|  | High or Low By Roger Lord |  |  |  |
| :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: | :---: |
| Dealer: North |  |  |  |  |
| Vul: None | North |  |  |  |
|  | A AK85 |  |  |  |
|  | - K2 |  |  |  |
|  | - J7532 |  |  |  |
|  | \& K4 |  |  |  |
|  | West |  |  | East |
|  | A 106 |  |  | A QJ973 |
|  | $\checkmark$ J73 |  |  | - 10985 |
|  | - Q1094 |  |  | - AK8 |
|  | \& 9875 |  |  | * 10 |
|  | South |  |  |  |
|  | - 42 |  |  |  |
|  | - AQ64 |  |  |  |
|  | - 6 |  |  |  |
|  | * AQJ632 |  |  |  |
|  | North | East | South | West |
|  | 1 Diamond | Pass | 2 Clubs | Pass |
|  | 2 Spades | Pass | 3 Hearts | Pass |
|  | 4 Clubs | Pass | 4 Hearts | Pass |
|  | 4 Spades | Pass | 6 Clubs | All Pass |
|  | ct: 6 Clubs |  | Opening | Spade 10 |

This deal arose in a pair game in the recent St. Charles Sectional. To reach the six club slam (see the bidding diagram), North and South both upgraded their key cards and distribution. There was a potential ruffing value in the heart suit, and there was little waste in the diamond suit. Almost all honor cards were "working."

Cover the East-West cards. West leads the spade 10, dummy winning with the king and East following with the seven. Plan your play before uncovering the hand.

You can count six club tricks, three hearts and two spades, for eleven. How do you make the twelfth?

There are at least three plausible lines. Two of them involve ruffing South's third heart. You will take North's heart king, cross to South with the heart ace, and lead a third heart towards the table. If LHO follows, you will ruff-but which club will you ruff with?

Ruffing with the king would create a trump trick for an opponent's fourth club (on a 4-1 or 1-4 split). If you ruff low, East might overruff with the setting trick.

Barring a good "feel of the table" guess, you should plan on ruffing low. This could lose only in case hearts divide $5-2$, specifically with the doubleton on the right. Alternatively, ruffing high loses when trumps divide either 4-1 or 1-4, of which there are more combinations.

When you project the play before you begin, you may notice that there is an additional danger. After you ruff the third heart and cash the trump king, how do you get back to your hand to draw the remaining trumps? If you lead a diamond, East will win and give his partner a heart ruff. Instead, playing a second and third round of spades will subject you to an overruff or a trump promotion.

The solution is to concede a diamond at trick two! The result is that later you will have a quick, safe entry via a diamond ruff to your hand.

## Suit Combinations -- One

Try these suit combinations, making the best play on each. You have entries to dummy's and declarer's hands. Nothing is known about the bidding or the rest of the play.

1. Dummy

AKQ105

Declarer
83
2. Dummy

AKQ105

Declarer
3
3. Dummy

Take all five tricks in the suit.
K10

Declarer
AQ643
4. Dummy

AKQ8

752
Declarer

Take all four tricks in the suit. If you play the ace and king, the jack and ten follow on your right and the three and four on your left. Now, when you get to your hand and lead up to the dummy, LHO follows with the six. Do you play for the drop of the nine or do you finesse the eight?

Answers to suit combination quiz:

1. Lay down ace, king and queen. Although opponents' cards will split 4-2 more often than 3-3, the play for the "drop" works with a 3-3 break and additionally with a 4-2 break when an opponent holds Jx (a doubleton jack).
2. Finesse the 10 (lead from declarer's hand toward dummy and insert the 10). For five tricks, the suit must divide $4-3$ (or 3-4). Half the time, the jack will be with LHO, and the finesse will succeed. Dropping the jack requires the jack to be in the hand with three cards. Thus, the chances for the jack to drop are three out of seven, which is less than the chances for finessing.
3. Finesse the 10 , by leading low from declarer's hand toward dummy and inserting the 10. This play makes five tricks when the suit splits 3-3 or 4-2 (or 2-4) and the jack is with LHO (half the time). Laying down the king, ace and queen instead yields five tricks only when the suit splits 33 , which is expected to occur substantially less than half* the time. In contrast with \#1. above, playing A, K, Q will not work when there is a doubleton jack, because the ten will fall uselessly on the second trick.
*The probability of a 3-3 break is $35.5 \%$.
4. Let's say you play ace and king, the jack and ten fall on your right and the three and four on your left. Now you get to your hand and lead up to the remaining Q8, to which LHO follows with the six. Do you play the queen to try to drop the nine, or do you finesse the eight, playing LHO for the nine? The answer, with overwhelming odds in your favor, is to play the eight.

The explanation lies in the numbers of possible combinations which could have been dealt. There is only one way that playing for the drop could succeed-RHO must have held J109 tripleton (which he could have played in any order). Before any cards are played, the finesse would succeed against any of the three RHO doubletons, J10, J9 or 109, and any of these doubletons would have had a chance to be dealt as opposed to the J109 tripleton.

