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Play like a Champion!

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A set of eight assorted deals for VB #18; ACOL version

VB#18 Year 2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 6N By: South
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 1
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

North
♠ 832
♥ A72
♦ 6542
♣ AK3

West
♠ JT965
♥ 964
♦ 3
♣ T862

East
♠ 74
♥ JT83
♦ AT98
♣ J74

South
♠ AKQ
♥ KQ5
♦ KQJ7
♣ Q95

This series of eight deals is our general series of hands, a random mixture of hands. Some of these deals have you as declarer and some have you defending.

Enjoy them as they come.

Hand 1. You pick up a powerful hand here. Can you make the most of your cards?

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	2NT
P	4NT	P	6NT
P	P	P	

Lead: ♠ J

You reach 6NT after the *quantitative* sequence 2NT – 4NT – 6NT.

Taking stock you can see nine on top (three Spades, three Hearts, three Clubs) so need three tricks from Diamonds. That's easy enough, surely, all you need is for Diamonds to break 3-2?

Well, you could take the ♠Q in hand at trick one and lead the ♦K. This will secure three Diamond tricks whenever the suit breaks 3-2 and will lead to defeat whenever the suit splits 4-1 (or 5-0). Much better is to make use of the three entries on table to lead Diamonds towards your hand. This way you will make three Diamond tricks whenever the ♦A is on your right as well as when it is on your left and the suit splits nicely.

So we take trick one, cross to table with a Club and lead a Diamond up. It would be nice if East were to play his Ace on thin air but this defender has played the game before – he plays low and we score the ♦J. Back to dummy for a repeat performance. A low Diamond again has East playing low and us making the ♦Q.

When West shows out we know Diamonds are 4-1 so we cross to the last entry on table and – for the third time – lead a Diamond through East. That defender can do nothing now; his goose is well and truly cooked. When, with a sigh, he takes his ♦A we can claim the rest.

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VB#18 Year 2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N By: South
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 2
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

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

Lead: ♠ Q

North
♠ 752
♥ A53
♦ 863
♣ 7642

West
♠ QJT98
♥ T74
♦ T942
♣ J

East
♠ 643
♥ QJ96
♦ A
♣ QT853

South
♠ AK
♥ K82
♦ KQJ75
♣ AK9

You pick up another powerful hand on this deal (aren't you the lucky one?)

Bidding it is easy. What about the play, though?

You pick up a full 23 points here – an improvement on the mere 22 points you were given in Hand 1. To get this across to North you open 2♣ and rebid 2NT. North, holding a complete blizzard, could Pass this but, with a juicy Ace, he is delighted to raise you to game.

West leads the ♠Q and you take stock. You can count six top tricks (two Spades, two Hearts and two Clubs) so need to set up the Diamonds to make the "extras". That's easily done, isn't it? Win the Spade lead and play the ♦K…

Not so fast! There is one (admittedly very small) extra chance here. We need a 3-2 Diamond break unless East has the singleton Ace. To cater for that we cross to the ♥A and lead a low Diamond up to the ♦K Q J. On this deal the 2% chance comes up – East is obliged to play his Ace on thin air. Now, regardless of the return, we have four Diamond tricks and ten in all.

Lucky? Well sort of, but this play costs absolutely nothing and gains on some rare occasion like this one. Las Vegas casinos make billions on 2% margins, so don't turn your noses up at increasing your chances of making a contract even if it's by a minute amount.

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A set of eight assorted deals for VB #18; ACOL version

VB#18 Year 2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N By: South
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 3
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: E / W
Play this hand online!	

North
♠ AK5
♥ A52
♦ QJ73
♣ 954

West
♠ QJT98
♥ T4
♦ KT82
♣ J8

East
♠ 63
♥ QJ976
♦ 9
♣ QT632

South
♠ 742
♥ K83
♦ A654
♣ AK7

An easy auction to an obvious contract.

If the bidding provides no test of your skill what about the play? Does that fall into the "routine" category as well?

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

Lead: ♠ Q

3NT is an obvious contract here and there may appear to be loads of tricks. In fact, you have just seven on top (two Spades, two Hearts, one Diamond and two Clubs) and the whole deal depends on making three Diamond tricks.

Faced with this Diamond combination many players will win the Spade lead on table and will run the ♦Q through East "taking the finesse". This play, however, is senseless. If East has the ♦K he will cover the ♦Q so you will need to fall back on a 3-2 break. If Diamonds are 3-2 then any (sensible) play will register three Diamond tricks. The crux of this deal is to make three Diamonds when the suit breaks 4-1.

Correct technique is to cash the ♦A first (on some days the ♦K will fall). Here, both defenders follow low. Now you lead a Diamond up to the ♦Q J, *through* West. When the ♦J scores and East shows out you know that you have to repeat the prescription. Come to hand and lead another Diamond. West is helpless now whether he plays high or low and you have three Diamond tricks.

What if **East** has four Diamonds? Well, the answer is simple. You go down in 3NT (unless West's Diamond is the ♦K). There is nothing you can do about it – the contract is doomed to fail. The recommended play, though, will bring home the bacon in all cases where 3NT can be made.

This contract *is* made via a finesse but it's a finesse through West, not through East.

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

VB#18 Year 2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 4
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: All
Play this hand online!	

North
♠ 9762
♥ AT5
♦ 985
♣ 732

West
♠ K54
♥ Q86
♦ AKQ3
♣ AK9

East
♠ QJ3
♥ 743
♦ J4
♣ QT865

South
♠ AT8
♥ KJ92
♦ T762
♣ J4

We have you defending on this deal.

What is the best way to inflict a wounding defeat on the enemy here?

Lead: ♠ 7

East-West bid rapidly to 3NT and North kicks off with a Spade lead. Now, you need to have a clear style here and a clear understanding. Some players lead "Top of nothing" and would lead the ♠9 from that (broken) combination. Computer analysis (yes, really!) shows that this play will drop tricks on a significant number of occasions as it will destroy the North-South Spade holding. Not here, admittedly, but on other layouts it would.

VuBridge, therefore, continues with the world-wide practice of leading *second highest* from a crummy suit (one not headed by an honour). So North's ♠7 shows a higher spot card but no interest in Spades. Of course, the ♠7 could be fourth-highest in other circumstances – how can you (South) tell?

Ask yourself what three cards North might have that are higher than the ♠7. You'll find that an impossible task. Slightly easier, perhaps, is to apply the *Rule of Eleven*. This is something that we will deal with in the next edition so we'll say no more for now.

All the above preamble is by way of saying that South's task is to realise that continuing Spades is akin to flogging a dead horse.

Defenders often have difficult choices of whether to return partner's suit (usually best!) or to switch to something better. Here, with it being pointless to continue Spades, South may as well switch to a Heart. On this deal that strikes gold; North-South can take the first five tricks.

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A set of eight assorted deals for VB #18; ACOL version

VB#18 Year 2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
	By: South
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 5
Dealer: North	Vulnerable: N / S
Play this hand online!	

North
- ♠ AK3
- ♥ 7643
- ♦ J94
- ♣ QJ3

West
- ♠ JT984
- ♥ K5
- ♦ T753
- ♣ A8

East
- ♠ Q5
- ♥ QJ82
- ♦ 862
- ♣ T964

South
- ♠ 762
- ♥ AT9
- ♦ AKQ
- ♣ K752

A straightforward auction.

The journey gets just a little bumpier as you play the cards, though...

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

Lead: ♠ J

You play in the obvious 3NT on these cards and West kicks off with the ♠J lead.

With two top Spades, one top Heart and three top Diamonds it is necessary to set up the Clubs for three tricks. Now, you might win the Spade lead on table and lead the ♣Q but that isn't the best way of developing the suit. You might think that you need a 3-3 Club break but, in actual fact, you can increase your chances by a small amount.

As usual, the right technique to develop a suit is to lead low towards an honour (or honours). Here, it is best to lead twice towards the ♣Q J on table. This way you will make three Club tricks if the suit breaks 3-3 or if West has the doubleton or singleton Ace. (Of course, you also give yourself the chance that West makes a gross blunder by playing his ♣A on thin air from a holding of ♣A × × ×).

So you take the Spade lead on table, come to hand with a Diamond and lead a Club. The ♣J scores so you repeat the process. Back to hand with a Diamond and another low Club. Nothing is lost if Clubs split evenly and the gain comes when West has to play his ♣A on your ♣5.

Now it is easy enough, a simple matter of good housekeeping to tidy up the necessary nine tricks.

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A set of eight assorted deals for VB #18; ACOL version

VB#18 Year 2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
	By: East
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 6
Dealer: East	Vulnerable: E / W
Play this hand online!	

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

North
♠ KT86
♥ J953
♦ QJ6
♣ 74

West
♠ 97
♥ K42
♦ A95
♣ KQJ53

East
♠ Q4
♥ A86
♦ K742
♣ AT92

South
♠ AJ532
♥ QT7
♦ T83
♣ 86

Another defensive hand.

This one is just too easy.

Isn't it? We'll see.

Lead: ♠ 3

You are on lead to a rapidly bid 3NT and have an obvious low Spade lead (the ♠3 to be precise).

To your surprise partner turns up with the ♠K and returns the ♠6. Declarer follows on the second round with the ♠Q, which you mash with the ♠A and you play…?

The point of this hand is that you should not be too eager to cash the ♠J. On this layout of the cards that would **block** the Spade suit; partner would win the next Spade lead and then that would be that – East would have the rest of the tricks.

Note that partner has played his part here. Many defenders in the North chair would return the ♠10 at trick two "to pin the ♠9 in dummy". That would be poor defence – you'd have no idea of what to do next. By returning his lowest Spade (and the ♠6 is the lowest Spade in the pack as you can see the ♠5 3 2 and East has played the ♠4) partner is showing that he started with four of them.

[*All right, for the pedants, North might have started with ♠K 6 alone, but if that were the case (a) would East play the ♠Q on the second round? and (b) how can you beat 3NT?*]

Having read the Spade suit (North has four, East has just two) you must **underlead** the ♠J at trick three to partner's ♠10. You overtake the next Spade lead (the ♠8) with your ♠J and cash the last Spade for one off.

Easy when you know how and impossible when you don't…

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A set of eight assorted deals for VB #18; ACOL version

VB#18 Year 2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 3N By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 7
Dealer: South	Vulnerable: All
Play this hand online!	

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

North
♠ AT652
♥ 754
♦ 5
♣ Q962

West
♠ K4
♥ AQT3
♦ Q963
♣ J53

East
♠ J87
♥ KJ
♦ AJT87
♣ AT4

South
♠ Q93
♥ 9862
♦ K42
♣ K87

More work as a defender on this model.

Can you read the layout of a suit early in the hand and get this deal right?

Lead: ♠ 5

You are defending 3NT as South when North leads a low Spade. Dummy plays the ♠7 and you have a decision to make. Should you play the ♠Q (*third player plays high* and all that jazz) or should you not (should you insert the ♠9)?

How can you tell what to do?

Well, let's go back to basics. A count of points shows that North cannot have led from ♠A K × × (×). Why? Because North can only have 4-6 points. So there is no danger of playing the ♠9 and watching declarer make a cheap trick with the ♠10 from, say, ♠10 ×. Declarer has a high Spade honour so if you play the ♠Q you are giving declarer two Spade tricks for certain. On the other hand, playing the ♠9 will give declarer one Spade trick whenever he started with ♠A × or ♠K ×.

Here the effect is obvious. If you play the ♠Q at trick one declarer would win the ♠K, run the ♦Q and you could no longer defeat the contract.

If, on the other hand, you were to insert the ♠9 declarer is a dead duck. He takes the ♠K, tries the Diamond finesse and you hit him with an avalanche of Spades. One down.

Read the Lead. We do say it many times but that's because it's important.

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A set of eight assorted deals for VB #18; ACOL version

VB#18 Year 2 General hands ACOL	Contract: 6H
	By: West
Date: 07/10/2015	Board #: 8
Dealer: West	Vulnerable: None
Play this hand online!	

North
♠ Q5
♥ 94
♦ AT4
♣ JT9643

West
♠ A9
♥ KQJT72
♦ J52
♣ AQ

East
♠ K82
♥ A85
♦ K9763
♣ K8

South
♠ JT7643
♥ 63
♦ Q8
♣ 752

Here you pick up a miserable collection of tat and watch as the opponents sail into a high-level contract.

What is the best way to make use of your meagre assets?

This is not an easy hand. You have been warned!

West	North	East	South
1♥	P	2♦	P
3♥	P	4NT	P
5♥	P	6♥	P
P	P		

Lead: ♣ J

East-West blast their way into a poor slam. After your partner leads the ♣J (better in principle than the ♦A after this bidding) the whole contract depends on a miracle lie in Diamonds or on a defensive mistake. The miracle lie in Diamonds, by the way, is to hope that North started with ♦A Q alone. Possible, but not likely.

There are other possibilities too, such as the defenders getting themselves tangled up and having to give away a fatal *ruff-and-discard*.

Anyway, declarer wins the ♣Q, draws two rounds of trumps, plays three rounds of Spades, ruffing the third round in hand, cashes the ♣A (crashing the ♣K on the table) and then leads a Diamond.

A weak defender in the North seat might panic and take the ♦A at this point and that might let the slam home. However, both defenders can count West for a 2·6·3·2 pattern so know that declarer has three Diamonds and that the ♦A is not going to run away. West calls for dummy's ♦K and now comes the moment of truth... what do you do as South?

It may be cruel to pick up a mere 3 points and have to sacrifice two thirds of them by chucking an important high card away but you must **unblock** the ♦Q.

True, this is a difficult play but it is logical. If you keep the Queen you will be on play with it at the next trick. What do you do next? Well, it's a fatuous question as you only have black cards left. So you lead one of those. Declarer gleefully throws the ♦J and trumps on table with the ♥8, claiming his slam a moment later.

Partner will sorrowfully shake his head as his "certain" winning Diamond (the ♦A) will fold its tent and creep silently away.

Chucking the ♦Q is your only hope - you cannot afford to be stuck on lead with it. If partner has ♦A J × it doesn't matter what you do. With the actual layout where North has ♦A 10 × you must disembarrass yourself of the blocking Queen.