck it, South winning the 10. You hope that they start playing hearts at you, but they instead come out the Queen of Spades. You play low from dummy, North follows (!), and you win your King.

Have you been counting? I sure hope so!

South has turned up with two spades, North played to two rounds of spades and also discarded one. We started with three spades, and dummy started with four. $2+3+3+4=12$. So there is only one spade left!

You play a spade to the Ace, South discarding a club and North dropping the Jack. You cash the huge S8, North and South each pitching a club. But what do you pitch...?

At this point, you take stock of where you're at:

You've collected three spades, two hearts, and a diamond at this stage.

You still have the Jack of Hearts, and the Ace of Diamonds as tricks to come.

So you are up to eight tricks!

Where is the ninth trick coming from??

You think a little deeper about the situation. South is known to hold hearts and clubs based on the auction. It's also likely that the cards they hold in those suits are good ones, given they bid twice without any word from their partner.

Also, in the auction, South showed five hearts and four clubs. We know they have exactly five hearts, since dummy had three, we had four, and North only had one. South may have five clubs, but it shouldn't matter. The point is that, at this stage, we know South must have one of the following hand shapes:

2 spades, 5 hearts, 2 diamonds, 4 clubs = 13 cards

OR

2 spades, 5 hearts, 1 diamond, 5 clubs = 13 cards

But you realise it's not going to matter...as long as you make sure to eliminate their diamonds! (If South's diamonds are not eliminated, they will have a way to exit their hand safely.)

On the S8 you discard your 3 of Diamonds, and play a heart to your Jack in hand. You then cash your Ace of Diamonds - South following - and play your 9 of Hearts which South must win.

South's last four cards are two hearts (10 and 8) and two clubs (Ace and Queen). They have no choice but to win the 10 of Hearts, cash the other heart and the Ace of Clubs, before conceding the final trick to your King of Clubs.

9 tricks in the bag for a massive +400!

The moral of the story? Always listen to the bidding, always watch the cards, and never give up hope in a tight contract. You never know when a stroke of luck might come your way!

Here's the full hand:

North V			
♠ J 9 4 3			
♥ 4			
♦ K 9 4 2			
♣ J 8 7 3			
West NV	East D NV		
♠ A 8 6 5	♠ K 7 2		
♥ A 7 6	♥ Q J 9 2		
♦ Q 8 7 6	♦ A J 3		
♣ 5 4	♣ K 10 2		
South V		HCPs	
♠ Q 10		5	
♥ K 10 8 5 3		10 14	
♦ 10 5		11	
♣ A Q 9 6			