

WHAT DO I DO NOW? – PART 3

By Larry Matheny

While the strategy needed to make the correct play is often obvious, some hands offer several possible solutions. As in the first two sessions, I am going to present a problem hand and then talk through various options as they occur at the table. Let's begin with a problem on defense.

HAND #1

	♠ AK84				
	♥ 1087				
Dlr E	♦ 42				
Vul N/S	♣ A982				
	♠ J5				
	♥ AKQ65				
	♦ K965				
	♣ 63				
		WEST	NORTH	ME	SOUTH
				1 ♥	1 ♠
		Pass	4 ♠	Pass	Pass
		Pass			

Sitting East I opened the auction with 1 ♥ but soon find myself on defense. My partner led the deuce of hearts and I won the queen. I continued with the king of hearts and my partner played the jack. This unnecessary high card shows some strength in the higher ranking side suit, so I switched to the five of diamonds. Declarer won with the ace as partner followed with the queen. Declarer drew trumps in two rounds, trumped dummy's last heart in his hand, and then exited with a low diamond that I won with the nine. Declarer has no more hearts and appears to be out of diamonds. It seems I have to lead a club to avoid giving declarer a ruff/sluff. Is there another option? What do I do now?

I'm going to stop and count declarer's hand. I know declarer had five spades and two hearts so if he has only two diamonds, he must have four clubs and a ruff-sluff would be of no value to him. I'm going to exit with a diamond and make South guess the club suit.

Declarer accepted the ruff/sluff and then played me for the queen of clubs and went down one trick. Finding the solution to this problem involved no more than counting to thirteen. Here is the entire hand.

HAND #1

Dlr E
 Vul N/S

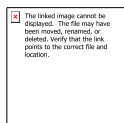
♠ 109		♠ J5
♥ J42		♥ AKQ65
♦ QJ1073		♦ K965
♣ Q74		♣ 63

♠ Q7632
 ♥ 93
 ♦ A8
 ♣ KJ105

HAND #2

Dlr E
 Vul E/W

♠ 952
 ♥ QJ93
 ♦ J2
 ♣ AQJ3



♠ J64
 ♥ AK8762
 ♦ AQ
 ♣ 74

WEST	NORTH	EAST	ME
		Pass	1 ♥
Pass	3 ♥	Pass	4 ♥
Pass	Pass	Pass	

I accept my partner's invitation and bid the heart game. West leads the king of spades and East encourages with the eight. West continues with the queen of spades and a third one to East's ace. East now switches to a low diamond and it seems I'm in trouble. What do I do now?

After studying the situation it occurs to me the diamond finesse is a mirage. The only important card is the king of clubs. I win the ace of diamonds, draw trumps, and take the club finesse. When that finesse succeeds I return to my hand and repeat the club finesse and then discard my diamond loser on the ace of clubs. This shows the importance of playing the hand, not the suit. Here is the entire hand.

#2 ♠ 952
 Dir E ♥ QJ93
 Vul E/W ♦ J2
 ♣ AQJ3

♠ KQ10		♠ A873
♥ 54		♥ 10
♦ K1087		♦ 96543
♣ K986		♣ 1052

♠ J64
 AK8762
 ♦ AQ
 ♣ 74

HAND #3

It's getting late in a pairs game and I pick up: ♠K7632 ♥KJ2 ♦KJ10 ♣K10. My partner opens 1♣ and I respond 1♠. I wake up when I hear him rebid 4♠. This shows a balanced hand with around 19+ points in support of spades. With controls in all of the side suits, I bring out our RKC bid of 4NT and he shows 0 or 3 keycards. It's clear he holds 3 so we are missing 1 keycard. A feature of Roman Keycard Blackwood is the Ask for the queen of trumps. I trot out 5♦ asking if he has the queen and unfortunately he says no. What do I do now?

We have an above average session so I'm not going to bid the slam. Here is the entire hand:


#3	♠ A854			
Dir: E	♥ AQ6			
Vul: N	♦ Q4			
	♣ AQJ9			

♠ QJ10	♠ 9	WEST	NORTH	EAST	ME
♥ 109	♥ 87543	Pass	1♣	Pass	1♠
♦ A9632	♦ 875	Pass	4♠	Pass	4NT
♣ 874	♣ 6532	Pass	5♣	Pass	5♦
		Pass	5♠	Pass	Pass
		Pass			

♠ K7632
♥ KJ2
♦ KJ10
♣ K10

West led the ace of diamonds and then waited for his spade trick. Slam was bid by many pairs and would have succeeded if the queen of trumps could have been captured. It was not a bad slam but unless you hold ten trumps, it's usually best to avoid bidding slams when you are off a keycard and the queen of trumps. For those who think this too pessimistic, remember my partner could have held the ace of diamonds and his spades could have been J854. The winning strategy at matchpoints is to not press for close games or slams, and instead take your plus scores. Pushing for games and slams is an impulse from our rubber bridge days.

HAND #4

	♠ Q108
Dir E	♥ 102
Vul N/S	♦ AQ64
	♣ K864
	
	♠ AKJ
	♥ AK9764
	♦ K3
	♣ A3

I'm sitting South in a strong flight-A Pairs game. My partner and I reach a small slam in hearts against silent opponents. West leads the jack of clubs and my only concern is the trump suit. I win the ace of clubs and play the ace of hearts from my hand. West follows with the jack and East with the 3. The fall of the jack makes me nervous. I am in a good contract although the play in 6NT will be the same. With this form of scoring, I have to consider the importance of overtricks. If West holds the QJ doubleton of hearts; I can make seven by simply cashing the king. What do I do now?

I am going to take the safety play of a low heart from my hand. It turns out this was necessary as West discards a club. East wins dummy's 10 with his queen and returns a club. I win and have no more trouble with the hand. If I had played the king of hearts hoping for that QJ doubleton, I would have gone down. Here is the complete hand:

#4	♠ Q108		West	North	East	Me
Dlr E	♥ 102		-	-	Pass	2 ♣
Vul N/S	♦ AQ64		Pass	2♦	Pass	2 ♥
	♣ K864		Pass	2NT	Pass	3 ♥
♠ 75432		♠ 96	Pass	4 ♥	Pass	6 ♥
♥ J		♥ Q853	Pass	Pass	Pass	
♦ J10		♦ 98572				
♣ J10972		♣ Q5				
	♠ AKJ					
	♥ AK9764					
	♦ K3					
	♣ A3					

HAND #5

	♠ 1074		West	North	Me	South
Dlr N	♥ K765		-	Pass	Pass	1 ♥
Vul E/W	♦ QJ4		Pass	2 ♥	Pass	4 ♥
	♣ QJ2		Pass	Pass	Pass	
		♠ A985				
		♥ Q10				
		♦ 108765				
		♣ 73				

I am in the East chair defending a heart game and my partner leads the king of spades. I encourage with the nine and he continues with the queen and a third spade to my ace with declarer following. It might not be easy to find the setting trick; what do I do now?

The only major honor cards missing are the ace of hearts, the ace-king of diamonds, and the ace-king of clubs. Can my partner hold any of these? No, it seems to me that if declarer was lacking any of these honors, he would have made a game try rather than leaping to game. So where does that leave me? Well, the other missing card is the jack of hearts and it is possible my partner holds it. So, with nothing else promising, I return the last spade. This works when my partner ruffs with the jack. My heart queen

has now been promoted to the setting trick. All that was required was a review of the auction and a little math. Here is the entire hand:

#5	♠ 1074		♠ A985
Dlr N	♥ K765		♥ Q10
Vul E/W	♦ QJ4		♦ 108765
	♣ QJ2		♣ 73
♠ KQ3			
♥ J4			
♦ 932			
♣ 109854			
	♠ J62		
	♥ A9832		
	♦ AK		
	♣ AK6		

Hand #6
Dlr W
Vul E/W

♠ 73
♥ A62
♦ Q84
♣ K8753



♠ A
♥ KJ10
♦ A53
♣ AJ10962


West	North	East	Me
2 ♠	Pass	3 ♠	4 ♣
Pass	5 ♣	Pass	Pass
Pass			


I hold the South hand and when dummy appears I am disappointed we are in a club game rather than 3NT. I have to assume others will have a similar auction and do what I can.

A small spade is led and I count 3 possible losers: 1 heart and 2 diamonds. At first glance it appears I need to either find the heart queen, or the diamond king must be in the West hand. Is there any other play; what do I do now?

The hand is not as difficult as I first thought. I see an elimination play that will succeed no matter where those two cards are lurking. I win the ace of spades, draw trumps with the ace-king, and then ruff dummy's last spade in my hand. Now I just lead the ace and

another diamond. Whoever wins can cash another diamond but then they have to lead a heart or give me a ruff-sluff. Another guess eliminated. Here is the entire hand:

#6	♠ 73		♠ Q1082
Dlr W	♥ A62		♥ 9843
Vul E/W	♦ Q84		♦ KJ762
	♣ K8753		♣
♠ KJ9654			
♥ Q75			
♦ 109			
♣ Q4			
	♠ A		
	♥ KJ10		
	♦ A53		
	♣ AJ10962		

Hand #7	♠ 62	West	North	East	Me
Dlr S	♥ Q62	-	-	-	2 ♥
Vul Both	♦ J76	Pass	2NT	Pass	3 ♥
	♣ AQ875	Pass	Pass	Pass	
					
	♠ 73				
	♥ AKJ1093				
	♦ 32				
	♣ J96				


West leads the deuce of clubs and I am very surprised when dummy hits the table. It seems my partner's "bluff" of 2NT kept the opponents out of the auction. They have a spade fit with at most four losers and very likely only three. Looking at the play, if I was in a team game I would just try to make the contract. However, this is a Pairs event so I'm going to "matchpoint" the hand. That means asking these simple questions:

1. Am I in a good contract or a bad contract?
2. What about the opening lead? Was it normal? Did it help or hurt me?
3. Is the vulnerability a factor?
4. How many tricks do I need to take?

Answering these questions: 1) I am in a very good contract; 2) The opening lead has my attention...it could be away from the king or it could be a singleton; 3) We are vulnerable so I must be careful; 4) I need to consider what my goal should be. What do I do now?

If I want to try to make the hand, I must take the club finesse. However, if the lead is a singleton, I risk doing down two (or more) tricks. The opponents should be cold for +140 or +170 and maybe even +620. That means going down one for -100 should be a good result while going for -200 would lose to all of the opponents who play a spade partscore. I'm going to win the ace, draw trumps, and accept down one.

Many of the differences between matchpoint games and team events are complex and as this hand shows, you will not succeed if you play them both the same. Here is the entire hand:

#7	♠ 62	
Dir S	♥ Q62	
Vul Both	♦ J76	
	♣ AQ875	
♠ KJ954		♠ AQ108
♥ 74		♥ 85
♦ AQ1095		♦ K84
♣ 2		♣ K1043
	♠ 73	
	♥ AKJ1093	
	♦ 32	
	♣ J96	

Of all of the problems presented, this last one might be the most important. In a Pairs game you can't just "play bridge", you must play matchpoints.