

Board 10
 West Deals
 Both Vul

GNT Defense -- Problem

♠ 6 5 2
 ♥ A 8 7 6
 ♦ Q 9 7 4
 ♣ 5 2

♠ J 7 4 3
 ♥ 5 4
 ♦ A J 2
 ♣ 10 7 6 3



<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	Pass	Pass	2 ♣
Pass	2 ♦	Pass	2 NT
Pass	3 ♣	Pass	3 ♦ ¹
Pass	3 NT	All pass	

1. No 4- or 5-card major suit.
 3 NT by South
 Lead: ♥ 5

Take over from me for a deal from the District 25 Grand National Teams (Unlimited Flight) trials.

When declarer shows at least half the deck in a balanced hand, a passive lead is strongly recommended. An aggressive lead is more likely to cost a trick than to gain. Since opener denied a long major suit, the ♥ 5 lead is a standout. Dummy plays small, partner the ♥ 9, and declarer wins the ♥ Q. Surely, declarer has the king as well. (Per Eddie Kantar, it's generally more deceptive for declarer to play the king from touching honors at notrump.)

Declarer cashes the ♣ K, partner following with the ♣ J. On the ♣ A, partner plays the ♥ 2. Declarer next tries the ♣ 8; you smartly win the ten, as partner discards the ♥ 3. What now?

GNT Defense -- Solution

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♠ 6 5 2		♠ Q 10 9 8									
♥ A 8 7 6		♥ 10 9 3 2									
♦ Q 9 7 4		♦ K 10 8 5									
♣ 5 2		♣ J									
♠ J 7 4 3	<table border="1" style="border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 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 8
	N										
W		E									
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♠ A K											
♥ K Q J											
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♣ A K Q 9 8 4											

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Pass	Pass	Pass	2 ♣
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1. No 4- or 5-card major suit.

3 NT by South

Lead: ♥ 5

Why did partner discard hearts? It looks like pard has something more useful in both of the other two suits.

Count declarer's tricks: five clubs, probably four hearts, and a trick or two on the side. To set this contract, it's now or never. Can a spade lead be right?

Declarer should have at least 21 HCP, as a weaker hand would probably be opened 2 NT. So the opponents have at least 27 HCP, leaving at most 7 HCP for partner. If pard has ♠ A K x x x, a spade lead will do it. Is that possible? NO! Pard would have discarded a discouraging diamond.

So, a diamond shift it must be. Which diamond? To take FOUR diamond tricks, right away, the only lead that can work is the ♦ J -- pard must -- and does -- have ♦ K 10 8 x. If dummy covers, pard wins the king, returns a small diamond to your ace, and the ♦ 2 picks up dummy's ♦ 9 7 with pard's ♦ 10 8. Declarer chose to duck the ♦ J, whereupon the ♦ A followed by the ♦ 2 had the same effect.

If you found the shift to the ♦ J, you win 13 IMPs and earn a 7 IMP lead in the first segment of the match. If you chose another suit, declarer makes five.

This type of problem is a recurring theme in bridge defense problems by Eddie Kantar, and I'm proud to give him credit for this success.

At IMPs, this is an easier play than at matchpoints, where leading the ♦ J might cost overtricks. Still, pard probably has the ♦ K, or a diamond might have been discarded. Furthermore, pard discarded two low hearts, which may have been suit preference for diamonds, the lower side suit.

GNT Game Try -- Problem

Board 11
 West Deals
 None Vul

♠ A 8 6 4
 ♥ 10 7 4
 ♦ A 10 3
 ♣ A 7 3



♠ K J 9 7
 ♥ K 5 3
 ♦ Q J 9 2
 ♣ J 5

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♠
Pass	2 ♠	Pass	2 NT ¹
Pass	3 ♠ ²	All pass	

1. Artificial inquiry.
 2. Four spades, minimum hand.
- 3 ♠ by South
 Lead: ♦ 5

Playing basic Spiral, North would bid 3 ♥ to show a 4-min. We play Fragment Spiral, as described in my article on this site. Bidding higher than 3 ♠ with a 4-max allows opener to have two descriptive fragment bids with a 3-max. With either method, 3 ♠ would be the unattractive contract.

Needing all the luck we can get, we try the ♦ 10 on the opening lead of the ♦ 5. East wins the ♦ K and returns the ♦ 6, West following with the ♦ 4, and dummy wins the ♦ A. The opening lead was either third best from even (four), or high from a doubleton. The opponents surely have the count, but we don't know who hopes to ruff.

Plan the play.

GNT Game Try -- Solution

Board 11
West Deals
None Vul

♠ A 8 6 4		♠ Q 5 2									
♥ 10 7 4		♥ Q J 8 2									
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1. Artificial inquiry.
 2. Four spades, minimum hand.
- 3 ♠ by South
Lead: ♦ 5

One of the great bridge books of all time is *The Complete Book of BOLS Bridge Tips*, edited by Sally Brock. Mike Lawrence's tip called "Ecstasy" applies to this deal. He asserts that any emotion, happy, sad or other, can wreak havoc on your game. That sure applied to this deal. Fresh off my success on the previous board, I did not give this deal my best play, and we lost 6 IMPs. Ducking the opening lead was fine. After that, I did not make a coherent plan.

Going down is only 50 a pop, so making the contract is everything -- forget about undertricks. I cashed the ♠ A and led to the ♠ K, eschewing the finesse. (I may also have been taken in a little by Lew Gamerman's excellent falsecard of the ♠ 10, under the ace.) I was able to discard a heart from dummy, but I still lost a diamond, a trump, two hearts and a club.

A bold trump finesse makes the contract for sure when West follows suit: Draw trump and take an immediate heart discard. If the spade finesse loses, it's only worse when it's a doubleton. My play may have been better suited to matchpoint scoring, but I doubt it. Basically, I took the two finesses that lost, and refused the one that would have won.

Board 8
 West Deals
 None Vul

GNT Slam? -- Problem

♠ 10 9 5 3 2
 ♥ 7 5
 ♦ A 9 8
 ♣ J 8 4

♠ Q 6
 ♥ K Q 8 4 3
 ♦ J 10
 ♣ A K 9 5



♠ A K 8
 ♥ A J 2
 ♦ K Q 7 5 3
 ♣ 7 3

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♥	Pass	2 ♦ ¹	Pass
2 ♥ ²	Pass	3 ♥ ³	Pass
4 ♣ ⁴	Pass	4 ♦ ⁵	Pass
?			

1. Natural and forcing to game.
2. Waiting, without something important to say.
3. Hearts are trump; may or may not be slamming.
4. Denies both a spade control and serious slam interest.
5. Last Train: slam interest, but there is a problem.

Skip forward to the third segment of the match. We were now well behind, and a disaster on this hand pretty much sealed our fate. Can you do better?

Here is how an intermediate player makes a slam try: bid 4 NT to ask for aces or key cards; when you get the answer, decide whether you feel like bidding a slam. Advanced players know better. Blackwood is not a slam *try*, it's a slam *check*. First you decide whether or not to bid a slam, then you check for key cards -- only stopping short when the opponents have too many.

The bidding above is trying to decide whether or not to bid a slam. The bids are part of a framework invented by Eric Rodwell, called Serious 3 NT. Once a major suit fit of at least eight cards has been confirmed in a forcing, non-competitive auction at the 3-level, it is no longer possible to play 3 NT. That bid becomes artificial, showing *serious slam interest*. Over 3 ♥, West might take these actions:

- 3 ♠ would show first or second round control of spades, whether slamming or not -- clearly wrong here.
- 3 NT would deny a spade control, but show serious slam interest.
- 4 ♣ denies a spade control, denies serious slam interest, and shows first or second round control of clubs.
- 4 ♦ denies a spade or club control, denies serious interest, and shows a diamond *honor* control in pard's suit. In other words, each higher bid denies the ability to make a lower bid.
- 4 ♥ shows a poor hand for slam; a second round control might be skipped.

(Non-Serious 3 NT is an adaptation that conceals information from the opponents on non-slam hands. Experience has shown that Serious bids slams better, and that's the way Rodwell still plays it. People play further variations on these methods.)

East's 4 ♦ is Last Train [to Clarksville], an adjunct by Jeff Meckstroth. Four of the suit below trump shows interest in slam, but indicates there is a problem of some sort. What's your bid?

Board 8
 West Deals
 None Vul

GNT Slam? -- Solution

♠ 10 9 5 3 2
 ♥ 7 5
 ♦ A 9 8
 ♣ J 8 4

♠ Q 6
 ♥ K Q 8 4 3
 ♦ J 10
 ♣ A K 9 5



♠ A K 8
 ♥ A J 2
 ♦ K Q 7 5 3
 ♣ 7 3

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

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
1 ♥	Pass	2 ♦ ¹	Pass
2 ♥ ²	Pass	3 ♥ ³	Pass
4 ♣ ⁴	Pass	4 ♦ ⁵	Pass
?			

1. Natural and forcing to game.
2. Waiting, without something important to say.
3. Hearts are trump; may or may not be slamming.
4. Denies both a spade control and serious slam interest.
5. Last Train: slam interest, but there is a problem.

Partner has promised a spade control, since you don't want to bid slam without one. Partner also has at least the ace or king of diamonds - it's dumb to go slamming with a topleless suit. Serious slam interest has been shown by 4 ♦, so pard is supposed to ask for key cards with all suits controlled... why not? Maybe pard needs a diamond honor to fit into ♦ K x x x x; maybe pard has only one key card (see below); more likely, pard simply needs you to have a little extra. Compare this hand to your actual holding:

♠ 9 6 ♥ K Q 8 4 3 ♦ 10 8 ♣ A Q 9 5

11 excellent points in two suits of 9 total cards: 20 Bergen points and an automatic opening bid. This hand would be bid the same way, because the minimum values are slam-worthy.

Your hand is much better than this minimum, so you have to do something. Three of the cards, ♥ K Q and ♣ A, are gilt-edged. What is the value of the other four honors, ♠ Q, ♦ J 10 and ♣ K? What is the best way to help partner?

One way would be to ask for keycards and bid the slam. Entirely reasonable; slam is unlikely to be worse than 50%. Wait, hearts are trump! Do we have more than one key card in hand? Whew, yes; it's safe to ask with 4 NT. An acceptable alternative is 5 ♣, showing a second club control, but bypassing Blackwood.

Better yet, bid 4 ♠. What??? Well, you have denied first or second round control of spades, so this shows *third* round control, and in the long trump hand, the ♠ Q is better than shortness. Pard can then bid 4 NT, if the 4 ♠ bid appeals. Easy-peasy, bid that slam.

A grand slam may be biddable, when pard's suit is headed by only the ♦ A, instead of the ♦ K Q (discarding the diamond loser on a spade). The key here is to recognize that your 15-count now qualifies as extra values.