

DAVID BIRD

Playing and Defending Slams

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Introduction

Why do bridge writers shy away from part scores, preferring games or slams? One reason is the higher scores involved, making 1430 instead of 110. There is more tension, because the difference between success and failure is many times greater.

It is not the main reason, though. Writing up part–score deals usually requires a trick–by–trick description of the early stages, before the ending arrives. This can be dull to read and not much fun to write. I am notorious for my reluctance to use part scores. Put together all the books, columns, bridge fiction and tournament reports that I write in a year, and you will rarely find more than three or four part–scores.

Why would anyone want to read or write a bridge book restricted to slam contracts? Because the play can be described so economically. You can reach the important and instructive part of each deal in just a few lines: ‘Declarer won the ♠K lead, drew trumps and eliminated the club suit. When he led the ♦Q...’

In this book, for example, you will learn all you need to know about a huge range of end–game techniques. Their setting in the context of a slam will make it easier for you to absorb the instruction. You will then be able to use the recommended plays the next time that you play (whether that’s with friends, in a local club, in some big tournament, or playing on the internet).

I very much enjoyed writing this book and I hope you find it a rewarding and enjoyable read.

My best wishes,
David Bird

Acknowledgement

My thanks go to the *Master Point Press* proof-reader, Martin Cantor. Despite my own valiant efforts, his eagle eyes proved superior to mine, many times over.

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Part I

Playing Slams

1

Determining the Best Line

Anyone going down on our very first slam might have a troubled time getting to sleep later in the day. The key to success is, yes, to make a plan right at the start. Over to you!

Both Vul	♠ J 10 5										
Dlr: South	♥ K 4 3										
	♦ J 5 4										
	♣ Q 8 5 2										
♠ Q 6 3		♠ 9 8 4 2									
♥ 7 5	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;"> <table style="border-collapse: collapse; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px;"> <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		♥ 9
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♦ 9 8 3 2		♦ K Q 7 6									
♣ J 10 9 4		♣ K 7 6 3									
	♠ A K 7										
	♥ A Q J 10 8 6 2										
	♦ A 10										
	♣ A										

West	North	East	South
			2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♥
pass	3♥	pass	3♠
pass	4♥	pass	4NT
pass	5♣	pass	6♥
all pass			

North's single raise to 3♥ is a stronger move than 4♥ would have been. South cue bid 3♠ to hear a potential cue bid from North. When it was not forthcoming, he was sure that North would hold the ♥K to justify his 3♥ bid. After checking this with Roman Keycard Blackwood, he bid 6♥. What plan would you make when West leads the ♣J?

The first line to catch your eye would be finessing against the ♠Q, a

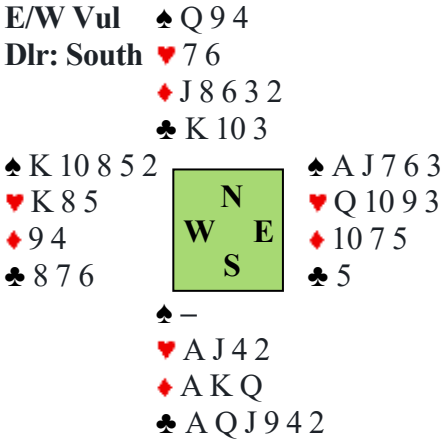
50% chance. Next you should look for any extra chance. Yes, there is one in diamonds. You can set up an extra trick there if East happens to hold the $\heartsuit K-Q$ (or, less likely, a doubleton honor).

You win the club lead and draw trumps with the ace and king. Did you notice that I missed an important detail there? You must lead the $\heartsuit 6$ (or $\heartsuit 8$) to the king. This will allow you to cross to the $\heartsuit 4$ later.

When you lead a low diamond from dummy, East has no winning option. If he plays low, your intended finesse of the 10 will win. Slam made. If instead he splits his honors, you will win and return the $\heartsuit 10$, setting up dummy's $\heartsuit J$ for a spade discard. Again, slam made.

If instead the $\heartsuit 10$ loses to an honor with West, you can test for the small chance of the $\heartsuit A$ dropping the other honor. Otherwise, you will cross to dummy's $\heartsuit 4$ and take your main chance of running the $\heartsuit J$.

You bid the next slam in your usual efficient way. Dummy goes down and – yes – it seems a great contract. This is the moment to foresee any bad breaks that might prove awkward. Perhaps you can neatly side-step any such misfortune.



West	North	East	South
			$2\clubsuit$
pass	$2\heartsuit$	pass	$3\clubsuit$
pass	$4\clubsuit$	pass	$5\clubsuit$
pass	$6\clubsuit$	all pass	

With his minimal $2\clubsuit$ opening, South declines to cue-bid over $4\clubsuit$. How would you play $6\clubsuit$ when West leads the $\clubsuit 8$?

If trumps are 2–2, you will be able to unblock the $\heartsuit A-K-Q$, reaching the $\heartsuit J-8$ with a trump entry. The original declarer drew two rounds of trumps, leaving the $\clubsuit K$ as an entry to dummy. When trumps proved to be 3–1, he took his second chance – that West would have to follow to three rounds of diamonds. West ruffed the third diamond and exited with a heart to the queen and ace. Only two discards were available on the remaining $\heartsuit J-8$, so the slam went one down. Do you see a better line of play?

You should win the trump lead with the $\clubsuit 10$ and lead a spade, discarding a diamond – the $\heartsuit A$ for maximum impact! You can then win the return and cash the $\clubsuit A$. When trumps break 3–1, you then need only a 3–2 break in diamonds. All follow to your $\heartsuit K-Q$ and you cross to the $\clubsuit K$, drawing the last trump. You then discard three heart losers on the $\heartsuit J-8-6$. That’s +920.

- **When honors in your hand risk blocking a longer suit in the dummy, look for a chance to discard a blocking honor while dummy’s entry is intact.**
- **Here, you could not afford to win the trump lead in hand (proceeding to test for a 2–2 trump break). That’s because you needed to be in dummy at the start to discard a blocking diamond. The recommended line was best, needing only a 3–2 diamond break.**

Whenever an opponent enters the bidding, this may provide helpful information if you end up as declarer.

	N/S Vul	\spadesuit K J 6	
	Dlr: South	\heartsuit A Q 2	
		\diamond 10 2	
		\clubsuit A K J 5 2	
\spadesuit 7 5 4	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block; text-align: center;"> N W E S </div>	\spadesuit 9 3	
\heartsuit J 7		\heartsuit K 10 9 8 6 5	
\diamond Q J 9 7 6 5 2		\diamond 8	
\clubsuit 8		\clubsuit Q 10 9 7	
		\spadesuit A Q 10 8 2	
		\heartsuit 4 3	
		\diamond A K 6	
		\clubsuit 6 4 3	

West	North	East	South
			1♠
3♦	4♣	pass	4♦
pass	4♥	pass	4NT
pass	5♦	pass	6♠
all pass			

Three cue bids and RKCB lifted South to 6♠. A heart lead would have worked well, and East might well have doubled the heart cue bid. How will you play when West reaches for the ♣8?

You win with dummy's ace and draw trumps. The stage is then set for an endplay on East. You continue with the ♦A–K, making sure that East cannot exit subsequently in that suit. When you lead the ♣4, West discards a diamond. "Play the two," you say.

East wins with the ♣7 and has to lead back into one of dummy's tenaces. Whether he chooses a heart or a club, you will be able to establish the thirteenth club for a diamond discard. Very enjoyable!

- **West's 3♦ overcall told you that you could eliminate East's diamonds without ruffing a third round. Ducking a club to East was then certain to force a helpful return.**

Over the years, I have benefited from countless great deals constructed by my great friend from Australia, Tim Bourke. Would you have made this 6♥ contract of his?

Both Vul ♠ A J 2
Dlr: South ♥ A Q 9 7
 ♦ A 8 6
 ♣ 7 6 4

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

West	North	East	South
			1♥
2♠	3♠	pass	4♣
pass	4NT	pass	5♥
pass	6♥	all pass	

West leads the ♠K to dummy's ace, and you see that all will be easy, provided the trumps are not 4–0. You could then draw trumps and take the club finesse for a possible overtrick. If it lost, your four diamond tricks would allow you to throw dummy's club loser, and a club ruff in dummy would be your twelfth trick.

What will happen, though, if you follow this line and West shows out on the first trump? You will go down! Before playing to the second trick, you must plan to overcome the only threat to your contract, a 4–0 trump break.

The winning line is a dummy reversal. By ruffing two spades in the South hand, you will make six trump tricks to go with six side-suit winners. Only one play is good enough; you must ruff a spade in your hand at trick two. You cross to the ♥A, seeing the 4–0 break, and ruff the ♠J. You then play the ♥K–J, cross to the ♦A and draw the last trump. Three more diamond tricks and the ♣A land the slam.

- **Right at the start, you identified the only risk, a 4–0 trump break. You spotted the dummy reversal to overcome it.**

Here's another deal where you must make an early plan. If instead you play the first few tricks on auto-pilot, and you will be in big trouble!

None Vul	♠ A 5 2										
Dlr: South	♥ A Q										
	♦ Q 9 8 5 4 2										
	♣ K 3										
♠ 6 4	<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		♠ 10 7 3
	N										
W		E									
	S										
♥ J 10 9 3 2		♥ K 8 6 4									
♦ 10 3		♦ K J 7 6									
♣ Q 9 8 6		♣ J 4									
	♠ K Q J 9 8										
	♥ 7 5										
	♦ A										
	♣ A 10 7 5 2										

West	North	East	South
			1♠
pass	2♦	pass	3♣
pass	3♠	pass	4♣
pass	4♥	pass	4NT
pass	5♥	pass	6♠
all pass			

Spades were agreed as trumps. 4♣ and 4♥ then showed first- or second-round controls. The RKCB response of 5♥ confirmed that the two missing aces were held.

How would you play 6♠ when West leads the ♥J? If you play the queen from dummy at Trick 1, as many players would, you will go down. There will be no way to set up either the diamonds or the clubs, without losing a further trick. The winning play is to rise with the ♥A. You then cash the king and ace of clubs and play a third club, throwing the ♥Q.

After this inspired start, nothing can prevent you from ruffing a heart with a low trump, and then ruffing the fourth round of clubs with the trump ace. Finally, you will draw trumps and score the thirteenth card in the club suit. Slam made!

The next deal illustrates an important card play technique that you will use many a time:

Other books from Master Point Press

by David Bird

25 BRIDGE MYTHS EXPOSED
BRIDGE ENDPLAYS FOR EVERYONE
BRIDGE ENTRY TECHNIQUES
BRIDGE SQUEEZES FOR EVERYONE
CLEVER PLAYS IN THE TRUMP SUIT
OFF-ROAD DECLARER PLAY
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ROBIN HOOD'S HOLD-UP (bridge fiction)
SOMEHOW WE LANDED IN 6NT
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WINNING DUPLICATE TACTICS
WINNING NOTRUMP LEADS (with Taf Anthias)
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25 WAYS TO BE A BETTER DEFENDER
25 WAYS TO COMPETE IN THE BIDDING
25 WAYS TO TAKE MORE TRICKS AS DECLARER
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PLANNING THE DEFENSE
PLANNING THE PLAY OF A BRIDGE HAND
PLANNING THE PLAY – THE NEXT LEVEL
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BE A DIFFICULT MATCHPOINT OPPONENT
BRIDGE CARDPLAY – AN EASY GUIDE (10 books)
BRIDGE TECHNIQUE SERIES (12 books)

Slam contracts are among the most enjoyable and rewarding parts of the game we all love. They are also a splendid setting for instructive writing. The teacher and reader can quickly reach the instructive part of the play.

The first part of this book is on Playing Slams. Topics include determining the best line, managing entries, maneuvers in the trump suit, avoidance play, locating missing queens and jacks, setting up squeezes, setting up endplays and rescuing slams in danger. The second part covers Defending Slams, including opening leads against a slam, planning a slam defense, defending doubled slams, defending against slam endplays and slam squeezes.

Your level of performance will surely rise after mastering the many techniques clearly explained in this book.



DAVID BIRD (England) has written 169 bridge books, including 87 for Master Point Press. He is renowned for his clear explanations and economical writing style. Winner of a record twelve 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 over fifty years, have a daughter, a son, and two grandchildren.

