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This series is all about counting the defenders' shape. Its counterpart (counting points) is series 2421

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

VB#16 Y2 Counting the hand Part 2 SA

Date: 21/06/2014

Dealer: East

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Contract: 3N
By: South
Board #: 1
Vulnerable: None

Lead: ♥ 3

This hand sets the scene for this series of deals – that of **counting the hand**. In the previous series in this edition of V-Blue we were looking at counting points. Now we are concerned with counting hand patterns.

Here, against the obvious contract of 3NT by South, West leads the ♥3 and the defenders cash the first four Hearts leaving declarer to guess the Clubs. It's a classic **find the lady** hand. Who has the ♠Q?

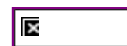
After taking his four Heart tricks West exits with the ♠J, leaving you to find the ♠Q with no help. First you cash the Diamonds (everybody follows, so that's no help) and then you cash the remaining Spades. Ah-ha! When West shows out at trick nine you have all the information you need. Can you see it, Dr Watson?

Well, East has shown up with three Hearts, has followed to three Diamonds and is now known to have six Spades. A quick count on your fingers shows him to be 6-3-3-1 (or just possibly 6-3-4-0) and the Club finesse through West is a certainty.

Note that the singleton Spade probably marks West with a 1-4-4-4 hand as well (a subtle but important inference). Why? Well, if West had a five-card suit would he not have led it against 3NT?

Anyway, as the cards lie you can cash the ♠A (after all, East's Club might just be the ♠Q) and then you can finesse the ♠J with complete confidence.

West	North	East	South
♠ J	♠ AQ9	♠ T87653	♠ K42
♥ KJ93	♥ 874	♥ AT6	♥ Q52
♦ T732	♦ QJ8	♦ 954	♦ AK6
♣ Q743	♣ KJ92	♣ 8	♣ AT65



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

VB#16 Y2 Counting the hand Part 2 SA

Date: 21/06/2014

Dealer: South

[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 3N
By: South
Board #: 2
Vulnerable: N/S

Lead: S

You reach 3NT after opening 1NT and being raised to game. If the bidding provides no test then the play might...

West leads the ♠K and you count eight top tricks (one Spade, one Heart, three Diamonds and three Clubs). You duck the first Spade, partly to break the East-West communications and partly to gain some information. When East shows out on the second Spade (signalling strongly for a Heart) you take the ♠A and set about finding your ninth trick.

A 3-3 Club break will do, a 3-3 Diamond break will do and there is the additional chance that the ♦J drops in two. There is no "position" in Clubs (they are either 3-3 or they aren't) but there is a guess in Diamonds, which must be left to last until you can gauge what is going on.

After cashing three top Clubs East shows out on the third round, showing that the suit is 4-2. Now what? Well, the first point to note is that West started with ten black cards (six Spades and four Clubs). You should now cash the ♥A to see if West follows to that. When he does you know eleven of his cards.

Cashing the ♦A Q now shows you the remaining two cards in his hand. His hand pattern started life as 6-1-2-4 so you are 100% safe to lead a Diamond and play your ♦10. If West takes that with the ♦J he must have started with 14 cards...

West	North	East	South
♠ KQJ732	♠ T85	♠ 9	♠ A64
♥ 7	♥ JT4	♥ KQ9862	♥ A53
♦ 84	♦ AQ3	♦ J972	♦ KT65
♣ T853	♣ A762	♣ J9	♣ KQ4



Here you are in a typical position. You are in game but one trick short of your contract.


How might you play a critical suit to best advantage?



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VB#16 Y2 Counting the hand Part 2 SA	Contract: 7N By: South
Date: 21/06/2014	Board #: 3
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: E / W
Play this hand online!	

North		East
♠ AQ4		♠ 8653
♥ A4		♥ JT965
♦ KJ853		♦ Q76
♣ KQJ		♣ 9
West		East
♠ JT9		♠ 8653
♥ 873		♥ JT965
♦ 9		♦ Q76
♣ T87643		♣ 9
South		East
♠ K72		♠ 8653
♥ KQ2		♥ JT965
♦ AT42		♦ Q76
♣ A52		♣ 9

This is a deal based on a deal from USA v Switzerland in 1968. (Yes, some of us at VuBridge really do go back that far!)

The American declarer at the time managed to make his adventurous contract by delaying a critical decision as long as possible. Can you follow his line of play and his reasoning?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1NT
P	7NT	P	P
P			

Lead: ♠ J

North's raise of 1NT to a grand slam may charitably be described as "optimistic". Perhaps he was losing the match and had to make up the leeway. Whatever the reason, South had to find a way to make the contract or suffer a devastating loss. West found a Spade lead, giving nothing away.

South could see that the whole hand depended on finding the ♠Q. But he can play either East or West for that card so what should he do? If you take the Diamond suit in isolation the percentage play is to bash down the ♦A and ♦K and hope the ♦Q falls.

However, taking the whole hand into account, the best line is to cash all the tricks in the outside suits first and see if you can pick up some clues. Here, it is soon apparent that Clubs are 6-1 and also that West has three Spades and three Hearts. There is simply no room left, therefore, for more than one Diamond (if the Diamonds are 4-0, by the way, the grand slam is doomed).


Anyway, as West is marked with a singleton Diamond, you should do what the declarer at the time did – cash the ♦K and play a Diamond to the ♦10. All that remains is to add up the score...



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VB#16 Y2 Counting the hand Part 2 SA	Contract: 1N By: South
Date: 21/06/2014	Board #: 4
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: All
Play this hand online!	

North		East
♠ K95		♠ 87642
♥ 62		♥ AJ85
♦ 832		♦ A95
♣ AT942		♣ 6
West		East
♠ JT		♠ 87642
♥ KT74		♥ AJ85
♦ K764		♦ A95
♣ Q73		♣ 6
South		East
♠ AQ3		♠ 87642
♥ Q93		♥ AJ85
♦ QJT		♦ A95
♣ KJ85		♣ 6

After the excitement of Hand 3 you are down to earth with a bang now.

Even in a modest part-score there is still work to be done, though.

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ 4

A modest contract of 1NT but the principles of counting the hand remain the same.

West leads a Heart and the defense cash four tricks there (you can throw a Club on the last Heart, dummy can throw a couple of Diamonds) before switching to Diamonds, playing off three rounds.

To try and get Clubs right you should defer the decision and play on the other suit(s); here, that's Spades. When East shows up with five of those he is known to have started with five Spades, four Hearts and at least three Diamonds so cannot have more than one Club.

In other words he must have a 5-4-3-1 pattern. Accordingly it is safe for you to cash the ♣K and finesse the ♠10 with complete confidence.



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VB#16 Y2 Counting the hand SA	Contract: 7N By: South
Date: 21/06/2014	Board #: 5
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	2NT
P	7NT	P	P
P			

Lead: H

With 38 points between you it is an easy and fast route to 7NT, played by you.

West leads the ♥10 and you are a tad disappointed to see your hand is a mirror image of your partner's in that you both have a 4-3-3-3 shape. Despite your 38 points you only have twelve top tricks (three in each suit). All will be well if neither defender has more than three Clubs but if they do – and the ♣J is not the singleton – you will have to pick up the Jack by means of a finesse.

At the moment you have no clues and to play the Clubs early with the possibility of finding them badly placed would be an expensive misguess. It costs you nothing to play the other suits first in search of clues.

You win the first trick in dummy then play off the top three Diamonds ending in the closed hand, noticing West show out on the third round.


Next come the top three Spades and once again you notice West show out on the third round. What does this tell you? Well, East is known to have five cards in both Spades and Diamonds so you now know that East cannot hold ♣J × × ×. Can you see *why*?

Anyway, just for completeness, you play off the top three Hearts and this time East shows out on the third round.

That completes the picture and you know East started with five Spades, two Hearts, five Diamonds and, by deduction, one Club. In short, he has a 5-2-5-1 pattern. That means you can pick up the ♣J by finessing through West. To confirm your diagnosis, you cash the ♣K and then play the ♣A and, as expected, East discards. This gives you a *marked finesse* through West for the thirteenth trick.

You make this contract by careful counting and deduction. Sherlock Holmes would have thought these inferences "elementary". How good a bridge player would he have made, we wonder...?

North		East
♠ 732		♠ JT865
♥ KQJ		♥ 65
♦ KQJ		♦ 87542
♣ KQ93		♣ 6

West		East
♠ 94		♠ JT865
♥ T9873		♥ 65
♦ T9		♦ 87542
♣ J875		♣ 6

South
♠ AKQ
♥ A42
♦ A63
♣ AT42

After the breather of 1NT you are back in the big time with this deal.

Here you have a chance to practise your techniques of observation and deduction.

If you get it right Sherlock Holmes would approve...



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VB#16 Y2 Counting the hand Part 2 SA

Date: 21/06/2014

Dealer: South

[Play this hand online!](#)

Contract: 6N

By: South

Board #: 6

Vulnerable: E / W

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1NT
P	6NT	P	P
P			


Lead: ♠ K

You open 1NT and North surprises you with a raise straight to 6NT. Oh well, at least it isn't another grand slam...

West leads the ♠K and you take stock. A mandatory *count of tricks* reveals that you have eleven certain ones (one Spade, three Hearts, four Diamonds and three Clubs) with chances of making four Club tricks providing you don't lose a trick to a possible ♣J × × × lurking in an opponent's hand.

Best technique is to duck the first trick. This play might not occur to many but it is important as it gives you a little time to count the hand. West persists with Spades and now you get your first vital piece of information: Spades are 6-1. You cash three Hearts and four Diamonds and now you have all the facts at your fingertips.

Can you **see** it? West is known to have six Spades, three Hearts and two Diamonds – it is not possible for him to have four Clubs in his hand as well. However, it is possible that East has four Clubs. As a precaution, therefore, you play off the ♣A K and note (with satisfaction) that West throws away a Spade on the ♣K. This leaves you with a *marked finesse* to take. A Club to the ♣9 brings home the bacon and you have your slam.

North		
♠ T64		
♥ AJ		
♦ KQJT		
♣ AKT3		
West		East
♠ KQJ982		♠ 7
♥ 8743		♥ 9652
♦ 62		♦ 9743
♣ 4		♣ J865
South		
♠ A53		
♥ KQT		
♦ A85		
♣ Q972		

This hand is similar to Hand 5. However, there is a small but crucial twist in the play. Overlook it and you may fail.