

Board 11
South Deals
None Vul

Spade Slam -- Problem

♠ 9 7
♥ A J 6
♦ A 8 6 4
♣ 10 7 3 2



♠ A K Q 8 5 4 3
♥ K 2
♦ Q 10
♣ A Q

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

All pass

1. Natural game force.
2. Control bid.
3. RKB spades.
4. Two key cards, without the ♠ Q.

6 ♠ by South

Lead: ♦ J

(immaterial details supplied)

Take the seat of Grand Life Master Larry Sealy, playing against two other GLMs in a regional Swiss team event. Describe in detail your line of play, on the lead of the ♦ J.

Don't skip to the tips! Instead, propose a solution, test it against each tip in order, and revise the plan as needed.

Tip 1: You start with 11 tricks (7 spades, 2 hearts, 1 diamond, and 1 club).

Tip 2: No expert player would lead the ♦ J in this situation, unless it were a singleton. Play the ♦ A, or fail.

Tip 3: Any finesse you take will lose. The 75% line of finessing the club at trick 2 (winning the trump or club return, and finessing in hearts) therefore fails, with further undertricks in diamonds.

Board 11
South Deals
None Vul

Spade Slam -- Solution

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

NS 6N; NS 6♠; N 2♥; N 3♣; S 2♣; S 1♥; NS 1♦; Par +990: NS 6N=

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

All pass

1. Natural game force.
2. Control bid.
3. RKB spades.
4. Two key cards, without the ♠ Q.

6 ♠ by South

Lead: ♦ J

After winning the ♦ A, Larry drew six rounds of trumps discarding three diamonds and a club from dummy. He saw East play one spade, three diamonds, and two clubs on the spades. Here is the key position:

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

Larry surmised that East had nothing to protect in clubs, so the club finesse was losing. He cashed the ♠ 3 and the ♣ A, putting the screws to East. If East had discarded a heart, keeping two diamonds, Larry would have played three rounds of hearts from the top, to make the slam. Remember, the count in diamonds is perfect.

When East came down to the singleton ♦ K, Larry planned to stick him in with it. First, he made the crucial play of the ♥ K, so that the endplay would actually work. So long as East holds either the ♥ Q or the ♣ K (if both, it's trivial), playing off the trumps should allow declarer to decide between the actual strip and endplay and a finesse in clubs or hearts. In the end position above, West must retain three clubs, lest declarer drop the jack and knock out the king -- West cannot obscure the heart position or cash a diamond. Playing off a long suit is a powerful technique. This line should also work if the ♦ J is a doubleton.

Given the singleton ♦ J, a great plan is to take the club finesse, win the return in hand (even if a heart) and play off all the trumps. It's a double squeeze; nobody can protect the third round of hearts. The key to the pressure is the ♦ Q sitting behind East.

Fourth Seat -- Problem

Board 1

West Deals

None Vul



♠ Q 8

♥ J 10 9

♦ A J 7 5

♣ K J 6 3

West

Pass

North

Pass

East

Pass

South

?

Take the seat of my partner, Gary Schwartz, in the top bracket of a regional matchpoint pairs event.

Do you open or pass the hand out? Why?

Board 1

West Deals

None Vul

Fourth Seat -- Solution

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

EW 2♠; EW 1N; EW 2♣; NS 1♥; EW 1♦; Par -110; EW 2♠=

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	1♦
Pass	1♥	1♠	Dbl ¹
2♠	3♥	All pass	

1. 3-card heart support.

The goal of opening would be to get a positive score. For those who chose to open, a likely auction is above. The opponents make 2 ♠, and we go down if we bid on.

The rule is to add our spades to our HCP and open when these "Pearson points" total 15 or higher. The rule is good on this specific deal, but flawed on many others. Larry Cohen's Rule in Fourth Seat (CRIFS) says, "any time it is borderline [to open] (like 10, 11, 12 HCP), evaluate your opponents!" Against stronger opponents, pass it out, but open against weaker opponents. "Please don't tell your opponents why...."

We were the only pair to pass this out, our only passout in six days of bridge. Five pairs played at each of 3 ♥ and 3 ♠. One got to play 2 ♥, an amazing occurrence.

3 ♠ E (+150) 100%
2 ♥ N (+110) 91%
3 ♠ E (+100) 77%
3 ♠ E (+50) 59%
Pass (0) 45%
3 ♥ N (-50) 23%
3 ♥ N (-100) 0%

The law of total tricks is best at deciding whether or not to compete to or at the three-level. Both sides have eight trumps, and thus should be comfortable at an 8-trick contract. In this case, the law says not to let the opponents play at the nice, safe two level, but do let them play when they bid at the three level.

There should have been no 3 ♠ contracts. If the field were strong enough for all East-West pairs to first bid 2 ♠ and then pass 3 ♥, we would have had a 100% result! Nevertheless, if we thought our opponents would let us play 2 ♥, or bid 3 ♠ over 3 ♥, then we should have bid. This top bracket contained quite a few players who would have been more comfortable in a lower bracket, possibly including an opponent or two on this deal. Our middling 45% result had potential upside, but not enough actual "field protection."

There is much more to this topic. Look for an upcoming article, "Opening in the Passout Seat."

A Fistful of Diamonds -- Problem

Board 4

North Deals

Both Vul

♠ K 8 5 2
♥ 8 6
♦ 3
♣ A K 9 6 3 2



♠ A J
♥ A 5 4
♦ Q 10 9 8 6 5 4
♣ 8

West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♦
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	3 ♦
All pass			
3 ♦ by South			
Lead: ♠ 9			

Join me as South in the top bracket of a regional open pairs event. With the likely misfit, we settle for an invitational 3 ♦ rebid and play there. A weak doubleton is often a strong lead, especially through dummy's suit. Plan the play to make the most of it!

Note: At the table and above, the deck was rotated 180 degrees in the board. (I discovered this too late to report the issue or for the board to be re-scored using the fouled board procedure.) The rotation probably happened at a table where a player was visually impaired. When declaring, she sensibly insisted on placing the dummy immediately in front of her. To do this, the board was removed from the table; a better idea would be to place the board in front of her partner, without changing its orientation. Otherwise, the occasional error in returning the hands to the board seems inevitable. (The board is further rotated here, for convenience.)

A Fistful of Diamonds -- Solution

Board 4

North Deals

Both Vul

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

NS 4♦; NS 2N; NS 3♣; NS 1♠; EW 1♥; Par +130; NS 2♦+2

West	North	East	South
	1 ♣	Pass	1 ♦
Pass	1 ♠	Pass	3 ♦
All pass			
3 ♦ by South			
Lead: ♠ 9			
Made 4 — NS +130			

Start by winning the lead cheaply in hand; then cash the second spade in hand. Lead a club to dummy and cash *the other top club* to discard a heart loser. West is probably going to ruff the third spade, so the club is far safer at this point. Then we try the ♠ K, discarding our last heart loser. West ruffs with the ♦ 2. In exchange for our certain heart loser, we usually save a trump trick in a situation such as:

♦ A J 2 ♦ K 7

After ruffing the ♠ K, West returns a heart to our now-singleton ace. Now, because we see the jack is singleton, we lead the ♦ Q. Seriously, no other play can help; the lead of the ♦ Q picks up the now-singleton jack in either hand. Suppose there is a singleton ace (or king). We lead any diamond except the queen, and that opponent wins. The other opponent follows with the ♦ 7, still holding ♦ K-J. We must lose them both.

The lead of the ♦ Q is a standard play in this situation. It's more often seen on opening lead; for example, against a 3 NT contract, after opening a weak 2 ♠. Holding a side entry, lead the ♠ K, hoping to drop the singleton queen in dummy, from

♠ K J 10 9 4 2

Again, we cannot reduce our spade losers to one by finding a singleton ace, only the queen.

Yes, we could also save the trump trick by leading, instead of the ♠ K, the ♦ 3 to finesse for the jack. This play works when East (but not West) has either a singleton or doubleton ♦ J.

Another approach would be to defer dummy's winners for later, and lead the ♦ Q at trick two. This still pins the ♦ J, as West wins. Now a club shift strands the ♠ K, removing our chance to gain by discarding the third heart. We could cash the second spade before leading the ♦ Q. Which line do you like best?