

ALTERNATE PATHS TO SLAM

You are sitting South and your partner has put you in 6NT. What are your thoughts?

North
♠AK32
♥Q3
♦J52
♣10942

South
♠QJ
♥AK652
♦AKQ
♣AQ7

This is how the hand was bid, but I would have started with 2♣ and rebid 3NT over partner's waiting 2♦ bid.

West	North	East	South
Pass	Pass	Pass	2NT
Pass	6NT	All Pass	

Your partner was a tad aggressive to put you in slam, but when you see the possibilities you are not upset. Besides, it never pays to be upset when you see the dummy. Even if you want to ask partner where the hand is that he had when he was bidding! A happy partner is a partner that will play well for the rest of the session.

You see 11 top tricks: 4 spades, 3 hearts, 3 diamonds and 1 club. Your 12th trick can come from a club finesse. However, that is only a 50% proposition. Is there any other approach that gives you better odds?

I always say, "I never met a 5-card suit I didn't like", the heart suit is such a suit. You can develop an extra heart trick if the outstanding six hearts break no worse than 4-2. That's an 84% probability and much better than that of the club finesse working.

Even if the hearts break friendly, there are two other issues to be concerned about. The spade suit is blocked in your hand so you have to unblock those before going to the dummy for the other two spades, and you are seriously short of entries.

The other issue is being able to keep control of the hearts once the defender captures the 4th heart. This requires careful play.

Win the first diamond and immediately unblock the ♠QJ. Then lead a low heart and duck the first round, allowing the opponents to win the first heart trick. It doesn't matter which one wins because you will win whatever they lead back. Say East wins and leads a low club. You must ignore the finesse possibility and rise with the ♣A. Your plan doesn't require the club finesse – it's all about the heart suit.

Now lead a low heart to the ♥Q in the dummy and take the two good spades there. When both opponents follow to the second heart you know you are safe. You will discard the two remaining clubs in your hand on dummy's ♠AK. Now get back to your hand with a diamond and enjoy the remaining hearts and accept your partner's congratulations!

This is the complete board:

D 8		N North	WEST NORTH EAST SOUTH
		♠AK32	Pass Pass Pass 2NT
		♥Q3	Pass 6NT Pass Pass
		♦J52	Pass
		♣10942	
W West		E East	
♠84		♠109765	
♥74		♥J1098	
♦109864		♦73	
♣KJ63		♣85	
	S South		
	♠QJ		
	♥AK652		
	♦AKQ		
	♣AQ7		

If you would like to see the whole hand played out, click on this link: <http://tinyurl.com/pcktkwa> or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick.