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Eight General Hands. SA version. Updated spring 2015

Y1 VBlue #14 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: East
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ QJ73		
	♥ K94		
	♦ A		
	♣ 98732		
West		East	
♠ 96		♠ A8	
♥ 862		♥ AJ5	
♦ KQJ97		♦ T643	
♣ AT6		♣ KQJ4	
	South		
	♠ KT542		
	♥ QT73		
	♦ 852		
	♣ 5		

This is our General Series, a collection of eight practice hands on themes covered so far in VuBridge.

The hands are in no particular order, just enjoy them as they come...

Hand 1: We start you with a defensive problem.

We don't think it is **too** testing but you do have to think just a little...

It's all based on **counting**.

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

Lead: ♠ 4

Bidding.

An easy and obvious auction (for the opponents).

After North Passes as dealer, East opens 1NT and West raises that directly to 3NT.

These opponents are not interesting in hanging around to pick the daisies.

Play.

We have an easy opening lead of a low Spade – the ♠4 to be precise. Dummy displays a fair hand (10 points) with a useful *source of tricks* in Diamonds. North follows at trick one with the ♠J and East takes the Ace.

So... the first question – **where is the ♠Q?**

Clearly partner has it as East wouldn't take the Jack with the Ace had he started with the ♠A Q. This is why it is so important to play the *lower card from touching honors* in third seat, as North has done here. It allows partner an insight into the layout of the suit.

East has nowhere to go for nine tricks without Diamonds, so he plays one to the Jack at trick two. Declarer can see that he is wide open in Spades – all he can do is to look impassive and pray the defenders make a mess of the hand. Believe us – it happens!

North takes his ♦A (not that he has much choice in the matter), and naturally returns our suit. We do like dutiful, attentive partners here at VuBridge. It makes for a less stressful game.

Now, the correct card to play back from that Spade holding is the **Three**, and North does precisely that. The way to signal what you have in these positions is to lead back your higher card when you have two remaining, and to lead back the lowest card from three remaining.

This ♠3 is very informative – it tells us that East started life with just two Spades and that partner has four. Note that we know it can't be that East has four Spades (and North has two); we have already deduced that North has the ♠Q!

We take the ♠10 and have to be a little bit careful. Should we cash the ♠K next (at trick four) we'd **block** the suit. North would win the next round of Spades with nary a Spade to lead. Oops! Declarer's prayers would have been answered.

However – we are good **counters**. We have counted the Spade suit and know exactly what to do. To prevent the Spade suit from being tangled we play a low Spade at trick four and not the King. North takes the Queen (we knew he held that card!) and plays his last Spade. Naturally, we overtake it with the King and cash the last, baby Spade.

Declarer sulkily claims the rest, but he is still one down.

[Note. *North could have made your life easier here had he played back the ♠Q at trick three and not the Three. However, it is generally best to adhere to the agreed method. If we don't do that it is easy for partner to become confused and to miscount the hand. Here, North made a textbook play and should be applauded for it].*



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Y1 VBlue #14 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North

♠ 86
♥ K9842
♦ 973
♣ T97

West
♠ K953
♥ 63
♦ Q54
♣ KJ85



East
♠ A42
♥ A5
♦ AKJT2
♣ Q63

South

♠ QJT7
♥ QJT7
♦ 86
♣ A42

In bridge sometimes there are "routine" defensive plays.

Sometimes, though, you have to *read the runes* and break your routine.

To work out what is going on you need to apply some arithmetic skills – known as **counting** (!)

Well, that may appear meaningless at the moment – this deal will help explain it.

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

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

The bidding on this deal is quick and efficient. East, with a balanced 18-point hand, is too strong for a 1NT opening (showing 15-17 points). Therefore East's plan is to open his longest suit followed by a jump rebid in No-trumps.

So East here opens 1♦ and jumps to 2NT after a 1♠ response by West, indicating 18-19 points and a balanced hand (and denying four cards in Spades, of course). West, with 9 points, has an easy raise to 3NT and that's where the auction ends.

Play.

Now the problem turns in our direction. Generally we would tend to lead from our longest and strongest suit, but here, both of our (major) suits are of equal length and strength.

We should, of course, opt for Hearts. Since West has responded 1♠, we would hardly expect to find partner with length and strength in that suit. Therefore, our best hope is to lead a Heart (which happens to be an **unbid suit**).

On the ♥Q lead, partner follows with the ♥9 and declarer takes the trick with his Ace. Next comes a small Club from hand. So often it is right to play low in these circumstances and so often it is wrong to put Aces on small cards. Here, though, is an exception.

So, what are the clues that point us along the right path?

Well, the ♥9 from North is highly significant. An unnecessarily high card signals **encouragement**. What can North have to get excited about in Hearts?

[North cannot have a singleton Heart, by the way, as that would give East a six-card suit...]

So North must have deliberately selected a high Heart from amongst a selection of them. As North cannot have more than 3 points at best the rest of his hand must be old bus tickets.

That means there is a strong chance East has eight top tricks and is trying to sneak through a ninth.

With nothing else to play for we may as well take the ♣A and see how many Hearts we can cash. If North has only four (which is quite possible), then we couldn't break 3NT. Here, though, he has five and East must suffer defeat. Had we played low on the Club East would have made nine tricks and loud cackling noises.


East played the hand well, you should note. Had he run off his Diamonds first the winning defense would have been much more obvious.



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Eight General Hands. SA version. Updated spring 2015

Y1 VBlue #14 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ QJT32		
	♥ T7		
	♦ A4		
	♣ 7653		
West		East	
♠ K984		♠ 76	
♥ Q		♥ KJ632	
♦ JT982		♦ 753	
♣ T42		♣ A98	
	South		
	♠ A5		
	♥ A9854		
	♦ KQ6		
	♣ KQJ		

Handling entries is an important skill to acquire and we've come across this topic before.

Don't worry if you haven't fully mastered this technique yet – think of this deal as more practice.

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

Lead: ♦ J

Bidding.

With a fine hand we open our longest suit 1♥ and plan to make a jump rebid of 2NT to indicate 18-19 points. Here, partner responds 1♠ and raises 2NT to 3NT.

Play.

West leads the ♦J (presumably the top of a sequence) and care must be taken before proceeding.

There are just five top tricks (three Diamonds, one Heart and one Spade). With Spades needing to be established and accessed it is important to win the opening lead in the closed hand (with a mildly deceptive ♦K) to preserve the ♦A as a later entry to the table. Yes, this appears to ignore the *play high from shortage* "rule" but entries are a vital commodity and here we cannot afford to remove the ♦A prematurely.

The main source of extra tricks is Spades and these must be played by cashing the ♠A first and then a small one to the ♠Q J 10 on table. If the opponents do not part with the ♠K we can continue with another top Spade to drive it out. As it happens, West takes the King on the third round and continues Diamonds. With no other entries to dummy we cash the remaining Spades and pause for a recount.

We now can see eight winners (four Spades, one Heart, and three Diamonds) so, after the Spades have been run off, we must divert our attention to Clubs and set up a trick or two there. As the opponents do not switch to Hearts in time we even make an overtrick.


When on lead with the ♠K West would have done best to lead the ♥Q but this is desperately difficult for him (we bid Hearts, remember). Also, the power of our intermediate Hearts would prevent East-West from taking more than two tricks in the suit.



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Y1 VBlue #14 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ JT974	
	♥ A82	
	♦ AK	
	♣ AQ2	
West		East
♠ K63		♠ AQ5
♥ JT953		♥ 76
♦ Q84		♦ 9532
♣ 95		♣ JT84
	South	
	♠ 82	
	♥ KQ4	
	♦ JT76	
	♣ K763	

On this deal you have three options to choose from and only one will lead you to victory.

Choose wisely.

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

Lead: ♥ J

Bidding.

North opens the bidding with 1♠ and we respond 1NT to show 6-9 points. Partner raises to 2NT (showing around 17-18 points) and we advance to 3NT – an easy decision given that we have a maximum hand in context.

Play.

West leads the ♥J against 3NT and, as we count eight *top tricks*, (three Hearts, three Diamonds and two Clubs) we realise we only need to worry about establishing one more trick. But from where..?

The Spade suit is an option but it requires giving up the lead three times, which may take too long. The Club suit is also another option since, if the suit splits 3-3, our fourth Club would become a winner.

The third, and best, option is to establish our ninth trick from Diamonds. After unblocking the ♦A K, we would have ♦J 10 left in our hand. If we're able to come back to our hand and lead the ♦J to force out the Queen we'd establish the ♦10 as a winner.

Before embarking on this line of play we ought to make sure that we do not allow the opponents to take enough winners to defeat us. Here, if East-West collect the ♦Q, they'd only have three Spades to cash, so they would only have a total of four top tricks to take. This certainly would not harm our 3NT in any way.

So, we win the opening lead in dummy (preserving our ♥K Q as entries if needed), unblock the ♦A K, and cross to our hand with a Heart to lead the ♦J. West wins the ♦Q as we discard a Spade (or a Heart) from dummy. West can see the futility of leading Spades so he stoically continues with a third round of Hearts, won by our ♥Q.


The ♦10 presents itself to us as our ninth trick and, as a bonus, we even have the opportunity to test the Clubs to see if they break 3-3 for an overtrick. As it happens, Clubs split 4-2 here on this deal but, no matter, we make the magical number of nine tricks.



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Y1 VBlue #14 General Hands SA	Contract: 4H
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ A76		
	♥ 952		
	♦ AKQJ6		
	♣ A4		
West		East	
♠ KQT		♠ J9543	
♥ QJ74		♥	
♦ T9		♦ 753	
♣ KJ63		♣ QT952	
	South		
	♠ 82		
	♥ AKT863		
	♦ 842		
	♣ 87		

Sometimes a trivial-looking hand comes along before a nasty split throws a shower of cold water over you and wakes you up.

Can you recover here?

West	North	East	South
-	1♦	P	1♥
P	2NT	P	4♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ K

Bidding.

North opens 1♦ and jumps to 2NT over our 1♥ response. This leap shows a balanced hand of 18-19 points and it's up to us to place the final contract. With 7 points and a six-card suit we really ought to take a pot at game (we have 25-26 points between us and the long suit ought to be worth something extra) so we try 4♥.

Play.

West leads the ♠K against 4♥ and we see that we might make all thirteen tricks here. A 2-2 trump break (against the odds but not so unlikely) and we are home and dry (six Hearts, five Diamonds and two Aces). However...

The first thought that should come to mind (when we have stopped dreaming about what might have been) should be to identify our losers. A Spade loser and a potential Club loser are the first two and the number of Heart losers will depend on how the suit is splitting. The Diamond suit can provide us with extra winners to discard losers from our hand – so we appear to be well placed. Our Plan is simply to draw trumps and dump losers.

However, after we win the ♠A and play a Heart to our ♥A, we notice East's discard with some concern. A vile 4-0 trump break gives us two definite Heart losers. This puts greater emphasis on getting our Diamonds going to discard a Club loser from the closed hand. The important step now is that we must cease drawing trumps and work on our Diamonds immediately. (Well, we could cash a second top Heart if we wish – it makes little difference).

So we cash the Diamonds from the top. West ruffs the third round and cashes the ♠Q. He then shifts to a Club, which we must grab with the Ace and proceed to lead a fourth Diamond discarding a Club loser. Don't worry about West ruffing the Diamond – he is entitled to his two natural trump winners anyway. Ruffing one of our winners with a certain trump trick doesn't damage our prospects at all, and here we get the chance to dump a Club loser.

Can you see what would happen if we tried to play three rounds of trumps instead of working on our Diamonds? West, frustratingly, would then be in control of the hand. He would win the third Heart, cash his ♠Q and switch to a Club. We could, of course, take the ♣A but it would now be too late to play on Diamonds. West would ruff the third Diamond and sink our contract with the ♣K.



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Y1 VBlue #14 General Hands SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1♠
P	2♣	P	2NT
P	4♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♥ 5

Bidding.

Our 1♠ opening bid fetches a 2♣ response from partner, showing Clubs and promising at least 10 points. We rebid 2NT to show our minimum hand and partner raises that to the Spade game.

Play.

West leads the ♥5 against 4♠ and, after counting our four (maybe five) potential losers (one Spade, one Heart, two or three Diamonds), we have to decide whether it's right to draw trumps on this hand or to negotiate a Heart ruff in dummy.

Initially, playing for a Heart ruff on table looks harmless but a closer look at our Club suit suggests that there isn't any need for a Heart ruff – not to mention the possible risk of an over-ruff. Dummy's Club suit should provide us with five Club winners and these will easily take care of sufficient losers in our hand. At worst, we plan to lose one Spade and two Diamonds.

A **count of winners** puts us on the right lines. Essentially we can see four Spades, two Hearts and four (maybe five) Clubs. With sufficient winners it is usually the right play to *draw trumps*.

So we win the opening Heart lead (taking it in either hand is fine – we actually chose the ♥A) and draw trumps, beginning with the ♠K. As the ♠A does not appear immediately we continue leading trumps.

On this hand East wins his ♠A (on the third round of Spades) and shifts to a Diamond. We have to cover East's actual ♦8 – allowing him to retain the lead would be fatal. As the cards lie it doesn't matter which of the ♦J or ♦K we play; the opponents can claim only two Diamond tricks.

Once we get back on lead we are able to draw any remaining trumps and run the Clubs (remembering to unblock the ♣K first, of

North

♠ K72
♥ A4
♦ 762
♣ AQJ62

West

♠ 5
♥ J97532
♦ AQT4
♣ 98



East

♠ A983
♥ QT
♦ 983
♣ T543

South

♠ QJT64
♥ K86
♦ KJ5
♣ K7

The old, old question is, of course:

Should we draw trumps or should we not draw trumps?


course...)



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Y1 VBlue #14 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 7
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ AQ32	
	♥ QJ4	
	♦ 532	
	♣ Q65	
West		East
♠ 9864		♠ JT7
♥ A9762		♥ T3
♦ J		♦ AT7
♣ J94		♣ A8732
	South	
	♠ K5	
	♥ K85	
	♦ KQ9864	
	♣ KT	

Playing after your opponent can give you an edge at this game, especially when that opponent has a critical card.

This deal shows you what we mean.

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

Lead: ♥ 6

Bidding.

There is a somewhat creaky auction to game here.

We open 1♦ and follow with 2♦ to show a minimum hand with long Diamonds. North, who could bid try 2NT to show an invitational (and balanced) hand, not unreasonably chooses to raise to 3♦ showing an invitational hand with Diamond support.

With the South hand an acceptance of partner's invitation is clear. Having limited our hand with the 2♦ rebid to about 12-14 points we have a maximum in context. With stoppers in the unbid suits we should allow ourselves to be lured by the prospect of a game bonus.

However, it's the old story. 5♦ is asking for (or contracting for) too many tricks. If game is available on these minor-suit hands then it will be in 3NT. So that is what we should try.

Play.

West leads his fourth-best Heart (the ♥6) against 3NT and only three Spade tricks can be seen "on top". The Diamond suit is, no doubt, our main source of extras and will provide us with four or five tricks depending on how the suit is distributed.

Two tricks in Hearts are also there for the taking (once the ♥A is dislodged), as well as a slow trick in Clubs. All in all, we are surrounded by trick-taking potential but, because Diamonds offer us the best prospects, that's where we should start.

To establish five tricks from this Diamond suit, we must be careful in playing the suit in the right order. Plonking down the ♦K will not do a great job if the suit breaks 3-1. The best way to play the Diamonds is to actually take advantage of the order of position. That is, we should start off by leading a Diamond from dummy, intending to play an honour if East plays low. *Lead towards honors* is generally sound advice.

This gives us the advantage of playing after East; that is, East must make his decision of playing low or the Ace before we make our decision. As we can see with hindsight, he has no winning option on this deal. As East holds three Diamonds to the Ace, we need to lead a Diamond towards our hand twice (since East ducks his Ace on the first round, naturally enough).

Getting over to dummy's hand may be awkward as entries are scarce, so we should play the ♥Q from dummy at trick one. West's low Heart lead is quite likely to be away from the Ace so the ♥Q can be tried for a quick entry.

A low Diamond to our King follows and, as pesky East holds onto his ♦A, we cross back to dummy with a Spade (yes, a Spade) to lead another Diamond. Crossing over to dummy with a Spade may put our Spade suit in an awkward blocked position but we don't really need all of our three Spade tricks, do we?

Well, a quick count of our tricks suggests that we do not. Once our Diamonds are established, we'll have five Diamonds and two Spades. If the opponents are adamant about establishing their Heart suit then we will eventually collect two tricks from that suit as well.


If our arithmetic is correct, five plus two plus two totals nine tricks.



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Eight General Hands. SA version. Updated spring 2015

Y1 VBlue #14 General Hands SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 24/03/2016	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 8
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ KJ7	
	♥ K843	
	♦ A9	
	♣ A954	
West		East
♠ A43		♠ 52
♥ T65		♥ QJ72
♦ QJT83		♦ 642
♣ QT		♣ K863
	South	
	♠ QT986	
	♥ A9	
	♦ K75	
	♣ J72	

Another variation on an old theme...

Should we draw trumps, or should we not draw trumps?

How can you tell?

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

Lead: ♦ Q

Bidding.

The auction is nice and simple on this deal.

North opens 1NT (15 points and a 4·4·3·2 shape) and we have to respond. With a five-card Spade suit and 10 points (game-going values, in other words) we respond 3♠, which is forcing. North, with three-card support for Spades, raises to 4♠ and that's where the bidding ends.

Play.

West leads the ever-so-attractive ♦Q from that seductive sequence and the way that this hand should be handled should become quite evident after we count our winners and losers.

Our **loser** count indicator suggests four potential losers, that is, one Spade, one Diamond, and two Clubs. In terms of **winners** there are four Spades, two Hearts, two Diamonds and a Club.

So the arithmetic balances – nine winners and four losers. Good in a way but we need to secure ten tricks. How might we do that? The question that we always face when playing suit contracts is: **Should we draw trumps?**

With insufficient winners that is generally unwise. Best is to look for a ruff in the dummy (a ruff in the *short trump hand*). If we can find one then we will generate an extra winner whilst eliminating an undesirable loser.

Note that there is a Diamond shortage in dummy (and a Heart shortage in hand). Taking a Diamond ruff on table is good play to do but ruffing a Heart in the closed hand is just plain silly.

Ruffing in the *long trump hand* will not benefit us at all (since the Spades are all natural trump winners anyway). Therefore, it is always good to look to ruff in the short trump hand and here, dummy's doubleton Diamond is in the short trump hand.

So... the Plan. After winning the ♦A at trick one, we should simply play our ♦K next and ruff the

small Diamond. Once that Diamond loser is taken care of all that's left to do is to draw trumps (remembering to count them!) and claim our deserved ten tricks.

We make **five** Spades, two Hearts, two Diamonds and one Club.