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Eight General Hands. SA version. Updated spring 2015

Y1 VBlue #19 General Hands SA	Contract: 3S
Date: 24/01/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ K962		
	♥ 7		
	♦ A8643		
	♣ T96		
West		East	
♠ 85		♠ J3	
♥ KQ95		♥ AJT62	
♦ T7		♦ QJ92	
♣ K5432		♣ AQ	
	South		
	♠ AQT74		
	♥ 843		
	♦ K5		
	♣ J87		

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...

Here, on Hand 1, we start out with a typical competitive battle between the two sides, using major suits as weapons.

Who will come out on top? Well, it's usually the side with Spades...

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

Lead: ♥ K

Bidding.

East opens the bidding with 1♥ and we make an overcall of 1♠. Overcalls do not promise a hand with opening values and, especially at the one-level, it is often worth mentioning Spades while it is convenient to do so.

West supports his partner with 2♥ and North does the same with our Spades. East has nothing extra to mention and so he Passes, as do we, but West, holding four trumps and a side four-card suit, refuses to sell out and competes further with 3♥.

North, using similar reasoning out-competes the opponents with 3♠ and that's where the bidding eventually rests.

Play.

West leads the ♥K and this is overtaken by East's ♥A who then switches to the ♠A followed by the ♣Q. Any idea we may have that the opposition have kindly established the ♣J are rapidly crushed when East trumps the next Club.

However, despite losing the first four tricks, the hand is relatively easy to make as we simply just lose one Heart and three Clubs (our two other Hearts can be trumped in dummy, in the *short trump hand*).

We can actually afford to draw trumps should we wish. Alternatively, as here, we trump two Hearts in the dummy and draw trumps *en route*. Nine tricks come from **seven** Spades (that's five in hand and two ruffs on table) and two top Diamonds.

Our 10-point hand combined with partner's 7-point hand allows us to make nine tricks with far less than half the points in the pack, you may note.


Distribution favors the bold.



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VB#19 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 24/01/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ 76	
	♥ Q6	
	♦ KJ652	
	♣ QJ43	
West		East
♠ K5		♠ 32
♥ 9752		♥ KJT3
♦ QT987		♦ 43
♣ A9		♣ KT872
	South	
	♠ AQJT984	
	♥ A84	
	♦ A	
	♣ 65	

Planning the play at the start of the hand usually sets us on the right course.

However, things sometimes don't often go as expected and, when this happens, we must prepare to change tack.

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

Lead: ♦ T

Bidding.

We open 1♠ as South and face a rebid problem after North responds 1NT (6-9 points or thereabouts). 2♠ would be wet and 4♠ an overbid; the right shot is a jump rebid of 3♠, indicating invitational values (round about 15-17 points).

North (who could Pass with an unsuitable hand) raises to game. He has a maximum for his 6-9 range and so should accept the invitation. He should not think about bidding 3NT with doubleton Spade support and a dubious Heart holding.

Play.

West leads the ♦10 (the top of an interior sequence) against 4♠ and the contract appears to have five potential losers. Two sure losers in Clubs, two possible losers in Hearts, and maybe one in Spades (depending on where the ♠K is).

The Hearts can be easily handled by playing a low Heart towards dummy's ♥Q. Even if this should lose to East's King, a later Heart ruff can put us in dummy to reach the ♦K.

After winning the Diamond opening lead we do just that and, after East captures the ♥Q, he decides to shift to a trump. To finesse or not to finesse?

This trump switch, in a way, has made the contract much easier to play. As the opponents did not cash their Club tricks we can simply ignore the Spade finesse by going up with the ♠A, cashing the ♥A, taking a Heart ruff and cashing the ♦K for a Club discard.

Although this line of play gives up on the Spade finesse (which is the best play of the suit in isolation) this allows us to ensure a discard on the ♦K.

We lose a Spade, a Heart, and a Club, taking full advantage of the opponent's misdefense. Yes, East could have defeated us by switching

to a Club instead of a trump, but who says opponents play perfectly? Anyway, why is a Club lead an obvious defense?


When the opponents get a difficult defense wrong we must take full advantage and then sit back and listen with interest to the postmortem...



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Eight General Hands. SA version. Updated spring 2015

VB#19 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 3H
Date: 24/01/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ QT832	
	♥ 4	
	♦ 984	
	♣ KQ86	
West		East
♠ KJ54		♠ A7
♥ 96		♥ K32
♦ AT2		♦ KQJ53
♣ T753		♣ 942
	South	
	♠ 96	
	♥ AQJT875	
	♦ 76	
	♣ AJ	

That is often a key question when bidding – just how far are we willing to compete in the auction?

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

Lead: ♦ A

Bidding.

As South, we open the bidding with 1♥ (some might want to pre-empt with a seven-card suit but the hand is unsuitable for that action). North responds 1♠ with his five-card suit.

Thereafter, the auction gets competitive as East makes a highly dubious overcall in Diamonds and eventually we decide to take the push and out-compete East-West by bidding 3♥.

Play.

West leads the ♦A and it looks as though we have five losers; two Spades, one Heart (despite the Heart finesse working, we cannot pick up the ♥K), and two Diamonds.

However, defenders do not always play perfectly and, when the defence is sub-optimal, we must capitalise on it. As we can see, the right defence on this deal is to cash two Diamonds and switch to Spades. That way, the defence would take the first four tricks and they can sit back and wait to score the ♥K.

On this hand, East makes an error of playing a third round of Diamonds after taking the top two Diamonds. This allows us to ruff and, before drawing trumps, we must play three rounds of Clubs to discard a Spade loser from our hand.

How we play the Clubs on this hand is important – we should, of course, start with the ♣A followed by the ♣J and overtake it with dummy's ♣Q. If we do not overtake the lead would be in our hand and we'd have no way of crossing over to dummy to discard any losing Spade on the top Clubs.


After playing three rounds of Clubs discarding a Spade, we follow it up with a finesse in Hearts. It works, but the ♥K is protected by another small Heart so, in the end, we lose one Spade, one Heart, and two Diamonds.

It might have been easier to let East play in 3♦. That has no chance of making...



Eight General Hands. SA version. Updated spring 2015

VB#19 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/01/2016	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ A73	
	♥ 762	
	♦ T82	
	♣ 5432	
West		East
♠ T86		♠ J5
♥ AKJ5		♥ QT4
♦ K96		♦ AQJ74
♣ AQ7		♣ J86
	South	
	♠ KQ942	
	♥ 983	
	♦ 53	
	♣ KT9	

Following the right "rules" should make this hand relatively easy.

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

Lead: ♠ 3

Bidding.

Short and sweet for East West. West opens 1NT and East raises that to 3NT.

Play.

Against 3NT partner finds the killing opening lead of the ♠3. As this is a low card, we can be quite certain that it promises an honor – very probably the Ace of Spades.

[Although leading fourth-best from our longest and strongest is the normal rule for opening leads, our fantastic partner decides to ignore his pathetic ♠5 4 3 2 and goes fishing with a speculative Spade. Luckily for him (and for the partnership) he catches a big one. A Spade is certainly the killing lead here...]

Anyway, at trick one, we must remember to play the **Queen** of Spades and not the King (third hand high, sure, but the *lower of equals*). This way, when partner sees the Queen winning the trick, he can logically work out that we also hold the King. Had we played the ♠K partner would have assumed that we were denying the Queen and might have made the wrong defensive play. Not on this deal, to be sure, but there are many occasions where lack of precision in these cases can cause major misunderstandings.

Anyway, after winning the ♠Q at trick one we must take care to return a **low** Spade, and not the ♠K. As partner is marked with the ♠A we need to **unblock** the suit. Now we cash the first five Spades and live happily ever after.

Sometimes defenses such as this seem quite simple when looking at all four hands. In practice, though, defenders often tangle suits up through over-excitement at the table.


Adherence to the normal rules (such as third hand playing the lower of equals and returning the fourth-highest card or the higher of a doubleton) usually avoids error.



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Eight General Hands. SA version. Updated spring 2015

VB#19 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 2C
Date: 24/01/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North		
	♠ 7		
	♥ Q743		
	♦ K963		
	♣ QT85		
West		East	
♠ KJ		♠ Q9643	
♥ KT62		♥ A95	
♦ QJT8		♦ 742	
♣ 762		♣ A4	
	South		
	♠ AT852		
	♥ J8		
	♦ A5		
	♣ KJ93		

Timing is important on this deal.

Don't forget to take this into account when planning the play as declarer.

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

Lead: ♦ Q

Bidding.

After we open 1♠ and partner responds 1NT we can see from our minimum hand that game is off the menu. However, that doesn't mean we should Pass North's 1NT response – far from it.

A 2♣ rebid merely indicates secondary Clubs along with an unbalanced hand and so that's what we should try. Unbalanced hands (actually we are *semi-balanced*) generally play better in a suit contract, so a 2♣ rebid gives us the best chance of finding a useful fit.

North Passes 2♣ with alacrity and that ends the auction.

Play.

West leads the ♦Q and the sight of dummy's singleton Spade suggests that the best way of tackling this hand is via Spade ruffs on table.

So we win the opening lead in dummy (keeping the ♦A as a later entry back to the closed hand) and play the ♠A followed by a Spade ruff. A Diamond to the Ace is followed by a second Spade ruff.

If we're content with eight tricks this is the point where we can draw trumps and claim our eight tricks via the ♠A, two Spade ruffs, the ♦A K and three trump tricks.

However, since it is highly likely that West began with more than two Diamonds, we can sneak in a couple of overtricks by crossing back to our hand with Diamond ruffs in order to continue ruffing our Spade losers in dummy.

A careful, well-timed series of plays nets us ten tricks before East-West have a chance to do anything about it.


Perhaps the opponents should have led trumps...



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VB#19 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 24/01/2016	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North		
	♠ 64		
	♥ 952		
	♦ K764		
	♣ 9832		
West		East	
♠ 92		♠ KJ8	
♥ QT6		♥ AKJ8	
♦ AQJ98		♦ T32	
♣ QT4		♣ KJ7	
	South		
	♠ AQT753		
	♥ 743		
	♦ 5		
	♣ A65		

When things look bleak, don't give up.

Where there's life, there's hope.

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

Lead: ♠ 7

Bidding.

We overcall East's 1NT with 2♠ as we hold a fair hand and a good six-card suit.

This bid catches West unawares. Unsure of how he can ask his partner if the Spades are stopped, West jumps speculatively to 3NT, hoping that East had some values in Spades for his 1NT opening. East does have such values but, unfortunately for the opposition, it isn't enough.

Play.

We lead the ♠7 to begin our quest on setting up our suit. As the first trick goes ♠7 - ♠2 - ♠4 - ♠8, this can be read as both good news and bad news. It is always depressing to see declarer win our opening lead with a card that's lower than the ♠10 but it is actually an investment worth taking – provided that partner holds a second Spade and an entry.

Declarer, without nine tricks on top, has to hope that the Diamond finesse is right. Unfortunately, today is not his day and, after partner gains the lead with the ♦K, a Spade return through declarer's remaining ♠K J allows the defense to triumph.

We take five Spades, the ♦K and the ♣A for three down.

"No finesse ever works for me", wails East, plaintively.



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Eight General Hands. SA version. Updated spring 2015

VB#19 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 4H
Date: 24/01/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 7
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

North

♠ K53
♥ A987
♦ JT6
♣ A65

West
♠ QJT8
♥ J632
♦ 975
♣ QJ



East
♠ A96
♥
♦ K832
♣ T97432

South

♠ 742
♥ KQT54
♦ AQ4
♣ K8

On this deal there are a couple of problems that need solving.

Clear thinking is needed.

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

Lead: ♠ Q

Bidding.

A straightforward *invitational* sequence of 1♥ – 3♥ – 4♥.

Play.

West leads the ♠Q against 4♥.

This ♠Q opening lead reeks of bad news because it indicates that the ♠A is with East. It traps dummy's ♠K in an inescapable vise.

The reason why we know that the ♠A is with East is because underleading Aces against suit contracts is not done in the best circles. It is a lead for lunatics and geniuses only. Does West look like Albert Einstein? Is he wearing a straitjacket?

With three Spade losers off the top, our contract comes under pressure as we must start making assumptions and plays that would allow our contract to succeed.

Firstly, the Diamonds need to be picked up without loss. That needs a successful finesse against the ♦K, although that can wait. The first thing to do is to pull trumps.

When drawing trumps, the play of the ♥K guards against any foul breaks. The presence of the ♥10, 9 and ♥8 allows us to make this play without much concern since a 2-2 or a 3-1 break would not pose any problem.

However, if a 4-0 split occurs (as on this deal) the play of the ♥K allows us to take note of the opponent with the Heart void. Whoever that might be we could subsequently take the marked finesse against the player with the ♥J.

Here, East shows out, so we continue with the ♥Q and then a Heart to the ♥9, nullifying West's ♥J × × ×. The ♥A pulls the last trump and now it's all down to the Diamonds.


We finesse against the ♦K by running the ♦J and, when that proves to be successful, we claim our contract.

We make five Hearts, three Diamonds and the
♣A K. That's ten.



Eight General Hands. SA version. Updated spring 2015

VB#19 Y1 General Hands SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 24/01/2016	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 8
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ AQ5		
	♥ KJ98		
	♦ 983		
	♣ T98		
West		East	
♠ KT974		♠ J863	
♥ Q543		♥ 6	
♦ 5		♦ AJ764	
♣ AK3		♣ QJ5	
	South		
	♠ 2		
	♥ AT72		
	♦ KQT2		
	♣ 7642		

Diagnosing declarer's plan is one key skill to have as a defender.

Once we can figure out what declarer is up to we may be able to find a counterplay.

What's declarer's plan on this deal?

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

Lead: ♣ T

Bidding.

West opens 1♠ and East is full value for a raise to 3♠. Only 9 points? Yes, but a 5·4·3·1 shape makes the hand worth more than 2♠. Much more.

West, with a marginal decision, opts to try for the game bonus by bidding 4♠. Again, he is short of points but upgrades his 5·4·3·1 shape.

Play.

North, not wanting to open up the Heart suit, leads the ♠10 against 4♠.

Sitting as South we might ask ourselves what declarer's plan might be. The Diamond suit is not as threatening as it might appear to North (as we have it well held) but the Heart singleton is a worry.

If we had to guess declarer's plan we might predict that declarer was going to aim for Heart ruffs on table. If that is the Plan what can we do to put a spoke in the wheels? The usual counterplay is to lead trumps.

Declarer wins the opening lead with his ♣K and plays off the ♦A and ruffs a Diamond (he is hoping to take advantage of a lucky Diamond lie – maybe someone started with ♦K Q ×? Nope).

West now exits with a low Heart from his hand. Partner plays the ♥8 and this is where we must make the critical decision of overtaking with our ♥10 to switch to a trump. This important defense allows us to play Spades from our side, making it convenient for partner to play three rounds of trumps off the top with the ♠Q, ♠A, and a third trump.

If partner were left on lead he would be unable to lead Spades to advantage and declarer could have ruffed his Hearts away with impunity.

As it is, three rounds of trumps reduce dummy to rubble – with only one trump left on table there are insufficient trumps to take care of the losing Hearts.

Skilful play allows declarer to set up a long Diamond but that's for one off.