

Learning Points – Declarer Play – Listen and Plan Accordingly

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Declarer Play Level: BASIC
Tuesday Night Lecture Series

- **Stop** Planning the play:
- **Look** 1. Before you play, count winners and losers. How many tricks do you need?
- **Listen** 2. Review what your opponents said/did not say, and what they led.
- **Analyze** 3. Look for ways to eliminate losers or create winners.
- **Plan** 4. Formulate a plan. We know what our options are (losers and winners, sources of tricks), which defender can hurt you, and what additional information we need to make informed choices. Look for the best opportunity with highest chance of success.
- **Execute**

Planning is often dynamic – the direction you choose depends on what you learn along the way. Sometimes the obvious plays are not the best plays. Learning the best play for a given card combination helps. Playing the cards you have for the number of tricks you really need helps even more. Playing within the context of the entire hand is our objective. Check every plan to see if you overlooked an opportunity or threat.

South	West	North	East	Here's hand where the bidding provides a planning road map for the play. Can you translate the opponent's bids into a successful plan? You can if you put yourself in West's shoes.
1♠	Double	Redouble ¹	2♣ ²	
3♠	Pass	6♠ ³	All Pass	

1= 10+ HCP but not 4♠s

2= Weak escape; a place to play

3 = Science, Schmience. We got tricks.

Start by asking: "What shape and how many of the remaining HCPs must West have for a Takeout Double?"

North

♠Q65

♥AKJ532

♦A74

♣2 6 Spades
 Lead ♦K

SLL:

HCP:

Top Tricks:

Losers:

Lead: **Threat!!!**

Analysis:

Can't lose lead before rid of ♦ losers

South

♠AKJ1097

♥6

♦J32

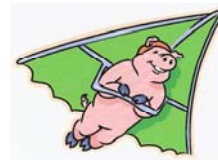
♣KJ5

Plan:

William S. Root, How to Play a Bridge Hand, pp. 200-201

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Here's the complete Analysis and Plan:

South has a skimpy 27 HCP slam. Few if any will bid it. The opening lead poses a major threat – 2♦ losers are immediately exposed. There are no trump losers, but 1♣ loser for sure. With so many immediate losers we cannot give up control of the hand. We must eliminate at least 2 of the losers before opponents gain the lead. Clearly our source of tricks is the Heart suit. How should we play Hearts?

We don't have much choice actually. West is marked with the DKQ (from the lead) and must have at least 5 more HCP to justify the double, probably 6 or 7 more. In fact, we can count on West to have 4 hearts too. West's likely distribution is 1♠, 4♥, 4♦, and 4♣ (though some 35 or 53 minor suit split is possible).

North
 ♠Q65
 ♥AKJ532
 ♦A74
 ♣2 6 Spades
 Lead ♦K

South
 ♠AKJ1097
 ♥6
 ♦J32
 ♣KJ5

SLL:
 HCP: 14 + 13
 Top Tricks: 9
 Losers: 3 Quick
 Lead: Threat!!!

Analysis:
 Can't lose lead before rid of ♦ losers
 Assume LHO 1444 w/10+ HCP & ♥Q

Plan:
 2 Rounds trump confirm LHO's singleton
 Finesse ♥J then ruff ♥
 Use ♠Q as entry to 4 good ♥s.
 Pitch 4 losers, make 12 tricks.

Clues from the bidding
 West doubles South's 1♠ bid. East bids 2♣ over North's redouble.

William S. Root, How to Play a Bridge Hand, pp. 200-201

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Novice	Intermediate	Advanced
Take the ♥ finesse then cash 2 more ♥s to drop 2 losing ♦s. This fails when trumps split 1-3 and East has short ♥s.	Take the ♥ finesse. Lead to the ♣J, hoping for ♣Q onside. Play ♥A pitching ♦ loser. Cross ruff until ♥s are winners.	Plan for a 4-2 ♥ break with the ♥Q onside. Draw trumps before running ♥s where you drop 3 losers. No ♣ finesse at all!

North
 ♠Q
 ♥AK53
 ♦74
 ♣2

West's takeout double paints a very clear picture, if you listen. Assume West has 4 hearts and a singleton spade. Draw 2 round of trump leaving the trump Q in dummy. Finesse the HQ then ruff a low heart immediately (no over ruff possible).

← In this position lead a ♠ to the carefully preserved ♠Q, drawing East's last trump. Now you can cash 4 ♥s, discarding 4 losers from your hand. You lose only 1 trick at the end.

Making 6, beautifully played!

South
 ♠J109
 ♥
 ♦J3
 ♣KJ5

Note: The ♣ finesse is a *practice finesse* – even if it works it can't help you. Why take it? Knowing West has 4 ♥s (a 4-2 split is 33% more likely than a 3-3 split) suggests a 1st round finesse followed by an immediate ♥ ruff. That way you can exhaust all West's remaining ♥s with the ♥AK when you take the last trump out of East's hand with the ♠Q.

The opening lead and the bidding both provide clues to the safest plan to make the hand.

Keywords: SLL-APE, Listen, minimum takeout double strength and shape, ruff out a 4-2 break, avoid practice finesses, loser count,