

Planning the play as declarer

As declarer you need a certain number of tricks to make your contract. When dummy goes down, stop for a moment and make a plan of how you are going to make those tricks. This plan will only come about by careful, logical thought on your part.

One way is to become a SWOT, which stands for:

Strengths Count the tricks that you can make without losing the lead. In no trumps this is just high cards and long suit tricks. In a suit contract, add the extra tricks that can be made straight away by ruffing.

Weaknesses Work out how many tricks you are short of your target. If the number of top winners equals the number of tricks needed for your contract, you can just take them. But as overtricks improve your score, you should consider if any are available without endangering your contract.

Opportunities Look at each suit in turn to find the opportunities to make extra tricks.

Threats Think what might go wrong when you play your contract and how you can counter the threats.

Plan When you have gathered the evidence, make your plan for the contract.

Here is an example of how SWOT might work. Say you are in 3NT and the defence lead a suit where your only stopper is the ace and two little cards in one hand, facing two small cards in the other.

- The Strength might be that you can cash eight tricks off the top.
- The Weakness is that you need nine tricks for 3NT.
- The opportunity might be in a suit where you have KQJ, where if you drive out the ace you will set up your ninth trick.
- The Threat is that the defence can win their ace and cash too many winners in the suit led.
- The Plan might be to hold up your ace in their suit until the third round. When you play your suit, you hope that if the suit led breaks 5-3, the hand with the winners does not hold the ace of your suit.

1. https://tinyurl.com/23s3a3r2



S $\spadesuit = 1$ $\heartsuit = 2$ $\spadesuit = 0$ $\clubsuit = 6$ Total = 9 tricks

W 0 tricks short

O Finesse ♠ Q. Finesse ♦ K.

T If declarer takes the Φ Q finesse and East wins Φ K and switches to diamonds, the defenders will cash too many tricks (4 diamonds and the Φ K)

Plan: Win ♠ A and take 9 top tricks.

With regard to the diamond suit, East is the danger hand. Declarer is not concerned if West leads a low diamond. Dummy's ♦ K is sure to win a trick, regardless of which defender holds the ♦ A. But if East leads a low diamond and West has the ♦ A (a near certainty as East would not lead away from an unprotected ace in a suit contract) then dummy's ♦ K will be trapped.

Take 9 tricks ending in dummy and then lead a low diamond to finesse the DK. It's a no risk 50-50 chance. It fails.

2. https://tinyurl.com/2d74q989



S \spadesuit =1 \heartsuit =2 \spadesuit =0 \spadesuit =5 Total=8 tricks

W 1 trick short.

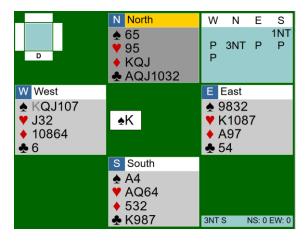
O Finesse ◆ Q. Finesse ◆ K.

T East wins ♠ Q with ♠ K (remember that declarer cannot see where the ♠ K is) and returns a spade, setting up too many losers to risk the diamond finesse. If declarer wins the first trick with the ♠ A and finesses the ♦ K then whichever defender holds the ♦ A will win the trick and play another spade, winning with the ♠ K and taking 5 spade tricks in total plus ♦ A to defeat the contract by two tricks.

Plan: Play ♠ Q at trick 1 and hope that West has led from ♠ KJ10xx and not from ♠JT9xx.

As with board 1, end trick 9 in dummy and try the (failing) DK finesse. East wisely rises with the ♦A.

3. https://tinyurl.com/27pmcpzv



S
$$\spadesuit = 1 \quad \heartsuit = 1 \quad \blacklozenge = 0 \quad \clubsuit = 6 \quad \text{Total} = 8 \text{ tricks}$$

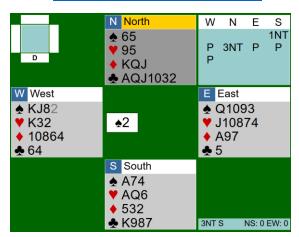
W 1 trick short

O 2 more diamond tricks available after driving out ♦ A. Finesse ♥ Q.

T Spades will be wide open once declarer has taken her ♠ A : at least 4 losers.

Plan: Take heart finesse as only chance for ninth trick. Too many spade losers to play diamonds, which would involve having to give up the lead. Play all the clubs before taking the finesse. The defence may throw away the wrong cards. Here declarer makes 12 tricks!

4. https://tinyurl.com/2dl2zflz



S
$$\spadesuit = 1 \quad \heartsuit = 1 \quad \blacklozenge = 0 \quad \spadesuit = 6 \quad \text{Total} = 8 \text{ tricks}$$

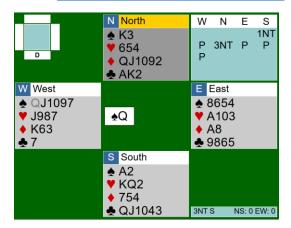
W 1 trick short.

O 2 more diamond tricks available after driving out ♦ A. Finesse ♥ Q.

T Only one spade stopper, the suit they have led.

Plan: The lead was ♠ 2. It looks as if spades are breaking 4-4 so the defence can only win three spade tricks plus their ♦ A. Play diamonds rather than take the heart finesse, which, if it fails, (as the cards lie it would fail) would give the defence a fifth trick.

5. https://tinyurl.com/2xmes39x



S
$$\spadesuit = 2 \quad \heartsuit = 0 \quad \spadesuit = 0 \quad \clubsuit = 5 \quad \text{Total} = 7 \text{ tricks}$$

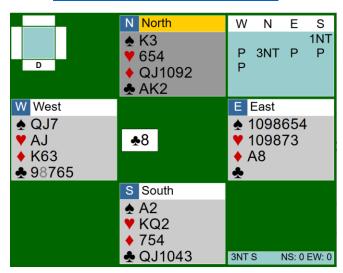
W 2 tricks short.

O 1 or 2 heart tricks available by leading twice up to ♥ K Q . 3 diamond tricks available after driving out ♦ A K.

T Only 2 spade stoppers, the suit they have led.

Plan: You don't have time to establish diamonds as you would have to lose the lead twice. The defence will persist with spades and establish three spade winners plus two red aces to defeat the contract. Win ♠ K and lead up to ♥ K, hoping that East holds ♥ A. Later cross to ♠ A and lead up to ♥ Q.

6. https://tinyurl.com/22en633p



S
$$\spadesuit = 2 = 0 = 0 = 0 = 5$$
 Total = 7 tricks

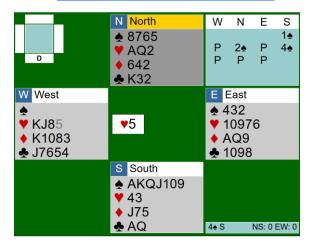
W 2 tricks short.

O 1 or 2 heart tricks available by leading twice up to ♥ K Q. 3 diamond tricks available after driving out ♦ A K.

T No obvious threats: they haven't led spades.

Plan: Drive out ♦ A K (Declarer can afford to lose the lead twice.). When back in, cash 3 diamond tricks, four more club tricks and ♠ A K, 9 tricks in total.

7. https://tinyurl.com/23fqhk8j



S $\spadesuit = 6$ $\heartsuit = 1$ $\spadesuit = 0$ $\spadesuit = 3$ Total = 10 tricks

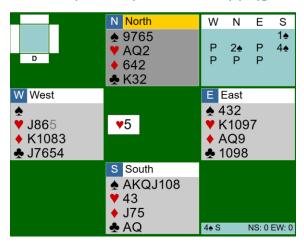
W 0 tricks short.

O Finesse ♥ Q.

T The clubs are blocked, and the lead threatens your only entry to dummy.

Plan: If you win the lead with dummy's ♥ A then you cannot make three club tricks. You must play ♥ Q at trick 1 and hope it wins. If so then draw trumps and then lead a low club to the ♠ AQ, and then a low heart to dummy's ♥ A and cash ♠ K. Making 11 tricks.

8. https://tinyurl.com/2aqqvqg5



S \spadesuit = 6 \heartsuit = 1 \spadesuit = 0 \spadesuit = 3 Total = 10 tricks

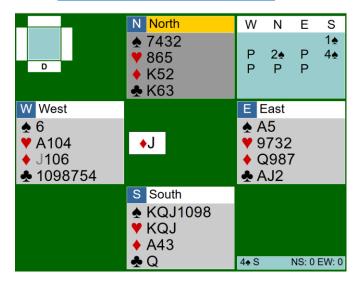
W 0 tricks short.

O Finesse ♥ Q.

T None. The clubs are blocked but you can get to your **♠** K by overtaking your **♠** 8 with dummy's **♠** 9.

Plan: Rise with ♥ A, cash ♠ A K Q, unblock ♠ A Q, overtake ♠ 8 with dummy's ♠ 9 and cash ♠ K.

9. https://tinyurl.com/2bnl9dal



S
$$\spadesuit = 0 \quad \heartsuit = 0 \quad \spadesuit = 2 \quad \spadesuit = 0 \quad \text{Total} = 2 \text{ tricks}$$

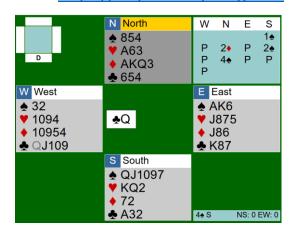
W 8 tricks short.

O 5 spade tricks available after driving out ♠ A. 2 heart tricks available after driving out ♥ A. 1 club trick available after driving out the ♠ A.

T A loser in each suit if they persevere in diamonds.

Plan: Win ♦ A and immediately play ♠ Q. When you later take ♦ K you can throw your diamond loser on ♠ K.

10. https://tinyurl.com/2bagxbuu



S
$$\spadesuit = 0$$
 $\heartsuit = 3$ $\spadesuit = 3$ $\clubsuit = 1$ Total = 7 tricks

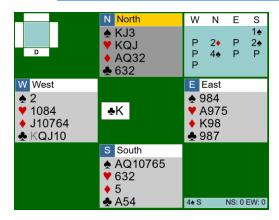
W 3 tricks short.

O 3 spade tricks available after driving out the ♠ A K.

T Two losers in each black suit.

Plan: Win ♠ A and immediately cash ♦ A K Q, discarding a club loser.

11.https://tinyurl.com/24g737ep



S $\spadesuit = 6 \quad \heartsuit = 0 \quad \blacklozenge = 1 \quad \clubsuit = 1 \quad \text{Total} = 8 \text{ tricks}$

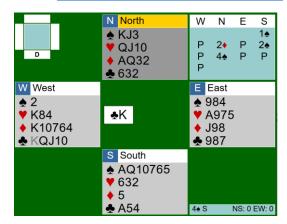
W 2 tricks short.

O 2 heart tricks available after driving out ♥ A. Finesse ♦ Q.

T None. Only 3 losers: 1 ♥ and 2 ♣.

Plan: Don't risk a diamond finesse hoping to make an overtrick. If it loses then declarer will cash two clubs and the ♥ A and you are down. Win ♠ A, draw trumps and drive out ♥ A.

12.https://tinyurl.com/25l6mv9e



S $\spadesuit = 6$ $\heartsuit = 0$ $\spadesuit = 1$ $\clubsuit = 1$ Total = 8 tricks

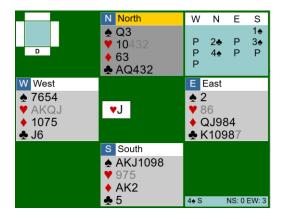
W 2 tricks short.

O 1 heart trick available after driving out ♥ A. Finesse ♦ Q.

T 2 heart losers and 2 club losers.

Plan: Win ♠ A, draw trumps and take the diamond finesse. When it wins discard a club on ♦ A and drive out ♥ A K.

13.https://tinyurl.com/2ygwcfgg



East cashes ♥AKQ and leads ♥J. You cannot afford to lose another trick.

S \spadesuit = 6 \heartsuit = 0 \blacklozenge = 2 \spadesuit = 1 Total = 9 tricks

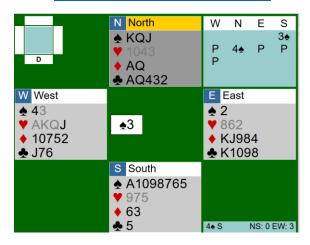
W 1 trick short.

O Finesse ♠ Q. Ruff diamond in dummy.

T None.

Plan: Don't risk the finesse. Trump fourth heart, cash ♦ A K and ruff a diamond in dummy with ♠ Q (high to avoid the risk of an overruff). Then draw trumps.

14. https://tinyurl.com/24s6lbnf



West cashes ♥ AKQ and then leads ♠3.

S $\spadesuit = 7 \quad \heartsuit = 0 \quad \blacklozenge = 1 \quad \spadesuit = 1$ Total = 9 tricks

W 1 trick short.

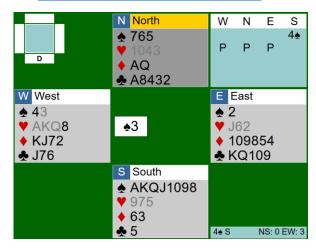
O Finesse **♦** Q. Finesse **♦** Q. Length trick if clubs break 4-3.

T If you take any finesse and it fails you are immediately one down.

Plan: Aim to establish fifth club. Win \clubsuit K, cash \clubsuit A, ruff \clubsuit 2, cross to \spadesuit Q, ruff \clubsuit 3, cross again to \spadesuit J, ruff \clubsuit 4, and use \spadesuit A as a final entry to discard \spadesuit 6 on \spadesuit Q.

If clubs had broken badly, you could still finesse ♦ Q.

15.https://tinyurl.com/2a8r8bby



West cashes ♥ AKQ and then leads ♠3.

S \spadesuit = 7 \heartsuit = 0 \blacklozenge = 1 \spadesuit = 1 Total = 9 tricks

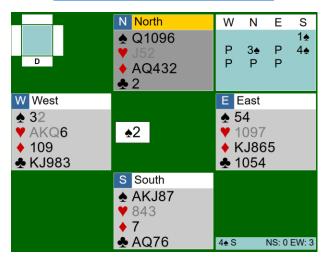
W 1 trick short.

O Finesse ♦ Q. Set up length trick if clubs break 4-3.

T You don't have sufficient entries to dummy to ruff out and enjoy the fifth club.

Plan: Draw trumps and finesse ♦ Q. Your only chance.

16.https://tinyurl.com/23lacd89



West cashes ♥ AKQ and then leads ♠2.

S $\spadesuit = 5$ $\heartsuit = 0$ $\spadesuit = 1$ $\spadesuit = 1$ Total = 9 tricks

W 3 tricks short.

O Finesse ♠ Q. Finesse ♦ Q. Ruffing losers in dummy. Cross ruff can increase 5 spade tricks to 8.

T If you take any finesse and it fails you are immediately one down.

Plan: Win Φ Q, cash \bullet A and Φ A and cross ruff the rest of the hand.