

Counting

Today's deal from a local club game provides a good lesson in declarer-play technique. The bidding shown was common at many tables: After West's preemptive opening, North made a takeout double (a little light perhaps, but it's difficult to pass) and South could not resist jumping to Blackwood and bidding six notrump.

The final contract is sound, and in fact superior to a slam in clubs. Why? Because in *notrump* declarer can postpone his guess for the queen of clubs, whereas in *clubs* declarer must make this decision immediately for fear of a ruff.



6 NT by South

| | | | |
|-----------------|--|-------------|--------------|
| None Vul | ♠K Q 10 | | |
| | ♥8 2 | | |
| | ♦A 9 7 | | |
| | ♣A 10 9 6 5 | | |
| ♠7 2 | ♥K Q J 10 7 5 4 | ♦6 3 | ♣Q 2 |
| | <div style="display: inline-block; border: 2px solid green; padding: 5px; text-align: center; width: 40px; height: 40px; background-color: white;"> N W E S </div> | | |
| | ♠A J 8 | ♥A 9 3 | ♦K Q J |
| | ♣K J 8 7 | | |
| <i>Lead:</i> ♥K | | | |
| <i>West</i> | <i>North</i> | <i>East</i> | <i>South</i> |
| 3 ♥ | Dbl | Pass | 4 NT |
| Pass | 5 ♥ | Pass | 6 NT |
| All Pass | | | |

Let's consider the play as it might have occurred at three different tables.

"Average Joe" was declarer at table one. After winning the second heart lead, he considered the play of the club suit. He had a combined holding of nine cards and, because of the bridge maxim, "eight ever; nine never," he knew never to finesse for the queen. Therefore, Joe cashed the top clubs and made his contract. Well done.

"Thoughtful Tom" was at the wheel at table two. He also won the second heart lead and considered the play of the club suit. He knew the normal percentage play holding nine cards, but this was not a normal situation. With hearts breaking seven-one, the odds greatly favored East to hold longer clubs. Therefore, Tom led a club to dummy's ace and finessed the jack on the way back. Oops! Down six.

"Expert Ernie" held the South cards at table three. He too won the second heart lead; but he was in no hurry to tackle the club suit. To find out more about the enemy distribution, he cashed all his winners in the other suits. Ernie learned that West began with exactly two spades and two diamonds. Combining this with the known seven-card heart suit, left West with *two* clubs — no more, and no less. Consequently, cashing the clubs from the top was a 100-percent guarantee.

It should be apparent that Joe's success was *lucky*. Tom, of course, was *unlucky*. And Ernie? *He didn't need any luck*.

Counting the Easy Way!

Many players are afraid to get into counting a bridge hand because they think it is difficult and only for the experts. It certainly would be if you tried to count every card as it is played. Forget it! Doing it that way might also drive you out of your mind. Fortunately, there is a better way. Good players think of each suit layout as a *pattern*. There are 39 possible patterns, of which only about half are reasonably common. If you memorize the common ones, you will have a mental template for association. The 20 most common patterns are:

1. 4-4-3-2

2. 5-3-3-2

3. 5-4-3-1

4. 5-4-2-2

5. 4-3-3-3

6. 6-3-2-2

7. 6-4-2-1

8. 6-3-3-1

9. 5-5-2-1

10. 4-4-4-1

11. 7-3-2-1

12. 6-4-3-0

13. 5-4-4-0

14. 5-5-3-0

15. 6-5-1-1

16. 6-5-2-0

17. 7-2-2-2

18. 7-4-1-1

19. 7-4-2-0

20. 7-3-3-0

For example, say you are declarer and this is your holding in the trump suit:

4 3 2



A K Q 6 5

Do not count the missing trumps! Assume you cash the ace and both follow, then when you cash the king an opponent shows out. Instantly you should recognize the common 5-4-3-1 pattern as the original layout of the suit. Hence you will always have one more card than your opponent unless you or he ruffs.

