

Play of the Hand: Playing Like the Hideous Hog



presented by
Audrey Grant



Play of the Hand

by David Lindop

Trust the Opponents!

Although the defenders are trying to defeat our contract, at times they can't help but provide us with assistance. Not only might they provide us with a favorable lead, we can generally trust the card they lead.

Why would they be so obliging? The defenders need to communicate with one another, and the way they do this is through their leads and signals. If they lead a low card, it is usually fourth highest; if they lead an honor, it is usually the top of touching cards. If they were to frequently deviate from their agreements, they would make our task as declarer more difficult, but they would also make their partner's task next to impossible.

Suppose we are declarer in 4♠ after the following auction:

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| | 1♣ | Pass | 1♠ |
| Pass | 2♠ | Pass | 4♠ |
| Pass | Pass | Pass | |

♠ A J 6 3
♥ K 10 4
♦ 9 4 3
♣ K Q J



♠ K Q 9 7 5
♥ A 6
♦ K 8 2
♣ 7 6 3

West leads the ♥Q. We have three potential diamond losers and a club loser. One possibility to eliminate a diamond loser is the diamond finesse. After drawing trumps, we can plan to lead a diamond from dummy toward our hand, hoping East has the ♦A.

However, West's lead of the ♥Q has given us a much better option. On the reasonable assumption that West has led the top of touching cards, we can place the ♥J in West's hand. So, we should win the ♥A, draw trumps, and lead the ♥6 toward dummy. If West follows with a low heart, we should confidently finesse dummy's ♥10, expecting the layout to be something like this:

♠ A J 6 3
♥ K 10 4
♦ 9 4 3
♣ K Q J

♠ 10 8 2
♥ Q J 9 8
♦ A J 7
♣ 10 8 2

♠ 4
♥ 7 5 3 2
♦ Q 10 6 5
♣ A 9 5 4

♠ K Q 9 7 5
♥ A 6
♦ K 8 2
♣ 7 6 3

West has made a perfectly normal lead, but it has given us the chance to make an 'impossible' contract. Without the lead of the ♥Q, we were destined to lose three diamonds and the ♣A.

Isn't it possible that West has made an unusual lead, such as the top of a doubleton, and the full deal is something like this?

♠ A J 6 3
♥ K 10 4
♦ 9 4 3
♣ K Q J

♠ 10 8 2
♥ Q J 8
♦ A J 7 5
♣ 10 8 4 2

♠ 4
♥ J 9 7 5 3 2
♦ Q 10 6
♣ A 9 5

♠ K Q 9 7 5
♥ A 6
♦ K 8 2
♣ 7 6 3

Sure. If that's the case, we'll go down an extra trick in 4♠ if we finesse

the ♥10. We lose a heart as well as three diamonds and a club. But we weren't making the contract anyway, so the extra undertrick isn't a big deal. Sometimes we have to pay off to an unusual lead.

Notice, however, that if East has the ♦A, we still make 4♠, even if our finesse loses to the ♥J. Suppose this is the layout:

♠ A J 6 3
♥ K 10 4
♦ 9 4 3
♣ K Q J

♠ 10 8 2
♥ Q 8
♦ J 7 6 5
♣ 10 8 4 2

♠ 4
♥ J 9 7 5 3 2
♦ A Q 10
♣ A 9 5

♠ K Q 9 7 5
♥ A 6
♦ K 8 2
♣ 7 6 3

After our heart finesse surprisingly loses to East's ♥J, the defenders can take the ♦A and ♣A, but that's all. We can discard a diamond loser on dummy's ♥K. In summary, finessing dummy's ♥10 has everything to gain and nothing to lose.

We won't always have such a 'no lose' option. Suppose we again reach 4♠ after this auction:

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| | | | 1♠ |
| Pass | 2♠ | Pass | 4♠ |
| Pass | Pass | Pass | |

♠ K 8 5
♥ K 10 4
♦ 10 8 7 2
♣ 8 6 3



♠ A Q J 6 3
♥ A 9 8 3
♦ A Q
♣ Q 5

We can generally trust the card a defender leads.



Play of the Hand

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Playing Like the Hideous Hog

One of the favorite characters in bridge literature is Victor Mollo's Hideous Hog. The Hog loves to declare every hand and admonishes opponents and partners alike for their inferior bidding and play. Bombastic though he may be, there might be something we can learn from his approach.

Like all experts, the Hog expects to win his 50% finesses more than half the time (see inset). He does this by improving the odds through good technique. Let's see if we can emulate him on the following deals.

On this first deal, we are declarer in 3NT after the following auction:

| | | | |
|------|-------|----------|--------------|
| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| Pass | 3NT | All Pass | 1NT |

♠ A 5
♥ 8 4 2
♦ A Q J 5
♣ 7 6 3 2

♠6

| | |
|---|---|
| N | E |
| W | S |

♠ K 8 3
♥ A J 10
♦ K 7 4 3
♣ A Q 5

West leads the ♠6. We have two sure tricks in spades, one in hearts, four in diamonds, and one in clubs. We need one more.

At first glance, the club suit seems to offer the best chance for a ninth trick. We can take the club finesse, hoping East holds the ♣K: a 50-50 chance. But if we keep the Hideous Hog in mind, we should look to improve our odds.

The heart suit offers a 75% chance. Not quite 8 or 9 out of 10, but close. By taking a repeated finesse, we will make two heart tricks whenever East holds the ♥K, the ♥Q, or both. We will lose only if West holds both the ♥K and ♥Q. Here's the full deal:

♠ A 5
♥ 8 4 2
♦ A Q J 5
♣ 7 6 3 2

| | |
|--------------|-------------|
| ♠ Q 10 8 6 2 | ♠ J 9 4 |
| ♥ Q 7 | ♥ K 9 6 5 3 |
| ♦ 9 2 | ♦ 10 8 6 |
| ♣ K J 10 8 | ♣ 9 4 |

♠ K 7 3
♥ A J 10
♦ K 7 4 3
♣ A Q 5

After winning a trick with the ♠A, we lead a heart and finesse the ♥10.

Our first finesse loses to West's ♥Q. West will lead another spade to drive out our ♠K, but we travel to dummy with a diamond to lead another heart. When East plays low, we finesse the ♥J. Our second finesse works, and we have our nine tricks. If we relied on the 50-50 club finesse, we would have gone down.

Sometimes the opponents improve our odds. We are again in 3NT:

| | | | |
|------|-------|----------|--------------|
| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| Pass | 3NT | All Pass | 1NT |

♠ 9 3
♥ 8 4 2
♦ 10 7 5 3
♣ A K Q J

♦Q

| | |
|---|---|
| N | E |
| W | S |

♠ A 8 6 2
♥ A Q
♦ A K 4
♣ 9 7 6 3

"When I take a 50-50 chance I expect it to come off 8 or 9 times out of 10."
 —The Hideous Hog

This time West leads the ♦Q. The situation looks familiar. We have eight tricks: a spade, a heart, two diamonds, and four clubs. Again, a tempting 50-50 finesse is staring us in the face, the ♥A-Q. However, we want to do better than that.

In fact, West's opening lead of the ♦Q has improved our chances to almost 100%! We should always look closely at the card an opponent leads against our contract. "Analyze the opening lead," is a fundamental principle of declarer play.

We can assume that the defender has made the same sort of lead that we might make in a similar situation. So when West leads the ♦Q, we can be extremely confident that West also holds the ♦J. West is simply leading top of a sequence—in this case a broken sequence—from a long suit.

So we win the ♦K, take the ♦A, and lead the ♦4 toward dummy's ♦10. Here's the complete deal:

♠ 9 3
♥ 8 4 2
♦ 10 7 5 3
♣ A K Q J

| | |
|-------------|--------------|
| ♠ K J 7 | ♠ Q 10 5 4 |
| ♥ K 7 3 | ♥ J 10 9 6 5 |
| ♦ Q J 9 8 6 | ♦ 2 |
| ♣ 5 4 | ♣ 10 8 2 |

♠ A 8 6 2
♥ A Q
♦ A K 4
♣ 9 7 6 3

West gets the ♦J, but dummy's ♦10 is our ninth trick. No need to risk our contract on a 50-50 chance when we have a sure thing. The Hideous Hog strikes again! In fact, if we take the heart finesse, West can defeat the contract by winning the ♥K and leading back a heart or switching to a spade.

Let's raise the stakes. This time we reach a contract of 6♥ after partner uses Blackwood.

| | | | |
|------|-------|----------|-------|
| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| Pass | 4NT | Pass | 1♥ |
| Pass | 5NT | Pass | 5♥ |
| Pass | 6♥ | All Pass | 6♦ |

♠ K Q 4
♥ K Q 8 6 2
♦ A J 4
♣ A Q

♣ J

N
W E
S

♠ A J 5
♥ A J 9 7 3
♦ K 10 5
♣ 8 4

West leads the ♣J and we like our chances. The only potential losers are the ♣K and ♦Q. If West has the ♣K, a finesse of dummy's ♣Q will be successful. Even if that loses, we can still guess which defender holds the ♦Q. We can take a diamond finesse against either defender.

The diamond guess is better than 50%. When we are taking our other winners, the defenders will likely give away the position of the ♦Q. The defender holding the ♦Q will nervously hold onto diamonds, while the other defender may helpfully throw them all away. Our odds must be at least 8 or 9 out of ten. Surely the Hog would be proud!

However, if we take the club finesse at trick one, we'll get a contemptuous snort from the Hog. **When there is 100% play available, even the Hog would not accept an 80 or 90% play!** Here's the full deal:

| | | |
|--------------|-------------|-----------|
| ♠ 10 8 3 | ♠ K Q 4 | ♠ 9 7 6 2 |
| ♥ 4 | ♥ K Q 8 6 2 | ♥ 10 5 |
| ♦ 9 7 6 2 | ♦ A J 4 | ♦ Q 8 3 |
| ♣ J 10 9 3 2 | ♣ A Q | ♣ K 7 6 5 |
| | ♠ A J 5 | |
| | ♥ A J 9 7 3 | |
| | ♦ K 10 5 | |
| | ♣ 8 4 | |



From cover of BRIDGE IN THE FOURTH DIMENSION, Pinnacle Books edition, 1975

If we take the club finesse, East wins the ♣K and leads back a club. We eventually have to guess who holds the ♦Q. If we win the ♣A at trick one, we can't go wrong!

We draw the defenders' trumps and take our three spade winners. Then we lead the ♣Q and don't care who wins the ♣K. On the actual deal, East wins the ♣K and these are the remaining cards:

| | |
|----------|---------|
| ♠ — | ♠ 9 |
| ♥ Q 8 6 | ♥ — |
| ♦ A J 4 | ♦ Q 8 3 |
| ♣ — | ♣ 6 5 |
| ♠ — | ♠ — |
| ♥ J 9 7 | ♥ — |
| ♦ K 10 5 | ♦ — |
| ♣ — | ♣ — |

If East (or West) leads a spade or a club, we can discard our diamond loser and ruff in dummy. If East (or West) leads a diamond, we play low and are certain of taking three tricks in the suit.

After seeing how the Hideous Hog avoids taking 50% finesses, we'll probably start to feel like the Rueful Rabbit, another of Victor Mollo's characters, and a frequent partner of the Hog: if there's a finesse to take, it's probably wrong!

On this final deal, we must listen to the opponents' bidding before taking the 'automatic' finesse.

| | | | |
|------|--------|------|-------|
| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| 1♥ | Double | Pass | 4♠ |
| Pass | Pass | Pass | |

♠ A Q 10 8
♥ J 4
♦ 7 6 4 2
♣ A K 9

♥ A

N
W E
S

♠ K J 9 7
♥ 10 5 3
♦ A Q 3
♣ Q J 7

West starts by leading the ♥A, ♥K, and ♥Q. We trump the third heart in dummy, and draw trumps, which takes three rounds.

The Rueful Rabbit looked suspicious. Only players like himself took simple finesses, so that must be wrong.

It's that time again! It looks as though our 4♠ contract hinges on a successful diamond finesse,

with East holding the ♦K. But if we listen to the auction, we should realize **West almost certainly holds the ♦K!** West opened 1♥ and has shown up with only the ♥A-K-Q. We have all the remaining high cards except the ♦K and ♦J, so West must have the ♦K to have enough points to open at the one level.

What alternative do we have? Well, **if we know a finesse is going to lose, we shouldn't take it!** We must hope West holds a singleton or doubleton ♦K. We play the ♦A and a low diamond, hoping the layout is like this:

| | |
|-------------|------------|
| ♠ A Q 10 8 | ♠ 5 2 |
| ♥ J 4 | ♥ 9 8 7 |
| ♦ 7 6 4 2 | ♦ J 10 9 8 |
| ♣ A K 9 | ♣ 8 4 3 2 |
| ♠ 6 4 3 | ♠ — |
| ♥ A K Q 6 2 | ♥ — |
| ♦ K 5 | ♦ — |
| ♣ 10 6 5 | ♣ — |
| | ♠ K J 9 7 |
| | ♥ 10 5 3 |
| | ♦ A Q 3 |
| | ♣ Q J 7 |

Now we're playing like the Hog! ❖



Play of the Hand

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Playing Like the Hideous Hog — Part II

“On the contrary,” declared the Hideous Hog, brandishing a stuffed olive to drive home the argument. “No one should tamely accept inferior odds. It’s sheer defeatism.”

“But what if you can’t help it?” objected Peregrine the Penguin. “Suppose that the correct odds are against you?”

“Then try some others,” retorted H.H. loftily.

“You may need two finesses or a three-three break,” persisted the Penguin, “and the odds ...”

“Let me tell you,” broke in the Hog, “that next to taking losing finesses, looking for three-three breaks is the most unrewarding pastime in bridge.”

“Come, come H.H., that’s unreasonable,” protested Oscar the Owl. “If the contract depends on a three-three break, the odds will be against it, and even you can’t cast a spell to make them otherwise.”

“Want to bet?” asked the Hog with a snort, and diving into his capacious pockets, he came out with a tattered piece of paper...

— Bridge in the Fifth Dimension
Victor Mollo, with Phillip & Robert King

The Hideous Hog, one of Victor Mollo’s favorite creations, might be a little overbearing, but he does provide us with some sound principles to follow when we are declaring. The Hog is always looking for that extra edge. He wants to do better than rely on a 50–50 chance to make the contract.

So let’s see if we can impersonate the Hog on each of the following deals. In each one, we have reached a small slam contract. There’s a tempting heart finesse that will give us twelve tricks — if it works! But that’s only a 50% chance. Can we improve our odds?

From 50 to 100

On this first deal, we reach 6♠ on the following auction:

| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
|------|-------|------|-------|
| | | | 2♣ |
| Pass | 2♦ | Pass | 2♠ |
| Pass | 3♠ | Pass | 4NT |
| Pass | 5♦ | Pass | 5NT |
| Pass | 6♣ | Pass | 6♠ |
| Pass | Pass | Pass | |

♠ A J 6
♥ J 8 6
♦ 9 4 2
♣ J 10 5 4

♦K

N
W E
S

♠ K Q 10 8 7 5 3
♥ A Q
♦ A 7
♣ A K

West’s opening lead is the ♦K. We have a diamond loser and a heart loser. The obvious line is to win the ♦A, draw trumps, and try the heart finesse. If it works, all will be well; but if loses, the defenders will then take their established diamond winner, and down we go.

The Hideous Hog would never settle for even odds, so can we spot something better?

Once our ♣A and ♣K are gone, dummy’s ♣J–10 can be promoted into a winner by driving out the ♣Q. That would give us twelve tricks for sure, without the need for a finesse. But we can’t afford to give up a trick to the defenders while they can still take their diamond winner, so how can we do that? **Perhaps we can arrange to establish the club winner while getting rid of the diamond loser at the same time.**

We win the ♦A and draw only one round of trumps with the ♠K. We need to keep two entries to dummy. Next we take the ♣A–K to get them out of the way. We play a spade to dummy’s ♠J to draw the remaining trump, and lead the ♣J.

If East covers with the ♣Q, we can ruff and get back to dummy’s ♠A to take the ♣10 and discard our ♦7.

But suppose East plays a low club. Now **we must be careful to discard the ♦7** instead of trumping. We don’t care if West wins this trick with the ♣Q. Our ♣10 is established as a winner and we still have the ♠A to get to dummy. We discard our ♥Q on the ♣10 and make our slam.

♠ A J 6
♥ J 8 6
♦ 9 4 2
♣ J 10 5 4

♠ 4
♥ K 7 4 2
♦ (K) Q 10 6
♣ Q 7 6 3

N
W E
S

♠ 9 2
♥ 10 9 5 3
♦ J 8 5 3
♣ 9 8 2

♠ K Q 10 8 7 5 3
♥ A Q
♦ A 7
♣ A K

By discarding our diamond loser on the losing club trick, we played **a loser on a loser**. The Hog would be delighted. If we’d taken the heart finesse, we would have gone down. We improved our chances from 50% to 100%.

From 50 to 75

On this next deal, we get to 6NT.

| | | | |
|------|-------|----------|--------------|
| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| Pass | 3♣ | Pass | 2NT |
| Pass | 6NT | All Pass | 3♦ |

♠ A Q 5 4
♥ 10 8 6 4
♦ A Q 4
♣ J 3

♠10

| | |
|---|---|
| N | E |
| W | S |

♠ K J 7
♥ A Q
♦ K J 8 6
♣ A K 4 2

West leads the ♠10 and we count our tricks. We have four spades, a heart, four diamonds, and two clubs. We need one more. A successful heart finesse will see us home, but the Hog would look for better odds.

We actually have a second finesse we can try, and **two chances are much better than one!** In clubs, we can lead low toward dummy's ♣J. If West holds the ♣Q, dummy's ♣J will be our twelfth trick. What if East has the ♣Q? Then we can fall back on the heart finesse. Here's the full deal:

| | | |
|--------------|--|-------------|
| ♠ A Q 5 4 | | |
| ♥ 10 8 6 4 | | |
| ♦ A Q 4 | | |
| ♣ J 3 | | |
| ♠ 10 9 8 6 3 | | ♠ 2 |
| ♥ K 7 | | ♥ J 9 5 3 2 |
| ♦ 9 5 2 | | ♦ 10 7 3 |
| ♣ Q 8 5 | | ♣ 10 9 7 6 |
| | | |
| ♠ K J 7 | | |
| ♥ A Q | | |
| ♦ K J 8 6 | | |
| ♣ A K 4 2 | | |

We win the ♠J and lead the ♣2. If West plays low, dummy's ♣J wins right away. If West wins the ♣Q, the ♣J will be a winner later.

Notice that if we tried the heart finesse first and it lost, we would go down. It's too late to lead toward the ♣J since West would win the ♣Q as the second trick for the defenders.

By trying the club finesse first, we improve our odds from 50% to 75%.

Don't Rely on a 3-3 Break

Once more we reach 6NT.

| | | | |
|------|-------|----------|--------------|
| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| Pass | 2♦ | Pass | 2♣ |
| Pass | 6NT | All Pass | 2NT |

♠ A K 6
♥ 8 4 2
♦ 8 5
♣ K 10 9 8 4

♠J

| | |
|---|---|
| N | E |
| W | S |

♠ 7 3 2
♥ A Q 6
♦ A K Q J 10
♣ A Q

West leads the ♠J, and things look pretty good. We have two sure spade tricks, a heart, five diamonds, and three clubs. We need one more.

There's the ever-present heart finesse, of course, but we know by now not to rely on that. The club suit offers an extra chance. After winning the ♠K, we can take the ♣A-Q, and go back to dummy with the ♠A to play the ♣K. If the clubs divide 3-3, or the ♣J falls, we have all thirteen tricks. If not, we can try the heart finesse. Our odds are about 75%.

Still, we'd get a disdainful snort from the Hog when this is the layout:

| | | |
|--------------|--|------------|
| ♠ A K 6 | | |
| ♥ 8 4 2 | | |
| ♦ 8 5 | | |
| ♣ K 10 9 8 4 | | |
| ♠ J 10 9 8 | | ♠ Q 5 4 |
| ♥ K 7 5 | | ♥ J 10 9 3 |
| ♦ 7 4 3 2 | | ♦ 9 6 |
| ♣ 7 3 | | ♣ J 6 5 2 |
| | | |
| ♠ 7 3 2 | | |
| ♥ A Q 6 | | |
| ♦ A K Q J 10 | | |
| ♣ A Q | | |

The clubs don't break and the heart finesse loses. The Hog would point out that we have a 100% play. Win the ♠K, play the ♣A, and then **play the ♣Q overtaking with dummy's ♣K!** We then lead the ♣10 to drive out the ♣J. We get back to dummy with the ♠A to take two established club winners for our twelve tricks.

Make Dummy a Winner

On our last deal we're back in 6♠.

| | | | |
|------|-------|------|--------------|
| WEST | NORTH | EAST | SOUTH |
| Pass | 1♥ | Pass | 1♦ |
| Pass | 4♠ | Pass | 4NT |
| Pass | 5♥ | Pass | 6♠ |
| Pass | Pass | Pass | |

♠ A J 9 2
♥ J 10 9 5
♦ A 7
♣ K 7 3

♣Q

| | |
|---|---|
| N | E |
| W | S |

♠ K Q 10 6
♥ A Q 7
♦ K Q J 10 3
♣ 6

West leads the ♣Q, marking East with the ♣A. We play low from dummy, and play low again when West continues with the ♣J. The ♣A doesn't appear from East, so we ruff. We need the rest of the tricks, and once again everything appears to depend on the heart finesse.

We don't want to hear another grunt from the Hog, so we look for a better chance. Actually, the opponents have already helped us along the winning line. By forcing us to ruff, we have one fewer trumps than dummy. If we ruff another club, we'll have two fewer trumps. Then when we draw trumps, **we can discard our ♥7 and ♥Q on dummy's trumps.**

| | | |
|--------------|--|-------------|
| ♠ A J 9 2 | | |
| ♥ J 10 9 5 | | |
| ♦ A 7 | | |
| ♣ K 7 3 | | |
| ♠ 8 4 | | ♠ 7 5 3 |
| ♥ K 6 3 | | ♥ 8 4 2 |
| ♦ 8 6 4 2 | | ♦ 9 5 |
| ♣ Q J 10 9 | | ♣ A 8 5 4 2 |
| | | |
| ♠ K Q 10 6 | | |
| ♥ A Q 7 | | |
| ♦ K Q J 10 3 | | |
| ♣ 6 | | |

We cross to the ♦A and ruff the ♣K with the ♠10. We play the ♠K, and then overtake the ♠Q with the ♠A and take the remaining trumps, discard two hearts. The rest are ours. No more 50-50 finesses for us! **♦**



Play of the Hand

by David Lindop

Playing Like the Hideous Hog — Part III

GOING WITH THE ODDS

Knowing how the missing cards in a suit are likely to be divided is very helpful in deciding the best play. It isn't necessary to memorize the full table below. The basic guideline is:

- An odd number of missing cards will tend to divide **as evenly as possible** (red highlighted numbers);
- An even number of missing cards will tend to divide **slightly unevenly** (black highlighted numbers).

| # of Cards Missing | Break | % |
|--------------------|-------|------|
| 2 | 1-1 | 52.0 |
| | 2-0 | 48.0 |
| 3 | 2-1 | 78.0 |
| | 3-0 | 22.0 |
| 4 | 3-1 | 49.7 |
| | 2-2 | 40.7 |
| | 4-0 | 9.6 |
| 5 | 3-2 | 67.8 |
| | 4-1 | 28.3 |
| | 5-0 | 3.9 |
| 6 | 4-2 | 48.5 |
| | 3-3 | 35.5 |
| | 5-1 | 14.5 |
| | 6-0 | 1.5 |
| 7 | 4-3 | 62.2 |
| | 5-2 | 30.5 |
| | 6-1 | 6.8 |
| 8 | 7-0 | 0.5 |
| | 5-3 | 47.1 |
| | 4-4 | 32.7 |
| | 6-2 | 17.1 |
| 8 | 7-1 | 2.9 |
| | 8-0 | 0.2 |

As Victor Mollo's Hideous Hog would say, "Anyone can win tricks with aces and kings. It's winning tricks with two and threes that's the sign of the true expert!" We don't have to like the Hog's bombastic demeanor, but that doesn't mean we can't learn something from his masterful technique.

Let's see how we can improve the odds of making our contract by turning those low cards into winners.

From 50 to 90

On this first deal, we are in 3NT.

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
2NT

Pass 3NT All Pass

♠ 7 4
♥ 8 6 3
♦ 9 7 5
♣ A K Q 3 2

♠ 5

♠ A K 8
♥ A Q 7 2
♦ A K 6 3
♣ 5 4

Can we do any better? Look at the five-card club suit in dummy. It will provide *two* extra tricks if the missing clubs divide 3-3, but we could still get *one* extra trick if the clubs divide 4-2. Playing on clubs improves our odds to nearly 85% (the 48.5% chance of a 4-2 break plus the 35.5% chance of a 3-3 break—see chart.)

There's a small problem. If we play the ♣A-K-Q and the suit *doesn't* divide 3-3, we can give up a trick to develop a club winner in dummy, but there's no way to reach it! How do we get around this? We have to give up on the chance of a 3-3 break and two extra tricks. After winning a spade, **we play a low club from both hands!** Here's the full deal:

♠ 7 4
♥ 8 6 3
♦ 9 7 5
♣ A K Q 3 2

♠ Q 10 6 5 2
♥ K J 9 5
♦ 10 2
♣ 10 8

♠ J 9 3
♥ 10 4
♦ Q J 8 4
♣ J 9 7 6

♠ A K 8
♥ A Q 7 2
♦ A K 6 3
♣ 5 4

West's opening lead is the ♠5. We have two sure spade tricks, a heart, two diamonds, and three clubs. That's eight tricks off the top; we need one more. There are lots of possibilities.

We could try finessing the ♥Q, hoping East holds the ♥K. That's a straight 50% chance. But those are not the odds the Hideous Hog wants to rely on for making a contract.

In hearts, diamonds, and clubs, we are missing six cards. If the missing cards are divided exactly 3-3 in the opponents' hands, we can develop an extra trick through length. The odds of a 3-3 break (see chart) are only a little better than 35%. Not as good as a finesse. An even number of missing cards tends to divide slightly unevenly. Six missing cards tend to divide 4-2 rather than 3-3.

By ducking a club, we get only one extra club, but that's all we need. We get two spades, a heart, two diamonds, and four clubs. Our ninth trick is dummy's lowly ♣3!

Calculating odds can be tricky. Playing a low club from both hands gives us an 85% chance of an extra trick from clubs, but our chances are better than that! If clubs break 5-1 or 6-0, we can still fall back on the heart finesse, bringing our odds to over 90%. Do we need to memorize the odds to become a better declarer? No. We need only to know that the combined chances of a 3-3 or 4-2 division are better than a 50% finesse to be on the right track.

More Practice

On this next deal, we are again in 3NT.

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
1NT

Pass 3NT All Pass

♠ K 10 7
♥ 9 5
♦ A 8 6
♣ K J 10 7 5

♥4

N
W E
S

♠ A Q 4
♥ A Q
♦ K 5 4 3 2
♣ 9 8 3

West's lead of the ♥4 ensures that we will get two heart tricks to go with three spades and two diamonds, but we still need two more. The club suit jumps out as a source of tricks. We can try the club finesse, hoping West has the ♣Q. Even if the finesse loses, we can drive out the ♣A to promote three tricks. But if the club finesse loses, the defenders will drive out our remaining high heart and win the race to establish tricks. **We must look for something better than 50%.**

In diamonds, we're missing only five cards, an odd number. They will tend to divide as evenly as possible, 3-2. Here's the full deal:

♠ K 10 7
♥ 9 5
♦ A 8 6
♣ K J 10 7 5

♠ J 8
♥ J 8 6 4 2
♦ Q 10 7
♣ 6 4 2

N
W E
S

♠ 9 6 5 3 2
♥ K 10 7 3
♦ J 9
♣ A Q

♠ A Q 4
♥ A Q
♦ K 5 4 3 2
♣ 9 8 3

We win the first heart and play the ♦A and ♦K. When both defenders follow suit, we give up a diamond and our remaining two low diamonds are the tricks we need. The odds of a 3-2 break are almost 70% (see chart), but if a defender showed out on the first or second round, we could fall back on the club finesse, taking our overall odds to about 85%.

An Early Decision

This time we reach 6♠ in a quick, if unscientific, auction:

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
1♥ Pass 1♠
Pass 2♠ Pass 6♠
Pass Pass Pass

♠ K 9 6
♥ K 5 4 3 2
♦ A Q J
♣ 9 3

♦10

N
W E
S

♠ A Q J 10 7 3
♥ A 9
♦ 6 4
♣ K Q J

West leads the ♦10, and we're immediately faced with a decision. Do we take the 50% diamond finesse? If it wins, the only trick we'll lose is the ♣A; if it loses, the defenders will take their ♣A, and down we'll go.

By now, we're well trained. Any time we see a 50% chance, we look for a better alternative. On this deal, it's the hearts. If the six missing hearts divide either 3-3 or 4-2 (over 80%), **we can develop an extra heart winner on which to discard a diamond.** Dummy is short on entries, so we must plan well. Here's the full deal:

♠ K 9 6
♥ K 5 4 3 2
♦ A Q J
♣ 9 3

♠ 8 5 2
♥ 10 7
♦ 10 9 8 7 3
♣ A 8 4

N
W E
S

♠ 4
♥ Q J 8 6
♦ K 5 2
♣ 10 7 6 5 2

♠ A Q J 10 7 3
♥ A 9
♦ 6 4
♣ K Q J

We win the ♦A, and can afford to draw only one round of trumps with the ♠A. Then we turn our attention to hearts. We take the ♥A, the ♥K and lead a third round, being careful to trump with a high spade in our hand.

When hearts don't break 3-3, we play a low spade to dummy's ♠9, and lead another heart and ruff with a high spade. Finally, we cross to

dummy's ♠K, drawing West's last trump. We lead the last heart, the ♥5, and discard our remaining diamond. We give up a trick to the ♣A, and have our slam: Six spades, *three* hearts, one diamond, and two clubs.

Don't Overlook the Obvious

On our last deal we're in 4♠.

WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
1♥ Double Pass 4♠
Pass Pass Pass

♠ A Q 10 8
♥ 3
♦ 10 6 5
♣ A Q 9 6 5

♣J

N
W E
S

♠ K J 9 7
♥ A Q 6 4 2
♦ K 8 3
♣ 2

West leads the ♣J, and we're faced with a myriad of finesses. We can try a heart finesse, a diamond finesse, and a club finesse. We can also try to establish tricks from length in either hearts or clubs. What are the odds of getting ten tricks out of this mess?

No need to worry. **We have ten tricks without a finesse!** Here's the complete deal:

♠ A Q 10 8
♥ 3
♦ 10 6 5
♣ A Q 9 6 5

♠ 5 3 2
♥ K J 9 8 5
♦ A Q J 7
♣ J

N
W E
S

♠ 6 4
♥ 10 7
♦ 9 4 2
♣ K 10 8 7 4 3

♠ K J 9 7
♥ A Q 6 4 2
♦ K 8 3
♣ 2

We simply win the ♣A, play the ♥3 to our ♥A, lead a heart and trump it in dummy. Then we trump a diamond, trump a heart, trump a diamond, and keep ruffing back and forth. We soon have ten tricks: the ♥A, ♣A, and *eight* spade tricks.

Once West leads a club, we have a 100% play for the contract. That's the type of odds the Hog likes! 



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