

PLAY OF HAND – SESSION 3

Trump Management, Roughing Finesse, Transportation, and Keeping RHO Out of the Lead

By Baloney Bill

So, after all of these Chat sessions that you have attending, you know that bridge can be a very complex game. This session relates to some of the complexity. Most experienced players enjoy the complexity; it makes the game very interesting. I've developed this lesson from a Bridge Bulletin contribution by Michael Berkowitz (Feb 2025, p 48).

North (your partner) holds the following hand (spades first, then H, then D, then C):

7 6 2
A 10 9 8
A Q J
9 3 2

South's (your) hand:

A K 9 5 4 3
J
K 9
K 7 6 4

Please note each hands' number of points (including distribution points and Losing Trick Count (LTC). Based on the combined LTC of each hand, should you be able to make 4 spades? Yes ___ No ___

The contract is 4S by South. Can you bid the hands such that you arrive at that contract? Yes ___

West leads the spade queen, which you take with the Ace. You lead the king of spades next and discover that West started with 3 spades (Q J 10) and east only one (the 8), so you know you will lose a spade trick. It also appears that you could lose 3 club tricks and go down one, if West holds the club ace, and East gets in the lead and leads a club. If East holds the club ace, you simply lead a club from the board and play the king (if East does not play her Ace); that gives you a 50% chance of making the contract.

How about if we change that 50% to greater than 50%?

Look at the nice "spot" cards in North's heart suit. I wonder if you can take more than one heart trick? Maybe! After taking your two spade tricks (do not lead a third spade – this is *good trump management* – Why? _____), lead your heart jack to Dummy's ace. Then lead the heart 10, tossing a club if East does not cover. You will likely lose this trick to West, but West won't be able to attack your club suit. If West does take the heart and then leads the ace of clubs, your will only lose one more club trick, because your king will be good and you can toss your fourth club on one of dummy's high diamonds.

Let's say West is too smart to lead his club ace. Instead, he leads a diamond, hoping his partner has the king. You take it with your jack, tossing the 9 from your hand, after which you lead another heart:

- If East covers it with the other heart honor, trump it and your last heart on the board will be good; toss a club on it.
- If East doesn't cover it, toss a club (This is called a _____ finesse). Lead the diamond king back to the board, taking it with dummy's ace (to make sure you can stay on the board – a potential *transportation* issue)), and lead the remaining diamond honor, tossing another club from your hand. You made your contract!

This technique will work as long as East holds at least one heart honor, which will occur 75% of the time. You just improved your odds over the 50% finesse you contemplated earlier.