

# A GREAT DEAL OF BRIDGE PROBLEMS

Julian Pottage



AN HONORS EBOOK FROM MASTER POINT PRESS

Text © 2014 Julian Pottage

All rights reserved.

Honors Books is an imprint of Master Point Press. All contents, editing and design (excluding cover design) are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Master Point Press  
331 Douglas Ave.  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada  
M5M 1H2  
(416) 781-0351

Email: [info@masterpointpress.com](mailto:info@masterpointpress.com)  
Websites: [www.masterpointpress.com](http://www.masterpointpress.com)  
[www.bridgeblogging.com](http://www.bridgeblogging.com)  
[www.teachbridge.com](http://www.teachbridge.com)  
[www.ebooksbridge.com](http://www.ebooksbridge.com)

ISBN: 978-1-55494-784-3  
Ebook PDF: 978-1-55494-539-9

Layout and editing: Julian Pottage  
Cover Design: Olena S. Sullivan/New Mediatrix

This is the greatest bridge problem collection, ever! Any questions?

Julian Pottage has developed a well-earned reputation as a great problem constructor. His problems don't require spectacular plays. They simply require the same attention to detail that produces winning bridge at the table.

In addition, his answers are sharp, to the point, and usually make you say, "of course."

Problem collections usually contain 50-100 deals. This one has almost 200, each fresher than the last. They are divided into categories, which involve slams, no trump contracts, trump contracts, defensive continuations by the opening leader, and quite a few others.

Try one problem each night before you go to bed. No sleeping until you get it right.

You may notice a tendency toward alliteration. Bridge can be fun, you know.

Ron Garber



## Introduction to the First Edition

Please may I begin by thanking Ron Garber and the team at Vivisphere for the pivotal part they have played in bringing this project to fruition. May I also thank Maureen Dennison and Peter Burrows for their sterling efforts in eradicating any errors or eccentricities in the initial manuscript. To conclude the credits I must mention the most important person of all. Without you, the reader, the book would be a court with no judge, a lock with no key, a yacht with no breeze: vanity and chasing of the wind.

This book differs from a number of other problem books not just in its size but also in its presentation. On many deals, I ask you not to predict the entire course of the play but just your action on the current trick and those immediately following. My purpose is twofold. Firstly, it simplifies the discussion and more readily replicates conditions you may meet at the table. Secondly, it makes it easier for you to satisfy yourself whether you have successfully solved the problem as posed.

In keeping with the theme of simplification, wherever I can I have given you an auction that would be as familiar in a home game as at a bridge club or tournament. On those rare occasions when I have needed to use conventions from the world of duplicate to make the problem fair or feasible, I have explained any bids about which you need to know. The one bid I do not explain is a 1NT opening. Unless stated otherwise, the range is 15-17 points.

Within each chapter, I have arranged the problems broadly in order of increasingly difficulty. In most chapters, a couple of the problems at the very end have a page and half of explanation rather than the normal page. This speaks for itself. Except in chapter 11 and, to some extent chapter 8, I suggest that you dwell on each problem for about as long as you would if you met it at the table. Naturally, you, the customer are always right. If you chose to linger on a problem you find particularly interesting, I would not wish to debate the point.

If you have been doing your homework, you will know that this is by no means the first book I have done that has required a sizeable source of raw material. If so, it seems only fair that I should share with you a couple of secrets of how I have managed to keep finding fresh copy. At the end of each bridge session I play, I look back over the hand records (or my scorecard if there are none) to identify and note down the most interesting deal or two. I am fortunate also to see much of the world's best bridge literature and do likewise with this. While I would not directly use this in work that I claim as originally mine, it gives me ideas to blend with my own. For instance, what I read as a problem for declarer I often transform to a defensive problem or vice versa.

For a variety of reasons, I usually tweak the cards or the bidding slightly. For one thing, I regard a problem where the best answer works 51% of the time and the second best 49% as unsatisfactory. The tiniest factor I have overlooked or exaggerated might tip the balance the other way. I like there to be no doubt about the best answer. For another, I wish to avoid any accusation that bids or plays made by the unseen players are so unsound as to make the problem void. Thus, I change any debatable actions. Another point is that I like the decisive play to be for the contract rather than for overtricks. This means you can assume rubber or IMP scoring for the problems. Finally, I often like to arrange things so that the auction is the same in Acol and Standard American.

My desire to have clear-cut answers explains why I have not given you any opening lead problems. For any given hand, except perhaps when partner has made a lead-directing double, one can construct the deal in such ways as to support more than one possible lead.

I finish with a request. If, despite spite the thorough checking to which I referred at the start, you spot a mistake then do please let us know. The innovative technology the publisher uses makes it easy to correct such things for the benefit of future readers. Happy solving!

Julian Pottage  
Porthcawl, Wales, 2008

# Contents

1.	Sensational Slams	1
2.	Crafty Continuations	27
3.	Notrump Niceties	53
4.	Riveting Returns	79
5.	Trump Teasers	105
6.	Watch and Wait	131
7.	Worries for West	157
8.	Contracts and Claims	183
9.	Culbertson Curiosities	207
10.	Examination for East	233
11.	Fantasy Fun-time	259
12.	Connoisseur's Collection	273

## **Dedication**

To Michael York Pottage (1923-2006),  
a kind gentle man,  
a loyal friend,  
a willing servant,  
a humble competitor,  
a trustworthy employee,  
a devoted husband and,  
to me, a loving father.



## Sensational Slams

Slams can arouse high emotions: *satisfaction* if a lengthy sequence leads to a good contract, *excitement* at the prospect of making a lot of tricks and a big score, *fear* of going minus with a good hand and *joy* if the contract succeeds. As bridge players, we are not as good as poker players at controlling our emotions. All the same, it pays to do so.

With the stakes higher than usual, a failure to give the play your full attention may make the best of auctions count for nothing. In a grand slam, the tension reaches its height. One slip can spell instant defeat. Usually one wants to avoid taking finesses or leading winners that may be ruffed. You want to keep your chances alive until the end. Small slams, which occur more often, do not generate quite the same stress level. The ability to lose one trick allows you more leeway. Moreover, the fact that you can afford to lose the lead opens up types of play not available in a grand slam, such as a throw-in or elimination play.

One thing that can make slams easier to play than games is that you usually have the entries to cross back and forth between the hands. One thing that makes them harder is that you less often have clues from the opposition bidding. While intervention can cause you problems in the auction, making it hard to reach the correct contract, it frequently helps you when it comes to the play.

1.1

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♥
pass	2♦	pass	3♣
pass	5NT	pass	7♣
all pass			

♠ A K Q  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ A J 9 7 3 2  
 ♣ Q J 8 7

♠ 9  
 ♥ A J 8 7 6 4 3  
 ♦ —  
 ♣ A K 10 9 3

West leads the six of clubs. With a long suit in each hand, you might try to set up the hearts or the diamonds. Does one suit offer a better bet than the other? Is there an even better plan?

1.2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	3♥	pass	4♣
pass	4♠	pass	5♦
pass	6♠	all pass	

♠ K 8  
 ♥ K 8 6 4 3  
 ♦ J 6 3 2  
 ♣ 8 5

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

West leads the ten of diamonds (consistent with a suit headed by the 10-9, K-10-9 or Q-10-9). How do you play to avoid the possible loss of two club tricks?

1.3

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

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♥
pass	2NT *	pass	3♥
pass	4NT	pass	5♥
pass	5NT	pass	6♥ **
all pass			

♠ Q 3  
 ♥ A 7 6 4 3  
 ♦ A J 5 3  
 ♣ Q 3

\* game-forcing heart raise

\*\* no kings

West leads the jack of hearts, which you will discover is from a holding of J-10-9-8. With finesse positions in two suits and the possibility of dropping the queen of diamonds, you want to combine your chances in some way. How should you best go about this?

1.4

♠ 10 8 5 2  
 ♥ A Q 8 7 5 2  
 ♦ J  
 ♣ A 5

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	1♥	pass	2♣
pass	2♥	pass	3♦
pass	3♠	pass	6NT
all pass			

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

West leads the nine of diamonds to the jack and queen. How do you play to the next two tricks?

1.1

Contract: 7♥

Lead: ♣6

♠ A K Q

♥ —

♦ A J 9 7 3 2

♣ Q J 8 7

♠ J 8 5 3

♥ K 10 9 5 2

♦ Q

♣ 6 5 2

♠ 10 7 6 4 2

♥ Q

♦ K 10 8 6 5 4

♣ 4

♠ 9

♥ A J 8 7 6 4 3

♦ —

♣ A K 10 9 3

One line is to win the opening lead in dummy and try to set up the diamonds. You will succeed on a normal 4-3 break. You will need four entries to dummy. You have them with two trumps, one spade and one ruff. If the diamonds do not break 4-3 but you have cashed the ace of diamonds early, you will be able to fall back on a crossruff.

Another line is to win the club in hand and play on hearts. On a 3-3 break, you need only two more entries to hand and can survive a 3-1 trump split. On a more normal 4-2 break, you need a 2-2 trump split because you need dummy's three remaining trumps for ruffing and so all your other three entries to hand need to be by ruffing. This line is inferior to playing on diamonds because you need more friendly breaks and because you cannot so readily combine your chances with a crossruff.

As you may have guessed, your best plan is to go for a crossruff from the start. So long as three rounds of spades and the red aces stand up, you can survive quite a hostile distribution. Win the first trick in dummy, cash dummy's side winners, ruff a diamond and cash the ace of hearts. If all has gone to plan, you can claim the remainder on a high crossruff. There is even a vague chance of success if the spades lie highly unevenly. If East ruffs, you can overruff and to try to set up the hearts, for which you will need a 3-3 heart break.

1.2

Contract: 6♠

Lead: ♦10

♠ K 8

♥ K 8 6 4 3

♦ J 6 3 2

♣ 8 5

♠ 5

♥ J 7

♦ Q 10 9 7 4

♣ Q 9 7 4 2

♠ 10 9 6 3

♥ Q 10 5 2

♦ K 8 5

♣ 10 6

♠ A Q J 7 4 2

♥ A 9

♦ A

♣ A K J 3

A lack of entries to dummy means you can rule out trying to set up the hearts. What is the best play in clubs?

Suppose you cross to the king of hearts and take a losing finesse. You will then face a nasty guess on the third round of clubs if West continues to follow. If you ruff low, East may overruff and set you at once. If you ruff high, trumps may be 4-1. With the layout as above, you have no winning option if you lose a trick to the queen of clubs.

If you were in a grand slam, it would be clear what to do. You would cash the top clubs and ruff the third round low. You would want to save the king to ruff the fourth round of clubs when you know that one of the defenders will have run out. Is this the best play in six?

If you ruff the third club low, you risk seeing East overruff and putting back a trump. You do better to ruff the third round of clubs with the king. You can then return to hand and ruff the fourth round low. Unless trumps break 5-0 or someone ruffs with a singleton trump – which would be very unlucky – you essentially just need the two clubs to stand up.

Take a bonus point if you considered but rejected trying to cater for a 6-1 club break by crossing over with a heart to lead the second round of clubs from dummy. A 5-1 heart break, which is more likely than a 6-1 club break, would spell defeat if the defender short in clubs has five hearts: you would lose an overruff on the fourth club and a heart ruff.

1.3

Contract: 6♥

Lead: ♥J

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

♠ 10 8 7 2  
 ♥ J 10 9 8  
 ♦ 10 8  
 ♣ 10 8 5

♠ K 9 6 5 4  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ Q 9 7 2  
 ♣ 9 6 4 2

♠ Q 3  
 ♥ A 7 6 4 3  
 ♦ A J 5 3  
 ♣ Q 3

One option is to cash two diamonds and, if the queen does not drop, fall back on the spade finesse. To try for a singleton spade king with the diamond finesse in reserve is better given the trump split and works as the cards lie. Best of all is to combine the finessing chances. You can do it if West holds three or four clubs. After the third top trump, play clubs throwing spades. If West has not ruffed, exit with a trump in this position:

♠ A J  
 ♥ 8  
 ♦ K 6 4  
 ♣ —

♠ 10 8 7  
 ♥ 10  
 ♦ 10 8  
 ♣ —

♠ K 9 6  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ Q 9 2  
 ♣ —

♠ —  
 ♥ 7 6  
 ♦ A J 5 3  
 ♣ —

West's spade exit gives you a free shot at the spade finesse. When East produces the king, you can ruff and try your luck in diamonds.

1.4

Contract: 6NT

Lead:  $\diamond$ 9

$\spadesuit$  10 8 5 2

$\heartsuit$  A Q 8 7 5 2

$\diamond$  J

$\clubsuit$  A 5

$\spadesuit$  J 9 4

$\heartsuit$  J 9 6 4

$\diamond$  9 8 6

$\clubsuit$  Q 10 4

$\spadesuit$  Q 7 6 3

$\heartsuit$  10 3

$\diamond$  Q 10 5 4 2

$\clubsuit$  9 3

$\spadesuit$  A K

$\heartsuit$  K

$\diamond$  A K 7 3

$\clubsuit$  K J 8 7 6 2

Suppose the play to the first three tricks goes ace of diamonds, king of hearts and a club to ace. You intend to cash the ace and queen hearts next to test the suit and to discard a diamond on each of these.

You will certainly succeed if hearts break 3-3. If hearts do not break 3-3, you can try your luck in clubs. If West has the heart length, you will play a club to the king and give up a club. This is a safety play against Q-x with West. You do not mind giving up an overtrick if East has Q-x-x. If East has the heart length, you will finesse the jack of clubs. In this case, you are quite happy to lose the lead to West.

Today your luck is out if you play as above. West has a sure entry in clubs and a heart to cash upon gaining the lead. Nor does it help to leave a heart winner in dummy (a strange play in any event if all follow to two hearts). You would have to lose a diamond at the end.

After taking the ace of diamonds and unblocking the king of hearts, you should continue not with a club to the ace but by ducking a club. Once you regain the lead you can cross to the ace of clubs and test the hearts. When these bring no joy you can return to hand with a spade and play clubs from the top.

1.5

♠ K J 4  
 ♥ A K  
 ♦ A 7  
 ♣ A K J 9 5 3

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	4♠
pass	4NT	pass	5♦
pass	7♠	all pass	

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

West leads the jack of hearts. With twelve top tricks, trying to set up a long club must represent your best bet. Can you spot the play for the first three tricks that gives you the maximum chance of success?

1.6

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

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	1♠	pass	2♥
pass	3♦	pass	3♥
pass	4♥	pass	4NT
pass	5♥	pass	6♥
all pass			

♠ K 7  
 ♥ A K J 10 6 3  
 ♦ 9  
 ♣ A 9 6 3

West leads the king of clubs. You decide to win, proceeding to cash the ace and the king of hearts. All follow but the queen of hearts remains out. Do you agree with the play to date? How do you continue?



1.7

♠ K  
♥ A Q 7 6 3 2  
♦ A Q 4  
♣ A K Q

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	3♠ *
pass	4NT	pass	5♦
pass	6♠	all pass	

\* pushy if you are vulnerable

♠ A 10 9 8 7 6 4  
♥ J 5  
♦ J 10 8  
♣ 9

West leads the nine of hearts. Assuming nothing peculiar happens in the majors, how do you play to the first seven tricks?

1.8

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

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1NT
pass	6NT	all pass	

♠ K 3  
♥ Q J 10 8  
♦ Q J 10 7  
♣ A Q 8

West leads the seven of hearts. Is it better to try for a 3-3 club break or for the ace of spades onside? Is there anything else to consider?

1.5

Contract: 7♠

Lead: ♥J

♠ K J 4

♥ A K

♦ A 7

♣ A K J 9 5 3

♠ 10 8 6

♥ J 10 9 7 2

♦ K J 9 6

♣ 4

♠ —

♥ Q 8 6 5 4

♦ 10 5 3

♣ Q 10 8 6 2

♠ A Q 9 7 5 3 2

♥ 3

♦ Q 8 4 2

♣ 7

With normal breaks in the black suits (2-1 in spades and 4-2 in clubs), you can afford to draw trumps ending in dummy at tricks two and three. You can then cash the ace of clubs, ruff a club, return to dummy with a trump or the ace of diamonds and ruff a second club. After this, you use dummy's last entry to enjoy the clubs. Indeed, so long as clubs break 4-2, you can succeed even if trumps break 3-0.

Now suppose that clubs split 5-1. In this case, you need an extra entry to dummy and cannot afford to cash two rounds of trumps. Say you cash the ace only before playing a club to the ace. Then you ruff a spade high (when East follows), cross to dummy with a trump (drawing the last missing trump you hope) and ruff a club low. Since dummy still has two entries left, you expect to set up and enjoy the long club.

The problem comes when West has three trumps and a singleton club. You cannot afford to ruff high twice. Nor can you afford to draw trumps before taking the second ruff. The solution is really rather neat. At trick two, discard your club on a heart. Then you can ruff the first club low, cash the ace of trumps, finding the news, cross to dummy in trumps and ruff a club high. After this you cross to dummy again, drawing West's last trump as you do so, to finish setting up the clubs. The ace of diamonds serves as the entry to the established winner.

1.6

Contract: 6♥

Lead: ♣K

♠ A Q J 8 3

♥ 8 5

♦ A K 10 6

♣ J 5

♠ 10 6 5 2

♥ Q 7 2

♦ 7

♣ K Q 10 7 2

♠ 9 4

♥ 9 4

♦ Q J 8 5 4 3 2

♣ 8 4

♠ K 7

♥ A K J 10 6 3

♦ 9

♣ A 9 6 3

Although cashing the two top hearts is not the best way to play for no trump loser, it is the best play when you look at the full picture. If you took a losing finesse, you would be down at once. By playing for the drop in trumps you can combine the chance of a doubleton queen with the chance of discarding all your losing clubs before someone can ruff.

With so few diamonds between the two hands (and the suit unbid), many would fall into the trap of playing on diamonds before spades. An untimely ruff on the second round then puts the contract two down.

Can you see why it is better to play on spades first? You need three discards in all, only one of which can come from diamonds. In other words, you need three rounds of spades to stand up regardless of how the diamonds break. The gain comes when someone has the missing trump and four (or more) spades. In this case, the other defender will show out on a spade and you will know it is safe to play a fourth spade. Indeed, when the spades break exactly 4-2 you can continue with a fifth round and make the contract even if diamonds are 8-0!

1.7

Contract: 6♠

Lead: ♥9

♠ K  
 ♥ A Q 7 6 3 2  
 ♦ A Q 4  
 ♣ A K Q

♠ Q 2  
 ♥ 9 8  
 ♦ 9 6 5 3  
 ♣ 10 6 4 3 2

♠ J 5 3  
 ♥ K 10 4  
 ♦ K 7 2  
 ♣ J 8 7 5

♠ A 10 9 8 7 6 4  
 ♥ J 5  
 ♦ J 10 8  
 ♣ 9

Unless West is known as a tricky customer, you should put up the ace of hearts, placing East with the king. Then unblock the king of spades, cash two rounds of clubs to discard a heart and ruff a heart. You then cash the ace of spades to reach this position:

♠ —  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ 9 6 5 3  
 ♣ 10 6 3

♠ —  
 ♥ Q 7 6  
 ♦ A Q 4  
 ♣ Q

♠ J  
 ♥ K  
 ♦ K 7 2  
 ♣ J 7

♠ 10 9 8 7  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ J 10 8  
 ♣ —

Lead a trump and cross your fingers. If the last trump is on your right, it does not matter that the ♥K is still out. Your luck is in. East wins and can do no better than return a club. This gives you the extra entry to set up the hearts and spares you from taking the diamond finesse.

1.8  
 Contract: 6NT  
 Lead: ♥7

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

♠ A Q 6 4  
 ♥ 7 6 5  
 ♦ 4 2  
 ♣ J 7 3 2

♠ 10 8 5 2  
 ♥ 9 4 3  
 ♦ 9 8 6 3  
 ♣ 10 9

♠ K 3  
 ♥ Q J 10 8  
 ♦ Q J 10 7  
 ♣ A Q 8

Should you test for a 3-3 club break before playing spades? Unless East holds exactly four clubs (less likely than exactly three), this allows you to combine your chances. Assuming there are no wild breaks, can you see something even better? Cash eight red winners before touching the black suits. This is the position as you cash the last red winner:

♠ A Q  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ —  
 ♣ J 7 3 2

♠ J 9  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ —  
 ♣ K 6 5 4

♠ 10 8 5 2  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ —  
 ♣ 10 9

♠ K 3  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ J  
 ♣ A Q 8

To keep four clubs West has to discard the queen of spades on your last red winner. This means you can drive out the ace of spades and make the slam even with clubs 4-2 and the ace of spades offside.

1.9

♠ J 7 4  
 ♥ A Q  
 ♦ K Q J 7 3  
 ♣ K Q 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♠
pass	2NT	pass	3♣
pass	4♣	pass	4♦
pass	4♥	dbl	pass
pass	rdbl	pass	5NT
pass	7♣	all pass	

♠ A K 10 3  
 ♥ J 5  
 ♦ A  
 ♣ A 10 8 7 6 3

West leads the ten of hearts. I hope that the bidding has not left you feeling exhausted because the contract is not quite as laydown as first appears. Can you spot the best way to play the first three tricks?

1.10

♠ 9 7 6  
 ♥ K J 2  
 ♦ 9 3  
 ♣ K 8 5 3 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	2♣
pass	2♦	pass	2♥
pass	3♥	pass	5♥
pass	6♥	all pass	

♠ A K Q 3  
 ♥ A Q 7 5 3  
 ♦ A K 7  
 ♣ Q

West leads the jack of clubs. East wins with the ace and switches to the jack of diamonds. What is the safest plan to avoid a diamond loser?

1.11

♠ K 9  
 ♥ A K 8  
 ♦ A K J  
 ♣ Q J 7 6 5

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	—	1NT
pass	7NT	all pass	

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

West leads a diamond, which dummy wins with the ace as East follows. You decide to cash the ace-king of clubs, preparing to claim, but West discards a diamond on the second round. How do you continue?

1.12

♠ K Q  
 ♥ K Q 3  
 ♦ K Q J 10  
 ♣ A 9 3 2

<i>W</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>S</i>
—	—	3♣	dbl
pass	4♣	pass	4♦
pass	4NT	pass	5♠ *
pass	7♦	all pass	

♠ A 10 9 4  
 ♥ A 9 7  
 ♦ A 8 7 5 3  
 ♣ J

\* three aces

West leads the five of clubs to dummy's ace. You cash the king of diamonds but East discards a club. This makes life awkward. Unless the jack of spades is short, you need six trump tricks rather than five. What is the safest way to take the necessary ruff(s)?

1.9

Contract: 7♣

Lead: ♥10

♠ J 7 4  
 ♥ A Q  
 ♦ K Q J 7 3  
 ♣ K Q 2

♠ Q 9 6 2  
 ♥ 10 9 8 6 3  
 ♦ 9 5 4 2  
 ♣ —

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

♠ A K 10 3  
 ♥ J 5  
 ♦ A  
 ♣ A 10 8 7 6 3

You would put up the ♥A even without the double of 4♥ and do so here. If trumps are 2-2 or 3-1, you can afford to proceed with a club to the king and one back to hand. However, this fails if East holds all the missing trumps because you can never draw trumps ending in dummy. Correct is to unblock the ace of diamonds at trick two. Only then do you play a trump. Once West shows out, you start running the diamonds.

♠ J 7 4  
 ♥ Q  
 ♦ J 7  
 ♣ Q 2

♠ Q 9 6 2  
 ♥ 9 8 6  
 ♦ 9  
 ♣ —

♠ 8 5  
 ♥ K 4 2  
 ♦ —  
 ♣ J 9 5

♠ A K 10  
 ♥ —  
 ♦ —  
 ♣ A 10 8 7 6

East has the chance now to ruff and does so. You overruff, cash the ace of clubs and cross to the queen of clubs for the last diamond.



1.10                                      ♠ 9 7 6  
 Contract: 6♥                              ♥ K J 2  
 Lead: ♣J                                    ♦ 9 3  
    ♣ K 8 5 3 2

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

♠ A K Q 3  
 ♥ A Q 7 5 3  
 ♦ A K 7  
 ♣ Q

Since ruffing a spade (if the suit does not break 3-3) requires some luck, it makes sense to try to ruff a diamond in dummy. You can use the king of clubs to discard any spade loser.

Ruffing a diamond should prove straightforward if diamonds break no worse than 5-3 and hearts 3-2. How can you cater for a bad break in one red suit or the other?

You could ruff the diamond high to ensure East cannot overruff. Of course, if you do that, you will go down any time trumps break 4-1. It would be nice to test the trumps to find out whether they are 4-1. The snag is that you cannot do so without committing yourself on how high you are going to ruff. If you cash the king and jack to leave a low trump in dummy, you are powerless to stop an overruff. The consolation is that you protect yourself if someone has a doubleton diamond and fewer than three trumps. Take 8 marks out of 10 if you decided to do this.

The best plan of all is to draw only one round of trumps with the king. If West has a doubleton diamond, you can take the ruff in safety, overruffing if need be but otherwise ruffing low. If West follows to three rounds of diamonds, the percentage play is to ruff low. It is much more likely that someone has four trumps than that West has six diamonds.

1.11

Contract: 6NT

Lead:  $\diamond$  10

$\spadesuit$  K 9  
 $\heartsuit$  A K 8  
 $\diamond$  A K J  
 $\clubsuit$  Q J 7 6 5

$\spadesuit$  3 2  
 $\heartsuit$  Q 9 7 3  
 $\diamond$  10 9 6 5 4 3  
 $\clubsuit$  9

$\spadesuit$  J 8 7 6 5 4  
 $\heartsuit$  10  
 $\diamond$  2  
 $\clubsuit$  10 8 4 3 2

$\spadesuit$  A Q 10  
 $\heartsuit$  J 6 5 4 2  
 $\diamond$  Q 8 7  
 $\clubsuit$  A K

With the clubs 5-1, you are still looking at the same 12 top tricks you could see to start with. Moreover, since East discards after dummy and you have no heart winner in your hand, a squeeze in hearts and clubs cannot succeed whatever the heart layout. This means you will need to score a third heart trick by straightforward play.

At the table, I bet that many a declarer would feel so despondent upon finding the foul club split that they would cash the ace-king of hearts next. At least the play would be over quickly this way. Perhaps you also feel like playing for the drop in hearts. Still, it costs nothing to try to find out about the distribution of the unseen hands first.

You should cash the king of diamonds followed by the queen-jack of clubs (discarding hearts) and three rounds of spades. As the cards lie, interesting things happen. East shows out on the diamond, marking the suit as 6-1, and West shows out on the third spade, marking spades as 6-2. This gives you a complete count on the East hand:  $6=1=1=5$ .

Since it is twice as likely that East's singleton heart is the nine or ten rather than the queen, you lead the jack of hearts. West covers and dummy wins as East drops the hoped-for ten. Finally, you cross back to the carefully preserved queen of diamonds to finesse the eight of hearts.

1.12

Contract: 7♦

Lead: ♣5

♠ K Q

♥ K Q 3

♦ K Q J 10

♣ A 9 3 2

♠ J 6 5 3

♥ 10 8 6 5

♦ 9 6 4 2

♣ 5

♠ 8 7 2

♥ J 4 2

♦ —

♣ K Q 10 8 7 6 4

♠ A 10 9 4

♥ A 9 7

♦ A 8 7 5 3

♣ J

How might ruffing in the short trump hand go? Suppose you unblock the king-queen of spades, cross to hand with the ace of hearts, cash the ace of spades and continue with the ten. If the jack of spades has not dropped, you ruff in dummy and take two more rounds of trumps. Now the snag hits you. To come back to hand to draw the last trump you will eventually have to lead a club and ruff low, hoping to find West with a second club. This is unlikely given the bidding and lead.

At least the above line represents an improvement on going for two club ruffs in hand. You do not want to incur an overruff and find out later that the jack of spades is short. So take 8 out of 10 for that.

Ruffing in dummy is the right idea. It is just question of the best way to go about it. Instead of cashing the king-queen of spades, overtake the second round! You can then lead the ten for a ruffing finesse on the third round. After ruffing the jack of spades and unblocking dummy's trumps, you have the ace of hearts as an entry to draw the remaining trumps.

On this line, you are certain to succeed if West is 5=3=4=1; you also have the odds on your side if West is 4=4=4=1 and are no worse off than with the other lines if West is 3=5=4=1. Indeed, if you know how your opponent plays and a smooth low spade greets your ten, you might elect to ruff in dummy, succeeding also when East has J-x-x.