

Declaring a Hand

Part 5: Putting it all Together

In today's lesson, we're going to put it all together. Specifically, we're going to look back at some hands that have been played in the Friday afternoon game that produced different results. To avoid any issues with having different targets, we're going to focus on hands with the following characteristics:

1. Multiple pairs ended in the same contract
2. There were no doubles
3. There were multiple pairs with different results
4. The initial lead is either quite likely or doesn't affect the outcome

With that in mind, let's get started¹:

Hand 1 – Board 11 from May 10th

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

Contract 4♥ by South. Lead 2♦. Results: Making 6(2), 5(2) or 4(3).

Analysis

Nothing special about the final contract: you've got 16 HCP and 8♥ between the two hands. So, you're definitely going to be in game and unlikely to try slam. 3NT is also an unlikely contract given your ♠ singleton. We're also pretty confident that we're going to make the contract. Specifically, unless something goes really wrong, we should be able to take 2 in each black suit, A♦ and 5♥ tricks for a total of 10. So, now we turn to seeing if we can do better than that.

¹ Regardless of original direction, I will put declarer's hand on the left-hand side.

The first option is to try and ruff 2♣ in Dummy. That will get us to 12 tricks, but only if LHO has exactly 3♣. In fact, if RHO has only 1♣, then attacking ♣ opens a slight chance of us going down. But, if that was our only choice, it would be worth the risk. However, the opening lead gives us another lane to choose? Do you see it?

Let's first analyze LHO's opponent's lead of the 2. What holdings could she have to make that her natural lead? If you think about it, there are only 3 possible holding types she could have, assuming standard leads:

1. A singleton
2. Honor X X X
3. Honor X X

Why can't she have 5 or 6♦? Because then her standard lead would be her 4th highest, which can't be the 2 in those cases. Why can't she have 2 or 3 little? Because the standard lead isn't low in either of these cases: with 2, it's high – low; with 3, it's MUD (middle – up – down). So, that leaves these 3 combinations, but how does that help us? If the lead is a singleton, then there's not much we can do about it other than hope LHO has the Ace of trump. (Note: If that's the case, we can come to 11 tricks by drawing trump and giving up a ♦ trick to RHO.)

What about the other two options? It's just a guess, right? Specifically, does LHO have the Jack or the King? (Note: If she has both, then anything higher than the 8 will eliminate our ♦ loser.) But, let's go a little deeper than that. What if LHO opponent has the King? Then, the right play is Dummy's Queen, but that only gets us to 11 tricks. So, we'll still need to try and ruff ♣ a in Dummy to get to 12. What if she holds the Jack? Then, playing the 8 will drive out RHO's King. That gets us to 11, but there's another benefit: Dummy's Q 10 is now sitting over LHO's Jack ♦. So, we can pick up our 12th trick through the marked finesse without risking anything in ♣. OK, but what if we guess wrong? There's no

problem there: we just discard our 2nd ♦ on one of Dummy's ♠ honors. That let's go back to the original plan of ruffing ♣. So, playing LHO for the Jack gives us 2 chances of making 12 tricks rather than just 1. Since there's no strong reason to believe LHO led away from the King rather than the Jack, that's the path we should take. Since that's the holding on this hand, we chalk up our well deserved 12 tricks.

Hand 2 – Board 18 from May 17th

♠ Q 8 6 5
♥ Q J
♦ A J 7 4
♣ A K 7

♠ A 9 7
♥ A 9 8 6 5
♦ Q
♣ J 6 4 3

Contract 3NT by South. Lead J♠. Results: Making 5(2), 2(1) or 1(2).

Analysis

There's a little bit of wiggle room on this one. With these cards, I would expect the bidding to go 1NT - 2♦ (transfer) – 2♥ – 3NT. Some may be afraid of the ♥Q J doubleton in and open 1♦. But, that should still lead to the same final contract with 28 HCP and no 8 card suit. Since Declarer is unlikely to have 3♥ on this bidding, LHO doesn't have many great leads. So, I would expect her to default to her standard lead of the J of ♠.

Despite all the HCP, this is a fairly dicey contract: we only have 5 guaranteed tricks: 2♣ and 1 in each of the other suits. The lead gives us a 2nd ♠ trick. We can also set up one in each of the other suits, but that's still only 8 tricks. We also need to be careful about transportation: the only guaranteed entry we have to Dummy is the A of ♠. (Note: If we overtake one of our ♥ honors in Dummy, then we will likely be giving up a trick in that suit.) So, what's our best approach? First, we need to figure out what LHO is leading from. Given the spot cards we have, it's most likely that LHO is leading from K J 10 X (X). Could it be from J or J x? Yes, but that would be an unusual holding to lead from in a NT contract, unless

partner bid the suit. So, we should let that run around to our Queen. We need an extra ♥ trick, plus it's our best chance to get several extra tricks, so we should lead the Queen ♥ at trick two. RHO wins his King and returns a ...? He's out of ♠ and Declarer is setting up ♥, so it has to be a minor. But, which one? It may be tempting to return a ♦, but that is unlikely to be right: unless partner has A J of the suit, RHO will never be able to get back in. Plus, leading away from the King may give Declarer an extra trick in the suit. (Note: Leading the King is a little better since it covers Dummy's Queen, but it doesn't help on this holding.) So, let's assume he makes his best return of a ♣. Now, it's Declarer's time for a decision: duck and guarantee 3 tricks in the suit or win the trick in hand? Actually, the "guarantee" is an illusion: if Declarer ducks, LHO will win her Queen. But, instead of continuing ♣. She'll switch back to ♠ knock out Dummy's only entry. That will make it tough for Declarer to get either his 2nd ♥ or 3rd ♣. So, he needs to win this trick in his hand and cash his other ♥. Next, he leads a ♠ towards Dummy. When LHO plays the 10, cover with Dummy's Ace. (Note: If LHO carelessly play low, then "confidently" insert the 9, which will hold the trick.) When you cash Dummy's Ace of ♥, you get the good news that the suit is breaking, which means you have a total of 4 tricks in that suit. That brings your total to 9: 2 in each black suit plus 1 in ♦.

But, we're not done yet! Look back at ♠. LHO started with the K J 10, but has played two of them on the first two tricks in that suit. You still have the 9 in Dummy and the 8 in hand. So, after you run the ♥, simply lead Dummy's last ♠. LHO can win this trick, but can't do any harm since you still have both minors stopped. So, that brings our total to 10 tricks.

One final note: the ♦ finesse does work, but it's not worth the risk based on this line of play. Specifically, after the run of Dummy's ♥, you have 5 cards left. You need two of them to be the boss minor cards to keep those suits locked down. You also need to keep 2♠. Otherwise, if LHO gets in, she'll be able to cash 3 tricks in that suit which will set the contract. So, that leaves 1 more card. If it's the Jack

of ♦ and the finesse wins, then we get to 11 tricks. But, what if it loses? Now, LHO can win her King and knock out our top ♣. When she gets in again with her King of ♠, she can cash her good ♣ which keeps us to 9 tricks. Given all the things that went our way on this hand, we're better locking in 10 tricks than a 50/50 shot of 9 or 11 tricks.

Hand 3 – Board 5 from May 24th

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

Contract 4♠ by North. Lead 3♣. Results: Making 4(3), 3(4) or 2(1).

Analysis

On this hand, there's a little uncertainty on the final contract. Specifically, you only have 24 HCP and 8 trump. While your singleton ♣ should be enough to push you into game, some pairs will stop in a partial: 5 out of 13 did at the table. Playing Standard American, I would expect a sequence like 1♠ - 2♣ - 2♥ - 3♠ - 4♠. Since some pairs may only be in a part score, we'll need to make the contract to get a good score: making was worth 11 MPs while going down scored 2.5 or less. That means, we should be willing to take some calculated, not crazy, risks in the play.

Before we determine our plan, we need to get the lay of the land. On the negative side, we only have 6 tricks: 2 trump and 2 in each red suit. If trump behave, we can get 2 more there, but that still leaves us 2 short. On the positive side, we only have 3 definite losers: 1 in each suit other than ♥. So, we've got a chance, but we need to get creative. First, if everything goes right in ♥ (i.e. Q X X in LHO's hand), then we can get 2 tricks in that suit. While that's relatively unlikely, having just one of those items (i.e. a 3-3 split or the Queen being onside) is close to 75%, so we should try that. Worse comes to

worse, we can double finesse RHO in \diamond . But that requires him to have both the Queen and the Jack, so it's only a 25% play for 1 extra trick.

Is there anything else we can do? The lead gives us one extra chance: we can try ruffing $3\clubsuit$ in hand. If that happens, then we're up to 5 trump tricks, so we can make our contract with just 1 extra trick in \heartsuit . But, we need to be careful: we don't have a ton of entries to Dummy and we need to be worried about the opponents switching \diamond to before we can set up \heartsuit for a pitch in Dummy. So, I would go about it like this:

- RHO opponent beats Dummy's $7\clubsuit$ with his Jack.
- We ruff his return of the $A\clubsuit$ in hand.
- We try the \heartsuit finesse which loses to RHO's Queen.
- Since any other lead will give us a trick, RHO switches to a low \diamond , which we win in hand.
- We draw two rounds of trump ending in Dummy. Since trump split 3-2, this leaves only the boss trump out.
- Ruff a $2^{\text{nd}}\clubsuit$ in hand.
- Return to Dummy with the $A\heartsuit$ and ruff a $3^{\text{rd}}\clubsuit$ in hand.
- When that holds, cash the $K\heartsuit$ in hand.

Since that holds, we're now a lock to make our contract. We already have 8 tricks: 5 trump, including 3 ruffs in hand, $2\heartsuit$ and $1\diamond$. We're in hand and still have the good $13^{\text{th}}\heartsuit$ and a good \diamond . Plus, Dummy still has one trump left. As long as we lead our last \heartsuit at trick 11, we'll still get the 2 more tricks we need regardless of when the opponent's ruff in since Dummy's $3^{\text{rd}}\diamond$ will go on this \heartsuit trick.

♠ 8
♥ A K 4 2
♦ 9 8 6 2
♣ A Q 9 4

♠ K Q 10 3
♥ Q 8 6
♦ K 4 3
♣ K 3 2

Contract 3NT by West. Lead 5♣. Results: Making 5(2), 4(2), 3(4) or 2(2).

Analysis

You'd rather have East declare this one to protect his pointed Kings, but it's more likely that East will end up declaring this hand. I would expect an auction like: 1♣ – 1♠ – 1NT – 3NT.² This is a pretty straight forward contract: you have 26 HCP and no 8 card suit, so you should be in 3NT. So, we're going to try and maximize our trick count. We've got 6 tricks off the top: 3 in each round suit. But, we've also got only 2 guaranteed losers: the two Aces. Clearly, LHO is the danger hand here, but there may not be anything we can do about it. Ideally, we'd like to find a suit that's splitting before attacking our exposed suits. The lead gives us a chance to test both of our long suits. Specifically, look at the spots in ♣. Since LHO has both the Jack and 10, then we can win the first trick with our 9. Next, we cash two more tricks in the suit to find out that LHO started with J 10 X X.

Next, we move on to ♥. When, that suit splits 3-3, our 4th ♥ becomes our 8th trick. Since we can't get back to our hand, we should now cash our final ♣. To keep our options flexible, we discard one of each of the other suits from Dummy. If RHO is counting, he knows that we're out of high cards since we already shown up with 13. So, partner must have both missing Aces. He'd like to keep 3♠ to cover Dummy's 10, but that would might allow Declarer to steal another ♦ trick. So, we expect him to discard 3♠. By similar logic, LHO is likely to pitch a ♠ since she should be able to figure out that her partner has the Queen of ♦. Unfortunately for the defense, Declarer now leads her ♠ singleton. Since LHO knows

² Is 1NT by South a distortion here? Yes, she should have 2+ ♠. But, any bid she makes will be a lie: she's 2 trump short for 2♣ and 2♦ or 2♥ would be a reverse. Given that, 1NT is her best bad bid.

that the K♦ is an entry, her best play is to win the Ace and return a ♠. While this lets Dummy cash two ♠ tricks, bringing Declarer's total to 10, that will be her last trick since Dummy will have to lead away from her K♦. Ducking this trick will only force Declarer into a line of play which will net her 11 tricks!

Hand 5 – Board 16 from May 31st

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

Contract 2♥ by North. Lead 4♣. Results: Making 3(3), 2(2) or 1(2).

Analysis

The bidding on this one should be pretty easy: North 2♥ opening in second seat gets passed out. Since we preempted, we're just trying to make as many tricks as possible. At first blush, that looks like 7: 5 trump and 2 Aces. The only real hopes for an 8th trick are 1. Something really good, like QX in one of the opponents' hands, happens in trump or 2. The ♣ suit splits 3-3. If LHO had led a ♠, then there would be one more option: duck the first trick in Dummy!. That might seem a little odd with the singleton in hand, but there's a method to this madness: if RHO has the K♠, then you'll just pitch your losing on Dummy's A♠. But, that's not the lead we got, so let's get back to the actual hand.

RHO wins the first two tricks with the Ace and Jack of ♣. Then, he switches to the Q♦. His play to the first 3 tricks basically rules out any chance of a 3-3 ♣ split, so we need to focus on trump. So, we win the A♦ in Dummy and cash the King of trump. Now, we need to get back to our hand. There's really only way safe way to do that: cash the A♠ and then ruff a second one in hand. Now comes the moment of truth: we cash the Ace of trump. When RHO drops the Queen, we're home free: clear out LHO's trump with the Jack and 10 and claim your 8 tricks.

Hand 6 – Board 17 from May 31st

♠ A 9 5
♥ A 5
♦ K J 2
♣ A K 9 6 5

♠ Q J
♥ K 9 8 4
♦ 10 7 6
♣ Q 8 7 4

Contract 3NT by North. Lead 7♠. Results: Making 3(4) or 2(2).

Analysis

On this one, we need to use the opponent's bidding to help us find the right line of play. The bidding should start 1♣ – P – 1♥. But now, there's a form in the road: RHO is strong enough to bid 1♠, but partner is a passed hand so he may decide to emphasize the length of his suit and bid 3♠ instead. There are slightly ramifications for the play, so we'll investigate them separately at the relevant point in the hand. In both cases, the first two tricks should go:

- 7♠ – Q – K – A
- A♣ – 2 – 4 – 2♠

Well, that's certainly an unwelcome development! Now, we only have 7 tricks: 3♣, 2♠ and 2♥. We can set up one more ♣ trick, but that could be problematic if LHO can return a ♠ and RHO can get in with A♦ to cash his ♠ winners. So, this is where we need to take into account the opponent's bidding. Let's start with the preempt (i.e. RHO bid 3♠). In that case, we can pretty confident that RHO started with 7♠. Might he have stretched to bid 3♠ with only 6? Yes, that's possible. But, then why would he discard ♠ a on the second trick? It's much more likely he would discard a losing ♥ in that case hoping that partner can get in with a ♣ and lead a second ♠ while he still has a (possible) ♦ entry. Given that, our best approach is to cash the King and Queen of ♣ keeping an eye on what RHO discards. If he

discards ♠, then we know he started with 7. Otherwise, he's got rid of his best source of tricks. In that case, we can return a 4th ♣ to LHO's Jack, which will set up our 5th ♣ for our 8th trick. The only situation where this wouldn't be the right play is if RHO discards 2♦. In that case, we should switch to a ♦ at trick 5 to knock out any potential entry RHO has before his are established ♠.

What is he only bid 1♠? In that case, we only know he has 5+♠, which makes it much more likely that LHO has a second ♠. However, that bid lets us put 8+ HCP in his hand. He's already shown up with the K♠, so that's 3. But, we can give LHO 1 for the marked J♣. That means RHO should have 5+ of the remaining 9 HCP unaccounted for. Well that makes it quite likely that RHO has the A♦, but it's not ironclad. For example, give RHO QJ♥ and Q♦ and he's got 8 HCP. So, let's get some more information by leading two more ♣ ending in Dummy. Yes, this is the same play as above, but it gives us different information. For example, let's assume that pitches 2♥ low. In that case, he's very unlikely to have the Queen and Jack of ♥ since he would have exposed that suit. Therefore, he's almost certainly got the A♦. So, we should lead a low ♦ from Dummy and play the King from hand if RHO ducks. When it wins, we can go back to ♣ to establish our 5th ♣. While the defense can get 3 ♦ tricks, if they're careful, that still means we're making the contract with 4♣, 2 in each major and 1♦ trick.