

Learning Points – Plan a Touchy Slam

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Declarer Play Level: Intermediate

North Deals EW Vul MPs	♠ 8 ♥ KJ ♦ KJ10973 ♣ J843	
♠ K1053 ♥ Q65 ♦ 8 ♣ AKQ96	N W 9 E S	♠ A9764 ♥ A9732 ♦ A65 ♣ -
	♠ QJ2 ♥ 1084 ♦ Q42 ♣ 10752	EW: 6♠, 5♥, 3N, 4♣, 1♦

North	East	South	West
2♦ ¹	2♠	3♦	4♦ ²
Pass	4♠	Pass	4N ³
Pass	5♣ ⁴	Pass	5♦ ⁵
Pass	5♠ ⁶	Pass	6♠

All Pass

1 = Weak 2 – 5-11 HCP

2 = GF w/ Support or Slam Invite

3 = Roman Keycard Blackwood

4 = 0 or 3 Key Cards

5 = Do you have the ♠Q? 6 = No.

South leads ♦2

West's 4♦ shows a fit with slam interest, or any slam going hand without a fit. West chooses to explore slam knowing East West have a 9-card or longer ♠ fit, likely 12 losers (unless we are missing 2 or more keycards), and a useful singleton in ♦s. Overcaller must have 3 Keycards at this vulnerability. No ♠Q means a small slam. Together East West hold only 26 HCP. West knows there are 11-12 combined losers. A great trump fit and useful distribution mean 12 tricks are possible.

The Play

Planning is the key. Let's assess our winners, losers, and possible trick sources. We need better than a 20% chance for this slam. What are other options? Close inspection shows Line A preserves all chances in B and C!

Count dummy entries to find the right sequence of plays.

Dummy (West) has 3 entries: the ♠K, and 2 ♦ ruffs. South has exactly 3 ♦s (the split 1-6-3 leaves 3 for South). If the ♣s break 4-4 we need 2 of the 3 entries. If trumps break 4-0 and we catch the right side we need all 3 entries. ♣s break 5-3 we need all the entries and a 2-2 trump split, or ♣J10(x), or a ♥ end play.

After the ♦ lead, win in hand and ruff a ♦. To cater to all opportunities, ruff a small ♣. Ruff the 3rd ♦ eliminating South and play ♠ to the ♠A (North is more likely to be void, if there is a void). When both

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Study a hand before you play. Count winners and losers, entries in both hands, and sources of tricks. Identify the danger hand. Look for different ways to group sources of tricks – they define your lines of play. Always start with the line of play that keeps the most options open.

Having a choice of plays, pick the order that maximizes your chances on the entire hand (not just in a single suit). We don't know much when a hand begins. Keep track of missing HCP & opponents' shape (Discovery).

The Bidding

East has 5 losers (add 1 winner for every 2 Aces more than the number of Qs you hold) and 12 HCP (17 Support Points). West has 5 ½ losers and 14 HCP (17 SP).

Many bid Michaels with 5=5 Majors. We use Michaels with 7-10 or 16+ HCP Vulnerable. With 11-15 we overcall. Leaping Michaels over weak 2-bids is popular: 3♥ to show ♥&♠, 4♣ to show ♣ and a Major, etc.).

South's ♦ raise is preemptive and smart on any 3-card holding at this vulnerability. South removed an entire level of bidding at no cost.

Declarer's Analysis:

1) **Top Winners:** 7 (2♠, 1♥, 1♦, 3♣).

2) **Losers:** 3 or 4 (1 or 2 ♥&♠).

3) **Trick Sources:**

A. 3♠, 1♥, 1♦ & 2♦ Ruffs, 4♣s & ♣ Ruff → Requires 4-4 ♣s

B. 2♠, 2♥, 1♦ & 2♦ Ruff, 3♣s & 2♣ Ruff → Needs end play.

C. ♠'s 2-2 and ♥K on side. (0.4 x 0.5 or ~20% Chance).

follow, lead small to the ♠K. The 3-1 trump shows, but you are in control. Lead ♣s, pitching small ♥s and watching for the ♣J10. Since the ♣9 is good, lead it and pitch your last ♥ Loser. Whether South ruffs or not, you give up only that trump trick, the high trump you were going to lose anyway!. The rest of your hand is high.

Don't sweat freak splits in the minors. Better to avoid distraction, concentrate on where we can succeed, and ignore the losing cases. If a freak split dooms this slam, smile, compliment partner on their bidding, and move quickly to the next board, forgetting this one entirely! Don't waste one iota of energy on post mortems until the game is over – you need all you have for the boards in front of you!

Bidding 6 and making 6 is a top no one accomplished.

Post Mortem

This tricky hand puts declarer on a narrow path, with many temptations to stray. Ruffing a ♣ immediately is necessary to benefit from a potential 4-4 ♣ split.

Line A fails whenever we ruff the 3rd ♦ before we ruff the 1st ♣ because we used out entries out of proper order. Ruffing a later round of ♣s is less safe (slight risk of an overruff) and might pose an entry risk when they are in short supply.

If the ♣s split 5-3 and ♣9 is not good, you must ruff instead of pitching your last ♥ loser. Lead a ♠ to endplay South with the master ♠. If North has the master ♠, then a ♦ return will not help you. We hope South must lead away from the ♥K eliminating your ♥ loser. On this hand, the ♥K was with North and the ♠Q with South, so the endplay failed. Any chance is better than no chance.

Line B fails unless conditions for a 1-suit endplay are in place (the hand that holds the trump winner has 3 ♦s and 4 or 5 ♣s). Because South is known to hold 3 ♦s, West cannot leave a trump in dummy. 2 rounds of trump and 2 ♦ ruffs exhausts dummy's trumps. Ruffing fewer Ds leaves South a convenient exit card, foiling an endplay.

With 3 or fewer ♣s, defenders can profitably ruff a ♣ winner, and exit with anything but ♥s patiently waiting for declarer to break the ♥ suit 1st and lose a trick.

Learning Points

1. On complex or challenging hands, count your winners, losers, entries and trick sources.
2. Sort tricks sources into lines of play. Choose an approach to benefit from 1 or more lines if the 1st one fails. The idea is to keep as many options alive as possible.
3. Count opponents' distribution – knowing shape determines whether you can ruff safely once or more and how much elimination work you face in a key suit if you are thinking about an end play.
4. When planning to run a long suit that you will eventually ruff once or more, consider ruffing as early as possible. You can make better use of rare entries.
5. Suits with Ax(x) opposite Qx(x) are suits opponents should lead first unless we have no other chance.

Keywords: Plan the play, Count winners and losers, Count entries, Count trick sources, keep chances available.

