

Declarer Play Problems - 1

Thursday mini-lesson – May 2026

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Problem 1

- Today we'll start a little series on declarer play problems. Some quite simple, and some that may require a little more thinking.

1.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠ 853	♠ AK7
	♥ 82	♥ AT93
	♦ AK762	♦ Q53
	♣ 974	♣ AK8

You are East in a contract of 3NT. South leads the ♣ Q. Plan the play.

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Problem 1 – cont.

1.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠853	♠AK7
	♥82	♥AT93
	♦AK762	♦Q53
	♣974	♣AK8

- In a notrump contract always first count your tricks off the top and make a plan
- Here there are 8 easy tricks– two ♠s, one ♥, three ♦s, and two ♣s
- Clearly ♦s is the suit where you hope for extra tricks. How many?

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Problem 1 – cont.

1.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠853	♠AK7
	♥82	♥AT93
	♦AK762	♦Q53
	♣974	♣AK8

- Two more if ♦s divide 3-2, one more if they divide 4-1, none if 5-0
- If 3-2, no problem, an overtrick is nice and easy
- If 5-0, too bad, on to the next hand!
- Hence, plan for 4-1. Do not touch any other suit before testing ♦s, since in this case, you need to give up the lead early and must maintain your stoppers in the other suits and an entry to dummy

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Problem 2

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠AQ72	♠KJ9
	♥Q53	♥A872
	♦T863	♦A754
	♣75	♣AK

- You are East in a contract of 3NT. South leads the ♣Q. Plan the play.

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Problem 2 – cont.

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠AQ72	♠KJ9
	♥Q53	♥A872
	♦T863	♦A754
	♣75	♣AK

- There are 8 tricks off the top – four ♠s, one ♥, one ♦, and two ♣s
- Where is your 9th trick coming from?
- You can only afford to lose the lead once, since it's clear the opponents have nine ♣s between them and you only have one stopper left after this opening lead

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Problem 2 – cont.

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠AQ72	♠KJ9
	♥Q53	♥A872
	♦T863	♦A754
	♣75	♣AK

- You have eight ♦s between your two hands and can set up one extra trick if the suit divides 3-2 (most likely)
- Unfortunately, you would have to lose the lead *twice* for that plan to work, and then they would run too many ♣ winners
- Obviously, the only safe chance for an extra trick is in the ♥ suit, by means of a finesse

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Problem 2 – cont.

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠AQ72	♠KJ9
	♥Q53	♥A872
	♦T863	♦A754
	♣75	♣AK

- Here you must lead a low ♥ from your hand *towards* the Q♥ in dummy
- If South has the K♥, all is well
- If North does, it's just unlucky
- It's a 50% chance, but that's all you have

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Problem 3

3. *West* *East*
- | | |
|-------|--------|
| ♠AJ3 | ♠KQT94 |
| ♥A863 | ♥KQ4 |
| ♦A2 | ♦J83 |
| ♣K962 | ♣A5 |
- You are East in a contract of 6♠. South leads the ♠2. Plan the play.

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Problem 3 – cont.

3. *West* *East*
- | | |
|-------|--------|
| ♠AJ3 | ♠KQT94 |
| ♥A863 | ♥KQ4 |
| ♦A2 | ♦J83 |
| ♣K962 | ♣A5 |
- In a suit contract, first count your losers – no ♠s, no ♥s, two ♦s, and no ♣s - One too many
 - How do you eliminate a ♦ loser in order to make your contract?

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Problem 3 – cont.

3. *West* *East*
- | | |
|-------|--------|
| ♠AJ3 | ♠KQT94 |
| ♥A863 | ♥KQ4 |
| ♦A2 | ♦J83 |
| ♣K962 | ♣A5 |
- You plan to ruff one ♦ loser in dummy
 - Therefore you must not pull trumps!
 - You need a trump in dummy to ruff the ♦ loser and one has gone already on the opening lead

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Problem 3 – cont.

3. *West* *East*
- | | |
|-------|--------|
| ♠AJ3 | ♠KQT94 |
| ♥A863 | ♥KQ4 |
| ♦A2 | ♦J83 |
| ♣K962 | ♣A5 |
- Win the opening lead in dummy, then immediately play the A♦ and concede a ♦
 - Presumably another trump will come back, but you can win it in your your hand to lead your last ♦ and ruff it while there is still one trump left in dummy
 - Then get back to your hand with the A♣ and draw the remaining trump (or trumps) and claim

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Problem 4

- 4.
- | <i>West</i> | <i>East</i> |
|-------------|-------------|
| ♠75 | ♠AK84 |
| ♥T62 | ♥AK7 |
| ♦973 | ♦AK5 |
| ♣AT762 | ♣853 |
- You are East in a contract of 3NT. South leads the ♦2. Plan the play.

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Problem 4 – cont.

- 4.
- | <i>West</i> | <i>East</i> |
|-------------|-------------|
| ♠75 | ♠AK84 |
| ♥T62 | ♥AK7 |
| ♦973 | ♦AK5 |
| ♣AT762 | ♣853 |
- There are 7 tricks off the top – two ♠s, two ♥s, two ♦s, and one ♣
 - Where are your 8th and 9th tricks coming from?

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Problem 4 – cont.

4.

West	East
♠ 75	♠ AK84
♥ T62	♥ AK7
♦ 973	♦ AK5
♣ AT762	♣ 853

- Clearly the length you have in the ♣ suit in dummy can provide a source of tricks. You are hoping for the suit to be divided 3-2
- Thus after you lose the lead twice in ♣s and win the A♣, your 4th and 5th small clubs will be good

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Problem 4 – cont.

4.

West	East
♠ 75	♠ AK84
♥ T62	♥ AK7
♦ 973	♦ AK5
♣ AT762	♣ 853

- Can you afford to lose the lead twice more? You may be worried that you only have one ♦ stopper left after the opening lead
- But look carefully at what the lead was! It was the 2♦ and based on standard 4th best leads South can only have four ♦s altogether, with North having three
- Hence you need only lose two ♦s and two ♣s if all goes well, and the contract will be made

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