

Learning Points – Can You Find the Game-Going Trick

by Steve Moese (Mike Purcell ed.)

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Declarer Play LEVEL: Intermediate

West Deals
None Vul
MPs

♠ QJ52
♥ AQJ
♦ K96
♣ Q105

Joe

Wednesday Evening STaC, March 10, 2010, Cincinnati Bridge Association Bridge Center, 2860 Cooper Road, Cincinnati, OH 45241 (513) 631-8070 . My partner is Dr. Joe Fisher.



Toward the end of a long round dotted with a few disappointing results you begin looking for an opportunity to leap-frog the field. Do you take the plunge and try for game? Chance favors the bold. Better still, can declarer make this game? Only with care and skill.

Steve

♠ A963
♥ 752
♦ A10872
♣ J

EW: 1♣
NS: 1N, 3♣
N:3♦, S:2♦

The Bidding

North holds standard 1N opening in most approaches. The 4=3=3=3 shape is a weakness and some might downgrade this hand. It holds only 1 Ace and 1 King with good intermediates. South's 2♣ call is slightly aggressive, but the hand is an invitational raise if partner holds ♠s (not a great chance but one that could turn the night around). Playing 15-17 HCP 1NT opening, many would force to game with South's hand. South's subsequent ♠ raise is excessively optimistic, driving for a top to gain ground on the field. With little duplication in ♣s, South's hand is worth 10-11 Support Points (HCP +

West	North	East	South
Pass	1N ¹	Pass	2♣
Pass	2♣	Pass	4♠ ²

All Pass

East leads ♥6

1= 14-16 HCP 2=Unbridled optimism.

Distribution) in ♠s. Note that the Total Losing Trick Count for South is 8. With a strong NT opposite, South expects partner to have 6 LTC losers. 24-8-6 = 10 tricks available. The 2 hands combined have a sound chance to make 10 tricks. Go ahead bid that game.

The Play

East's opening lead is likely from length and gives declarer a trick out of the gate. Declarer can count only 5 immediate winners (1♠, 2♥, 2♦) and 4-5 apparent losers (1-2 ♠, 1♥, 1♦, and 1♣). Setting up dummy's ♦s for 1 loser and ruffing ♣s seems right. There is one additional chance – can you see it?

The ♦ suit lends itself to a finesse of the ♦QJ in either opponent's hand. East seeing dummy to play next will find it easy to split honors. Leading from dummy first will make it harder for West to know to split honors. A thin premise perhaps, but playing toward hand allows declarer to avoid putting West on lead (AVOIDANCE). Declarer doesn't want a premature lead through the ♥AQ. Declarer planned the campaign as follows:

- 1) Low ♣ to the ♣J, West winning the ♣A. (If East wins ♣K, this contract goes down).
- 2) West returns a ♣. South ruffs East's ♣K, setting up the ♣Q.
- 3) ♠A then ♠3 puts West in with the ♠K at trick 5
- 4) The ♦Q collects the ♦K and is ruffed by East
- 5) East continues with the ♣9 – do you ruff? No, better to pitch a ♥.
- 6) The ♦A and a ♦ ruff are followed by the ♥A and a ♥ ruff in dummy to get to the established ♦.

Making 4 for +420 was a top board.

NS Pair	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
MPs	-50	420	-100		-50	-100	-150	-50			-50
Score	5.13	7.94	1.75		5.13	1.75	0.06	5.13			5.13

As often the case, down 1 would have been an above average result for North/South.

Post Mortem

South's bidding was influenced by distribution and loser count. The opening lead gave up a trick, but the contract still required careful play to land 10 tricks. The deep finesse in ♦s created chances, even though East scored a ♦ ruff. Dropping a ♥ on a good ♣ also kept transportation to the dummy for declarer to ruff out ♦s and establish the game-going trick.

Losing Trick Count - Once you have a good trump fit, count losers (non A, K, Q cards in each suit, maximum 3) A doubleton is 2 losers unless it holds the A or K or both. A singleton is 1 loser unless it's the Ace. Add your losers to partner's losers. Subtract the total from 24 and you have an estimate of your trick taking potential. This estimate can be adjusted for opponent's known strength (they do bid, right?).

You can estimate partner's losers as follows: A simple raise or typical 1NT response is 9 losers. An invitational raise is 8 losers. A weak 2 bid is 7-8 losers. A minimum opening bid is 7 losers. For each additional 3 HCP, deduct 1 loser. A 1NT bidder should show 6 losers on average.

West Deals None Vul MPs	♠ QJ52 ♥ AQJ ♦ K96 ♣ Q105	Joe
♠ K4 ♥ 8 ♦ QJ43 ♣ A108643	N W 24 E S	♠ 1087 ♥ K109643 ♦ 5 ♣ K92
Steve	♠ A963 ♥ 752 ♦ A10872 ♣ J	EW: 1♣ NS: 1N, 3♠, N:3♦, S:2♦

Learning Points

1. Sometimes all you have is a thin chance. Remember, thin chances are always better than no chance at all. Something beats nothing every time.
2. When attempting a finesse of 2 honors, you might choose the direction that best masks your intention. Lead toward the closed hand.
3. Devalue 4-3-3-3 and 5-3-3-2 hands, especially in a trump contract. These patterns will not contribute extra tricks.
4. Count support points once you have a good trump fit with partner (8+ cards). Support points can influence a close decision.
5. Count LTC once a good trump fit is confirmed. This can improve your evaluation further.

Key Words: Count tricks, Support Points, Total Losing Trick Count, 4333 shape