

♠ J62
♥ 6
♦ A94
♣ KQJ874

♠ AQ953
♥ KQ1094
♦ 8
♣ 52

East is in 4S after South opened the bidding with 1D. Opening lead DK.

How should East best play the hand?

DECLARER PLAY 11 – A DIFFICULT HAND

Dealer: S

Vul: EW

	♠ 74	
	♥ J853	
	♦ J652	
	♣ A93	
♠ J62		♠ AQ953
♥ 6		♥ KQ1094
♦ A94		♦ 8
♣ KQJ874		♣ 52
	♠ K108	
	♥ A72	
	♦ KQ1073	
	♣ 106	

East is in 4S after South opened the bidding with 1D. Opening lead DK.

How should East best play the hand?

The East declarer got into trouble on this hand – winning the DK with the DA, she unsuccessfully finessed for the SK and drew trumps. When she played on clubs, South carefully signalled a doubleton to his partner, who equally carefully took the CA on the second round. Cut off from the running clubs, declarer lost SK, CA, HAJ and a diamond at the end when she ran out of trumps to ruff them.

Can we do better? There are 3 inescapable losers looking at all 4 hands – CA, HA, and SK. You also might lose HJ, and also a 5th heart on a really bad day. There are 2 reasonable tries to get these last 2 losers away:

1. Set up the clubs to discard hearts on and use the trumps to get back to dummy if you need, and
2. Set the heart suit up by ruffing hearts in dummy.

Notice both require you to refrain from drawing trumps until you have set the suit up. There is an old saying in bridge, “Set your suit up before you draw trumps”. Naturally if you have trumps coming out of your ears (eg 10 or 11) you can afford to draw trumps and then set the suit up. But sometimes trumps are your only entry back to your long suit (as is the case here), or you are getting forced in trumps by the defence leading a long suit and you need trumps in dummy to do the ruffing rather than shorten your own trumps in hand. In these cases, you need to set the suit up first.

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	♣ 106	

So, let's say after winning with the DA, declarer leads CK and North takes the CA. North makes you ruff a diamond. Now you can just play SA, SQ and later SJ and get rid of trumps and then cross in clubs for your tricks.

But what if North gets clever and holds the CA up to the second round? And then leads a third club for his partner to ruff? You must ruff with SQ. If South overruffs with the SK, you can later draw trumps with SAJ ending in dummy and access the clubs.

What if South gets even cleverer and refuses to overruff your SQ? Just play SA and carefully lead low towards SJ. If South grabs their SK, the SJ is an entry to clubs. If South ducks with the SK, win SJ and lead clubs. If South ruffs in on clubs, the final small trump in dummy is a ruffing entry to the remaining clubs.

This line of play does require an assumption that South has the trump K but the odds do favour this on the bidding. When the CA appears in the North hand, this now makes it extremely likely South has the trump K for their opening bid.

Alternatively, ruffing the heart suit good doesn't quite work because the defence can reduce your trumps by repeatedly leading diamonds eg:

1. Win DA, lead a heart to HK and South's HA
2. South leads a diamond which you ruff
3. Ruff a heart in dummy, ruff a diamond back to hand, ruff another heart
4. Lead SJ from dummy with South winning SK
5. South leads another diamond. Reduced to SAQ you must ruff with SQ.

South still has S108 to your SA and must get another trump trick with SK, HA and CA and put you one down.