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Eight General Hands for Issue 18 of V-Blue (Year 1); ACOL
Version Updated spring 2015

VB#18 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 4S
Date: 05/09/2015	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ 96	
	♥ K75	
	♦ KQ4	
	♣ AK843	
West		East
♠ 82		♠ KT4
♥ QJT6		♥ A982
♦ T98		♦ A532
♣ J962		♣ T5
	South	
	♠ AQJ753	
	♥ 43	
	♦ J76	
	♣ Q7	

Here are eight general practice hands on the themes that we have been looking at in VuBridge. They are in no particular order, just enjoy them as they come...

Hand 1. We first begin with a relatively simple looking hand.

What play technique do we need to bring out of our toolbox and on to the table?

West	North	East	South
-	1♣	P	1♠
P	1NT	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

North opens 1♣ and rebids 1NT over our 1♠ response. This shows a balanced hand of 15-16 points so we can simply place the contract in 4♠ as North must have two or three card Spade support and the combined point-count is 25-26.

Play.

West's starts off with the ♥Q against 4♠ which neatly traps dummy's ♥K (as the ♥A is sure to be with East). With two Heart losers and one Diamond loser this deal is simply a matter of avoiding a trump loser. To do that we need to take a Spade finesse against East (or even two Spade finesses against East).

So... in detail. We ruff the third round of Hearts and play a Diamond to drive out the ♦A. East wins the ♦A over the ♦Q and, with little else to do, returns a Diamond. We take the ♦K, play a Spade to the ♠J (if it loses to the ♠K we are down) and then repeat the medicine. A Club to dummy's ♣K and a further Spade lead, through East, to the ♠Q picks up the trumps.

When the ♠A pulls out the last rotten tooth from the opponents the hand is over – we have the rest easily.



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VB#18 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 05/09/2015	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

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

Lead: ♥ 7

Bidding.

This auction has echoes from the previous deal.

East-West get to 3NT after East shows a balanced hand with 15-16 points by opening 1♦ and rebidding 1NT over a 1♠ response.

West is full value for a raise to 3NT – whether he should ignore the Diamond support while holding a singleton Heart is a moot point.

Note that 5♦ is a vastly superior contract on the East-West cards. That is not our concern – beating 3NT is.

Play.

The interesting decision on this deal is to decide what we should lead from the South's hand.

Obviously there is no doubt about which *suit* to lead, but the question is, which *card* should we lead?


On this hand, because of our lack of outside entries, we should lead our fourth-best Heart, the ♥7. This way we are more likely to be able to establish our suit and still be able to regain the lead in order to cash it out.

In other words, if declarer were to have a Heart stopper, we prefer to give up that trick first without using up partner's Hearts. If, instead, we were to lead the ♥A followed by the ♥K then a third Heart (with declarer winning that trick) our Hearts might be set up but we'd have no entry card back to our hand to cash them.

If we had a side Ace (for example) then it might be best to start with the ♥A.

Anyway, as it is, our ♥7 lead here goes to partner's ♥Q, and a return of the ♥10 traps declarer's ♥J. Basically, the defence take a finesse against declarer's ♥J.

The first five Heart tricks sink 3NT and an irritated declarer claims the rest.

	North	
	♠ J753	
	♥ QT2	
	♦ T7	
	♣ QJT3	
West		East
♠ AQ64		♠ K8
♥ 6		♥ J854
♦ K853		♦ AQJ64
♣ K964		♣ A8
	South	
	♠ T92	
	♥ AK973	
	♦ 92	
	♣ 752	

Can we take finesses in defence?

*[Note. If you have a keen eye, you might have noticed that a top Heart opening lead could still lead to the defeat of the contract, but only provided that the defence is **ultra careful**.*

*After the ♥A lead, North must **unblock** the ♥10 and South continues with a small Heart to North's ♥Q. Now a small Heart from North through declarer's ♥J 8 picks up the suit. We think leading the ♥7 makes life easier].*



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VB#18 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 4H
Date: 05/09/2015	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♠
P	1NT	P	3♥
P	4♥	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ T

Bidding.

We start the auction off with 1♠ and partner replies with a discouraging 1NT (6-9 points). East wisely Passes this, you may note. An overcall of 2♣ on that hand, sandwiched between two bidding opponents, would be unwise. "Suicidal" would be a more appropriate word.

Anyway, forget the opponents. What now?

Well, a jump rebid in a new suit is natural and shows a very strong hand (18-21 points). It is effectively game-forcing so partner is not allowed to Pass. Here, North is quite happy to raise our 3♥ jump to 4♥ when a Heart fit comes to light.

Play.

West leads the ♦10 against 4♥ and we play low from dummy, running it round to the ♦J. If West has led from the ♦Q East's ♦A would be forced out. We know from the opening lead that the ♦A is with East (underleading Aces against suit contracts is for lunatics and geniuses only. This West lays claim to be neither) so there is not much point in playing the ♦K at trick one.

[Note, in passing, that a Diamond lead is the only troubling defence. Had East overcalled with a pathetic 2♣ – "I had 14 points, partner!" – West would have led one. That would have made your life a lot easier. Don't overcall on poor suits!]

After winning the ♦Q, East, who appears to have a plane to catch, cashes the ♦A, then the ♠A and follows with a Club switch.

With the first three tricks lost, the deal is just a matter of handling the Heart suit.

With a suit missing the King, it is almost always right to finesse for the King (the rare exceptions include if we have an eleven-card fit).

This hand is **not** an exception. After winning the ♠A, we must ruff a Spade winner in dummy

North

♠ 6
♥ T742
♦ K762
♣ K962

West
♠ 98532
♥ 8
♦ T984
♣ Q87



East
♠ A4
♥ K53
♦ AQ3
♣ JT543

South

♠ KQJT7
♥ AQJ96
♦ J5
♣ A

How do you extricate yourself from a sticky situation?

(first step) followed by leading dummy's ♥10 (second step). The ♥10 is an important card as it allows us to take the finesse and stay on the table if it's successful.

Here, it is and we chalk up our game. Yes, if West had the ♥K we'd have gone down in 4♥. That's the way it is sometimes – live with it. Finesses work 50% of the time and fail 50% of the time.



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VB#18 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 4S
Date: 05/09/2015	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

North
♠ A752
♥ 8
♦ A65
♣ AQJT6

West
♠ Q
♥ T9432
♦ KQT9
♣ K95



East
♠ T863
♥ AJ65
♦ J84
♣ 82

South
♠ KJ94
♥ KQ7
♦ 732
♣ 743

Don't forget to plan your play on this deal.

Careful thought and planning can do wonders...

West	North	East	South
P	1♣	P	1♠
P	3♠	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♦ K

Bidding.

North opens 1♣ and we show our four-card major with a 1♠ response. With 15 points and an attractive 5-4-3-1 shape North is too good to bid a simple 2♠. He makes a game try of 3♠ and we accept the invitation holding 9 points, despite the unattractive 4-3-3-3 pattern.

Play.

Against our 4♠ contract, West makes the best opening lead for the defence of the ♦K. This immediately sets up two Diamonds for East-West and, with the ♥A to lose, we must pick up the Spades and Clubs for no loser – so we need finesses in both of these suits.

After winning the ♦A we should start out by playing the ♠A. West surprisingly drops the ♠Q which must be a singleton (it would be foolish to drop the Queen from a doubleton – why would anybody do that?)

The singleton Queen marks East with ♠10 8 6 3, so a Spade lead from dummy allows us to finesse the ♠9. Before drawing East's remaining trumps, we must make the most use of our entries (or, rather, the lack of them) by taking a Club finesse.

When that wins we draw East's remaining trumps and follow with another Club finesse. When the Clubs split 3-2 the suit is ours to run and we eventually just lose two Diamonds and the ♥A.



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Eight General Hands for Issue 18 of V-Blue (Year 1); ACOL
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VB#18 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 4H
Date: 05/09/2015	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

North

♠ J93
♥ 764
♦ AQ5
♣ AQT6

West

♠ 762
♥ T8
♦ JT96
♣ K984



East

♠ QT854
♥ AJ2
♦ K83
♣ 73

South

♠ AK
♥ KQ953
♦ 742
♣ J52

We all reach poor contracts in this game (yes, even us here at VuBridge!)

However, even if you are in a bad spot you should never give up hope. Somedays the cards lie very well for you.

West	North	East	South
-	1NT	P	3♥
P	4♥	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ J

Bidding.

North opens 1NT (12-14) and we respond 3♥ to show the five-card suit and game-going values. Holding three Hearts North raises us to the Heart game.

Play.

West kicks off with the ♦J lead against 4♥ and we try dummy's ♦Q with little hope and less luck. East wins the ♦K and returns another Diamond, forcing out dummy's ♦A.

With a trick lost and another Diamond loser exposed our 4♥ contract depends on how we play the Hearts and the Clubs.

Most of the time, a finesse play occurs when we are missing a critical honour of the King or the Queen. However, in this situation, our Heart suit also needs a type of finesse, but against the Ace.

Upon winning the ♦A, we play a Heart towards our ♥K Q as we hope the ♥A is with East. If East plays the ♥A (on air) we'd play low from our hand and look towards taking the Club finesse next.

If East plays a low Heart (as he does here, of course), our ♥Q wins and now – an important play – we cross back to dummy with a Club finesse in order to lead another Heart from dummy. Playing in this manner forces East to make a decision before we do, hence a finesse.

East can take the ♥A or play low, allowing us to score the ♥K. Whatever he does is fine by us. Here he chooses to take the ♥A and cash his side's Diamond trick. After that we take the Spade switch, draw the last trump and finesse Clubs again.


With Hearts dividing 3-2, the ♥A well-placed and the Club finesse working to boot, today is our lucky day and ten tricks are deposited into the bank.



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VB#18 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 4S
Date: 05/09/2015	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North		
	♠		
	♥ AQ74		
	♦ Q76532		
	♣ J83		
West		East	
♠ KJ54		♠ AQT762	
♥ KJ95		♥ T62	
♦ JT		♦ K	
♣ Q75		♣ AKT	
	South		
	♠ 983		
	♥ 83		
	♦ A984		
	♣ 9642		

Here you are defending with a poor collection, so you may be asking, "What does this hand have to do with me?"

Oh, everything!

West	North	East	South
-	-	1♠	P
3♠	P	4♠	P
P	P		

Lead: ♥ 8

This represents a different type of problem for you – an opening lead problem.

Bidding.

The opponents stroll into 4♠ by East via an invitational sequence of 1♠ – 3♠ – 4♠.

Play.

In what appears to be a dull collection the opening lead from the South hand is, in fact, the make-or-break point of the deal.

Opening leads can be tough, and they are blind, but we can often settle on the best choice with a little bit of thought and with a great deal of experience. Here, when the opponents have settled for game (suggesting 25-29 points or so), the weakness of our hand marks partner with some strength.

When we are on lead against a suit contract with a weak hand it is often right to lead a short suit with the primary aim of obtaining a ruff (or two).

Here, a Heart lead from a doubleton (the ♥8 – if we are going to lead a doubleton we must lead the higher card) immediately sets declarer on the road to ruin. A Heart to partner's Queen, the ♥A and a Heart ruff are followed in short order by the ♦A.

Note that the high-low play of the ♥8 followed by the ♥3 denotes a two-card holding in Hearts, so partner is not confused. Those players who lead "top of nothing" from doubletons, tripletons and even four-card holdings are just partner-torturers. Declarer's cunning false-card of the ♥10 is treated with contempt by North on this deal.

There are many layouts where a Heart lead could work well. If partner were to have, say, the ♥A and the ♠A, he might not be able to give us an immediate Heart ruff but when he got in with the ♠A he would be able to give us a third-round Heart ruff.

The moral is: we should lead our singletons or doubletons against a suit contract when we are

holding a weak hand in order to obtain as many ruffs as we can.


Warning! Many players overdo shortage leads, it must be said, and there are too many players who lead top-of-doubletons when they shouldn't. This is not a strategy to be adopted on every deal!



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Eight General Hands for Issue 18 of V-Blue (Year 1); ACOL
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VB#18 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 4S
Date: 06/09/2015	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 7
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ 9642	
	♥ 8	
	♦ KJ86	
	♣ K654	
West		East
♠ 3		♠ KT5
♥ QJ964		♥ KT53
♦ T943		♦ AQ72
♣ Q93		♣ JT
	South	
	♠ AQJ87	
	♥ A72	
	♦ 5	
	♣ A872	

Declaring in a suit contract may force you to apply many different card-play techniques.

This deal, frinstance...

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	1♠
P	3♠	P	4♠
P	P	P	

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

Our 1♠ opening fetches an invitational 3♠ raise from partner. Although partner only has 7 points the power of the singleton Heart combined with the fourth trump lends itself to an upgrade. The hand is worth more than 2♠ and, as the rules prevent North from trying to bid 2½♠, he decides to bid 3♠.

An overbid? Sure, but not that great a one and overbidding isn't yet a crime. Anyway, 3♠ makes it relatively easy for us to bid the 4♠ game.

Play.

West leads the ♥Q against our 4♠ contract and upon seeing dummy, we conclude that five potential losers loom large. One Spade, two Hearts, one Diamond, and one (or two) Clubs are the maximum amount of possible losers that we can see.

If our contract is to succeed we need to look to reducing two of those potential losers, and luckily, partner has made that easy for us.

The singleton Heart in dummy essentially screams out "ruffs", so we win the opening lead and return a Heart ruffing in dummy. We cross back to our hand via a Spade finesse (it can't hurt – even should it loses to West, a trump return would still allow us to ruff our last Heart) and follow it up with a second Heart ruff.


As all things are looking bright for us we continue with another (winning) Spade finesse, draw trumps and eventually give up two minor suit tricks to end with an overtrick.

On this deal, we have to combine the "draw trumps" idea along with "ruff losers in dummy" as well as the finesse play – isn't that fun?



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VB#18 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 06/09/2015	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 8
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ AKJ92		
	♥ J62		
	♦ KJ		
	♣ A75		
West		East	
♠ QT83		♠ 64	
♥ Q		♥ KT98543	
♦ A652		♦ T3	
♣ QJT9		♣ K4	
	South		
	♠ 75		
	♥ A7		
	♦ Q9874		
	♣ 8632		

What do we do when our partner bids like a train?

No, you don't complain – well, not immediately – your primary focus is to try to make the contract, no matter how repulsive it is.

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

Lead: ♣ Q

Bidding.

North opens 1♠ and we respond 1NT with our feeble hand to show 6-9 points. Partner, maybe overdosing on pharmaceuticals, decides to raise us directly to 3NT with his 17 point 5-3-3-2 hand. Maybe Hand 7 went to his head? There he had an excuse for a mild overbid; 3NT here is inexcusably wild.

We finish in a distinctly dubious 23-point game but that's no excuse to chuck the cards at partner and give up.

Play.

West leads the ♣Q and, disappointingly but not surprisingly, we see just four top tricks. Undoubtedly, the suits that we can work on are Spades and Diamonds. On the other side of the coin, our Clubs and Hearts are weakly held.

What we should do is to win the opening lead with the Ace (ducking might not work well as our Hearts are prone to attack – so it's best to take the ♣A) and start with the Diamonds. East smartly drops the ♣K to get out of West's way. Nice defence.

Attacking the Diamonds gives us the possibility of playing Spades later, whereas if we were to work on the Spades and it fails, we would not have time to play the Diamonds.

At trick two we lead the ♦K. As this holds the trick we continue with the ♦J. A (pleasant) surprise comes when East shows up with the ♦10 as this card solidifies our suit. Now it is vital for us to overtake with the ♦Q (else the ♦J may be allowed hold the trick, trapping us on table) so we can continue the attack in Diamonds to force out the ♦A.

After West takes his ♦A he cashes his Clubs and switches to a Heart, taken by our ♥A. We cash our Diamond winners and eventually take the Spade finesse by playing a Spade to dummy's ♠J.

Nine tricks after a hard day's work.

Was partner's bidding justified? No, not at all – just because a lucky contract slipped through is no reason to exonerate North's antics. Partner is clearly on medication of some sort and ought to get it changed. 3NT is a horrible contract – had we held more that this 6 points we'd have gone on to 3NT over a more sensible raise to 2NT.

However, when all is said and done, when playing desperate contracts it pays never to give up hope.