

The Advancing Player

Snooker Play—And Counting HCP

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Hand #1

♠AJ532	
♥943	
♦Q5	
♣KQ9	
♠109	♠K8
♥102	♥AQJ87
♦K109862	♦AJ7
♣875	♣A104
♠Q764	
♥K65	
♦43	
♣J632	

Dlr: East Vul: None

West	North	East	South
		1♥	Pass
Pass	1♠	1NT	2♠
Pass	Pass	Pass	

East had a horrible hand from which to lead, so tried a snooker play—and found the perfect holding in Dummy for it to work. East led the ♥Q from AQJ87 (!!) and found K65 in Dummy with West holding a doubleton. How does North “know” that East is trying a con job?

East has rebid 1NT opposite a passed partner which shows 18-19 HCP. There are only 22 HCP outstanding, and West cannot have more than 4 of them. If West REALLY held the ♥A, East would have an EASY lead from the ♦A and ♦K—because West would never pass with an Ace AND a King.

So, rise with the ♥K and play ♠A and a spade (since you “know” from the bidding that East has ♠K). You'll still be down 1: losing 1 spade; 2 hearts; 2 diamonds, and 1 club, but you won't be down 2 with West getting a heart ruff and Declarer never scoring the ♥K.

Hand #2

♠Q9	
♥QJ1085	
♦Q543	
♣K10	
♠KJ1063	♠A875
♥K92	♥64
♦98	♦KJ106

♣AQ3

♣J97

♠42

♥A73

♦A72

♣86542

Dlr: West Vul: None

West	North	East	South
1♠	Pass	2♠	Pass
Pass	Pass		

This hand was a case of counting HCP and noting a negative inference. I opened 1♠ in the West and North passed. Partner raised to 2♠ and South passed. I had 7 losers, so game is off the table. I passed as did North.

North led the ♥Q. South won the ♥A and shifted to a spade. I put in the ♠J, and killed North's ♠Q with the ♠A. Pulled one more round of spades, and then played ♥K and ruffed a heart on Dummy. (South followed with the ♥3 and then ♥7.) Next, I ran the ♣J from Dummy, which lost to the ♣K in the North. Properly not breaking new suits, North continued with a passive club. I won two clubs and took stock.

North has shown up with the ♥QJ, ♠Q, and ♣K. It appears very likely that North started with a 5-card heart suit. If North had held the ♦A, he might very well have overcalled 2♥. [This is an example of a negative inference—the “dog that did NOT bark” from the Sherlock Holmes story. MANY negative inferences occur at the bridge table, but most are missed because they involve something that did NOT happen.]

Normally, I would play for split Aces in a hand with no bidding, but North has shown up with 8 HCP and South has shown up with only 4 HCP. I am placing the Ace of diamonds in the South and HOPING that North has the ♦Q.

That gives us 10 tricks. Fifteen pairs played in 3♠. Three of them took 9 tricks; two took 11 tricks. The other eight took 10 tricks as we did. Ironically all six pairs who bid 4♠ went down 1!

Hand #3

♠AJ6

♥A10643

♦K7

♣K64

♠K843

♥J7

♦Q10863

♣Q3

♠Q1052

♥Q9

♦A92

♣AJ109

♠97

♥K854

♦J54

♣8752

Dlr: North Vul: None

There was an important inference on the opening lead of this hand. I elected to open the (North) 15-HCP hand 1NT rather than 1♥ due to rebid issues. After two passes, West bid 2♦—showing diamonds, and ANY other suit. [Any 5-4 hand meets Mel's rules for bidding in the balancing seat

after a strong NT.] I decided the odds were that West's other suit was clubs or spades, and I had a good positional advantage (with my honors) in both those suits, so I bid 2♥ and everyone passed. (Perhaps East was hoping that West's other suit was hearts.)

East led the ♠2. Since West is KNOWN to have diamonds, this opening lead STRONGLY suggests that East has possession of the ♦A—the only good reason to lead small in a suit that is not his partner's, unless he is leading a singleton, which is clearly NOT the case here. So, I need to generate an end play for East to be forced to play diamonds for me at some point. (Or if West has the ♦Q and is forced to play the suit, the ♦J in Dummy will be enough to mean that East has to take the ♦A.)

I take the ♠A, and play the ♥A and ♥K. Luckily the trumps divide 2-2. Then I lead the ♠9 from Dummy and duck. Alas East has a count on the suit, so he takes the ♠10 and returns the ♠Q. I ruff on Dummy and play a club to my ♣K, hoping West has that Ace. No such luck. East wins the ♣A, and leads back the ♣J. Now, however, fortune smiles upon us because West's doubleton club (He was 4-2-5-2.) is the ♣Q. He has to overtake his partner's ♣J. So, he leads a low diamond. I duck, playing West for the ♦Q and East for the ♦A. East takes the ♦A and one more club, but we make 2♥. ♣