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This is a set of four hands designed to complement David Bird's set of six deals for VB#15; ACOL version

VB#15 Y2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ A7	
	♥ J94	
	♦ Q62	
	♣ K8653	
West		East
♠ JT952		♠ K83
♥ 72		♥ T8653
♦ AKT3		♦ 74
♣ J7		♣ QT9
	South	
	♠ Q64	
	♥ AKQ	
	♦ J985	
	♣ A42	

**This set of four deals has you playing as declarer. The hands may all look similar but they contain subtle differences.**

In Hand 1, where are your tricks coming from?

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

Lead: ♠ J

After bidding 1♦ – 2♣ – 2NT – 3NT West starts off with the ♠J lead and you settle down to contemplate your chances.

You can count six top tricks easily enough (to wit: one Spade, three Hearts and two Clubs) and it is clear that this lead into your **split Spade tenace** will provide you with a second Spade trick some time or other.

Naturally enough, you play a low Spade from the table and see what happens. East has the ♠K, so he wins the first trick and knocks out the ♠A at trick two. You now have seven top tricks and need two more. As usual in these No-trump deals, the source of extra tricks may be found in your long suit – Clubs in this case.

With that in mind you should be able to see that you can make four Club tricks if (and only if) the suit breaks favourably for you. A 3-2 break will bring home the bacon but a 4-1 split will upset the applecart (splendid mixed metaphor!)

Right – we need to get started on Clubs so we play a Club to the ♠A and lead another Club. This second round we must duck – playing the ♠K and another Club would be committing *hara kiri*. How would you ever reach the dummy to cash the long Clubs if you played off the ♠K at this stage?

As the cards lie the 3-2 break is everything that we need for success. East takes the ♠Q at trick four to play another Spade but we are home and dry. We can take four Clubs, three Hearts and two Spades for nine in all.

Note, in passing, that we could have succeeded on this hand by ducking the *first* round of Clubs instead of the second. That play would have worked just as well as the line of taking the ♠A and ducking the second Club.






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VB#15 Y2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ A7	
	♥ Q94	
	♦ Q62	
	♣ KT653	
West		East
♠ JT952		♠ K83
♥ 72		♥ T8653
♦ A3		♦ KT74
♣ QJ87		♣ 9
	South	
	♠ Q64	
	♥ AKJ	
	♦ J985	
	♣ A42	

In this deal you have to think of what difference a slight alteration in a few cards makes to your line of play (if any).

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

Lead: ♠ J

This is Hand 1 all over again with just a slight tweak to the North-South cards.

After a repeat performance in the auction (a bidding sequence of 1♦ – 2♣ – 2NT – 3NT ) West kicks off with the ♠J lead and you thank partner sincerely before thinking about your prospects.

You can count six top tricks easily enough (to wit: one Spade, three Hearts and two Clubs) and this Spade lead into your **split tenace** will provide you with a second Spade trick.

Obviously, you play a low Spade from the table and see what happens. East wins his ♠K and shoots down the ♠A at trick two. You now have seven top tricks and need two more. As before – and as is normal in No-trump hands – the source of extra tricks can be found in your long suit, Clubs. The provision of the ♣10, however, makes it possible to cope with some 4-1 breaks as well as all the 3-2 splits.

On Hand 1 we could duck either the first round of Clubs or the second. Since we had no Club intermediate cards at all we had to hope that the suit was 3-2 and consequently we could lose one immediately or on the second round.

Here, though, we can cope with West having four Clubs but to do that we have to cash the ♣A first. Ducking the first round of Clubs would lead to defeat. Having cashed the ♣A we lead a Club up to the ♣K 10 on the table and see what West does. If he shows out (and East started with four Clubs) we are doomed. 3NT will fail and all we can do is grin and bear the pain. *C'est la vie.*

When West follows, though, we have them. On the ♣8 we play the ♣10 **knowing** that we are going to make four Club tricks. Be sure you can see this. If the ♣10 loses to East then Clubs must be breaking 3-2 and the ♣K will bring down the last Club and will establish the long Clubs as winners.

If the suit breaks 4-1 (as it does) then the ♣10 wins the trick and we continue on our merry way. The ♣K and a low Club sets up the last

Club on table. This way we lose one Club trick only and make four of them.


Now, you may be asking the question "*What if West splits his honours?*" That is, on the second round of Clubs what if West plays the ♣J (or ♣Q) instead of the ♣8? Well, we have two counters to that.

We could take the ♣K and – having noted the 4-1 split – return to a top Heart before playing a Club up towards the ♣10 6 5. That sets up four Club tricks nicely. Alternatively (and with greater elegance) we could **duck** the ♣J. Now we have the ♣K 10 6 poised over the ♣Q 8 as a *marked finesse* to be taken at our convenience. This way also brings home four Club tricks and the contract.



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VB#15 Y2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: E / W

	North		
	♠ A7		
	♥ Q94		
	♦ Q62		
	♣ K9653		
West		East	
♠ JT952		♠ K83	
♥ 72		♥ T8653	
♦ A3		♦ KT74	
♣ QJ87		♣ T	
	South		
	♠ Q64		
	♥ AKJ		
	♦ J985		
	♣ A42		

Hand 3 continues the theme of Hands 1 and 2.

However, your *source of tricks* is weaker here. What can you do?

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

Lead: ♠ J

This is Hand 2 all over again with just the barest alteration to the North-South cards.

After another simple sequence of 1♦ – 2♣ – 2NT – 3NT West puts the ♠J lead on the table and you thank partner before thinking about your chances.

Once more you can count six top tricks (one Spade, three Hearts and two Clubs) and this Spade lead into your **split tenace** will provide you with a second Spade trick.

You play a low Spade from the table and see what happens. East takes his ♠K and dutifully plays a Spade back at trick two, removing dummy's ♠A. You now have seven top tricks and need two more.

As before the source of extra tricks can be found in your long suit, Clubs. With no ♣10, though, it looks as though you may have to rely on a 3-2 Club break.

Well, hold that thought. There are a few 4-1 breaks that can be handled. If East has four Clubs (any four Clubs) you have no chance but what if West has them? ♣Q J 10 × you cannot deal with but you can cope if East has the singleton ♣Q, ♣J or ♣10.

On Hand 1 we could duck either the first round of Clubs or the second. With no intermediate cards at all we had to hope that the suit was 3-2. Here, though, we can cope with West having four Clubs and East having a singleton honour but to do that we have to cash the ♣A first. Ducking the first round of Clubs would lead to defeat.

When we play a low Club off the table East plays the ♣10 so now we have a deal almost identical to Hand 2. There is no percentage in ducking that – we must take the ♣A and lead a Club up to the ♣K 9 on the table to see what West does. If he shows out (and East started with four Clubs) we are doomed. 3NT will fail and all we can do concede defeat. Live with it.

When West follows, though, we have guaranteed success. On the ♣8 we play the ♣9

knowing that we are going to make four Club tricks. If the ♣9 loses to East then Clubs must be breaking 3-2 and the ♣K will bring down the last Club and will establish the long Clubs as masters.


If the suit breaks 4-1 (as it does here) then the ♣9 holds and we continue smoothly to success. The ♣K and a low Club sets up the long Club on table. This way we lose only one Club trick and make four of them.

West has no effective defence to this play. If he splits his honours on the second round of Clubs we can duck that and take the finesse of the ♣9 later in the hand. West does best to play small with nonchalance and hope that we take our eye off the ball, either by ducking the ♣8 completely or by playing a ham-fisted ♣K. That wouldn't be you, though, now would it?



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VB#15 Y2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 4
<a href="#">Play this hand online!</a>	Vulnerable: All

	North	
	♠ A8	
	♥ J83	
	♦ K4	
	♣ AT7632	
West		East
♠ Q972		♠ JT53
♥ Q97		♥ T64
♦ QT		♦ A8632
♣ Q985		♣ J
	South	
	♠ K64	
	♥ AK52	
	♦ J975	
	♣ K4	

Hand 4 is slightly different from the previous three.

Are you about to be very lucky?

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

Lead: ♠ 2

This deal differs from the other in many respects although it has echoes of Hands 1, 2 and 3.

After a rapid bidding sequence of 1NT – 3NT West leads a low Spade and you thank North profusely before **Counting** and **Planning**. This time you can count six top tricks (two Spades, two Hearts and two Clubs) with no extra trick being provided by the opening lead.

Note in passing that West chose to lead a Spade rather than a Club even though the latter suit is (marginally) stronger. Why did he do that? Well, this deal may provide the answer. Although dummy cannot be accurately predicted after 1NT – 3NT it is almost inconceivable that it will be displayed with a long major suit. However, a long minor suit is often concealed in the auction (as here). For that reason many players follow the precept of “*When in doubt, lead a major*”. This deal demonstrates the sagacity of that hoary advice.

Back to the plot. Your plan must involve developing the Clubs and you have to retain entries to the table to reach them. With that in mind it is important to take the ♠K at trick one and not waste the ♠A. Now you must cash the ♣K (playing *the high card from the short side first*) and intend to play a second Club towards the dummy, hoping that the suit breaks 3-2.

*[As an aside here, you cannot cope with West holding ♠Q J × × of Clubs. If that were his holding then on the second round of Clubs he would assuredly split his honors by playing the ♣J on the second round and you lack the entries (and another Club in hand) to set the suit up].*

Another possibility opens up when East follows to the ♣K with the ♣J. Did he start with the miraculous holding of ♠Q J doubleton, allowing you to take the ♠A (dropping the ♠Q) and run off six Club tricks?

Note that you can never make six Club tricks if you play the ♠10. Either East did have ♠Q J and makes a trick with the ♠Q or West started with ♠Q 9 8 × and makes at least one trick.

Well, this is a guess, isn't it? Play the ♣A or the ♣10? Decisions, decisions. Actually, no. This is a case for clear thinking and accurate counting. You need five Club tricks to secure your contract (you have two Spades and two Hearts outside the suit); making six Clubs would be a bonus.

You cannot afford *not* to make five Clubs, though, and that is that what you risk by playing the ♣A. If you played the ♣A in a greedy attempt to make an overtrick you would end up with two Club tricks only and a steely glare from partner.

Putting in the ♣10 guarantees you five Club tricks, whether or not it wins the trick. Let East take some pleasure at making the bare ♣Q if he started with ♣Q J doubleton. His joy will be short-lived as you win the Spade return and run off enough Clubs for your contract.

Never lose sight of your target number of tricks nor of the risks involved!