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This is a set of four hands designed to complement David Bird's set of six deals for VB#17; ACOL version

VB#17 Y2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ K53	
	♥ Q2	
	♦ A74	
	♣ JT432	
West		East
♠ QJ98		♠ 62
♥ T8		♥ J9643
♦ Q62		♦ KT98
♣ K975		♣ Q8
	South	
	♠ AT74	
	♥ AK75	
	♦ J53	
	♣ A6	

**This set of four deals looks at some subtle card combinations. You need to think carefully about your play on these deals...**

In Hand 1 you reach a routine contract. What suit should you play on and how should you play it?

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

Lead: ♠ Q

This is a tricky hand. You reach 3NT having opened 1♥ (normal enough with 4-4 in the majors and a hand too strong for 1NT) and rebid 2NT. West leads the ♠Q from his near-sequence and you have to decide how to play the hand.

A **Count** of tricks shows you to have seven on top (two Spades, three Hearts, one Diamond and one Club) and you may be grateful to have escaped a Diamond lead. Your best and longest suit is Clubs, although they are somewhat threadbare, and these need developing for the extra two tricks that you need.

With little else to do (you know Spades aren't breaking 3-3 after West has led one) you play the ♣A and lead another. A 3-3 Club break will see you home but what if they are 4-2?

Well, if East has four Clubs you'll need West to hop up with an honour on the second round. Here, though, West follows with two low cards to the first two rounds. What is your best play?

It may look obvious to try the ♣10 from table but that's against the odds. It's only right if West has precisely ♣K Q × ×. If, on the other hand, East has ♣K × or ♣Q × then playing a low Club will force him to play his high card on thin air. This is two shots to one, so playing low from dummy is the right play. Note that if Clubs are actually 3-3 it makes no odds which Club you play from dummy.

Here, East obliges with the ♣Q on dummy's ♣3 and you can see the harbour lights. You take the Spade return on table with the ♠K and play the ♠J to set up the suit. East signals vehemently for a Diamond switch but this defence comes too late. You have two Spades, three Hearts, one Diamond and three Clubs for your contract.



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VB#17 Y2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ 62	
	♥ J9643	
	♦ KT98	
	♣ 97	
West		East
♠ K53		♠ AT74
♥ Q2		♥ AK75
♦ A74		♦ J53
♣ JT432		♣ A6
	South	
	♠ QJ98	
	♥ T8	
	♦ Q62	
	♣ KQ85	

You must always remember when playing this game that the opposition have no idea what your hand is.

Can you take advantage of their obliviousness?

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

Lead: ♠ Q

You defend 3NT and lead the ♠Q from ♠Q J 9 8 (a near sequence). Dummy may ring a bell or two but that's something to think about later.

Declarer takes the ♠A and immediately plays off the ♣A and another Club. Obviously you take this and...? Well, the answer is that you concede the contract. This is another case where the "obvious" play is the wrong one.

There is no hurry to fly in with the ♣Q – there rarely is a hurry in bridge to grab tricks. Here, if you keep calm and play a low Club (in tempo) declarer may well go wrong. If he plays the odds he won't make the "obvious" play of dummy's ♠10 – on the contrary, he will follow the logic of Hand 1 and duck the Club. Now partner will take an unexpected trick with the ♣9 and 3NT will be in a mess.

You still have to defend carefully. Partner's Spade return knocks out the ♠K and declarer persists with Clubs. Partner's violent signal (the ♦10) suggests a switch to that suit and – rather than speculatively cash your ♠J – you follow partner's suggested path. Declarer has nowhere to go for tricks now and ends up two down.



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VB#17 Y2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ QT973	
	♥ Q2	
	♦ AQ4	
	♣ 974	
West		East
♠ K852		♠ J6
♥ 8		♥ KJT64
♦ JT982		♦ 73
♣ 653		♣ KQJ2
	South	
	♠ A4	
	♥ A9753	
	♦ K65	
	♣ AT8	

When playing suit combinations you have (on occasion) to make a difficult guess. Sometimes you choose wrongly but had no indication of why you should have got it right.

On other occasions, though, some guesses are better than others.

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

Lead: ♦ J

You reach 3NT and West finds a Diamond lead (a Club lead would have had you in difficulty but opening leads are blind – here, West has an obvious ♦J lead).

Now, with just six tricks on top (one Spade, one Heart, three Diamonds and one Club) the obvious suit to develop is Spades. The only way to do that is to play the ♠A and another Spade and see what happens.

Well, to no one's surprise West follows with two low Spades and now you have to decide what to do. Is the right play to finesse the ♠10 or to play the ♠Q? Is this a straight 50-50 guess or is there a reason for making the successful choice?

The finesse of the ♠10 (or ♠9 if you feel that strongly about it) will bring home four Spade tricks if West started with ♠J × ×. Playing the ♠Q will bring home the bacon if West started with ♠K × ×. These two positions are equally likely and no inference may be taken that West played low nonchalantly on the second round. No West of any experience is going to give you anything at all here – he would play low (in tempo) with either of these holdings.

So the position is a 50-50 guess? No – as you can see from the actual layout. By playing the ♠Q you gain when West started with ♠K × × × as well as ♠K × ×.

The same is not true in reverse, if you see what we mean. If West has ♠J × × × then finessing the ♠10 may bring you temporary pleasure as you force the ♠K but you must still lose two Spade tricks eventually.

So playing the ♠Q gives you two chances of success, whereas finessing the ♠10 gives you one. Some guesses are better than others...



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VB#17 Y2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ 42	
	♥ AQ4	
	♦ T63	
	♣ AT973	
West		East
♠ QT7		♠ K963
♥ JT986		♥ 72
♦ K4		♦ Q9752
♣ K52		♣ J6
	South	
	♠ AJ85	
	♥ K53	
	♦ AJ8	
	♣ Q84	

How should you play the critical suit here?

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

Lead: ♥ J

You reach another 3NT contract and West kicks off with the ♥J lead from his sequence.

Counting your top tricks you see that you have one Spade, three Hearts, one Diamond and one Club for a total of six "toppers". You need to swell that by three and the suit you need to play on is Clubs. So, the key question is: how should we play the Club suit?

You might play off the ♣A and another but what will you play if East follows small? The ♣Q or the ♣8? As the cards actually lie the ♣J would pop up (solving all problems) but on other layouts you wouldn't know what to do. You want to avoid these agonising guesses if at all possible and you also want to make the best (for which read "highest odds") play.

Here, the best play in Clubs is to take a **combination finesse** through West. The idea is to run the ♣Q and, should it lose to the ♣K, run the ♣8 next. This way you pick up four Club tricks whenever West has either Club honour – a solid 75% chance. True, this play loses if East started with the ♣K J but that's life. Live with it.

So you win the Heart lead in the closed hand with the ♥K and immediately advance the ♣Q. West might cover that with the ♣K – if he did you'd bash that with the ♣A and use the power of the Club intermediates to drive out the ♣J, setting the suit up for four tricks. As it is, the ♣Q holds the trick so you lead the ♣8 and see what happens next.

When West follows small it is 100% safe to run the ♣8. Either it wins the trick or – as here – East takes the ♣J. However, the remaining Clubs are now all winners and the contract is safe.

A Spade switch from East opens up that suit and rather than mess about for a possible overtrick you grab the ♠A and run for home. Your bag of booty consists of one Spade, three Hearts, one Diamond and four Clubs.