LISTEN UP AND COUNT THOSE CARDS

You are sitting in the South and your LHO opens 1♣. Your partner passes and the LHO raises to 2♣. What would you do here?

South
♠ AKQJ93
♥ A5
♦ KQ96
♣ 3

You see three losers and if your partner has help, you can easily make game. You hold your breath and jump to 4♠. West makes his opening lead of the ♥K and you see this dummy.

North
♠ 6
♥ 8742
♦ J85
♣ 76542

West
♥K

East

South
♠ AKQJ93
♥ A5
♦ KQ96
♣ 3

West	North	East	South
1♣	Pass	2♣	4♠
All Pass			

Well, it turns out you and partner have only half of the points at the table. Maybe you were too ambitious. But you just bare down and look for a way to make the contract.

You have a sure heart, diamond and club loser. Can you limit it to those three?

You win the ♥A and have no reason not to start pulling trump. You play the ♠AKQ and East discards a club on the third spade. You capture West's last trump with your ♠J. Easts discards another club.

Now it's time to attack the diamond suit. You lead the ♦K and West takes it with his ♦A. He returns the good heart and leads another heart, which you ruff with your next to last trump. You go to the dummy's single honor, the ♦J and lead a low diamond to your hand.

This is the critical play. There are two diamonds still outstanding, the ♦107. Do you finesse the ♦9, playing East for both cards; or play the ♦Q, hoping that the diamonds are split between the two hands? Is there any way to know for sure?

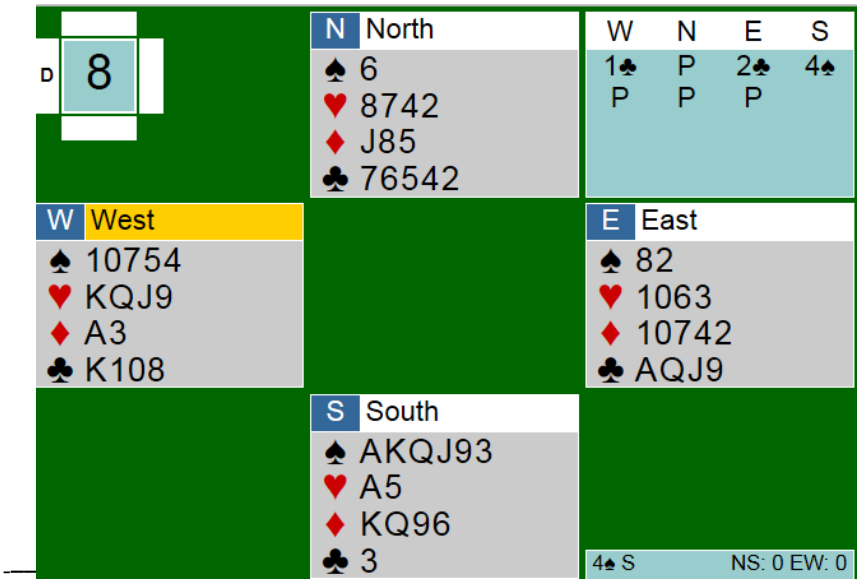
The answer is yes. But it will take a little observation of the bidding and a little counting of the cards in the opponents' hands.

This is how the analysis goes:

West opened a club and his partner raised it which denies a 4-card major. It also requires a 4-card club suit. He must have a 3-card heart suit because if it were any fewer, West would have had five and would have opened 1♥. That means that West started with four hearts. He already showed four spades and needed 3 clubs to open 1♣. That gives him a hand shape of 4=4=2=3. West has already played his two diamonds so the finesse of the ♦9 is a sure thing.

Whenever the opponents enter the bidding, there are clues to be found that can help you declare the contract. Counting the cards isn't very hard, but it takes practice. Try it the next time you get some hints from the bidding.

This is the entire hand:



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

http://tinyurl.com/ngug4x8 . Or, copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.