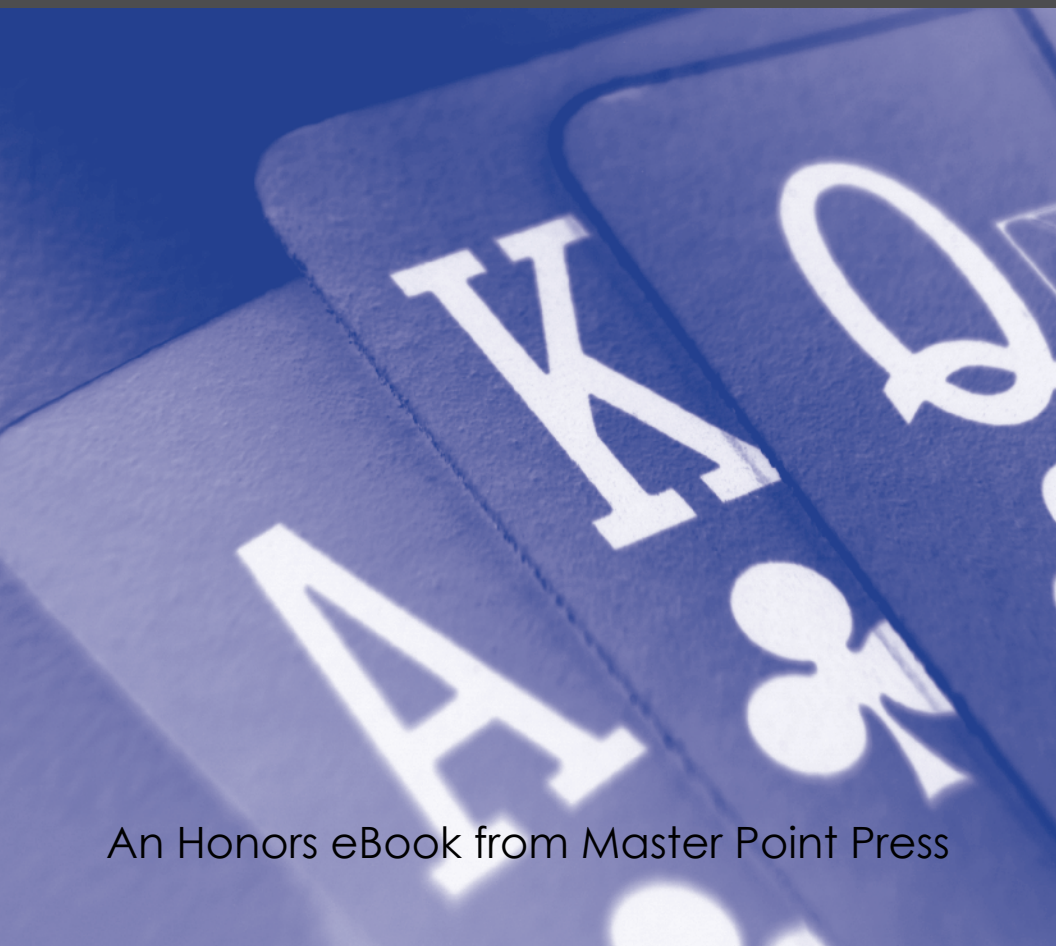


SIX STEPS TO WINNING DECLARER PLAY

Jay Apfelbaum



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Preface

I wrote this book because, in fifty years of playing bridge, I have seen countless declarers go down in contracts that they should have made. I believe they did not take into account the available information in planning the play of the hand. Defenders bid. Their bids give information about their hands. Defenders discard. What and when they discard gives further information.

My focus is on the process a declarer should follow in taking full advantage of all information in planning the play of each hand. The six questions presented for each of these fifty-two hands are the guide to developing the most effective strategy.

These hands are not presented in a particular order because there is no order of increasing difficulty at the table. We really cannot plan exactly how to play a hand until we see the dummy. For every hand, we ask the same six questions. The purpose is to help train the reader to ask these questions every time. This book is not so much about how we play a particular hand as it is about teaching the process for planning the play.

- 1) How many tricks can we take right now? These are the tricks we can win without letting the defenders on lead. Suppose we are declaring a 3NT contract. If we begin with six fast tricks, it becomes easier to put together a plan when we know that we need only three more to make the contract.

2) How many tricks can the defense take right now?

These are the tricks the defenders can win without letting us on lead. Again, suppose we are declaring 3NT. If we know that the defenders can win three fast tricks, our plan must allow for the loss of one other trick at most. A plan that requires us to lose two tricks to build our ninth trick is a ticket to failure.

3) Where can we get more tricks?

We must count the number of tricks we can build in each suit. We need to know which suit or suits will get us the tricks we need. We might have to build winners in more than one suit to succeed.

4) Where can the defense get more tricks?

We need to know which suits the defenders will attack to build their winners. We might have to disguise our weakness in those suits. We might have to keep one defender off lead to protect our holding in a suit. Very often, when playing 3NT, we might have to build our winners faster than the defenders can build theirs.

5) How many tricks do we need for a good score?

At IMPs, that is often just making the contract. At matchpoints, the goal might be to make an overtrick or hold our losses to down one. That will depend on what we think the players holding the same hands will do. We need to set a goal that offers the best chance for that good score. Making nine tricks in 3NT is a poor result if every other declarer makes ten tricks in 4♠.

6) What is the best way to play the hand?
This is where we create our plan. We put together all the information available in the auction and play, and decide what to do next. We determine which suit to play first, and how to play it. We must also be prepared to pause mid-hand to consider new information.

I believe that bridge is just as dynamic as life, love, politics and warfare. All offer incomplete information. Happenings occur without warning. A seemingly hopeless contract succeeds. A seemingly impregnable contract fails. The strong declarer makes the best plan based on everything that is known and might include acquiring more information to improve the chances of success. The technical term for this is abductive reasoning.

I could not have written this book without help of two wonderful people. I owe them both a thank you. My cousin/editor Iris helped me to make the writing clear and consistent and make my explanations more understandable.

My other thank you is to my wife, April. She reviewed each of these hands and asked me questions that helped me improve on my explanations. She also inspired me to write *Six Steps to Winning Declarer Play*. Happy and winning bridge to you all!

Hand 1

Dealer: North
Vul: North/South
Form: Matchpoints

North

♠ 5 3 2
♥ K 9 7 6 4
♦ J 5
♣ K 8 5

South

♠ J 8 6
♥ A 5 3
♦ A K 10 6 3
♣ A 6

West	North	East	South (you)
---	Pass	Pass	1NT
Pass	2♦	Pass	2♥
All Pass			

West leads the ♠A, on which East plays the ♠9 (encouraging). West continues with the ♠K (East plays the ♠4) and then the ♠7 to East's ♠Q. We follow suit to all three rounds of spades. East now plays the ♣J (promising the ♣10). Plan the play.

How many tricks can we take right now? we have the Ace and King in hearts, diamonds and clubs. That gives us six tricks.

How many tricks can the defense take right now? The defense has already taken three spade tricks. They cannot take any more tricks right now.

Where can we get more tricks? we have eight trumps, missing the ♥Q, ♥J and ♥10. If the defenders' trumps divide 3-2, we will get two more tricks by cashing our ♥A and ♥K. The defenders will follow suit to both tricks, leaving them only one more trump. If their trumps divide 4-1, we will get only one more trick by cashing our ♥A and ♥K.

The diamond suit might supply another trick if either the diamond finesse wins or the long diamond is set up by ruffing out the ♦Q. We take the diamond finesse by leading the ♦J and hoping that East has the ♦Q. We ruff out the ♦Q by first cashing the ♦A and ♦K and looking at the cards the defenders play. If neither defender plays the ♦Q, we continue by ruffing a diamond. If the ♦Q still does not appear, we get back to our hand to ruff another diamond.

Another possibility is to cash the ♣A and the ♣K and then ruff a club in our hand.

Where can the defense get more tricks? The defenders will win at least one trump trick. If a defender holds four trumps, they will win two more tricks. Also, the defenders will win a diamond trick if we take a diamond finesse and West has the ♦Q.

How many tricks do we need for a good score? The defenders took three spade tricks, but it looks as if that is normal. We need at least two other tricks to make our contract. That should be fairly easy as long as the trumps divide 3-2. We can get a good score by winning nine tricks (or eight if trumps divide 4-1). We did not overbid, which some pairs might do.

What is the best way to play the hand? East will have the $\spadesuit Q$ half the time. So, the odds for a diamond finesse are about 50%. Ruffing a diamond will get us a third trick if either defender has the $\spadesuit Q$ and no more than three diamonds. That will happen about two-thirds of the time. Ruffing a club in our hand will give us a third club trick just about all the time. That is the best chance, so we will ruff a club.

We plan to ruff a club in our hand for an extra trick. Do we draw trump first and then ruff a club, or ruff a club and then draw trump?

The right line is to play the $\heartsuit A$ and see what happens. If both defenders play a small heart, continue with a heart to the $\heartsuit K$. Now, play the $\clubsuit A$, a club to the $\clubsuit K$ and then ruff a club with our last trump. When the hearts divide 3-2, we make nine tricks.

Here is the full hand:

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

Final Comments: The six-question process led us to the correct percentage line of play and, on this hand, the maximum result. There are many hands where an inferior percentage line of play will win more tricks. That does not alter the process. In the long run, choosing the best percentage line of play gives you the best results. We should adopt an inferior percentage line of play only with a very good reason.

DO YOU WANT TO PLAY THE HAND BETTER THAN YOU DO NOW?

Too many players have trouble deciding how to set about a contract as declarer. Do they worry about losers or winners? Do they draw trumps or not? Should they be guarding against bad breaks? There are so many things to think about, it's easy to get sidetracked. In this book, you will learn about the right questions to ask yourself as declarer when dummy appears. In each of the 52 example hands, the author goes through the same six questions, and shows you how to arrive at answers that will help you develop the best plan for the hand. The examples range from relatively simple to fairly complex, but gradually you will learn to answer the questions for yourself and then use the information to play the hand to best effect.

Everyone who reads this book and applies what they have learned will become a better declarer.



JAY APFELBAUM lives in Philadelphia and works as an administrative law judge. He is married with two daughters and two grandchildren. He regularly plays with his wife, April, at local bridge clubs and tournaments. Jay is a Grand Life Master. His first regional victory came in 1973 at a knockout event in Richmond, Virginia. He won the Blue Ribbon Pairs in 1976. Since then he has won many regional events and placed in the top ten of a number of national events.