

Declarer Play 9 - Frozen suits and Lining up Your Chances

Dealer: S

Vul: EW

♠ KQ8

♥ J73

♦ AK93

♣ A62

♠ AJ10542

♥ Q5

♦ J52

♣ 85

S	W	N	E
2S	3C	4S	P
P	P		

West leads the CK. What's South's best line of play?

This is not an easy hand to assess as the best and most rational course of action might be to play for a defensive error.

Counting losers from the hand with the longest trumps (South):

1. No spade losers,
2. 2 heart losers,
3. 1 diamond loser, and
4. 1 club loser.

With 4 losers, we have to get one away to make our contract. Prospects don't look good. The most obvious chance is to play DAK and hope the Q falls (about a 16% chance when you have 7 cards in the suit). Playing a low diamond to the 9, hoping West clutches the DQ and D10 is only a 25% chance (and possibly less given West has shown long clubs and is thus more likely to have the shorter diamonds).

What you should initially note is that you really want the defence to lead hearts or diamonds for you. The heart suit, in particular, is a "frozen" suit – who ever leads it first is likely to give a trick away. Say West leads a low heart. You play low in dummy and your queen in the South hand forces East to play the ace or king. Now your queen will later force out the other high honour and you can throw your diamond loser away on the heart jack.

If you have to play the heart suit yourself, when you lead to the HQ it might be swallowed by the HA and then when you lead to the HJ it might be swallowed by the HK and you get no tricks.

With the diamond suit, you would really like East to lead the suit and then you get a chance to finesse the suit for free.

♠ KQ8
♥ J73
♦ AK93
♣ A62

♠ AJ10542
♥ Q5
♦ J52
♣ 85

(Hand repeated for convenience)

Is there any chance of eliminating trumps and clubs and forcing the defence to lead a red suit? Not really – trumps would have to be 2-2 and if you draw trumps and then lose a club, West can easily play another club to force you to ruff in hand and make you do the work in the red suits.

There is a glimmer of hope in the heart suit. If East has both top honours, when you lead to the HQ, they must play one and you can later force out the other one with the HQ and make the HJ for a discard.

If West has both honours, when you lead to the HQ it is swallowed by the HK, but you can later lead towards the HJ and force the HA out and then discard a diamond on the now good HJ. However, West is unlikely to have both heart honours (why did they lead the CK rather than the HA from HAK?). East is not likely to have both honours either as the West's 3 level bid is then very light.

The chances for 4S here are not good, but the way I would play this hand is:

1. Draw trumps ending in dummy,
2. Lead a low heart to the HQ and try to develop a heart trick, and
3. If you can't get a heart trick, play off all the trumps and then the DAK at the end, hoping for a doubleton DQ or the defence to make a mistake by throwing diamonds.

This "lines up your chances" by seeing what you can get in hearts and, if that fails, falling back on the diamonds. Note that you should leave the diamonds to last. You have 3 exposed losers (2 hearts and a club). If you expose the diamond loser early, you will go straight down.

When you have a loser or losers currently protected by higher cards, it's usually a good thing to leave the losers in a protected state and try to work the other suits to get a discard.

Dealer: S
Vul: EW

		♠ KQ8	
		♥ J73	
		♦ AK93	
		♣ A62	
♠ 3			♠ 976
♥ 1096			♥ AK842
♦ Q6			♦ 10874
♣ KQJ10743			♣ 9
		♠ AJ10542	
		♥ Q5	
		♦ J52	
		♣ 85	

S	W	N	E
2S	3C?	4S	P
P	P		

As you can see, both playing on the hearts and playing the top 2 diamonds work on this hand. Curiously, 3 out of 9 declarers only made 9 tricks.

West's club bid is not correct. You never bid weak over weak ie Don't pre-empt over a pre-empt. If you overcall a weak 2, you are saying that you have at least an opening hand. If East had an opening hand and a spade stopper, they could try 3NT which probably will play badly because the club suit is likely to get stranded in dummy.