

An Honors eBook from Master Point Press

**David Bird**

**TWELVE  
IMPORTANT  
BRIDGE LESSONS**



**DECLARER PLAY:  
THE NEXT LEVEL**

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# Introduction

This book contains twelve lessons on card play by declarer. It is a sequel to the first book in this series: *Twelve Important Bridge Lessons on Declarer Play*, and addresses various topics at a higher (intermediate) level of play. Each lesson contains at least eight, illustrative deals. The best line of play is explained clearly and concisely.

I follow the style acquired from my mentor of some fifty years ago, the legendary Terence Reese. When we wrote books together, I would send my first draft of each chapter to him, by post. Back it would come, with his editing in red biro (rather in the manner of a schoolmaster marking the work of an errant pupil). His most frequent edits were deletions of superfluous words or sentences. ‘Adds nothing’ he would scribble in the margin. Reducing the text to a minimum allowed ease of reading and clarity of explanation. Any undue verbosity or marginally overlong sentence would not be spared the maestro’s red pen.

You may be apprehensive that some deals will be somewhat difficult, but I have made every effort to set them at the right level. Remember, though, that if you could already see the winning line on most of the deals and quiz questions, you would not have learnt very much. The point of any lesson is to teach something new; the student then acquires fresh skills and knowledge.

For example, the last chapter of this book describes the ‘simple squeeze’. Many bridge players shy away from this form of play, often for their entire bridge lives. There is nothing at all complicated in a simple squeeze. A defender holds guards in two of your suits. You play winners in the other suits and he has to discard one of his guards. I have every confidence that you can learn how to play this basic form of squeeze (representing some 90% of all squeezes), just by reading the explanations in this chapter.

Right, it’s time for the first lesson. The noise coming from the room next door suggests we will have a good attendance. I’ll see you there!

**David Bird**

## **Dedication**

I have written bridge books almost non-stop for five decades now. Throughout this period, I have received countless inventive and wonderful deals from my friend and fellow writer, Australia's Tim Bourke. His constructions are elegant and instructive, some with a surprising twist. I open his emails eagerly, often concluding: 'Wow, I haven't seen that position before.' Tim's deals are perfect for my humorous fiction, featuring the Abbot and the monks of St. Titus. They are equally good for instructive books, such as this one. Indeed, several of the best deals you will find here have travelled to me from the far side of the globe. I am happy to dedicate this book to the world's best constructor of bridge deals. Many thanks, Tim.

## **Acknowledgements**

Another long-time friend and fellow writer, Marc Smith, kindly offered to proof-read each chapter, as I wrote it. He spotted a few more typos than usual, doubtless because I had two cataract operations during the writing. Each procedure left me temporarily with only one eye that could focus on the computer screen. Marc also suggested several improvements to my silky prose. Somewhat cheeky, you may think, but I had to agree with a good number of them.

I sent the completed MS to Barbara Giesbrecht, one of Canada's top proof-checkers. I was secretly hoping for an all-clear, congratulatory email by return. Some chance! I spent a good while applying her super-sharp corrections and improvements. Many thanks, indeed, Babs.

Finally, I am indebted to the USA's Bill Lide, who cast his eagle eyes over final MS, picking up some residual typos.

Thanks to this splendid team, the book is now in excellent shape (he said confidently). I hope you enjoy it!

## Lesson 1

# Trump Management

Trump contracts offer a wide range of possibilities for the declarer. In this lesson, we will see some deals where careful planning will enable you to make the most of your trump suit.

*“Can you put up the first deal, please, Simon?”*

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

West	North	East	South
			1NT
pass	2♣	pass	2♠
pass	4♠	all pass	

You may think there will be little to say about such a banal-looking deal. We will see!

Suppose you win the ♦Q lead and immediately play ace and another trump. West will overtake partner’s ♠Q with the king and draw a third round with the jack, continuing with another diamond. What will happen if you set up your club winners now? When West wins and plays a third round of diamonds, you will have to ruff with dummy’s last trump. In addition to two trumps and the ♣A, already lost, the defenders will score a diamond at the end. That’s one down!

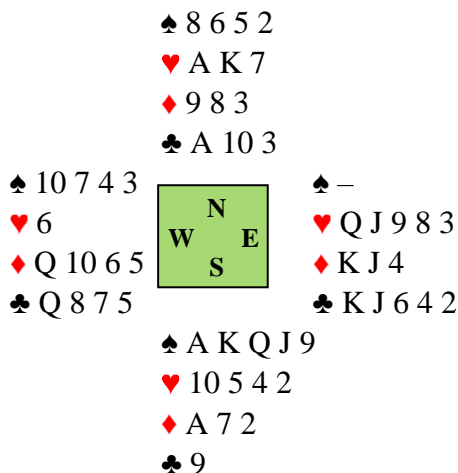
Perhaps, instead, you decide to ruff your two losing diamonds in dummy after drawing just one round of trumps. You win with the ♦A, play a trump to the ace, return to the ♦K and ruff a diamond. Now you come back to your ♥K and ruff your last diamond. East overruffs and plays a club to his partner's ace. West will make two trump tricks - one down, again.

How should the contract be played? You need to play two rounds of trumps, without the defenders being able to draw a third round. So, you should play a club at trick two. If the defenders hold up the ♣A, play a second club. You win the diamond continuation and now turn to the trumps, but you must play a **low trump**, not the ace.

You are now in control. Suppose the defenders switch to hearts. Win with the ♥A and cross to dummy's trump ace. That's better – you have drawn two rounds and are still on play. You will then cash your remaining winners and crossruff the red-suit losers. The defenders can score their top trump when they wish. The contract is yours.

**POINT TO REMEMBER.** When you are likely to have two trump losers, consider ducking the first round. You take the second round and play on the side suits, in full control of the hand.

You can now test yourself on the next deal, where your trump holding is much stronger:



West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♣
all pass			

You win the ♥6 lead with dummy's ace and play a trump to the ace, East discarding a club. What plan will you make?

If you draw all the trumps, you will have to rely on a 3-3 heart break; you will fall short of your target. Instead, you must aim to ruff your last heart. At trick three you lead a second round of hearts **towards the dummy**. It will do West no good to ruff a loser, because you would then draw his last two trumps and easily arrange a heart ruff.

So, West discards and dummy's ♥K wins the trick. You then concede a heart to East. You win the diamond switch with the ace and lead a fourth round of hearts. West has no answer. If he discards again, you will score a heart ruff, draw trumps and claim ten tricks. If instead he ruffs with the ♠10, you will discard a diamond from dummy and eventually ruff a diamond with dummy's spare trump. This technique is known as **trading ruffs**.

**POINT TO REMEMBER.** By leading towards the ♥K, you prevent West from ruffing it. You then proceed with your plans for a red-suit ruff.



	♠ 6 4 3		
	♥ J 8 7 3 2		
	♦ 10 5		
	♣ K 7 3		
♠ K Q J	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; width: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> N W     E S </div>	♠ 10 9 8 7 5	
♥ Q 10 6		♥ 5	
♦ K Q 9 8		♦ 7 4	
♣ J 10 5		♣ Q 9 8 6 2	
	♠ A 2		
	♥ A K 9 4		
	♦ A J 6 3 2		
	♣ A 4		

West	North	East	South
			2NT
pass	3♦*	pass	4♥
all pass			

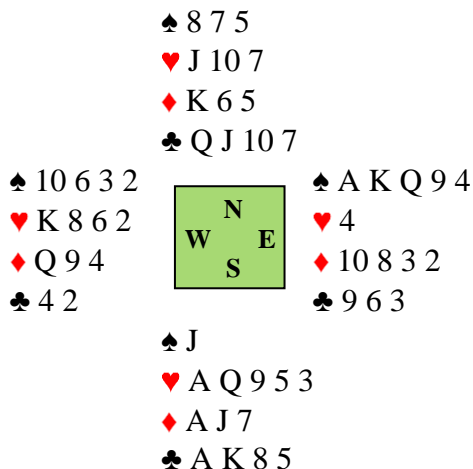
2NT is the best opening bid on those South cards. Partner responds 3♦ and you break the transfer, jumping to 4♥. How will you manage the play when the ♠K is led?

You can imagine how some declarers might proceed. They would win with the ♠A, draw two rounds of trumps with the ace-king and... go down!

You have four side-suit winners and need to make six trump tricks, including a spade ruff and a club ruff in your hand. Meanwhile, you cannot afford to let a defender draw a third round of trumps.

You should start by leading your remaining spade. West wins and switches to the ♣J. You win with the ace, cash the ♥A and continue with ace and another diamond, won by West. You win the club return with the king, draw a second round of trumps, and crossruff the remainder. West can take his trump trick when he likes.

**POINT TO REMEMBER. Make a plan for the whole deal before rushing to draw trumps at the start. Here you must set up your crossruff, before West can draw a third trump.**



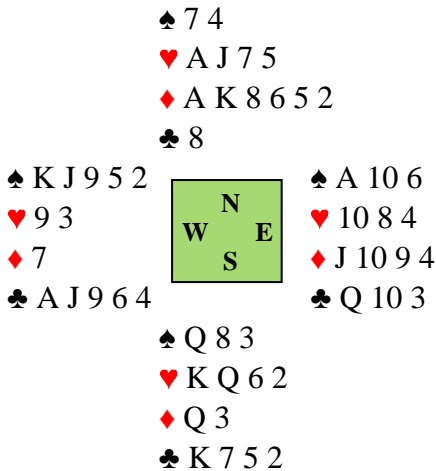
West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	2♥	2♠	4♥
all pass			

How will you play 4♥ when West leads a spade to the queen and East continues with the ♠A? You ruff the second spade and cross to dummy with a diamond to run the ♥J. West wins with the king and plays a third round of spades. What now?

If you ruff again in the South hand, you will go down. Reduced to one trump fewer than West, you will have lost control. Instead, you should throw the ♦7. This costs you nothing, in fact, since you were destined to lose a diamond trick anyway.

If West persists with a fourth round of spades, you will ruff in dummy, with the shorter trump holding. Nothing can then prevent you from drawing the outstanding trumps and claiming the contract. Refusing to ruff in the long-trump hand is an important technique when countering a forcing defense.

**POINT TO REMEMBER.** When the defenders embark on a forcing defense, you can sometimes survive by discarding from the long-trump hand instead of ruffing. You will ruff subsequently with dummy's shorter trumps.



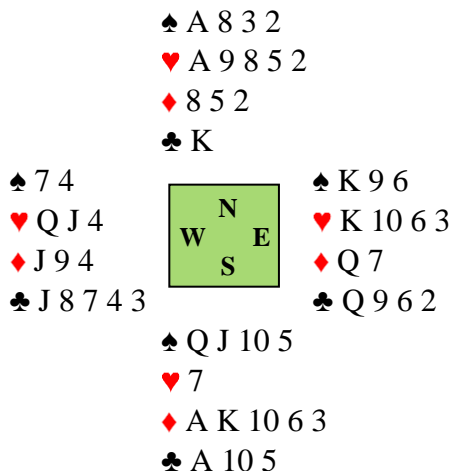
West	North	East	South
	1♦	pass	1♥
dbl	3♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

West leads a spade to East's ace. The ♠10 is returned, covered by the queen and king. How will you play when West persists with the ♠J?

You ruff low in the dummy, East following, and consider how to cope with a 4-1 break in either red suit. If the trumps are 4-1, there will be no possibility of establishing the diamonds with a ruff. You would then need a 3-2 diamond break.

You play the ♥A and ♥K, and breathe freely when you see a 3-2 break. You can then give yourself an **extra chance** by playing the queen and ace of diamonds before drawing the last trump. West shows out on the second diamond but cannot ruff because he doesn't hold the missing trump. You lead a low diamond and ruff with the ♥Q. You can then cross to the ♥J and enjoy the remaining diamonds. Game made!

**POINT TO REMEMBER.** When establishing a suit by ruffing, look out for an extra-chance play. You may avoid a ruff or overruff, because the defender out of the suit does not hold the last trump.



West	North	East	South
			1♦
pass	1♥	pass	1♠
pass	4♣*	pass	4NT
pass	5♥	pass	6♠
all pass			

North's 4♣ is a splinter bid, showing a sound game raise in spades and a club shortage. West leads a trump against your spade slam. How will you arrange the play? Some might think: 'West wouldn't lead away from the ♠K, so I'll go up with the ♠A.'

Go up and you will go down! You will need that ♠A later, as we will see. When you correctly play low, East wins with the ♠K and returns a second trump to your 10. You unblock dummy's ♣K, cash the ♥A, and cross to the ♦K. You then throw dummy's last diamond on the ♣A.

You are going to ruff a diamond and a club in dummy. The first ruff must be the club; you can then return to the ♦A to ruff a diamond. West follows to this trick, so you ruff with the ace. Your careful work is nearly at an end. You reach your hand with a heart ruff and draw the remaining trump. The two established diamonds then enable you to claim the contract.

**POINT TO REMEMBER.** If you watched some expert following the chosen line, no single part of it would impress you unduly. But the various elements had to be performed in just the right order to achieve success.

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

♠ 9 3 2 ♥ Q J 9 ♦ 8 4 ♣ A K Q 4 2	<div style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 5px; width: 60px; margin: 0 auto;">             N W     E S           </div>	♠ K Q 10 5 ♥ 7 3 ♦ 10 6 5 2 ♣ 10 9 3
--	--	---

♠ 7  
♥ A K 8 6 4 2  
♦ A 9 7  
♣ 8 7 5

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	1♠	pass	2♥
pass	4♥	all pass	

How would you play the heart game when West leads the ♣K and switches to the ♥Q?

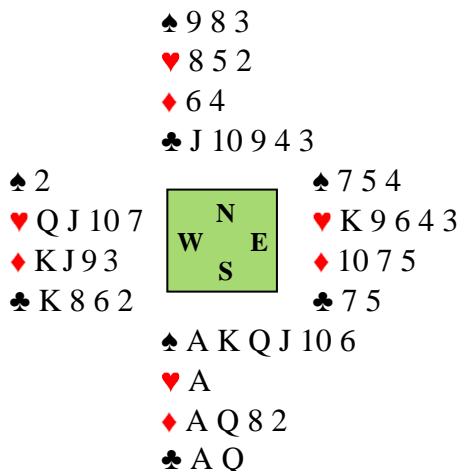
Suppose you win the trump switch, draw a second round of trumps, and play on diamonds, hoping to discard a club. Luck will not be with you. West will ruff the third diamond with his master trump and cash two more club winners, beating the contract.

Since you will have to lose a trump trick at some stage, it makes sense to do so when the defenders can inflict no damage. You should duck West's ♥Q at trick two.

Dummy's remaining trump prevents West from cashing two more club tricks. Whatever West does next, you will be able to draw trumps and claim the contract. You will score five trumps, four diamonds and the ♠A.

**POINT TO REMEMBER.** When you have (or may have) a loser in the trump suit, it can work well to duck a trump near the start. You will then be in control of the deal.

Think carefully when you plan the next deal. Try to foresee what may go wrong if you take the straightforward line.



West	North	East	South
			2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	3♣	pass	3♦
pass	4♠	pass	6♣
all pass			

North's 4♠ shows a bust, since 3♠ would have left space for cue-bidding. How will you play 6♣, when West leads the ♥Q to your ace?

You must delay drawing trumps. However, do you see what will happen if you mistakenly continue with the ace and queen of clubs? West will win and play a third club. East ruffs and you can overruff, but you will have lost a potential diamond discard. You will go down.

Instead, you should make the unnatural play of the ♣Q at trick two. If West wins with the ♣K, he is powerless. Suppose he plays another heart. You will ruff with the ♠10, play the ♠A-K and unblock the ♣A. You then cross to the ♠9 and discard three diamonds on the clubs.

Suppose instead that West holds up the ♣K. You cash the ♣A and play ace and another diamond. Nothing can then stop you from ruffing two diamonds with the ♠8 and ♠9. (You see now why it would be wrong to draw even one round of trumps at the start. The defenders would then play a second trump when you ducked a diamond.)

**POINT TO REMEMBER.** It was safer to play the ♣Q, rather than ace and queen.

## **Trump management**

## **Recap questions**

1. Why might you duck a round of trumps near the start?
2. What are some of the reasons for not drawing trumps straight away?
3. When there are still some trumps out, what step can you take to avoid a side-suit winner being ruffed?
4. Why might you ruff with a top honor, even though you knew the next hand must follow suit?
5. What does it mean when you ‘lose trump control’?

## **Answers**

1. Because ducking a round later would leave the defenders in control, perhaps able to damage you. When they win the first round, you will have trumps in both hands, leaving less chance of a hostile return. A first-round duck is usually right when you hold A-x-x-x opposite four or five low trumps.
2. You may need dummy’s short trumps to take a ruff or two. You may also need to use entries in the trump suit at a later stage. You may wish to test a side suit, to see if you can afford a safety play in trumps. Finally, you may need to take or set up a discard before allowing the defenders to win a trump trick.
3. You can lead towards the honor(s), through the defender who might be able to ruff. He would then be ruffing a loser if he stepped in.
4. To avoid blocking the trump suit. Suppose your trumps are A-K-x in dummy opposite Q-J-x-x in your otherwise entry-less hand. You might need to ruff with the ace. You would continue with king and another trump, hoping for a 3-2 break.
5. You have no trumps left and the defenders will be able to cash winners when they come on lead.

## Quiz Hands 1 & 2

1.

♠ J 4 3  
♥ K 9  
♦ 7 4 2  
♣ 10 7 4 3 2

♥Q led



♠ A K Q 10 8 7  
♥ 6  
♦ A K J  
♣ A 6 5

You manage to stop in 4♠. How will you play when the ♥Q is led?

2.

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

♦K led



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

West	North	East	South
			1♠
3♦	dbl	pass	4♥
pass	4NT	pass	5♠
pass	5NT	pass	7♥

What is your plan when West leads the ♦K?

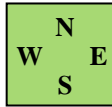


## Quiz Hands 3 & 4

3.

♠ 8 6 2  
♥ K 3 2  
♦ 8 7 3 2  
♣ A 9 8

♦Q led



♠ A K 7 5  
♥ A 9 8 7 4  
♦ A K 6  
♣ 5

After an auction of 1♥ – 2♥ – 4♥, West leads the ♦Q. How will you play this one?

4.

♠ A 7 5  
♥ K 6 2  
♦ A 9 5 4 2  
♣ J 4

♥3 led



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

West	North	East	South
	1♦	pass	1♥
pass	2♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

West leads the ♥3, East following with the ♥10. How will you manage the play?

# Answer to Quiz Hand 1

	♠ J 4 3										
	♥ K 9										
	♦ 7 4 2										
	♣ 10 7 4 3 2										
♠ 5		♠ 9 6 2									
♥ QJ10873	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♥ A 5 4 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♦ Q 10 6 5		♦ 9 8 3									
♣ Q 9		♣ K J 8									
	♠ A K Q 10 8 7										
	♥ 6										
	♦ A K J										
	♣ A 6 5										

West	North	East	South
			2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	3♠	pass	4♠
all pass			

How will you play the spade game when the ♥Q is led?

You are seemingly booked for a heart and two club losers. You must therefore avoid losing a diamond. You have an entry to take a diamond finesse, but can you see a second chance?

It may be possible to set up dummy's clubs for a diamond discard. If you mistakenly cover the ♥Q lead, East will win with the ace and switch to the ♦9. This will kill your hopes of setting up a discard in time. You should therefore play dummy's ♥9 at trick one.

You ruff the heart continuation and draw just one round of trumps, before playing ace and another club. East overtakes with the ♣K and switches to the ♦9. You rise with the ace, draw a second round of trumps and concede another club. East wins and plays another diamond. You win with the ♦K, cross to dummy with the third round of trumps, and cash an established club, ditching the ♦J.

Don't forget your final move. Ah yes, writing down the score.

## Answer to Quiz Hand 2

	♠ 5 2										
	♥ K J 9 5										
	♦ A 8 3										
	♣ A K Q 6										
♠ J 10 8 6		♠ 9 3									
♥ 6		♥ 10 7 4 3									
♦ K Q J 10 9 7 6	<table style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 100%; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♦ 2
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♣ 2		♣ J 10 8 7 5 4									
	♠ A K Q 7 4										
	♥ A Q 8 2										
	♦ 5 4										
	♣ 9 3										

West	North	East	South
			1♠
3♦	dbl	pass	4♥
pass	4NT	pass	5♠
pass	5NT	pass	7♥
all pass			

North begins with a negative (take-out) double and you jump to 4♥ because you hold extra values. What is your plan for the grand slam when West leads the ♦K to dummy's ace?

You can throw a diamond on the dummy's clubs, so you just need to set up the spades. You should play the ♥K and continue with the ♥9 to the ♥A. West's pre-empt make four trumps with East more likely, so you unblock the ♥9, preparing for a possible finesse of the ♥8.

You then play the ♠A-K and ruff a spade with dummy's jack. (This is why you left a high trump in dummy.) Thanks to your thoughtful unblock in trumps, you can then lead ♥5 to your 8. You draw the last trump with the queen and the grand slam is yours.

## Answer to Quiz Hand 3

	♠ 8 6 2										
	♥ K 3 2										
	♦ 8 7 3 2										
	♣ A 9 8										
♠ J 4	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: auto;"> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td style="text-align: center;">W</td><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td style="text-align: center;">S</td><td></td></tr> </table>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q 10 9 3
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ J 5		♥ Q 10 6									
♦ Q J 10 4		♦ 9 5									
♣ Q 7 4 3 2		♣ K J 10 6									
	♠ A K 7 5										
	♥ A 9 8 7 4										
	♦ A K 6										
	♣ 5										

West	North	East	South
			1♥
pass	2♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

How will you play when West leads the ♦Q to your ace? Suppose you start by drawing two rounds of trumps. You will find a 3-2 break but not make the contract. Neither spades nor diamonds break 3-3. You need to ruff a spade in the dummy. Provided you can do this after drawing two rounds of trumps, you will not be worried if the fourth spade is overruffed. The overruff will then be with a master trump.

It's not easy to time the play correctly. If you draw two rounds of trumps before playing ace, king and another spade, East will win and draw dummy's last trump. Suppose, instead, that you draw only one round of trumps and then play ace, king and another spade. East will win the third spade and West will then ruff the fourth spade with the bare jack of trumps. You will still have two tricks to lose (a trump and a diamond) and that will be one down.

The defenders must win their spade trick at a moment when they can do no damage. Duck a spade at trick two! You win the return, draw two rounds of trumps and then return to the spade suit. That's ten tricks whatever the defenders do.

## Answer to Quiz Hand 4

	♠ A 7 5											
	♥ K 6 2											
	♦ A 9 5 4 2											
	♣ J 4											
♠ K 3	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <table style="border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center;"> <tr><td></td><td>N</td><td></td></tr> <tr><td>W</td><td></td><td>E</td></tr> <tr><td></td><td>S</td><td></td></tr> </table> </div>		N		W		E		S		♠ Q 10 8 6 4	
	N											
W		E										
	S											
♥ 9 5 3		♥ 10										
♦ Q 8 7 3		♦ J 10 6										
♣ A Q 10 3		♣ K 8 5 2										
	♠ J 9 2											
	♥ A Q J 8 7 4											
	♦ K											
	♣ 9 7 6											

West	North	East	South
	1♦	pass	1♥
pass	2♥	pass	4♥
all pass			

West leads the ♥3, and you see that it may not be possible to ruff a club in dummy if trumps are 3-1. You should aim to establish the diamond suit. You win with the ♥J and cash the ♦K. Next you lead a club.

West rises with the queen and is faced with a dilemma. If he fails to lead a second trump, you will be able to ruff a club in dummy. Let's say that he perseveres with the ♥5. What now?

You should cover with the ♥6. If East produces the ♥9, you win and the 2-2 trump break will guarantee a club ruff with dummy's last trump. When the ♥6 holds, you cash the ♦A, ruff a diamond high and play another trump to the king. A second diamond ruff sets up a long diamond, and the ♠A will be the entry to cash it.

Look back at the diagram. The contract cannot be made if the ♥6 and ♥5 are interchanged. That's surprising!

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**DAVID BIRD** (England) has written over 165 bridge books. He is well known for his clear explanations and economical writing style. Winner of a record 12 American Bridge Teachers' Association Book of the Year awards, he is ranked among the top bridge teachers via the written word. He and Thelma, married for 50 years, have a daughter, a son, and two grandchildren.