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Eight deals for VBlue, year 2. Although a "general series" there is a theme running through - that of how to play suit combinations at trick one. SA Version. Updated winter 2015/6.

Y2 VBlue #10 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ AQ5	
	♥ 742	
	♦ KJ95	
	♣ 853	
West		East
♠ J9732		♠ K8
♥ QT6		♥ J953
♦ 7		♦ A862
♣ QT62		♣ J94
	South	
	♠ T64	
	♥ AK8	
	♦ QT43	
	♣ AK7	

This series of eight deals is our **General Series of eight hands**, usually a random mixture of deals. This time, though, there is a theme to them – and it is to do with "first trick crisis".

We won't explain further, we will just ask you to put your thinking caps on

In all these deals you are declarer, playing in 3NT. Just how are you going to play the hand?

Hand 1 sets the scene. The bidding is routine.

What about the play?

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

Lead: ♠ 3

Bidding.

After two Passes we have an easy opening bid of 1NT (16 points, 4-3-3-3 shape).

Partner has an equally easy raise to 3NT.

Simple bidding. (And a theme for this set of eight deals).

Play.

West leads a low Spade (the Three) from his five-card suit and we pause to eye up the dummy and to arrange a **Count** and **Plan**. We can't immediately divine the Spade position, of course, our task being to play the suit to best advantage within the context of the hand.

Our essential count of tricks shows there to be five on top (one Spade, two Hearts and two Clubs) with three Diamonds waiting in the wings after we have knocked out the ♦A. So, if we were to make two Spade tricks then 3NT would be easy.

What is the correct play at trick one? Put in the ♠Q? After all, following this opening Spade lead, West is strong favorite to hold the ♠K.

The answer is that we should hold fire by running the lead to the ♠10, just to see what happens. If East were to win the ♠J we'd still have the chance of playing a Spade to the ♠Q later in the piece. So playing low from dummy gives us a 75% chance – if West has either honor we will succeed in making our contract. In fact, 75% is underplaying our chances – surely West has one of the missing Spade honors to lead the ♠3? So we are almost certain to make 3NT by running the Spade to our ♠10.


As the cards lie we have an armchair ride – East takes his ♠K at trick one, playing it on dummy's ♠5, and we have little to do but knock out the ♦A for nine easy tricks.



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Y2 VBlue #10 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ AQ5	
	♥ 742	
	♦ KJ95	
	♣ 853	
West		East
♠ K9732		♠ J8
♥ KJ6		♥ AT985
♦ T		♦ 873
♣ QT62		♣ J94
	South	
	♠ T64	
	♥ Q3	
	♦ AQ642	
	♣ AK7	

This hand has similarities - and differences - with Hand 1.

What should you do here?

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

Lead: ♠ 3

Bidding.

After East Passes we have an easy opening bid of 1NT (15 points, 5-3-3-2 shape).

Partner raises immediately to 3NT.

Play.

West leads the ♠3 and dummy appears – with strange similarities to the dummy of Hand 1. Thanking partner courteously we embark on our **Count and Plan**.

Here (in terms of easy winners) we can see one Spade, five Diamonds and two Clubs, making a total of eight *top tricks*. Where's the ninth? Well, a second Spade trick would be nice and that surely must be achievable. Should we run the Spade round to the ♠10 (in similar vein to Hand 1)?

Well, the difference between this deal and the last is that we are wide open in Hearts. Should East win trick one he would undoubtedly shift to that suit and we'd lose the next four or five tricks (five on this layout). However, we do need two Spade tricks so we have to take some risk.

Best play is to insert the ♠Q at trick one, playing West for the ♠K. This isn't a bad shot, given that West has led from a long suit. We need to balance the need for two Spade tricks with the danger of allowing East on lead.

On this deal we simply cannot afford the luxury of running the Spade lead to the ♠10. The way the cards lie on this deal there is little doubt that East would play the ♠J and switch his attention to Hearts. And that would be two down instead of making.


The message of this hand is that suit combinations (Spades in this case) need to be handled ***in context of the overall hand***.



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Y2 VBlue #10 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North		
	♠ AQ5		
	♥ 742		
	♦ KJ95		
	♣ 853		
West		East	
♠ J9732		♠ K8	
♥ T96		♥ AKQ85	
♦ T		♦ 873	
♣ JT62		♣ 974	
	South		
	♠ T64		
	♥ J3		
	♦ AQ642		
	♣ AKQ		

You may think that dummy on this deal is starting to look a little familiar.

However, does that mean you should handle it in the same way as before?

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

Lead: ♠ 3

Bidding.

As dealer we have an easy opening bid of 1NT (16 points, 5-3-3-2 shape).

Partner raises us to 3NT without delay.

Play.

Once again West leads a Spade (is he always going to lead those?) and we contemplate dummy, an increasingly familiar hand. Weird, eh?

We pause before calling for a card as we **Count** and **Plan**, calculating how to make the hand. In passing, we may note the benefits of our rapid auction – a Heart lead defeats 3NT but East can hardly bid them at the four-level after 1NT – 3NT

Well, counting tricks is an essential ritual. Here it tells us that we have one Spade, five Diamonds and three Clubs without effort. That totals nine – so our contract is available in top tricks. When this rare state of affairs manifests itself we should just take what's on offer. Grab the goodies and get on with the next deal.

Were you tempted to play the Spades differently in an attempt to make an overtrick? If so, we would have suffered an embarrassing two-trick defeat. Had we played low from the table at trick one (or tried the ♠Q as a finesse) East would have grabbed the ♠K and rattled off his Hearts. Oops!

We should never succumb to temptation when all we could gain is an overtrick.

"Oh partner!", wails East, plaintively, "couldn't you have led a Heart?"



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Y2 VBlue #10 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

North

♠ AQ5
♥ 742
♦ KJ95
♣ 853

West
♠ J9732
♥ A65
♦ 8
♣ QJ96



East
♠ KT6
♥ T93
♦ Q7642
♣ T2

South

♠ 84
♥ KQJ8
♦ AT3
♣ AK74

Again, you may recognize partner's hand when it appears.

How do you play, though?

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

Lead: ♠ 3

Bidding.

After three Passes we have a routine opening bid of 1NT (17 points, 4-4-3-2 shape).

Partner raises us to 3NT without delay.

Play.

Just for a change (!) West leads a low Spade and exactly the same dummy appears on the table. Weird! Are you getting that strange feeling of *déjà vu*?

Anyway, it's time to **Count** tricks and make a **Plan**. What's the best line of play on this one?

This is an altogether trickier hand than the three previous deals. First, let's count our tricks. We have one Spade, no top Heart (but two slow ones after the ♥A has gone), two top Diamonds and two top Clubs. So we have just five *top tricks* with possibilities for developing extras in Spades, Hearts and Diamonds.

The first point is what to play at trick one. Well, the answer is **not** to put up the ♠A nor to prematurely finesse the ♠Q. We should play low, forcing East to take the trick.

On some days a naïve East would fly in with the ♠K, solving many of our problems, but not here. Instead East takes his ♠10 and is now on lead. A Spade return is hopeless for him so he has to find a switch. A Club is best but with only ♣10 × he prefers the near sequence holding of ♥10 9 × – and who could blame him?

This is all the help we need. We cover that, forcing the ♥A (and this way we now have two Heart tricks set up. That makes seven top tricks). West takes his ♥A and continues Spades. We try the finesse now and East takes his ♠K to return a Spade.

We may as well try Diamonds at this point but we are well aware that West has two winning Spades. With that in mind we take the two-way finesse into the safe hand – East. Irritatingly, East has the ♦Q but West's discard of a Heart suggests that suit will break. Sure enough, the

innocent ♥9 continuation from our right gives us the nine tricks we need.


We might have survived playing the ♠A at trick one (although we have a minefield to negotiate thereafter) but we would certainly have gone off had we tried the ♠Q. East would have taken the ♠K and returned the suit and West would have set up four Spades and the ♥A before we got going.

Playing low at trick one gives us the all-important *tempo*.



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Y2 VBlue #10 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ AQ5	
	♥ 742	
	♦ KJ95	
	♣ 853	
West		East
♠ JT964		♠ K82
♥ KJ5		♥ T986
♦ 3		♦ A72
♣ JT62		♣ 974
	South	
	♠ 73	
	♥ AQ3	
	♦ QT864	
	♣ AKQ	

What's the percentage shot here?

Should you go for the 50-50 choice now or later?

Why?

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

Lead: ♠ J

Bidding.

After two Passes we have an obvious opening bid of 1NT (17 points, 5-3-3-2 shape).

Partner has an equally obvious raise to 3NT.

Play.

West leads the ♠J and it is with a sense of foreboding that we await the dummy. Sure enough it's the same as the previous four deals. Welcome to the Twilight Zone.

Our essential **Count** of tricks shows there to be just five *on top* (one Spade, one Heart and three Clubs), with four slow Diamond tricks easy to make once the ♦A has been driven from its hidey-hole. So – what is the best line of play?

What should we do at trick one? We strongly suspect from this opening lead that the ♠K is offside (It's not exactly unheard-of for someone to lead the ♠J from ♠K J 10 × but it's rarer than from ♠J 10 9 ×). Ducking is no answer – West would just plug away in Spades.

If we try the ♠Q we'd be in the dark-and-smelly if East were to take the ♠K and either return the suit or shift to a Heart. If he cleared the Spades and West had the ♦A we'd be in a mess. If East had the ♦A and West the ♥K a Heart shift would be very unwelcome.

The best play (not one guaranteed to make the contract but the best play nonetheless) is to play the ♠A immediately. Now we go for Diamonds, knocking out the Ace, and we have to see what's what. On this lie of the cards everything is hunky-dory. East takes the ♦A and can do nothing damaging.

We gobble up the ♥10 switch (finessing, would have been poor play – it's all down to **counting winners**) and run for home at high speed.

Suppose West had been dealt the ♦A, had won a trick with it and had persisted with the ♠10. Now we'd have had a nasty guess. It could be right to try the ♠Q (had West had the ♠K) or it could be right to play the ♠5 (if Spades were


laid out as in the actual deal). Luckily we weren't put to that guess!



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Y2 VBlue #10 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North		
	♠ J5		
	♥ K42		
	♦ KJ95		
	♣ K853		
West		East	
♠ AQT32		♠ 976	
♥ T863		♥ J97	
♦ 83		♦ Q74	
♣ 62		♣ QJT9	
	South		
	♠ K84		
	♥ AQ5		
	♦ AT62		
	♣ A74		

A different dummy. (At last!)

What's the best line of play?

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

Lead: ♠ 3

Bidding.

After East Passes we have an easy opening bid of 1NT (17 points, 4-3-3-3 shape).

Partner raises immediately to 3NT.

Play.

West still leads a low Spade and partner finally puts down a different dummy. Hurrah!

It's time to take a few moments to **Count** and **Plan**.

Our count reveals that we have eight certain tricks (to wit: one Spade after this opening lead, three Hearts, two Diamonds and two Clubs). Where's the ninth? And how should we play the Spades?

Well, the Diamonds are laid out in the classical manner of a two-way finesse. We could play either East or West for the ♦Q and finesse against that player. In short, it's a straight 50-50 guess.

What about the opening lead – does that give us any help? Well, there is **no cost** in trying the ♠J. 75% of the time East will put the ♠Q or the ♠A on that and make the play redundant but here West has led from the ♠A Q so the ♠J holds.

This now makes 3NT secure. The ♠K is protected should West lead the suit – West is the **safe hand** (and East is the **danger hand**).


Accordingly, we must take the Diamond finesse in such a way that East cannot gain the lead. This means cashing the ♦K first (you never know, the Queen might fall) and then running the ♦J. As the cards actually lie that wins the trick but 3NT would have been secure had West been able to take the ♦Q. That player could not have attacked Spades again and we would have still had nine available tricks. As it is, we make ten.

Overtricks are always welcome.



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Y2 VBlue #10 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 7
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ J5	
	♥ K42	
	♦ KJ95	
	♣ Q853	
West		East
♠ KT632		♠ A97
♥ T83		♥ J976
♦ Q83		♦ T7
♣ 62		♣ KJT9
	South	
	♠ Q84	
	♥ AQ5	
	♦ A642	
	♣ A74	

What should you do here?

Does this deal have echoes of Hand 6?

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

Lead: ♠ 3

Bidding.

As dealer we have an easy opening bid of 1NT (16 points, 4-3-3-3 shape).

Partner raises us to 3NT without delay.

Play.

West leads a low Spade (does he have another suit in his hand?) and partner displays a similar dummy to Hand 6. Umm... time once again to **Count and Plan**.

Our Count reveals that we have six top tricks (discounting Spades) in the guise of three Hearts, two Diamonds and a Club. Where are the three *extras* coming from?

The Diamonds might come in for four tricks – we'd have to hope for a bit of luck here, though – and what about the Spades? What should we play at trick one? Is it right to try the ♠J from dummy?

In reverse order – certainly not! As declarer we have a certain Spade trick by playing small from dummy at trick one. The play of the ♠J could only jeopardize that – should we play high from the table we might lose the first five Spade tricks. Study the layout here – playing the ♠J is fatal to our side. In Hand 6 the play of the ♠J costs us nothing. Here, it gains us nothing. An interesting and instructive contrast.

East takes the ♠A at trick one and dutifully returns one (the ♠9). To maintain communications with his partner West astutely ducks that to the ♠J on the table, while following suit with the ♠2. We realize from the opponents' carding that Spades are 5-3 and that allowing either of them on lead would be fatal.

Any attempt to make tricks in Clubs would be futile – if we play up to the ♣Q we'd go down even if West held the ♣K.

The only chance is to rely on four Diamond tricks. The best play in the suit is the finesse-and-break, that is: play for West to have started with ♦Q × × or ♦Q ×. It's not a great chance but

it's the best one we have – significantly better than cashing the ♦A K and hoping the ♦Q falls.

So we play the ♦A and play a Diamond to the ♦J (we are allowed to cross our fingers as we do so). Today is our lucky day. West has the hoped-for combination and we have our four Diamond tricks.


That's enough for game so we run for home.



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Y2 VBlue #10 Eight General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 8
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ Q6		
	♥ JT		
	♦ J85		
	♣ KQT653		
West		East	
♠ AK952		♠ J74	
♥ 97653		♥ 842	
♦ 4		♦ K762	
♣ 72		♣ AJ9	
	South		
	♠ T83		
	♥ AKQ		
	♦ AQT93		
	♣ 84		

Partner is very proud of his dummy here.

It's just what you wanted to see – right?

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

Lead: ♠ 5

Bidding.

After three Passes we open 1NT (15 points, 5-3-3-2 shape).

Partner raises us to 3NT without delay.

Play.

West leads the ♠5 and partner's hand is something of a nightmare. There is nothing wrong – in theory – with raising 1NT to 3NT with that North hand but North's touching faith in the playing strength of his Club suit is not matched by the cards in our hand. *That's the way the cookie crumbles.*

As well as having no Club fit we don't appear to have a Spade stop either – so at first glance it seems as though East-West will simply cash the first four or five Spades and follow that with the ♠A. However, we mustn't give up hope – if it breathes it isn't a corpse.

The first point is that we have no choice but to make the desperation play of the ♠Q at trick one. It may be unlikely that West has underled the ♠A K but it's not impossible either. There is no other holding where we might make a Spade trick (it's futile to play small from table, as we would have done had dummy had ♠Q × × rather than ♠Q ×).

To our surprise and joy the ♠Q holds. West *has* led from ♠A K × × ×. Now we need to turn our attention to Diamonds where five tricks would allow us to land this unlikely game. Yes, we need the Diamond finesse to be working but we shouldn't be careless. If we were to lead the ♦J from table we'd have to remember to throw the ♦9 under that so that we could run the ♦8 next.

Slightly more elegant is to lead the ♦8 and run it on the first round. When that holds the trick we are conveniently placed to run the ♦J, revealing the 4-1 Diamond split. These machinations leave we still where we need to be – in the dummy – to take the third Diamond finesse.

After playing a Diamond to the ♦10 we can claim the necessary nine tricks (one Spade,

three Hearts and five Diamonds) and can graciously concede the remainder.

Note that leading the ♦J on the first round and then playing a Diamond to the ♦9 would put us in the wrong hand and the wrong time. Oops. One down.

Note also that the defenders cannot beat 3NT on this layout of the cards. Even if West starts off with the ♠A K the suit would become blocked and the defense could not run five tricks there. We could always force an entry to the ♣K Q and take the Diamond finesse anyway.

Lucky? You bet!