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This series of six deals is all about suit breaks (3-2, 3-3 and the like). All six deals need trick concessions after a bad split. Part 2 of 2. SA version. Updated winter 2015.

VB#5 Y1 Suit breaks Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 23/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ K93		
	♥ K9		
	♦ T9752		
	♣ Q54		
West		East	
♠ T642		♠ J87	
♥ QJT83		♥ 7642	
♦ AKJ		♦ Q3	
♣ T		♣ J982	
	South		
	♠ AQ5		
	♥ A5		
	♦ 864		
	♣ AK763		

This series is the second set of six deals all about suit breaks. The previous series may be found elsewhere in this edition of VBlue.

We are concerned here about how suits split between the opponents and whether we can make use of this in making tricks for our small cards (our long cards).

In these two series we are mostly concerned about playing in No-trumps although the principle of looking at how suits break as the play progresses applies to suit contracts as well.

In this set of six deals life is not as simple as in the first series. Do you have a Plan B when Plan A fails?

Hand 1 is a simple example of what to try when your main suit splits badly. Naturally enough, the answer is based on **counting**.

No surprise there!

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1NT
P	2NT	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

After North and East Pass we open 1NT in third seat with 17 points and a 5-3-3-2 pattern. Partner raises to 2NT with his 8 points and we advance confidently to game as we are maximum for our 1NT opening bid.

Play.

West starts off with the obvious ♥Q lead from his sequence.

Our **count of tricks** shows there to be eight (three Spades, two Hearts and three Clubs), leaving just one extra to find.

Clubs could well provide an extra **two** tricks, especially if they were to break 3-2, in accordance with the odds. With that in mind we play off two top Clubs to test the waters and are disappointed to see that the suit is actually breaking 4-1. That's Plan A dashed, is there a Plan B?

It might look as though it's right to switch to Diamonds, setting up (very) slow tricks there but that's an illusion. East-West would be well ahead of us in the race; they'd get their Hearts going long before we managed to establish a Diamond trick.

The solution is easy, once seen. Just give East his Club trick; setting up the long Club in the closed hand as the ninth trick.

In detail, then – take trick one (it doesn't matter where – we chose to win in hand with the King), play four rounds of Clubs, ceding the last one to the opponents, win the Heart return (no other defence is any stronger), cash the three winning Spades and take the last Club. That's nine tricks and the opponents are welcome to the rest.

The only danger to the contract is if one opponent held four top Diamonds and was able to take them all when on lead with the ♣J. If that were the case, so be it; as the cards actually lie, 3NT is untouchable.


West, all testy at the turn of events, petulantly throws his ♦A away as we cash our ninth trick. He can afford to do so as his hand consists of all winners but even so... Temper, temper!



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VB#5 Y1 Suit breaks Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 23/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ 96	
	♥ A8	
	♦ AK7532	
	♣ 942	
West		East
♠ T3		♠ QJ875
♥ QJT42		♥ 963
♦ J964		♦ T
♣ AK		♣ T865
	South	
	♠ AK42	
	♥ K75	
	♦ Q8	
	♣ QJ73	

This deal shares a theme with Hand 1.

However, there are deeper, tactical matters you must consider. For example, should you win trick one on the table or in the closed hand?

It doesn't matter, you say? Oh, but it does!

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

After East Passes as dealer we open 1NT with 15 points and a 4·4·3·2 shape and partner, holding 11 points and a fine six-card Diamond suit, raises us straight to game.

There is little point in North bidding Diamonds on hands like these as 5♦ is just too difficult to make. Besides, 5♦, making, scores precisely the same as 3NT, making. Why aim for eleven tricks when you could aim for nine?

Play.

West leads the ♥Q from his sequence and it's time to **Count** and **Plan**.

A count of *top tricks* shows there to be seven: two Spades, two Hearts and three Diamonds. A 3-2 Diamond break would swell the total to ten as Diamonds might actually produce six tricks (in vindication of North's bidding) provided we took the elementary precaution of playing off the ♦Q as the first play in the suit.

However, what if Diamonds are actually 4-1? Well, it might not be obvious at first sight but the first Heart must be taken in the closed hand with the King as the ♥A may well be needed for later as access to dummy's long Diamonds.

Having taken the ♥K we continue with the ♦Q and a Diamond to the ♦K. Oops! Diamonds are 4-1. What now? Well, we simply play off the ♦A and give up a Diamond to West. This sets up set up two baby Diamonds as winners and we have the ♥A as means of access to them.

West continues Hearts, placing the lead on table, so we cash the remaining Diamonds while we have the chance and finally swell the total to nine tricks by taking the ♠A K.


Our nine tricks have come from: two Spades, two Hearts and *five* Diamonds.



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VB#5 Y1 Suit breaks Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 23/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ Q8652	
	♥ K	
	♦ K732	
	♣ A63	
West		East
♠ A4		♠ KT97
♥ QJT94		♥ 8753
♦ T8		♦ J965
♣ JT85		♣ 9
	South	
	♠ J3	
	♥ A62	
	♦ AQ4	
	♣ KQ742	

By now you may just be getting the idea of this set of deals.

Just how should you go about establishing your long suit?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1NT
P	3♣	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

We open 1NT as dealer with 16 points and a good five-card Club suit, giving partner a small problem. He responds 3♣ to show a five-card suit and a desire to play in game.

With no liking for Spades we have to go back to No-trumps and North Passes that, although he has some misgivings holding a 5·4·3·1 shape.

Play.

West leads the ♥Q from his sequence against 3NT and we have to **Count** our tricks and make a **Plan**.

We can see two Hearts, three Diamonds and three Clubs *on top*. We have the prospect of making five Club tricks on a 3-2 break or four Diamonds on a 3-3 break. If Clubs did break in the expected manner we'd have ten tricks, note. If both suits broke favorably we'd have eleven tricks.

We take the ♥K on table (we have little choice in that matter!) and turn our attention immediately to Clubs. We cash the ♣A (*play the honors from the short suit first*) and lead a Club to the ♣Q at which point we learn the bad news as East shows out, chucking a Heart.

The sure way to establish a ninth trick is to continue with the ♣K and then play a fourth Club (throwing a Spade away from the table), conceding the trick to West. We could try Diamonds, hoping for a 3-3 split but we'd be taking the high cards out of the closed hand, making access to the thirteenth Club (not to mention the ♥A) very difficult.

Although this play gives up a Club trick there is compensation in the fact that that the last Club in the closed hand (the ♣7) is a winner.

West plugs away in Hearts (what else could he do?) so we take the Ace, cash the baby Club winner and try the Diamonds. When they prove to be 4-2 we settle for nine tricks and the contract.

The full count of nine tricks is: two Hearts, three


Diamonds and four Clubs.



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VB#5 Y1 Suit breaks Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 23/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ A73		
	♥ 763		
	♦ KQ842		
	♣ T5		
West		East	
♠ KT842		♠ J6	
♥ T82		♥ J954	
♦ 95		♦ JT73	
♣ AJ9		♣ K82	
	South		
	♠ Q95		
	♥ AKQ		
	♦ A6		
	♣ Q7643		

You have a straightforward bidding sequence to the world's most popular contract.

If the bidding provides little challenge how about the play? How do you manage to get your main suit going for the requisite number of tricks?

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1NT
P	2NT	P	3NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ 4

Bidding.

After the other three players Pass we open 1NT in fourth seat with 17 points and a 5-3-3-2 shape. Partner, holding 9 points and a decent five-card Diamond suit, raises us to 2NT. Some adventurous players might raise directly to 3NT with that collection, arguing that the five-card suit compensates for a missing point. It is close.

Well, with 17 points we simply have to take a shot at game after the invitational raise.

Play.

West leads the ♠4 and we must pause to take stock and study the dummy.

Our **Count** of *top tricks* shows us that we have one Spade, three Hearts and three Diamonds, making a total of seven. This Spade lead may be helpful (we can guarantee a second Spade trick by running the lead to hand) and the Diamonds might break 3-3. So there are chances of extra tricks and this helps us formulate a **Plan**.

We play low from table and are pleased to win trick one cheaply with the ♠Q. Now we play off the three top Diamonds, starting – of course – with the ♦A. No luck today, West shows out on the third round, revealing that the suit is breaking 4-2.

East, by the way, is up to his usual tricks, throwing the ♦J on the third round, hoping we'd miscount the Diamonds. Much good does that little ploy do him! Our plan is to make use of the "long" Diamond by giving East a trick in the suit, setting up the ♦8. So we do give East his ♦10, the defender's joy at being given a Diamond trick being short-lived.

East-West could cash three Club tricks (which wouldn't do us any harm) but, naturally enough, East returns his partner's suit by plowing away in Spades.

We grab the ♠A, the last Diamond and run for home with the ♥A K Q.


Our nine tricks come from: two Spades, three
Hearts and four Diamonds.



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VB#5 Y1 Suit breaks Part 2 SA	Contract: 2N
Date: 23/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ A7	
	♥ 842	
	♦ 532	
	♣ KQT64	
West		East
♠ KT3		♠ Q952
♥ KQ76		♥ AT9
♦ JT984		♦ 6
♣ 3		♣ J8752
	South	
	♠ J864	
	♥ J53	
	♦ AKQ7	
	♣ A9	

On some deals it's not only the *quantity* that matters (the actual 3-3, 3-2 – or whatever – break) but the *quality* of the intermediate cards.

Can you see what to do here? Take care – it's easy only when you **see** it.

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1NT
P	2NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ J

Bidding.

After two Passes we open 1NT with a moderate 15 points and a 4·4·3·2 shape.

Partner, holding 9 points and a five-card Club suit, raises us to 2NT. Some players might raise directly to 3NT with that North hand, arguing that a five-card suit headed by the ♠K Q 10 compensates for any missing point. It is very close. Neither 2NT nor 3NT would be a bad bid. How long is a piece of string?

Anyway, there is nothing here at all to encourage us to bid game. A minimum point count, no five-card suit, no useful *honorettes* (Tens and Nines, essentially).

Prudence dictates that we Pass, leaving us in a part-score.

Play.

West leads the ♦J, following the principles of leading his longest suit and leading the top card when holding a sequence. On this occasion the lead catches his partner with nothing in the suit and does us no harm whatsoever – we won't always be so fortunate...

We must start with our **Count** and **Plan**. In terms of *top tricks* there are seven, made up of one Spade, three Diamonds and three Clubs. The suit that could (should) provide an extra trick or two is our long suit, Clubs.

If Clubs were to break 3-3 we'd have five Club tricks. It is worth noting that we would also make five tricks in Clubs if either opponent started with either the singleton ♣J or with ♣J ×. Maybe somebody should have bid 3NT after all...

We win the first Diamond with the ♦Q and set about the Clubs. Again, the first play should be to play off the ♣A (*play the high cards from the short suit first*) and then lead another Club, hoping for good things.

When West shows out on the second round the Clubs are known to be 5-1. Still, the intermediate Clubs (the ♣10 and ♣9) are

important here.

All we have to do is to allow the ♣9 to run to East, losing to the ♣J. This leaves the last three Clubs (the ♣K Q 10) as winners on the table. There is still access to dummy (in the guise of the ♠A), so the contract is secure, unless East-West could run off too many Hearts.

Sure, as the cards lie, the defense could cash four Hearts if they wanted to but that would still only total five defensive tricks in all. As it is, East decides to knock out our ♠A and hopes that will upset our applectart. Nope, we take the Ace and have enough tricks for our part-score.


Our eight tricks come from one Spade, three Diamonds and four Clubs.



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VB#5 Y1 Suit breaks Part 2 SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 23/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ J73		
	♥ A7		
	♦ K5		
	♣ K86532		
West		East	
♠ AT4		♠ K92	
♥ K653		♥ QT92	
♦ JT9873		♦ 62	
♣		♣ JT97	
	South		
	♠ Q865		
	♥ J84		
	♦ AQ4		
	♣ AQ4		

When dummy goes down here it may appear you are in an easy contract with tricks to spare.

On this sort of deal you should be prepared to cope with all that life can throw at you – in this case that's a nasty and unexpected suit break.

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	3NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ J

Bidding.

We open 1NT in second seat (a 4-3-3-3 hand with 15 points) after East has Passed as dealer. With no further ado partner raises us to 3NT.

As so often at this game, bidding Clubs in these circumstances (a 6-3-2-2 hand) would be a waste of breath. 5♣ is usually too difficult to make and 3NT is often easier.

Play.

Against 3NT West leads the ♦J (a Heart lead would be fatal to our cause but how is West supposed to know?) and we begin our **Count** and **Plan**.

In *top tricks* we have seven (one Heart, three Diamonds and three Clubs). However, surely the Clubs will produce six tricks, after all, with nine cards between dummy and declarer, it would be very unfortunate to run into a 4-0 break.

We should always tread carefully, though. The first point is that we must take dummy's ♦K at trick one (yet another example of *play the honors from the short suit first*) and then try the Clubs.

A Club to the ♣Q brings a shock – Clubs **are** 4-0. This needs a short reappraisal and then a Plan B. A recount shows that **five** Club tricks (rather than six) would produce sufficient tricks for the contract. So we can afford to give up a Club trick and still make 3NT. Accordingly we cash the ♣A, play a Club to dummy's ♣K and lead another Club, giving East his ♣J.

East plays another Diamond and we have to be careful here. Having taken the ♦Q we must cash the ♦A before crossing to the table with the ♥A to take the last two Clubs. If we don't cash that Ace we'll never make it.

The requisite nine tricks come from one Heart, three Diamonds and five Clubs. The opponents mop up the rest.

