



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

Y2 VBlue #23 Four General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: North	Board #: 1
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: None

North		East	
♠ 952		♠ JT874	
♥ 73		♥ 8652	
♦ AK972		♦ 4	
♣ 863		♣ 975	
West		East	
♠ 6			
♥ KQJT9			
♦ J863			
♣ AT4			
South			
♠ AKQ3			
♥ A4			
♦ QT5			
♣ KQJ2			

This set of four deals looks at some subtle card combinations. You need to think carefully about your play on these deals...

Hand 1: You have seen this theme before but it is an important one, so it bears repetition.

Besides, you may find it useful for the puzzle that is Hand 2...

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

Lead: ♥ K

Bidding.

After two Passes we open 2NT with our balanced 21 points.

Partner, holding 7 points and a good five-card Diamond suit, has an easy raise to 3NT.

Play.

West leads the ♥K against 3NT and we see dummy has both good features and bad features. The Diamond suit (a five-carder headed by the ♦A K) is very good news but the mutual Heart shortage is not. We thank partner for his contributions and settle down to **Count** and **Plan**.

We may as well duck the first Heart. On some lucky days a confused defender may try his luck elsewhere. Not here – West's Hearts are so good he persists with them enthusiastically.

So we take the ♥A at trick two and should realize the need to cash the next eight tricks. If we allow the opponents to gain the lead they'd be sure to defeat us with their set-up Hearts and the ♣A.

Counting our *top tricks* we see three Spades (maybe four on a 3-3 break), one Heart, three Diamonds (maybe five if that suit comes in) and no Clubs. On a more friendly lead we'd be able to establish two Club tricks but here – with wide open Hearts – we can't afford to do that.

So the focus of the deal is Diamonds – can we make five Diamond tricks? On a normal 3-2 break it would be easy. Can we pick up a bad break, though? If East has long Diamonds (four or five of them) then the answer is **no** – it cannot be done. But what if West is hiding a guilty secret and has long Diamonds? Could we nullify them? **Yes** is the answer but we have to play with precision.

After taking the ♥A at trick two we cash the ♦Q. If East were to show out we could lead the ♦10 next and pick up the entire suit, no matter how West defended. Here, though, that obscure chance does not materialize as both defenders

follow suit. So we lead the ♦10 next (an essential play) to unblock the suit in the event of a 4-1 break.

West plays low, naturally enough, and we take the ♦K (after all, Diamonds could be 3-2). If East had followed we would have known the suit was breaking favorably and we'd have just cashed out the Diamonds. As it is, with the evident 4-1 split, we have a textbook *marked finesse*.

Returning to hand with a Spade we finesse against the ♦J and the rest is easy.

Nine tricks come from three Spades (that suit does not break for us either), one Heart and five Diamonds.

Postscript.

This Diamond holding is a common one and needs attention. Unblocking the Ten is important; if we had failed to do that we would have been defeated by the blockage.

Play it through and see. We cash the Queen, we play low to the King, discovering the bad break, and then what? We'd come to hand with a Spade and lead the ♦10 but West would smugly play a low card on that. Now we'd have no winning play. If the Ten holds, the two winning Diamonds would be stranded on table.



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Y2 VBlue #23 Four General Hands SA	Contract: 3N
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: East	Board #: 2
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: N / S

	North	
	♠ Q74	
	♥ QJ3	
	♦ QT5	
	♣ QJ63	
West		East
♠ KT652		♠ A3
♥ KT97		♥ 852
♦ 4		♦ J863
♣ 872		♣ AT94
	South	
	♠ J98	
	♥ A64	
	♦ AK972	
	♣ K5	

You should notice that there is an identical suit combination in this deal to one that appeared in Hand 1.

So how do you play this deal?

What makes this hand different?

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

Lead: ♠ 5

Bidding.

After East Passes as dealer we open 1NT and partner raises to game.

Simple, prosaic bidding.

Play.

West kicks off with a low Spade lead and, after the mandatory show of gratitude to partner, we pause while we **Count** and **Plan**.

By the age-old practice of *counting top tricks* we can see straight away that we have one Spade trick (we had no guarantee of that had we broached the suit ourselves but we must make a trick in the suit once the defenders lead it), one Heart trick and three Diamond tricks. It's a simple matter to set up two Club tricks so our contract depends on picking up Diamonds for five tricks.

Is this deal a repeat of Hand 1? After all, the suit is identical. Maybe so. However, we have other matters to attend to first.

East-West play three rounds of Spades, allowing us to take the ♠Q on the table. When East shows out on the third Spade we realize that we cannot make this hand if West has the ♣A. If he has that card then he has an entry to his long Spades, allowing him to cash one Club and four Spades. Note that we simply have to play on Clubs to make sufficient tricks. **Que sera sera.**

We lead a Club off the dummy at trick two to the ♣K and – when it holds – play another to the ♣J. This sets up the necessary two Club tricks. Note that we cannot afford to play Diamonds before Clubs as then we'd remove the essential link between dummy and the closed hand.

East takes the ♣A and plays the ♥8. Eschewing the tainted finesse (we don't need it for the contract and, anyway, West has signalled his liking for Hearts) we take the ♥A and set about Diamonds. What is the best and most precise play to land five Diamond tricks?

Well, anything reasonable works if the suit splits 3-2 and nothing works if Diamonds are 5-0. If West has four Diamonds we cannot make the hand without a peek into his cards. So the focus here is picking up four Diamond tricks when East has ♦J × × ×.

The correct (and only winning) line of play is to cash the ♦A first, unblocking the ♦10 from dummy. Then we play a Diamond to the ♦Q. This way we have cashed two rounds of the suit and are still where we want to be – on table – to discover if the suit is splitting well or badly. Now we are over here we must take that ♣Q and then we can revert to Diamonds, taking the marked finesse.

We score one Spade, one Heart, five Diamonds and two Clubs.

Postscript.

This is not an easy hand, and is all but impossible if you have never seen this theme before. Well, now you have...

The play of cashing the ♦A, unblocking the Ten, is a variation on a theme.



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Y2 VBlue #23 Four General Hands SA	Contract: 4S
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: South	Board #: 3
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: E / W

		North	
		♠ 7	
		♥ AKJ4	
		♦ JT62	
		♣ AKQ6	
West			East
♠ Q			♠ A52
♥ T982			♥ Q63
♦ AK853			♦ 97
♣ 754			♣ JT982
		South	
		♠ KJT98643	
		♥ 75	
		♦ Q4	
		♣ 3	

A long suit and plenty of tricks. A superfluity of winners, in fact.

Unfortunately, you are in danger of losing too many tricks first.

How, *precisely*, should you attempt to draw trumps?

West	North	East	South
-	-	-	3♠
P	4♠	P	P
P			

Lead: ♦ A

Bidding.

We open 3♠ on our eight-card suit and partner – holding quick tricks in the form of the ♠A K Q and the ♥A K – raises us to 4♠.

[Note: A bid of 3NT on the North cards would have been a truly awful call – try playing that contract after East leads the ♠J. When partner opens with a pre-emptive 3♥ or 3♠ 95% of the time our two choices of response are to raise him to game or to Pass].

Play.

The play's the thing. West leads a top Diamond and, on the sight of dummy, we see that we would have an easy time making this contract had West led a Club or a Heart as we could have dumped our Diamond losers. Unluckily for us, The Great Dealer in the Sky dealt West the ♦A K so he had an easy lead. Still, we thank partner courteously before we take a moment or two to **Count** and **Plan**.

After West cashes the top Diamonds we contemplate a dummy full of master cards (so we have no problem with **winners**) but with the prospect of losing two trump tricks. The focus of this deal is how to play Spades so as to avoid too many **losers**.

Now, with nine trumps missing the Ace-Queen it is normal to finesse against the Queen, which makes it hard to see why that would be the wrong play here. The point is that we cannot repeat the finesse as we only have one trump on table. By playing a Spade to the ♠J (or equivalent) we would be hoping that East held precisely ♠Q ×. No other holding helps us. Were the Spades 3-1 then we would have two losers without the option.

Now consider the alternative play of a Spade to the ♠K. This works if East has ♠A × (an exactly equal chance to East having ♠Q ×) and also if East has ♠A × ×, giving West the singleton Queen. Note that the layout where West holds the singleton Ace is useless to us – there would be no way of avoiding two trump losers.

So putting up the ♠K gives us two chances as against finessing the ♠J which gives us one. On that basis we play a Spade to the ♠K and see how our luck is today.

Good is the answer as the ♠Q comes down from West. We rack up our game for the loss of two Diamonds and just one trump.

Postscript.

Learning all your *suit combinations* and the best way to play them is a long and, frankly, daunting process. This is one of the more obscure layouts, but it is susceptible to analysis at the table.



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

Y2 VBlue #23 Four General Hands SA	Contract: 4H
Date: 03/07/2016	By: South
Dealer: West	Board #: 4
Play this hand online!	Vulnerable: All

West ♠ J762 ♥ Q8 ♦ T74 ♣ KT82		East ♠ 954 ♥ A3 ♦ 86532 ♣ A93
North ♠ A83 ♥ 6542 ♦ QJ9 ♣ 754		South ♠ KQT ♥ KJT97 ♦ AK ♣ QJ6

Here is a game contract reached with a minimum of fuss.

You have enough points for game but you have a lack of entries to the table. (That's the penalty for picking up too good a hand!)

So... what is the best way to go about the time-honored line of "Draw trumps and claim"?

West	North	East	South
P	P	P	1♥
P	2♥	P	4♥
P	P	P	

Lead: ♣ 2

This deal shows a near-identical theme to Hand 3 but in a more prosaic setting.

Bidding.

After three Passes we open 1♥ and see partner give a gentle raise to 2♥.

With 19 points we think it right to take a pot at 4♥, even though we regard 5-3-3-2 hands with some trepidation.

Play.

As an aside you may note that West has a disgusting choice of opening leads. Leading from ♠J × × × is a strong contender to cough up a trick to the opponents, a trump is out of the question and a Diamond could be too passive. So West decides, not unreasonably, to go on the attack and lead a low Club. Many players would rather sell their children into slavery than lead from a King but this West has no truck with such nonsense – a Club lead is as likely to be right (or wrong) as any other on his hand.

[Note: *As the cards lie West could lead anything (bar a Heart) and it would make little difference. We are always going to lose two Club tricks (any potential discard on the ♦Q J 9 is of no use to us) and the focus of this deal is (as in Hand 3) the trump suit*].

We note the ♣2 lead, study the dummy, thank partner and prepare our **Count** and **Plan**.

Winners? Three Spades, three Diamonds, at least three Hearts and a slow Club. We have plenty of those.

Losers? *Ay, there's the rub.* We can see two Club losers immediately and the Ace of trumps. If East-West take a Club ruff then that's *Goodnight Vienna*; we'd be down before we start. If, though, Clubs are 4-3 (as this lead of the Two suggests), then there is to be no Club ruff.

So it all hinges on the trump suit. How should we play Hearts so that we minimize the chance of losing two Heart tricks?

Now, if dummy had copious entries the correct play would be – without argument – to lead Hearts up to the ♥K J 10 9 7 and to finesse against the ♥Q. If that went well (either by holding the trick or by forcing the ♥A) then we'd cross back to table and repeat the process.

However... there can be no repletion of procedure on this deal. Dummy has one entry (the ♠A) and no more. After we have taken our Heart finesse, then what? Suppose we crossed to the ♠A here and played a Heart to the ♥9 and West played the ♥A. Now what? Dummy would be an entryless horror.

In these circumstances we'd have no option but to lead Hearts from hand, and that means laying down the ♥K, hoping and praying East started with ♥Q ×. If he started with ♥Q × × then we would fail; indeed we could never have made our contract.

So we need to look again at this suit combination. If we can play Hearts only once from the dummy is it right to finesse the ♥J? Why not play the ♥K? That works if East were to hold either ♥A × or ♥A × ×, giving us two chances as against one. The arguments are precisely the same as we made in Hand 3.

After three rounds of Clubs we cross to the ♠A and duly lead a Heart. Playing the odds we try our luck with the King, and it holds. Another Heart lead brings down the Queen and the Ace, to deep sighs from East and West. We make the game for the loss of two Clubs and a Heart.

Postscript.

It's the lack of entries to dummy, note, that forces us into the unnatural play of a Heart to the King. Give dummy the ♠Q (and our hand the ♠3) and we'd play it the "natural" way of attempting to finesse twice against the Queen. Ironically, on this layout of trumps, we'd go down. *That's the way the cookie crumbles.*