

Pre-Balance
by Roger Lord

Dealer: North

Vul: None

North

♠ 1063
♥ J2
♦ AJ106
♣ KQ64

West

♠ K952
♥ Q87
♦ K753
♣ 87

East

♠ AJ4
♥ AK1043
♦ 82
♣ J105

South

♠ Q87
♥ 965
♦ Q94
♣ A932

North

Pass
Double

East

1 Heart
Pass

South

Pass
3 Clubs

West

2 Hearts
All Pass

Contract: Three Clubs

Opening Lead: Heart Seven

It may surprise some readers that a column would prescribe a “dangerous” style of intervention against constructive bidding. North’s takeout double would be an example. Rather than adhering to dull abstention, frequent competition appeals to us. Besides, it’s more fun!

After North passes, East opens one heart, and West raises to two hearts. North balances with a takeout double. North is assuming that his partner holds some of the balance of power. Furthermore, because East-West have announced a fit in hearts, it is extremely likely that North-South can find a fit of their own.

North’s balancing call in the direct seat can be termed a “pre-balance” (before the opponents have both passed or limited their hands). Having only three cards in the unbid major, North’s action is neither perfect nor risk-free. However, acting makes more sense if partner has a similar bidding philosophy, so that he can be trusted not to leap off to higher peril. The balancer’s partner should recognize that the balancer already has bid some or all of partner’s values. Thus, South bids three Clubs, which ends the auction. East-West could not have made a higher contract.

As for the play at three clubs, with a heart lead, East will win the king and ace and, with nothing better to do, lead a third heart, which declarer ruffs in dummy. Declarer draws trumps, which break 3-2, ending in his hand with the club ace. Now, South will proceed to finesse in diamonds, in an attempt to score the four diamond tricks needed to land the contract.

Be careful! Finding the king onside will not be good enough unless you prepare to finesse three times in succession. To do that, you must start by leading the nine of diamonds, following with dummy’s six, and continue by leading the queen, trapping West’s king. Instead, if you start by leading the queen, you will find it impossible to take all four tricks. Try it and see for yourself.

Correction: The previous article of this series, titled “Develop a Dozen,” contained an error in the bidding diagram. The final bid, by South, should have been six hearts.

Suit Combinations Entries are available to declarer and dummy hands

1. Dummy
AK942
Declarer
J3

A. Take all five tricks in the suit.
B. Take four tricks in the suit—you can afford to lose one trick.
2. Dummy
AK92
Declarer
Q10874

Take all five tricks in the suit.
3. Dummy
AK92
Declarer
Q8743

Take all five tricks in the suit.

Answers

1. A. Lead from South, run the jack, and if West covers, win, go back to South and finesse dummy's nine.

B. Lead a low card from dummy toward the jack, hoping for the queen to appear. If the jack loses, play ace and king, trying to drop the queen.
2. Lay down the ace (from the hand with two high honors). If the split was 4-0, you can now see which hand to finesse for the jack.
3. This is tricky, especially if it occurs in the middle of a game. In general, players are taught to first attack the hand with the double high honor—but not this time! Here, you must play the queen first, preparing to finesse twice against West's remaining J102 if the suit broke 4-0. The difference here is that you cannot pick up the suit if it is East who holds the four cards.