

**High or Low
By Roger Lord**

**Dealer: North
Vul: None**

North

♠ AK85
♥ K2
♦ J7532
♣ K4

West

♠ 106
♥ J73
♦ Q1094
♣ 9875

East

♠ QJ973
♥ 10985
♦ AK8
♣ 10

South

♠ 42
♥ AQ64
♦ 6
♣ AQJ632

North	East	South	West
1 Diamond	Pass	2 Clubs	Pass
2 Spades	Pass	3 Hearts	Pass
4 Clubs	Pass	4 Hearts	Pass
4 Spades	Pass	6 Clubs	All Pass

Contract: 6 Clubs

Opening Lead: Spade 10

This deal arose in a pair game in the recent St. Charles Sectional. To reach the six club slam (see the bidding diagram), North and South both upgraded their key cards and distribution. There was a potential ruffing value in the heart suit, and there was little waste in the diamond suit. Almost all honor cards were “working.”

Cover the East-West cards. West leads the spade 10, dummy winning with the king and East following with the seven. Plan your play before uncovering the hand.

You can count six club tricks, three hearts and two spades, for eleven. How do you make the twelfth?

There are at least three plausible lines. Two of them involve ruffing South’s third heart. You will take North’s heart king, cross to South with the heart ace, and lead a third heart towards the table. If LHO follows, you will ruff—but which club will you ruff with?

Ruffing with the king would create a trump trick for an opponent’s fourth club (on a 4 -1 or 1-4 split). If you ruff low, East might overruff with the setting trick.

Answers to suit combination quiz:

1. Lay down ace, king and queen. Although opponents' cards will split 4-2 more often than 3-3, the play for the "drop" works with a 3-3 break and additionally with a 4-2 break when an opponent holds Jx (a doubleton jack).
2. Finesse the 10 (lead from declarer's hand toward dummy and insert the 10). For five tricks, the suit must divide 4-3 (or 3-4). Half the time, the jack will be with LHO, and the finesse will succeed. Dropping the jack requires the jack to be in the hand with three cards. Thus, the chances for the jack to drop are three out of seven, which is less than the chances for finessing.
3. Finesse the 10, by leading low from declarer's hand toward dummy and inserting the 10. This play makes five tricks when the suit splits 3-3 or 4-2 (or 2-4) and the jack is with LHO (half the time). Laying down the king, ace and queen instead yields five tricks only when the suit splits 3-3, which is expected to occur substantially less than half* the time. In contrast with #1. above, playing A, K, Q will not work when there is a doubleton jack, because the ten will fall uselessly on the second trick.
*The probability of a 3-3 break is 35.5%.
4. Let's say you play ace and king, the jack and ten fall on your right and the three and four on your left. Now you get to your hand and lead up to the remaining Q8, to which LHO follows with the six. Do you play the queen to try to drop the nine, or do you finesse the eight, playing LHO for the nine? The answer, with overwhelming odds in your favor, is to play the eight.

The explanation lies in the numbers of possible combinations which could have been dealt. There is only one way that playing for the drop could succeed—RHO must have held J109 tripleton (which he could have played in any order). Before any cards are played, the finesse would succeed against any of the three RHO doubletons, J10, J9 or 109, and any of these doubletons would have had a chance to be dealt as opposed to the J109 tripleton.