

Declarer Play Problems - 2

Thursday mini-lesson – June 2026

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Problem 1

- Continuing our series on declarer play problems, let's look at a few slam hands

1.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠7652	♠AK
	♥T63	♥AKQJ4
	♦852	♦KQ7
	♣K86	♣AQ5

You are East in a contract of 6NT. South leads the ♠Q. Plan the play.

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Problem 1 – cont.

1.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠7652	♠AK
	♥T63	♥AKQJ4
	♦852	♦KQ7
	♣K86	♣AQ5

- As usual, in a notrump contract first count your tricks off the top and make a plan
- Here there are 10 easy tricks– two ♠s, five ♥s, zero ♦s, and three ♣s
- Where can you hope to find two more tricks?

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Problem 1 – cont.

1.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠7652	♠AK
	♥T63	♥AKQJ4
	♦852	♦KQ7
	♣K86	♣AQ5

- Clearly the ♦ honours can provide one additional trick easily by *promotion* (forcing out the ace with one high honour to promote another)
- The only way to get *two* additional tricks is by finessing twice with the ♦ honours
- To do this you must be able to lead twice *towards* the ♦ KQ combination

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Problem 1 – cont.

1.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠7652	♠AK
	♥T63	♥AKQJ4
	♦852	♦KQ7
	♣K86	♣AQ5

- If North has the A♦, it doesn't matter when s/he plays it, you will always get two tricks in the suit

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Problem 1 – cont.

1.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠7652	♠AK
	♥T63	♥AKQJ4
	♦852	♦KQ7
	♣K86	♣AQ5

- To do this, however, you do need *two entries* to dummy in order to finesse in the right direction twice
- Fortunately you have them – the K♣ and the 10♥
- You must be careful to not squander them early

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Problem 1 – cont.

1.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠7652	♠AK
	♥T63	♥AKQJ4
	♦852	♦KQ7
	♣K86	♣AQ5

- Do the finessing work *immediately* after winning the opening lead while you still have stoppers in all the other suits
- On a bad day, South will have the A♦ and the contract is unmakeable
- This is therefore a 50% slam, but that's your only hope

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Problem 2

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠KJ62	♠A4
	♥AT74	♥65
	♦KJT5	♦AQ4
	♣7	♣KQJT95

- You are East in a contract of 6♣. South leads the ♠10. Plan the play.

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Problem 2 – cont.

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠KJ62	♠A4
	♥AT74	♥65
	♦KJT5	♦AQ4
	♣7	♣KQJT95

- In a suit contract we count *losers* (from the perspective of the declarer hand)
- Here there are two losers – one ♥ and one ♣
- How can we plan to try and eliminate one loser?

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Problem 2 – cont.

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠KJ62	♠A4
	♥AT74	♥65
	♦KJT5	♦AQ4
	♣7	♣KQJT95

- Since you have just three ♦s in your hand but four winning ♦s overall, counting dummy's, you can arrange to pitch the ♥ loser on a good ♦
- Fortunately the ♥ loser is what is called a *slow loser*, that is the opponents cannot take it as soon as they get the lead (you have the A♥ in dummy as protection)

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Problem 2 – cont.

2.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠KJ62	♠A4
	♥AT74	♥65
	♦KJT5	♦AQ4
	♣7	♣KQJT95

- Thus you have time to draw trumps, where you have a certain *fast loser*, the ace
- Then, after all the trumps have been pulled, lead the long ♦s to throw away the ♥ loser
- This contract is virtually 100%

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Problem 3

3.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠KJ62	♠A4
	♥AT74	♥65
	♦KJT5	♦AQ4
	♣7	♣KQJT95

- You are East in a contract of 6♣. South leads the ♥K. Plan the play.

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Problem 3 – cont.

3.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠KJ62	♠A4
	♥AT74	♥65
	♦KJT5	♦AQ4
	♣7	♣KQJT95

- Here you have exactly the same cards in both hands as in the previous example and the contract is also the same
- The only difference is the opening lead – and what a difference that makes!

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Problem 3 – cont.

3.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠KJ62	♠A4
	♥AT74	♥65
	♦KJT5	♦AQ4
	♣7	♣KQJT95

- Here we have the same two losers – one ♥ and one ♣
- Now unfortunately, because of the opening lead, both our losers are *fast losers*. That is, as soon as we lose the lead (in trying to pull trumps, say) the opponents can take two tricks, the A♣ and a ♥
- How do we manage to solve this problem?

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Problem 3 – cont.

3.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠ KJ62	♠ A4
	♥ AT74	♥ 65
	♦ KJT5	♦ AQ4
	♣ 7	♣ KQJT95

- We must try and pitch the ♥ loser *before* we touch trumps. We could, as in the last hand, try to use the long ♦ suit in dummy to throw away our ♥ loser, but since we haven't been able to pull trumps, even with a friendly 3-3 split in the ♦s, an opponent will certainly be able to ruff the 4th ♦ winner with a low trump and still be able to win the A♣
- Hence we must abandon this idea. Is there another way to make the contract?

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Problem 3 – cont.

3.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠ KJ62	♠ A4
	♥ AT74	♥ 65
	♦ KJT5	♦ AQ4
	♣ 7	♣ KQJT95

- A second possibility is to try and get an extra trick in ♠s by taking a finesse with the J♠
- Lead low towards J♠ in dummy. If it wins, unblock the A♠ in hand and return to dummy with the A♥ and pitch the ♥ loser on the K♠

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Problem 3 – cont.

3.	<i>West</i>	<i>East</i>
	♠KJ62	♠A4
	♥AT74	♥65
	♦KJT5	♦AQ4
	♣7	♣KQJT95

- For this plan to work, you have to hope that South has the Q♠ (a 50% chance) *and* that the ♠ suit divides 4-3 (a 62% chance) for a combined probability of just 31%
- Don't worry about calculating the probabilities – it's your *only chance* to make the contract, so *go for it!*

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Summary

- The principles discussed in these three examples, that is;
 - leading towards double honours to finesse
 - distinguishing between fast and slow losers
- are applicable to *all* levels of contracts – not just slams

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