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

Y2 VBlue #21 Four General Hands SA	Contract: 5D
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

	North		
	♠ A943		
	♥ J		
	♦ KQJT		
	♣ T753		
West		East	
♠ Q2		♠ JT86	
♥ Q		♥ K97543	
♦ 76532		♦	
♣ KJ962		♣ Q84	
	South		
	♠ K75		
	♥ AT862		
	♦ A984		
	♣ A		

Hand 1: Here, some good bidding lands you in an unusual but good contract.

Can you find equally fine play to land it?

West	North	East	South
-	P	P	1♥
P	1♠	P	2♦
P	3♦	P	3♠
P	5♦	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ 2

Bidding.

We open 1♥ after two Passes, and rebid 2♦ over a response of 1♠.

Partner raises us to 3♦ so we now have to decide whether to bid again or to Pass.

With 15 points and something useful in partner's Spade suit we simply have to bid on, Passing would be wet. Best is to suggest Spades as a possible resting spot by bidding 3♠. After all, partner might have five of them and 4♠ might be a cakewalk.

North can actually deduce that we have a singleton Club now (we have opened 1♥, rebid 2♦ and supported Spades. Just how many Clubs can we have?)

With the information that his four useless Clubs are facing a shortage (a good sign in general) partner decides it's time to take a pot at that rarest of contracts, 5♦.

[Note: It is worth noting that 3NT would have been a real struggle on the North-South cards. Eight tricks on top but where's the ninth?]

Play.

West, deducing that we are bidding on shape, finds the good lead of a trump and we must settle down to **Count** and **Plan**.

We can see only one loser at first (the third Spade). However, eleven winners don't immediately present themselves as there are only eight on top (two Spades, one Heart, four Diamonds and the ♣A). With insufficient winners it would be potty to attempt to draw trumps, the more so when East discards on dummy's ♦10. What is this? A 5-0 trump break? Ugh!

We have to use our trumps for ruffing and, if the foul trump split is bad news, the good news is that we have all the high Diamonds between us.

A recount of tricks shows that we have four tricks in the plain suits so need seven trump tricks. Is that possible? Yes, of course! We have four Diamonds by force – we just require three ruffs. This hand requires a **crossruff**.

Now, the "rules" for a crossruff state that we should cash all necessary outside winners before embarking on an orgy of ruffs. To that end we start off by cashing the ♠K, the ♠A and the two other Aces before ruffing everything in sight. (To be precise we ruff Hearts on table and Clubs in hand).

We duly record two Spades, one Heart, one Club and seven trump tricks.


Postscript.

Why are these preliminaries (the cashing of outside winners) necessary? Well, if we were to play off the ♥A and ruff a Heart on table early, West would seize the opportunity to throw off a Spade. Now we would be unable to cash the ♠A K at any time in the play (West would ruff and then return another trump), and the game would fail.



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Y2 VBlue #21 Four General Hands SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North		
	♠ KJ83		
	♥ J		
	♦ K642		
	♣ K753		
West		East	
♠		♠ 76542	
♥ Q987642		♥ K	
♦ J973		♦ T8	
♣ 96		♣ AQJT2	
	South		
	♠ AQT9		
	♥ AT53		
	♦ AQ5		
	♣ 84		

After the nasty breaks of Hand 1 you pick up a pleasingly balanced hand.

That surely guarantees that the suits will break well for you, doesn't it?

Doesn't it?

West	North	East	South
-	-	P	1NT
P	2♣	X	2♥
P	3NT	P	4♣
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ 9

Bidding.

After East Passes as dealer we open 1NT and partner asks us a question with a 2♣ Stayman enquiry.

From a position of being comatose East now emerges from the bushes with a lead-directing Double. We brush that aside by showing our Hearts (with both majors we always bid Hearts first) and North leaps to 3NT.

Now, whatever temptations we may harbor to Pass this they must be resisted. North has not employed Stayman just to pass the time of day; he has a purpose in mind and that can only be because he has a four-card major. As he clearly does not have four Hearts he simply must have four Spades. A 4♣ call from us is mandatory.

Play.

West dutifully leads a Club in response to his partner's lead-directing bid and we thank partner before pausing to **Count** and **Plan**.

We may contemplate dummy with little cause for concern. Four Spade tricks, the ♥A and three Diamonds makes eight "on top" and we just need two ruffs to swell the coffers up to ten.

Looking at losers there are none in Spades, none in Hearts (assuming we can trump some – or all – of our three losers), none in Diamonds and two in Clubs. (The ♣A is over the ♣K. The bidding and opening lead have made that abundantly clear. We have more chance of finding Elvis alive living with the Loch Ness monster than we have of finding the ♣A with West).

So we allow the ♣9 to win trick one and the ♣10 to hold trick two. East now leads a trump and our complacency is shattered when West chucks a Heart. What? Another 5-0 trump break? Ouch! Now what?

Well, the idea of ruffing a couple of somethings somewhere, drawing trumps and cashing winners has just left the building. We need Plan

B. Luckily, all of our trumps are high so we might get somewhere with a *crossruff*. If we could trump three Hearts on table we would make seven trump tricks. That requires three outside winners to make the total up to ten. Do we have them?

Well, it appears that we have four outside winners, three Diamonds and a Heart. However, we must not be greedy by trying to cash a third Diamond trick. Were we to try to cash three Diamonds East would ruff and play another trump, cutting down on the number of tricks available by ruffing. Best is to hope to cash two Diamonds and the ♥A and then crossruff the hand.

The play in detail: we win the trump shift in hand at trick three, cash precisely two Diamonds, take the ♥A and then play for ruffs. We trump three Hearts on table and two Clubs in hand. That lands ten tricks, despite the evil 5-0 trump break.


Postscript.

Remember, the "rules" for a crossruff state that we must sufficient outside winners before embarking on our ruffing spree. We only need two Diamond winners; trying for three would be greedy. So we must cash exactly two Diamonds and the ♥A before East has the chance to disgorge any of his Diamonds as we ruff Hearts.



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

Y2 VBlue #21 Four General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

	North	
	♠ J3	
	♥ AKQ	
	♦ JT43	
	♣ 9873	
West		East
♠ T9854		♠ KQ72
♥ T5		♥ 98642
♦ A96		♦ K87
♣ JT6		♣ 4
	South	
	♠ A6	
	♥ J73	
	♦ Q52	
	♣ AKQ52	

A trivial deal with sufficient top tricks to land your contract without any difficulty.

Or is there something that you might have overlooked...?

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

Lead: ♠ T

Bidding.

With 16 points and a 5-3-3-2 pattern 1NT is a vastly superior call to an opening bid of 1♣, so – as dealer – that is our choice.

With 11 points and a 4-4-3-2 shape North has an easy raise to game.

Play.

West leads the ♠10 against 3NT and, having given thanks for the dummy, we take a few moments to **Count** and **Plan**.

This lead, somewhat unsportingly, knocks out the ♠A, leaving us vulnerable in that quarter. So we need to take the next eight tricks in a hurry or we'd be swept away by a tidal wave of the opponents' Spades. Do we have nine top tricks?

The answer appears to be Yes as we can see one Spade, three Hearts and five Clubs. The only obvious problem is if Clubs break 4-0, which would give us only three Club tricks. If Clubs are 4-0 then 3NT is simply doomed to fail. *That's the way the cookie crumbles.*

Anyway, after Hands 1 and 2, with their hideous 5-0 trump breaks, aren't we due just a modicum of good fortune?

If Clubs are 3-1 or 2-2 is this hand not trivial? We just cash five Club tricks, three Heart tricks and throw the rest to the wolves? Not so fast... There is a sting in the tail.

Try the effect of cashing the ♠A K Q and doing the "obvious" thing of calling "small, please" to dummy as we do so. North would oblige with the ♣3, then the ♣7 then the ♣8. Now our last two Clubs in hand are the ♣5 2 and dummy's is the boss ♣9. The fourth Club would be won on the table and the last, winning, Club would be in our hand. Oops! What happened? We blocked the Clubs, that's what.

The correct line to avoid this embarrassment (and partner's icy stare) is to jettison dummy's blocking ♣9 8 7 under our ♠A K Q leaving the

♣3 as the last Club on the table. This falls on the ♣5 and we can then cash the ♣2.

Easy when you see it... and it is best to see it early rather than too late.

Postscript.

It is easy, far too easy, to assume that a suit, such as Clubs in this case, is ready to run if it breaks 3-1 or 2-2. Playing carelessly (**not** unblocking) would go unpunished if Clubs split 2-2; we could take two top Clubs, cash the third one on table and then overtake the Nine. However, a 3-1 break would lead to defeat.


This is why we recommend thinking a hand through before playing to the first trick. How many players (partners, even) do you know who would be on trick four before they realized the fate that was about to befall them?



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Y2 VBlue #21 Four General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

	North		
	♠ J3		
	♥ AKQ		
	♦ JT43		
	♣ 9876		
West		East	
♠ T9854		♠ KQ7	
♥ T5		♥ 98642	
♦ A96		♦ K872	
♣ JT3		♣ 4	
	South		
	♠ A62		
	♥ J73		
	♦ Q5		
	♣ AKQ52		

This deal bears a remarkable resemblance to Hand 3. Odd how these things happen in VuBridge, isn't it?

So should you play this hand in identical fashion to Hand 3?

Actually, you should see that's not possible – so what can you do to land your contract?

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

Lead: ♠ T

Bidding.

After three Passes we open 1NT (streets better than 1♣) and North has an easy, effortless raise to game.

Play.

West leads the ♠10 against 3NT and, having thanked partner, we take a time-out to **Count and Plan**.

This lead, irritatingly, knocks out the ♠A, leaving us vulnerable in that quarter. So we need to take the next eight tricks in a hurry or we'd be swept away by a landslide of Spades and Diamonds. Do we have nine top tricks?

The answer, as in Hand 3, appears to be Yes as we can see one Spade, three Hearts and five Clubs. The only obvious problem is if Clubs break 4-0, which would give us only three Club tricks. If Clubs are 4-0 then 3NT is simply doomed to fail. *That's the way the cookie crumbles.*

So we have to forget that possibility and focus on making our contract if Clubs are 3-1 or 2-2.

Now, in Hand 3 we saw that we had to unblock an awkward Club suit. Here, there can be no unblocking of dummy's Clubs on our top cards as they are sequential. A 2-2 break would have us in Easy Street – we could cash two high Clubs, cross to the ♣8 and then overtake the Nine. Simply done. However...

Try the effect of cashing the ♣A K Q in the event of a 3-1 split. Our last two Clubs would be the ♣5 2 and dummy's would be the boss ♣9. The fourth Club would be won on the table and the last, winning, Club would wither away in our hand. Not good. Not good at all.

The only way to unblock this suit is to pitch one of dummy's Clubs. If we could throw a Club out of the window we'd be fine as the remaining ♣9 8 7 would fall on the ♣A K Q. Well, we can't do that but we might set up a discard, courtesy of the opponents.

West's Spade lead is covered by the ♠J and East's ♠Q. East continues Spades and we hold off again. On the third round of Spades we make the crucial play of throwing a Club from table on the ♠A. After that it's all plain sailing.

We cash five Clubs and three Hearts and concede the last two tricks. No problem.

Postscript.

This hand is hard to see. Many players would assume they had nine on top and would grab an early Spade before playing Clubs. Curtains as the cards lie. The clever part (holding up Spades so that we can get a Club discard) is not an obvious play. At least, it's easy to miss.