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DECLARE & DEFEND

In **Board 7** North ends up as Declarer in 3NT against silent opponents.

♠ A43 ♥ 875 ♦ QJ65 ♣ A92	
<i>Declarer</i>	
<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
<i>Dummy</i>	
♠ Q8 ♥ AKQ3 ♦ 2 ♣ KJ7543	

East's opening lead is the Diamond Ten, won by West's King. West returns the Diamond Four, at which point we have two questions for you:

- What are the possible layouts for the Diamond suit?
- What card do you play from your hand on the second trick?

West's return of the Four is quite revealing! With a holding such as ♦K74 he would have returned the Seven, so West probably started with ♦K4 or ♦K874 or ♦K43.

- If West started with ♦K4 then you will want to play an honor from hand, maximizing the chance for overtricks.
- If West started with ♦K874, again you will again want to play an honor (also catering for a really tricky West who started with ♦AK74).
- If West started with ♦K43, then playing an honor risks the contract (East can duck and, if West gets in with a Club, a Diamond through will be ruinous to Declarer).

So, the safer plan (and the one you would adopt at teams) is to play *low* from hand on the second Diamond. But this is matchpoints, and surely Declarer should go for broke by playing an honor. He will regret this only if the Diamonds are 3-5 *and* if the defense plays well (by ducking the second Diamond) *and* if the Clubs fail to come home with no losers.

Check the Hand Records for the full hand, where you will see that playing an honor is the winner. The Clubs come in, Hearts are 3-3, and Declarer has

11 tricks. There might even be an amusing 12th trick if you play an honor and East makes the (big) mistake of ducking! Well, amusing for Declarer, anyway.

On **Board 13** North is in 6♠.

	♠ AQ982 ♥ KT ♦ 7 ♣ AJ987	
♠ 743 ♥ J832 ♦ AKJ8 ♣ T6	<i>Declarer</i>	♠ 6 ♥ Q965 ♦ QT52 ♣ Q542
	<i>West</i> <i>East</i>	
	<i>Dummy</i>	
	♠ KJT5 ♥ A74 ♦ 9643 ♣ K3	

The defense plays Diamonds and you ruff the second round. Here's how Declarer might botch the contract. He draws trumps in three rounds, plays ♣K, then ♣A, and leads a third round of Clubs. Should he take a ruffing finesse? Or should she play for 3-3 Clubs? It won't be obvious, and it's better to avoid such guesses wherever possible. So, let's try again.

You are unlikely to make this contract if Clubs are 5-1 or 6-0, but you are home free if they are 4-2 or 3-3. The secret to success is to tackle Clubs early, using trumps to provide the necessary back-and-forth transportation. After ruffing that second Diamond, you cash the ♣K and ♣A, ruff a Club high, and now it's plain sailing. You return to hand with a trump, ruff another Club high, and return to hand once more with Dummy's last trump. That is 12 easy tricks without any guesswork.

Another line of play is to go for a cross-ruff. Declarer can count four top side-suit tricks, so needs eight trump tricks. As he has nine trumps he can afford one round of trumps before cashing the side-suit winners and going merrily on his cross-ruffing way. But this is slightly inferior. Just like the line given earlier, Declarer would require Clubs not to be 5-1 or 6-0, added to which there is the slight risk of an overruff. After playing that one round of trumps there will still be a low trump in one hand or the other. Declarer does best by trying to score a Heart ruff with a low trump, and will be disappointed if Hearts turn out to be 6-2.

On **Board 22** let's start with a look at the Club suit. Yet again, Declarer is in the North seat, this time playing 3NT, after East has opened 2♠.

Declarer
♣ A73

<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
♣ Q964	♣ J
<i>Dummy</i>	
♣ KT852	

Looking only at the N-S cards, you can see that this suit will be worth four tricks (very occasionally five) if the missing Clubs are 3-2. Can you bring the suit in for one loser if the Clubs are 4-1? Maybe is definitely our answer to that question. The bidding suggests that, if the suit is 4-1, then the singleton Club will be with East, and if that singleton happens to be the Queen or Jack or Nine then you can overcome the 4-1 adversity.

So, you lead a low Club to Dummy's King and, lo and behold, out pops the Jack from East's hand. Now you run the Club Ten, and West has two choices, please follow closely now:

- If West covers with the Queen then Declarer takes the Ace, leads the Seven, and West can grab his Nine, now or later. Either way, Declarer has four Club tricks. You did notice that "now or later", we hope. It might be a valuable clue in the ensuing analysis.
- If West declines to cover the Ten then Declarer runs it around and, in the fullness of time, entries permitting (could be another clue there), has four Club tricks.

No more nibbling around the edges, this is the deal:

	♠ AK5 ♥ K95 ♦ AKQT ♣ A73	
♠ 32 ♥ J8742 ♦ 65 ♣ Q964	<i>Declarer</i> West East Dummy	♠ QJ9764 ♥ Q3 ♦ J874 ♣ J
	♠ T8 ♥ AT6 ♦ 932 ♣ KT852	

East leads the ♠Q, won by Declarer (no good reason to duck). Nine top tricks, can you make 11? Extra Club tricks are the way to go, and here is one way in which the play might develop:

Declarer wins the opening Spade lead
Low Club to East's J and Dummy's K
The Club Ten is covered by Q and A
 Declarer's Club Seven won by West's Nine
Declarer wins the Diamond return
Over to the ♥A, etc

That passage of play brought in 11 tricks, but you no doubt noticed that West made Declarer's life too easy. He must let Declarer's Club Seven hold Trick 4! Now Declarer scores only three Clubs, for want of entries to Dummy. So, let's have a do over:

Declarer wins the opening Spade lead
A low Club to East's J and Dummy's K
The Club Ten is covered by Q and A
Declarer's Club Seven holds the trick!
Two top Diamonds are cashed
The ♥K and ♥A are cashed.

Of course, Declarer notes East's ♥Q with special interest. What are East's last five cards? He could be down to: ♠J9x, ♥J, ♦x. Or maybe: ♠J9x, ♦Jx. We'd say that the latter holding is more likely, as perhaps with ♥QJx, he would have led that suit originally, rather than attacking his own Spades when his hand is virtually entryless. If Declarer guesses right then he will cross to the ♠K, exit a Spade and, after cashing another Spade, East will be end-played in Diamonds! A nice hand, eh?

We have just enough space left for a suit combination from **Board 31**. Diamonds are trumps, and North is Declarer:

Declarer
♦ AJT64

<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
♦ KQ2	♦ 8
<i>Dummy</i>	
♦ 9753	

How do you play this suit?

- The Ace on the first round? That's a 66% chance of holding the losers to one.
- Finesse the first round, and play the Ace on the second round? That's 70%.
- Finesse on the first round, then finesse again? That's 76%.

So, in the absence of contra-indications (such as bidding by the opponents, or fear of a defensive ruff, or lack of entries to Dummy), the percentage play is to finesse twice. For once, the computer rewards the theoretically correct play.

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