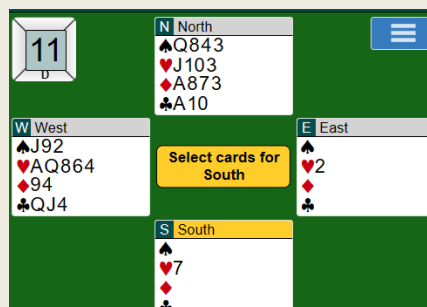


♠♥♦♣ WORKING ON SHAPE ♠♥♦♣

South opens 1NT and after a Stayman sequence, ends in 3NT. You are sitting in West and you lead the ♥6.

This is what you see:



The Dummy puts up the ♥10 and your partner plays the ♥2. Declarer plays the ♥7.

What is your plan for defeating the contract?

Things don't look good. You have 10 HCP and can see 11 HCP in the Dummy. Assuming 16 HCP for South, you can give your partner about 3 points. Those 3 points are not in Hearts, because if he held the ♥K, he would have played it. You will probably get a Club trick and can always cash the ♥A. But where are the other 3 tricks going to come from?

Give up? The answer is buried in the shape of the Heart suit. That sounds mysterious. But it really isn't. You have 5 Hearts and Dummy has 3. The other 2 hands have a total of 5 Hearts and the most probable split is 3-2. That would make the suit a 5-3-3-2, the second most popular of all the possible distributions.

How does that help, you ask. Well, if you knew how many Hearts your partner held you can compute the Declarer's holding. For example, if partner started with three Hearts, then Declarer started with two. If that is true, laying down the ♥A will quash Declarer's ♥K and the rest of your Hearts will take tricks.

On the other hand, if Partner started with two Hearts, Declarer started with three and you need your partner to get the lead and send a Heart through South, allowing you to capture Declarer's ♥K.



This is all based on a 5-3-3-2 distribution. If the actual distribution was 5-4-3-1, the next most prevalent distribution, South would have the Hearts well stopped and there would be no hope for defeating the contract. Therefore, assume the most probable 5-3-3-2 distribution.

Okay, so how can you find out how many Hearts your partner started with? The answer depends on whether you and your partner know when and how to signal count.

East is 3rd hand to the initial lead. When you lead a low card, his responsibility is to try his best to win the trick. But when he can't beat the Dummy's card, and he doesn't hold an honor himself, he shows count. The standard system is a low card played to the trick shows an odd number of cards; a high card shows an even number. East played the ♥2 and he doesn't have the ♥K. So, you know South must have started with the ♥K7.

Eventually, South will have to set up his Clubs and there is no way that you will not get the lead with your ♣Q. When you do, you will table the ♥A and take 4 Heart tricks to go with the ♣Q, to set the contract.

This is the entire deal:

	N North ♠Q843 ♥J103 ♦A873 ♣A10				
	W West ♠J92 ♥AQ864 ♦94 ♣QJ4	W N E S Pass 2♣ Pass 2♦ Pass 3NT Pass Pass Pass	E East ♠K107 ♥952 ♦10652 ♣952		
	S South ♠A65 ♥K7 ♦KQJ ♣K8763			3NT South 0 0	

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/ympfrsyb>, or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. If you don't want to see the opponents hands, click on the white area in the South hand before you start.

Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own. <https://tinyurl.com/2p3hmb44>