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Eight General Hands for Issue 20 of V-Blue (Year 1); ACOL version Updated spring 2015

VB#20 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North	
	♠ 6	
	♥ A5	
	♦ AKJT764	
	♣ QJ7	
West		East
♠ AQ93		♠ JT2
♥ J9874		♥ Q62
♦ Q95		♦
♣ T		♣ A985432
	South	
	♠ K8754	
	♥ KT3	
	♦ 832	
	♣ K6	

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...

Hand 1: We begin with a deal that requires the usual process of **Counting** and **Planning**.

With that done you shouldn't have any trouble **Executing**.

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

Lead: ♥ 7

Bidding.

North opens 1♦ and we naturally respond 1♠. Partner now rebids 3♦ and we have to decide whether to go quietly (and Pass) or to bid on.

Well, with stoppers in the outside suits and three cards in partner's suit it is more than reasonable to take a pot at 3NT. Unsurprisingly, that ends the auction.

Play.

West leads his fourth-best Heart (the ♥7) and we pause to take stock. With a ten-card fit in Diamonds the odds of dropping the ♦Q in two rounds of the suit are quite high. The chance of a 2-1 break is 78% for those of you interested in these things. However, we must take every precaution on this hand as it would be unfortunate to fail here.

In the (admittedly unlikely) event that Diamonds split 3-0 with West holding all three we must take the ♥A at trick one. This allows us to play a top Diamond to discover how the suit is splitting. Should both opponents follow then we'd have seven top Diamonds and may have chances to establish an overtrick or two.

On this deal East does indeed show out on the first round of Diamonds, marking West with the ♦Q. This is the point where we are able to hop over to our hand with the ♥K and take the marked Diamond finesse, subsequently running off the suit and securing the contract. We make seven Diamonds and two top Hearts.

Can you see what would happen if we had played a low Heart from dummy at trick one? East's ♥Q would force us to play the ♥K and, after playing a Diamond to the Ace (not the Jack, as taking the finesse for the Queen with three cards missing is anti-percentage and we are not allowed X-ray vision) we would find ourselves short of a quick re-entry back to our hand.

If we were to try a Club the defence could beat us if they were on the ball. East could rise with the ♣A and find the lethal switch to the ♠J.


Note that if East started with $\spadesuit Q \times \times$ (and West with a void) then 3NT is probably going to fail no matter what we do.



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VB#20 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North		
	♠ J4		
	♥ QT98		
	♦ 652		
	♣ A762		
West		East	
♠ 65		♠ QT83	
♥ AK754		♥ J2	
♦ 984		♦ AKJT7	
♣ Q54		♣ KJ	
	South		
	♠ AK972		
	♥ 63		
	♦ Q3		
	♣ T983		

What are the pros and cons of overcalling?

To bid or not to bid, that is the question...

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

Lead: ♠ 7

Bidding.

East starts off the auction with 1♦ and we overcall 1♠ as South. The tactics of overcalling differ from opening the bidding; an overcall may be made on a far weaker hand than an opening bid as long as it contains a strong suit.

Here we only have 9 points and would not dream of opening the bidding. However, after East opens 1♦ the temptation to stick in a 1♠ bid is too great to resist. True, the ♦Q might be worthless (we'd have preferred the ♠Q to strengthen the overall power of our hand) but we can't have everything.

Why bid at all? Well, not only does a 1♠ overcall remove West's ability to bid 1♥, it can help partner's opening lead problem if West ends up as declarer. Also, holding the top suit (Spades), we can sometimes push the opponents about in the auction, often forcing them above their comfort zone. Not here, as North has no Spade support, but we should not underestimate the effect of bidding Spades.

For instance, we shouldn't be afraid of a 4♣ barrage bid from partner. Imagine if he held something like:

♠ Q 10 7 5 3
♥ 7 2
♦ 2
♣ A Q J 5 2

Opposite that hand, we can make ten tricks in Spades if the finesse of the ♣K is successful. That's a game made on thin air (18 points).

Anyway, the auction simply does not pan out that way. West (duly irritated that his 1♥ response has been taken away) bids 2♥ over our 1♠, partner Passes, East rebids 2NT and this is raised (dubiously) to 3NT.

Play.

Although we did not hear a 2♠ raise from partner we should still lead a low Spade. If partner has a doubleton Spade, and the Spades are 5-3-3-2 around the table, giving up a Spade would net us four Spade tricks later.

Our actual ♠7 lead goes to partner's ♠J and declarer's ♠Q. Declarer cashes the ♦A, crosses to a top Heart and takes the (losing) Diamond finesse (at least he didn't peek at our cards and drop the ♦Q!) Although unsuccessful, taking the Diamond finesse is East's percentage play.


A Club switch from us finds partner with the ♣A and a Spade return spells ruin for East. Two down.



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VB#20 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 45
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North		
	♠ 7		
	♥ KQ654		
	♦ QJ974		
	♣ 74		
West		East	
♠ 43		♠ Q852	
♥ JT97		♥ A832	
♦ KT82		♦ A5	
♣ QT8		♣ 962	
	South		
	♠ AKJT96		
	♥		
	♦ 63		
	♣ AKJ53		

This deal is exciting. Why? Because you have a shapely and interesting hand.

Have you heard the expression "Six-five, come alive"?

Well, you have now!

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

Lead: ♥ J

Bidding.

We open 1♠ and hope that this call is not going to be Passed out. No, partner is there with the *good news – bad news* response. 1NT keeps the auction alive (for which we are truly thankful) but it suggests that there is little opposite to fire our enthusiasm.

We now daren't rebid 2♣ as that risks getting Passed out (a simple rebid does not oblige partner to bid again). To get across the playing strength of this hand we have to jump the bidding and try 3♣, a call which forces the bidding to game.

North warns us that his hand consists of red-suit values by returning to 3NT and not supporting either of our suits. Perhaps that is where we wish to play?

Not today, José. Our powerful 6-5 shape isn't going to play in No-trumps in a month of Sundays and we should remove North's suggestion of 3NT to 4♣. Even if we catch North with a singleton or a void Spade the sheer strength of our semi-solid trump suit could stand up on its own. The decision would have been tougher if the Spades were a mere ♠A K J 6 5 2, but luckily we have the support of the useful ♠10 and ♠9 today.

Play.

Against 4♣ West innocently leads the ♥J. Better for his side would have been a Diamond and even a trump lead would have worked out to our disadvantage. The Heart lead (top of a sequence) is, in fact, fatal to the defence but West cannot be blamed – it's the logical and sensible lead from his hand.

The ♥J is covered by the ♥Q and East's ♥A and we ruff, setting up the ♥K as a winner. Can we reach His Majesty? Well, only if Clubs break in friendly fashion... (a 3-3 break is what we need).

In fact, this deal is all about setting up Clubs in our hand, so the first item on the agenda is to cash the ♣A K and ruff the third round. As luck

would have it the suit does break 3-3 and we gain access to the table.

Now we can pitch a losing Diamond on a winning Heart and draw trumps. Hang on, though... we have to get off the table and the only way to gain entry to the closed hand is via a ruff. That leaves us, note, with just four trumps. We cash the ♠A K and then...?

Now it may be tempting to lead another trump to drive out the ♠Q. True, if trumps break 3-3 everything would be hunky-dory and we would amass an overtrick. But why should we be that lucky? Are we a lottery winner? Clubs were 3-3, why should Spades behave nicely as well?

Work out what happens if we play a trump and Spades are 4-2. Someone takes the ♠Q and **forces** us (forces us to ruff, that is) by playing another Heart. We have just one more trump winner and would go one down.

Correct play (**not** being greedy) wins the day. After the ♠A K we have a certain Diamond loser and can afford to lose two trumps. The right play is simply to play off winning Clubs and allow the opponents to ruff in when they like.

We can only lose (in total) one Diamond and two trumps however the adverse trumps lie.


4♠ bid and made.



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VB#20 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: West
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North		
	♠ KQT63		
	♥ 932		
	♦ A53		
	♣ 65		
West		East	
♠ J952		♠ 84	
♥ AQ8		♥ K76	
♦ T76		♦ KQJ984	
♣ AK9		♣ Q8	
	South		
	♠ A7		
	♥ JT54		
	♦ 2		
	♣ JT7432		

There are some interesting points for the defence on this deal.

With hindsight, partner's lead is not the best. How might we recover?

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

Lead: ♠ K

Bidding.

East-West have a rapid 1NT – 3NT auction.

Note East's raise to 3NT. With 11 points and a long Diamond suit a 3NT bid is definitely worth the gamble.

Firstly, it is highly unlikely that an eleven-trick contract of 5♦ would do well (it needs too many tricks). Secondly, as 3NT is the most likely game contract, there's no need to mess around to advertise the Diamond suit. A direct jump to 3NT hides that information.

Play.

North, not unreasonably, opts to lead the ♠K. A King lead promises a suit that's either headed by the K Q J or the K Q 10. It is usually a good idea to lead the King from K Q 10 because if dummy has a doubleton Jack (or if declarer has ♠A J doubleton) the ♠K prevents declarer from getting a cheap second Spade trick.

Having analysed the position it is clear for us to overtake partner's ♠K lead (so we **unblock** the suit) and return one. This enables the defenders to finesse against declarer's ♠J even though (on this layout) the ♠J does become a trick eventually.

Still, partner establishes the fifth Spade in his hand and just has to wait patiently to regain the lead to cash it. The ♦A is a certain entry.


An initial low Spade lead from partner would have worked better, as it happens, but that's not our concern. The ♠K is the normal lead from that holding. *Nothing went wrong with this defence.* However, had we failed to overtake partner's ♠K with our ♠A, we could say goodbye to defeating the contract. With the Spades blocked North wouldn't have enough entries to establish and cash his Spades.



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VB#20 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 4SX
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 5
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ A9532	
	♥ 84	
	♦ KJ53	
	♣ 76	
West		East
♠ Q86		♠
♥ J95		♥ AT32
♦ Q42		♦ AT98
♣ QT98		♣ KJ543
	South	
	♠ KJT74	
	♥ KQ76	
	♦ 76	
	♣ A2	

Gathering clues is one thing, but applying the acquired information is another.

Can you use your deductions to outplay your opponents here?

West	North	East	South
-	P	1♣	1♠
1NT	4♠	X	P
P	P		

Lead: ♣ T

Bidding.

East opens 1♣ in second seat and we overcall 1♠. West now bids a dubious 1NT announcing (approximately) 7-9 points with a Spade stopper.

Partner, with an unbalanced hand and five card trump support, raises us all the way to 4♠. Believing that we are out of our depth, East makes an (even more dubious) penalty Double hoping his partner can just contribute a couple of tricks to the defence. He expects West to have a trump trick, note, after the 1NT bid.

Play.

West kicks off with a lead of the ♣10 to our Ace. A quick loser count suggests that we have a Heart, a Club, and one or two Diamonds. We could potentially lose a trump trick, but thanks to the information given by the auction, there is only one way to play the Spades.

West's 1NT bid told us that the ♠Q is lying in his hand. We should therefore lay down the ♠K to confirm the break. Once East discards we can subsequently take the **marked finesse** against the ♠Q.

With the trumps taken care of our 4♠ Doubled contract hinges upon a correct guess in Diamonds (assuming both honours are not with East – if they are, then there's nothing we can do).

East did open the bidding with 1♣ and, from the penalty double of 4♠, he sounds like a man with both red suit Aces. Therefore, when it comes to play the Diamonds (by leading from our hand, of course), we should play a Diamond to dummy's ♦J.

As it is here, once the ♦J forces East's ♦A, the hand becomes a matter of ruffing Hearts in dummy (or ruffing Diamonds in our hand – either way, it's the same).


4♠ Doubled makes ten tricks, East paying the price for his foolish Double.



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VB#20 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 6
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North		
	♠ JT87		
	♥ 7654		
	♦ JT5		
	♣ AQ		
West		East	
♠ 652		♠ AK43	
♥ 83		♥ KQT92	
♦ 4		♦ K3	
♣ J976532		♣ T4	
	South		
	♠ Q9		
	♥ AJ		
	♦ AQ98762		
	♣ K8		

Simple overcalls can serve a purpose besides pestering the opponents and getting in the way.

Sometimes the hand belongs to our side and we need to find our best contract.

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

Lead: ♥ 8

Bidding.

After East opens 1♥ we overcall 2♦, West Passes and North raises us to 3♦.

Partner has a fairly weak hand with moderate trump support but that doesn't make 3♦ wrong.

Knowing that our partner has some values and support in Diamonds we are able to take a shot at 3NT, a contract that's very likely to succeed based on our source of tricks in Diamonds. After all, the ♦K and a black Ace opposite would give us nine easy tricks in No-trumps.

*[Note: Overcalls at the two-level show at least 10-plus points and, usually, a six-card suit. Don't overcall at the two-level on peanuts, it's a dangerous place to be; have a decent suit as a safety net. Also (compare with Hand 2) don't **over-estimate** the effect of bidding a minor suit in a competitive auction. The opponents can often outbid you in a major].*

Since East opened the bidding with 1♥, it is important for us to have a stopper in that suit as West is sure to lead his partner's suit. The ♥A stops the opponents from running off the Hearts all at once.

Play.

After a Heart lead to East's ♥Q and our ♥A, the fate of our contract lies with the location of the ♦K. If it's on the right side (literally so: on our **right**) we make an overtrick. If it's on the wrong side (on our **left**) we go down three. That's life.

Luckily, East's opening 1♥ bid favours him to hold the missing King, so the right play is to cross to dummy with a Club and run the ♦J for a finesse. Taking the finesse is still the percentage play in the suit if we are missing the King and two small cards.

*[If we were in an **eleven-card** fit missing the King then the percentages would be quite close, slightly favouring playing for the drop – laying down the Ace – over the finesse].*

The ♦K is on the correct side for us on this deal, so taking ten tricks here proves no effort.

Note that 5♦ would be hopeless after the obvious Heart lead.



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VB#20 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 7
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

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

Lead: ♥ Q

Bidding.

We have an obvious opening bid of 1NT here, indicating a balanced hand with 12-14 points. Partner, with his bare 12 points and few intermediates raises to 2NT (some aggressive players might take a punt at 3NT here) and we go on to game as we have a maximum.

Play.

West leads the ♥Q (which we can read to be from a suit headed by the ♥Q J 10 or ♥Q J 9) and we can see five *top tricks* to begin with (two Spades and two Hearts). The Diamonds should produce one extra trick so the Clubs have to come in for four tricks (giving us a total of four Clubs, one Diamond and two in each major suit).

So **how should we play the Clubs?** Taking the finesse is certainly the right play but this suit needs just a little more care and attention.

With no intermediate cards to support our suit (namely, the ♣9 and/or the ♣8), we must start with a **low** Club from the South hand. If West were to follow low we'd play the ♣10 and hope it wins. If it did we'd cross back to hand (with a top Spade) and then lead the ♣Q.

The special case where leading a low Club from hand (instead of an honour) gains us a trick is when West has been dealt a singleton ♣K, as is the case here. If the ♣Q were led on the first round of Clubs then a maximum of three tricks only could be taken from the suit as East's ♣9 8 7 6 would eventually become a trick.

After the Clubs are played correctly then we, of course, turn to Diamonds next to establish our ninth trick in that suit.

North

♠ K643
♥ K63
♦ Q7
♣ AT43

West

♠ T92
♥ QJ982
♦ 6432
♣ K



East

♠ QJ8
♥ T4
♦ AJT9
♣ 9876

South

♠ A75
♥ A75
♦ K85
♣ QJ52

Settling early on a line of play is not always the best idea.

Sometimes you ought to try to look out for an even better play to give yourself the maximum chance.



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VB#20 Y1 General Hands ACOL	Contract: 3N
Date: 07/10/2015	By: East
Dealer: West	Board #: 8
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

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

Lead: ♥ 3

Bidding.

East-West here have an uninterrupted auction to 3NT.

West opens 1♠, East responds 2♣, West raises to 3♣, and East decides to take a shot at 3NT.

Play.

We find ourselves in an awkward situation as we must find a lead from the miserable South collection.

When deciding upon an opening lead, if the decision is not clear-cut (if we don't have a sequence to lead from or a decent five-card suit), sometimes it's best to go through a process of elimination of what we *wouldn't* lead.

On this deal the opponents have shown Spades and Clubs. This neatly eliminates a black-suit lead, so we are now down to a Heart or a Diamond. The principle here (leading from a three-card suit) is that we want to find partner's suit rather than set up our own suit.

Which is better? Diamonds or Hearts?

Either red suit could be right. But, we would probably give a (very) slight edge to a Heart lead – because our Hearts are marginally stronger (and therefore require less help from partner). It's a close call – we may be right today and wrong tomorrow.

When leading away from three cards to an honour, the correct card to lead is the lowest. So we lead the ♥3 and await dummy with interest.

The first trick goes ♥3 - ♥5 - ♥J - ♥7 as partner wins the trick and declarer decides not to part with his ♥A. North naturally returns a Heart (the ♥4, notice) to declarer's ♥A and we play... the King (of course!)

How do we know to casually throw away our ♥K, a card that was going to be a trick?

Let's work it out. The way that the play has unfolded, the ♥Q must be with partner. If

North

♠ K92
♥ QJ742
♦ K9853
♣

West

♠ AQJT7
♥ T95
♦ 7
♣ AJ87



East

♠ 65
♥ A8
♦ AJT4
♣ KQ543

South

♠ 843
♥ K63
♦ Q62
♣ T962

Don't play too quickly, otherwise the critical moment may pass you by in a flash.

Once again you are defending.

declarer held that card, he surely would have won partner's ♥J with it, so North is clearly marked with the ♥Q J and the ♥K represents a **blockage** in the suit.

Therefore it is necessary to get out of partner's way by dropping the ♥K under declarer's Ace. When North regains the lead with a Spade (declarer needs the Spade finesse for his contract) he is able to cash the Hearts from the top. Were we to keep the blocking ♥K it would be impossible for partner to run the Hearts.

East-West have not bid well. Both 5♣ and 4♣ make on their cards. Still, that's their problem, not ours...