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Four deals to supplement David Bird's hands for VBlue, year 2. SA Version. Updated summer 2016.

Y2 VBlue #7 Four General Hands SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ K652		
	♥ 764		
	♦ KJ6		
	♣ A84		
West		East	
♠ Q7		♠ T8	
♥ QJT5		♥ 832	
♦ T843		♦ A52	
♣ Q93		♣ KT762	
	South		
	♠ AJ943		
	♥ AK9		
	♦ Q97		
	♣ J5		

This set of four deals concentrates on declarer play. The hands, though, are in two pairs, there being a link between Hands 1 & 2 and an link between Hands 3 & 4.

Whether that helps you find the winning play on each deal is not easy to say, however.

In this deal (Hand 1) the bidding is routine.

What about the play?

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

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

After two Passes we open 1♠ on a 5-3-3-2 hand with 15 points. Partner raises to 3♠ and, despite some misgivings, we go on to game.

A routine 1♠ – 3♠ – 4♠ auction.

Play.

West leads the ♥Q from his sequence and we pause for our mandatory **Count** and **Plan** routine.

Taking stock we see four or five Spades (depending on the break), two Hearts, two Diamonds and a Club, making nine or ten **winner**s. Looking at **losers** there may be a trump loser, there is a certain Heart loser, a sure Diamond loser and a certain Club loser. Thus, there are three certain losers and may be a fourth, in Spades.

The upshot of this counting winners and losers is that we realize that we cannot afford to lose a trump trick. The crux of the matter is that we have to play the trump suit for five winners (and no losers).

Winning the ♥K at trick one we may as well draw trumps immediately. To do this we cash the ♠K first (does the Queen fall singleton? Nope) and play a low Spade, hoping the ♠Q will appear on our right. If it did, we'd have the contract handed to us on a plate. When East follows with two low Spades we have to decide whether to finesse the ♠J or to play the ♠A, hoping to drop the ♠Q on our left.

Well, the odds are close here (closer than many players think), but the right play is to try the ♠A, hoping for a 2-2 break. At first sight this may appear to contradict the odds, which say that a 3-1 break is more likely than a 2-2 break. However, the odds change as the cards are played and here some of the originally possible distributions have been eliminated. For example, it is no longer possible that Spades are 4-0 nor that they are 3-1 with the singleton Queen.

Many players remember this play (trying to fell the Queen in two rounds) with the old adage ***eight ever, nine never***, which suggests that we should play for the drop with nine trumps missing the Queen but take the finesse when we have eight trumps missing the Queen. This aphorism does at least keep us on the right side of the odds.


So we play the Ace of trumps and are gratified when West reluctantly plays his Queen. After Her Majesty has been toppled the rest of the hand is easy – we just knock out the ♦A and claim our ten tricks (five Spades, two Hearts, two Diamonds and a Club).



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Y2 VBlue #7 Four General Hands SA	Contract: 45
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North		
	♠ K93		
	♥ T83		
	♦ K863		
	♣ A94		
West		East	
♠ Q82		♠ 5	
♥ 2		♥ KQJ7654	
♦ AJT75		♦ 42	
♣ QT53		♣ J87	
	South		
	♠ AJT764		
	♥ A9		
	♦ Q9		
	♣ K62		

You have a nice hand here but East is not out to make your life easy.

How might you cope with both bidding and play?

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

Lead: ♥ 2

Bidding.

East irritates us by opening 3♥ as dealer. Terrific (!)

Well, with a good six-card Spade suit and 14 points we just have to step into the unknown here and try 3♠. If partner has peanuts (and West is lurking with a powerhouse) we are about to suffer a penalty. On the other hand, if North has something decent we may make a game. Passing 3♥ is for wimps.

As it is, West Passes and partner raises us to 4♠.

Play.

West leads the (revealing) ♥2 and we contemplate a fair dummy.

Hearts are clearly 7-1; the bidding suggested that and the opening lead can only be a singleton. A count of *winner*s and *loser*s shows us that we must lose a Heart, a Diamond and a slow Club. So we have to avoid a trump loser.

There is very little chance that we could establish a Diamond as a dumping ground for a loser; the crux of this hand is how to play Spades to best advantage.

Taken in isolation, the correct (as in mathematically best) play in Spades is to cash the ♠K and play a Spade to the Ace, as in the previous deal. However, can that be right here?

West is known to have a single Heart (and East has seven of the beasts). Is it *likely* that West has just two Spades and ten minor-suit cards?

Whenever one opponent is clearly very short in one suit it is wise to play him for length in another suit. The best odds on this hand are obtained by finessing Spades through West. Sure, this play won't always work, but that's not the point. We are simply looking for the best odds.

With that in mind we cash the ♠A first, just in case the ♠Q falls, and then play a Spade

towards the King. When West follows low we insert the Nine and are gratified when East throws off a Heart.


At this point the hand is assured. We have six trumps, one Heart, one Diamond and two Clubs for certainties. Messing about for an overtrick proves fruitless and we are satisfied with ten tricks.



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Four deals to supplement David Bird's hands for VBlue, year 2. SA Version. Updated summer 2016.

Y2 VBlue #7 Four General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North		
	♠ J85		
	♥ 42		
	♦ KJ832		
	♣ KQ6		
West		East	
♠ K2		♠ Q964	
♥ KQT97		♥ 863	
♦ 4		♦ A975	
♣ T9832		♣ 54	
	South		
	♠ AT73		
	♥ AJ5		
	♦ QT6		
	♣ AJ7		

Here the bidding is over swiftly.

The play may take more time – and we warn you that the critical play comes early in the piece.

Can you bring home your contract here?

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

Lead: ♥ K

Bidding.

As dealer, we open 1NT with our balanced 16 points. North, with 10 points and a five-card Diamond suit, raises immediately to 3NT.

A routine 1NT – 3NT auction.

Play.

West leads the ♥K (the textbook lead from a near sequence of ♥K Q 10) and we take time out to **Count** our top tricks and make a **Plan**.

There are nine easy tricks (assuming Diamonds aren't 5-0, that is) via one Spade, one Heart, four Diamonds and three Clubs. So this looks to be the most mundane of contracts – right? Well, not quite – what do we do at trick one?

It's a simple case of duck or die – should we take the ♥K with the ♥A we'd suffer defeat as East would get in with the ♦A and would fire a Heart through our remaining ♥J 5, allowing West to score four Heart tricks. Ouch!

This exact position (holding the ♥A J × when the ♥K is led on our left) is common and well-known. The right play, of ducking the ♥K, is so well-known that it was given a special name a couple of centuries ago in the days of whist (yes, it really is that old!) The play is known as the **Bath Coup** as it was so dubbed in the whist houses in the English city of Bath. In those days of yore it was seen as a clever and daring play.

In bridge this play is more mundane. Playing low at trick one places the defenders on the horns of a dilemma. If – in this deal – West continues Hearts he'd present us with a cheap trick in the form of the Jack. If he abandons Hearts and shifts to another suit then we'd retain our all-important Heart stopper. Heads we win, tails they lose. On this deal, West leads a Club at trick two, although nothing is any better.


After West's futile Club shift we take the King, knock out the ♦A and make nine tricks with ease. In fact, just to dot *is* and cross *ts*, we make one Spade, one Heart, four Diamonds

and three Clubs. 3NT bid and made.



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Y2 VBlue #7 Four General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ J83	
	♥ J42	
	♦ KJ83	
	♣ KQ9	
West		East
♠ KQ6		♠ T542
♥ KQT97		♥ 63
♦ 754		♦ A9
♣ T2		♣ 86543
	South	
	♠ A97	
	♥ A85	
	♦ QT62	
	♣ AJ7	

Here you have a similar hand to Hand 3. Surprise, surprise, the bidding and opening lead may ring some bells too.

What, though, about your card-play? Is that the same?

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

Lead: ♥ K

Bidding.

After three Passes we open 1NT with our balanced 15 points. North, holding a balanced 11 points, has an easy raise to game.

A invitational sequence of 1NT – 2NT – 3NT.

Play.

West leads the ♥K (the normal lead from a holding of ♥K Q 10) and we pause a while to Count our top tricks and make a Plan.

Our count shows see three slow Diamonds (after the ♦A has been knocked out), three solid Clubs and two Aces, so that's eight tricks. Is this a deal on which we should employ the Bath Coup by ducking the ♥K at trick one? After all, if West were to continue Hearts the ♥J would score in the dummy.

The answer to this question is a resounding NO! The opening lead has been unfortunate for the defense – the ♥J has been set up as a sure trick for us provided that we don't duck the opening lead. Also, if we duck the Heart lead, a Spade shift might prove embarrassing to our cause on other layouts of the suit.

So... we grab the ♥A immediately and set about Diamonds – driving out the ♦A. East, with little else to do, returns a Heart, setting up his partner's suit. Well, this defense does indeed establish West's long Hearts as winners, but it also sets up our ninth trick (one Spade, two Hearts, three Diamonds and three Clubs).

We are happy to take these tricks and concede the rest to the enemy.