

DECLARER PLAY - WEEK 2
 PLAYING NO TRUMP CONTRACTS - PART 1
 (Counting Winners and Promoting High Cards)

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The basic strategy that should be followed to make your no trump contract is:

1. Listen to opponents' bids.
2. Observe the opening lead.
3. **Plan your offense:**
 - a. **Consider the number of tricks you must win.**
 - b. **Count *sure winners* in the combined hands.**
 - c. **Analyze ways to develop needed winners:**
 - ✓ **Promote high cards.**
4. **Execute the plan.**
5. Watch defenders play.
6. Keep track of cards played.

COUNTING WINNERS

When you are playing a no trump contract, your objective is to take at least the number of tricks that are required to make the contract. Since there is no pesky trump suit to interfere with your winners, the second step in planning your offense is to count the *sure winners* in each suit of your combined hands and then add up the counts to get the total number of sure winners.

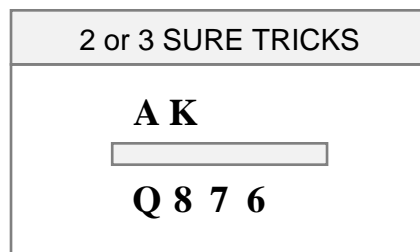
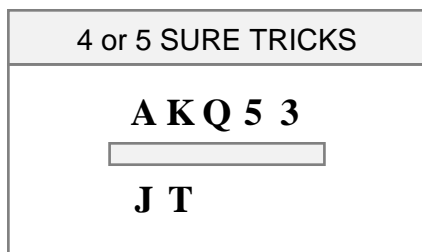
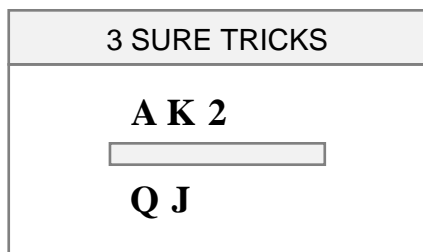
A sure winning trick is any trick that you can take without giving up the lead. For example, there are four sure tricks in the left and the middle, but there are no sure tricks on the right because you may have to give up the lead to the missing Ace before you can take a trick in the suit. If you give up the lead to the missing Ace, you might not regain the lead to take tricks with the remaining promoted honors.

4 SURE TRICKS
<div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">A</div> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">K</div> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">Q</div> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">J</div> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; width: 100%; height: 15px; margin: 5px 0;"></div> <div style="display: flex; justify-content: center; align-items: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">7</div> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">5</div> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">3</div> <div style="margin-right: 10px;">2</div> </div>

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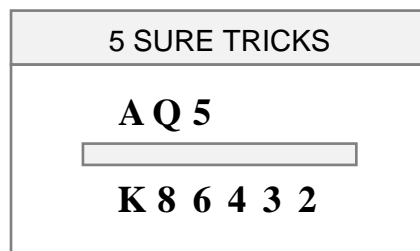
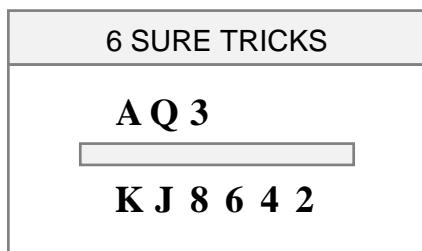
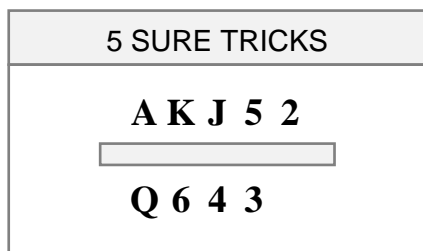
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The maximum number of sure winners is the length of the suit on the long side if you can gain entry to the long side. For example:



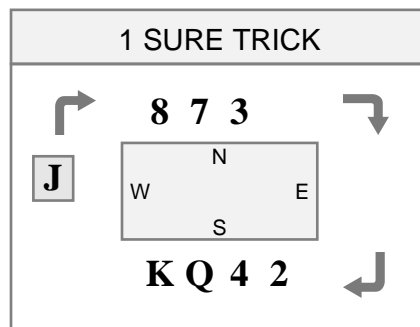
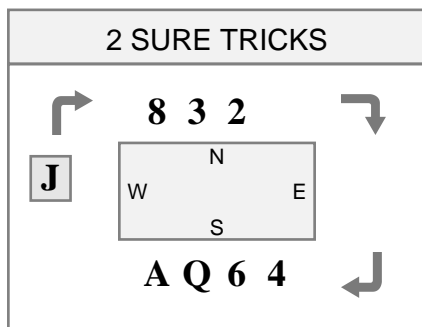
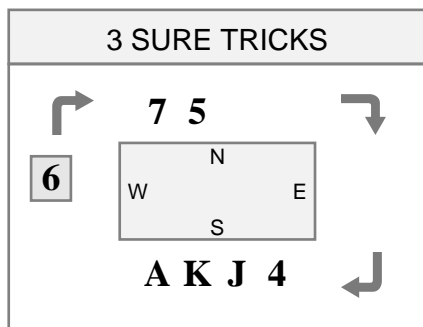
In the example in the middle, you can count five sure tricks only if you have an alternate entry to the long side. If not, then you only have four sure tricks because the missing six cards might be split five-one or six-zero. In the example on the right, you can count three sure tricks only if you have an alternate entry to the long side to play the queen.

If opponents will not have any high cards left after you play your high cards, you can count the length of the suit on the long side as winners. Suppose, for example, that you are missing only four cards in a suit:



In the example on the right, you will probably take six tricks but you can only count five sure tricks because the missing **JT97** may all be in one hand.

Every now and then the opening lead "makes the contract" by promoting possible losers into sure winners. For example, if South is the declarer and West leads:



In the example on the left, you can count three sure tricks only if you are prepared to play the **J** on the first trick. In the middle example, you can count two sure tricks only if you are prepared to play the **Q** on the first trick. In the example on the right, you can count the sure trick only if you are prepared to play the **K** or **Q** if East does not overtake with the ace.

COUNTING WINNERS																																																					
<p style="text-align: center;">OPENING LEAD: ♠J</p> <p>Listen: The bidding is no help.</p> <p>Observe: The ♠J is probably top of connecting honors in a three card (broken) sequence. West should have at least 2 more spades including the ♠T and the ♠9 (you have the ♠8 so the sequence should not be broken). Defenders will probably try to establish their spade suit.</p> <p>Pause: You must take 9 tricks.</p> <p>Look: You have 9 sure winners (3 ♠ + 0 ♥ + 4 ♦ + 2 ♣).</p> <p>Analyze: No extra tricks are needed and there is no way to safely establish an over trick.</p> <p>Execute: Take the nine tricks without giving up the lead. If opponents get the lead and switch to hearts, you might lose five tricks.</p>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <tr> <th colspan="4" style="text-align: center; background-color: #e0e0e0;">NORTH - DUMMY</th> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">♠ K 8 4</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">♥ J 4 3</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">♦ K J 9 6</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">♣ K T 4</td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <tr> <th style="width: 25%;">East</th> <th style="width: 25%;">South</th> <th style="width: 25%;">West</th> <th style="width: 25%;">North</th> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Pass</td> <td style="text-align: center;">1NT</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Pass</td> <td style="text-align: center;">3NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align: center;">Pass</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Pass</td> <td style="text-align: center;">Pass</td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <th colspan="4" style="text-align: center; background-color: #e0e0e0;">SOUTH - DECLARER</th> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">♠ A Q 3</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">♥ 8 6 5</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">♦ A Q T 8</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="4" style="text-align: center;">♣ A 8 7</td> </tr> </table>	NORTH - DUMMY				♠ K 8 4				♥ J 4 3				♦ K J 9 6				♣ K T 4				East	South	West	North	Pass	1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass		SOUTH - DECLARER				♠ A Q 3				♥ 8 6 5				♦ A Q T 8				♣ A 8 7			
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<p>Note that if the opening lead had been a heart and the missing hearts had been split 5-2, the contract would have been set.</p>																																																					

PROMOTING HIGH CARDS

You can promote high cards that are in a sequence by using the force of your high cards to drive out opponents' higher cards. This is the most common method for developing extra winners. It is also the most certain method when a trump suit can not interfere with your plan. However, your plan must allow for the fact that **you must give up the lead to promote your high cards.**

LOSE 1 • PROMOTE 3
K Q J T <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px auto;"/> 7 5 3 2

LOSE 2 • PROMOTE 2
Q T 9 4 <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px auto;"/> J 7 3

LOSE 1 • PROMOTE 4
Q 5 <hr style="width: 50%; margin: 5px auto;"/> K J T 9 6

In the right hand example you must **play the high card from the short side first.** Then if the ace does not fall, lead the low card toward the long side. You must also preserve an alternate entry to the long side because an experienced defender will hold up the ace in an effort to strand your extra winners.

COUNTING WINNERS • PROMOTING HIGH CARDS

OPENING LEAD: ♥J

Listen: The bidding is no help.

Observe: The ♥J is probably top of connecting honors in a three card (broken) sequence. West should have at least 2 more hearts including the ♥T. West should also have either the ♥K or ♥8 or both. Opponents will probably try to establish their heart suit. This lead promotes your ♥Q into a sure winner only if the queen is played on the first trick.

Pause: You must take 9 tricks.

Look: You have 7 sure winners (3 ♠ + 2 ♥ + 2 ♦ + 0 ♣).

Analyze: You can promote 2 clubs by losing one trick. You can afford the loss because after you win the first trick, you still have a sure winner in each of the other three suits.

Execute: Take the first trick with the ♥Q (or the ♥A if East plays the ♥K) and then lead a low club. If the ♣J takes the trick, lead another club. When you regain the lead, cash your winners starting with the spades (if they are split 3-3 or the ♠JT falls, you gain an overtrick).

NORTH - DUMMY

♠ A 6 2
♥ 9 7 4
♦ A K T 2
♣ J 6 3

East	South	West	North
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Pass	1NT	Pass	3NT
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Pass	Pass	Pass	
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SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ K Q 9 7
♥ A Q 6
♦ 9 6 4
♣ K Q 4

COUNTING WINNERS • PROMOTING HIGH CARDS

OPENING LEAD: ♥J

Listen: The bidding is no help.

Observe: The ♥J is probably top of connecting honors in a three card (possibly broken) sequence. West should have at least two more hearts including the ♥T. Opponents may try to establish their heart suit.

Pause: You must take 9 tricks.

Look: You have 5 sure winners (0 ♠ + 3 ♥ + 2 ♦ + 0 ♣).

Analyze: You can promote 3 clubs by losing one trick and you can promote 2 spades by losing a second trick. You can afford the losses because after you win the first trick, you still have two sure winners in hearts and diamonds.

Execute: Take the first trick and promote the clubs until the ♣A falls or you take 3 club tricks. When regain (or retain) the lead, promote the spades. Then take your winners to make an overtrick.

NORTH - DUMMY

♠ Q J 8
♥ A K 3
♦ 9 8 2
♣ J T 8 5

VUL

East	South	West	North
------	-------	------	-------

Pass	1NT	Pass	3NT
------	-----	------	-----

Pass	Pass	Pass	
------	------	------	--

SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ K 5 4
♥ Q 4 2
♦ A K 5
♣ K Q 7 4

VUL

LOSING TRICKS

You must lose one or more tricks to promote high cards in a suit. In general, you want to lose these tricks early while you still have stoppers in the other suits.

TAKE YOUR LOSSES EARLY!

Since opponents are trying to establish their long suit, you may not be able to afford all of the losses. Be sure to consider the number of tricks that you can afford to lose when you develop your offensive plan. If you can not develop a winning plan because you can not afford losing the necessary tricks, then plan to minimize the total number of tricks you will lose.

COUNTING WINNERS • DELAYED PROMOTION

OPENING LEAD: ♠Q

Listen: The bidding is no help.

Observe: The ♠Q is probably top of connecting honors in a three card (possibly broken) sequence. West should have at least two more spades including the ♠J and, since you have the ♠K9, West should have the ♠T. Defenders will probably try to establish their spade suit.

Pause: You must take 9 tricks.

Look: You have 9 sure winners (1 ♠ + 3 ♥ + 0 ♦ + 5 ♣) if you are prepared to play the ♠K on the first trick.

Analyze: No extra tricks are needed. You can promote 4 diamonds but you must lose a trick to the ♦A and you can not afford to give up the lead if the missing spades are split 5-3 (47%).

Execute: After you gain the lead with the ♠K, take the club and heart winners without giving up the lead. Then try the diamond promotion for a possible overtrick.

NORTH - DUMMY

♠ 8 6 4
♥ K 9 4
♦ 6 4
♣ K Q T 8 6

North	East	South	West
Pass	Pass	2NT	Pass
3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass

SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ K 9
♥ A Q 6
♦ K Q J T 9
♣ A J 9

TAKE YOUR WINNERS LATE!

Because you must be able to regain the lead after you lose a trick in the suit you are promoting, you must preserve sure winners in the other suits. There is one exception to this guideline:

If you have a long solid suit and you do not need to use the suit for transportation between the hands, play the long suit to force opponents to discard from other suits.

BLOCKING OPPONENT'S COMMUNICATION - HOLDUP PLAY

There are many situations in which you must give up the lead to make the contract. When one defender on lead can set you but the other cannot, you must keep the *dangerous opponent* from getting the lead if possible. One way to do this is to **holdup** a stopper in the lead suit long enough to void the suit in the hand of the dangerous opponent's partner. This makes the dangerous opponent's partner a *safe opponent* because the safe opponent can no longer return the suit if the safe opponent gains the lead.

COUNTING WINNERS • PROMOTING HIGH CARDS • HOLDING UP

OPENING LEAD: ♦6

Listen: The bidding is no help.

Observe: The ♦6 is probably fourth highest in longest and strongest suit. West should have at least three more diamonds including an honor. By the rule of eleven, East has two diamonds higher than the six. Opponents will probably try to establish their diamonds.

Pause: Must take 9 tricks.

Look: 6 winners (2 ♠ + 3 ♥ + 1 ♦ + 0 ♣).

Analyze: Can promote four clubs but must lose one trick. If West has five diamonds and regains the lead after you play the ♦A, you will be set. But if East has the ♣A you can make an overtrick if you can prevent East from leading a diamond back to West.

Execute: Holdup the ♦A to exhaust East's diamonds. When gain the lead on the third trick, lead the ♣K (high card from the short side) and continue leading clubs until the Ace falls. When regain the lead run the clubs and the remaining winners.

NORTH - DUMMY

♠ A 6 5
♥ K 4 2
♦ 9 4
♣ Q J T 8 3

VUL

South	West	North	East
-------	------	-------	------

1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass
Pass	Pass		

SOUTH - DECLARER

♠ K 7 3
♥ A Q 9
♦ A T 5
♣ K 9 6 2

VUL

In this example, the opening lead tells you that West is the dangerous opponent because West has at least three more diamonds. Since eight missing cards are most likely split 5-3 (47%) instead of 4-4 (33%), West probably has four more diamonds and can set the contract if West regains the lead after you play the ♦A.

- If the missing diamonds divide 4-4 (33%) you make the contract no matter when you play the ♦A.
- If the missing diamonds divide 5-3 (47%) and West also has the ♣A, you will be set no matter when you play the ♦A.
- But if the missing diamonds divide 5-3 (47%) and East has the ♣A, you will be set only if you play the ♦A on the first or second trick.

By holding up the ♦A until the third diamond trick, you increase your chance of making the contract because you might exhaust East's diamonds so that East can not lead a diamond back to West if East gains the lead with the ♣A.

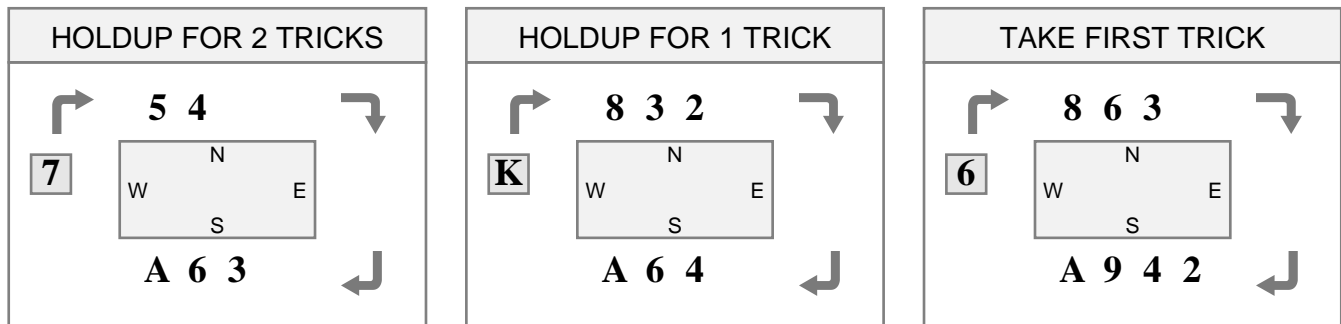
THE GUIDELINE OF 7

You want to holdup long enough to run one defender out of the suit to make that defender a safe opponent. But, if you holdup too long, the defense may attack another suit which could defeat the contract. The following *guideline* suggests how long to hold up:

THE GUIDELINE OF 7

With only one stopper in the suit when your left hand opponent leads top of connecting honors or fourth highest against a no trump contract, subtract your combined cards in the suit from seven to *estimate* how often to holdup.

The goal of this guideline is to give you the highest probability of losing at most three tricks in the lead suit regardless of how the missing cards in the suit are split between your opponents. For example, if South is the declarer and West makes the opening lead, the best chance to make East a safe opponent and limit the defense to at most three tricks is:



- **Left Example:** If the eight missing cards are split:
 - ✓ 5-3 (47%) → Defenders will take four tricks in the suit if you do not holdup the Ace twice. If you wait until the third trick to play the Ace, East will be void in the suit and you might limit the defense to only two tricks.
 - ✓ 4-4 (33%) → Defenders will take at most three tricks no matter when you play the Ace because a holdup will not exhaust East's holding in the suit.
- **Middle Example:** If the seven missing cards are split:
 - ✓ 5-2 (31%) → Defenders will take four tricks in the suit if you do not holdup the Ace once. If you wait until the second trick to play the Ace, East will be void in the suit and you might limit the defense to only two tricks.
 - ✓ 4-3 (62%) → Defenders will take at most three tricks in the suit if you do not holdup or only holdup for one trick.
- **Right Example:** If the six missing cards are split:
 - ✓ 4-2 (48%) → Defenders will take at most three tricks in the suit if you do not holdup.
 - ✓ 3-3 (35%) → Defenders will take at most two tricks in the suit if you do not holdup.

Remember that this is only a *guideline*. It should be used only when there is nothing better to guide you. Suppose South is the declarer for a **3NT** contract:

GUIDELINE OF 7 • EXCEPTION EXAMPLE 1																																																					
<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">OPENING LEAD ♥K</p> <p>Listen: The bidding is no help.</p> <p>Observe: The ♥K should be top of connecting honors in a three card (possibly broken) sequence. The missing hearts are most likely split 5-3 (47%) so West probably also has either the ♥QJxx or the ♥QTxx.</p> <p>Pause: You must take 9 tricks.</p> <p>Look: You have 9 sure winners (0 ♠ + 1 ♥ + 5 ♦ + 3 ♣).</p> <p>Analyze: If the missing clubs split 3-3 (35%) you make an overtrick.</p> <p>Guideline of 7: Suggests you holdup the ♥A until the third trick. But if you holdup and the defense switches to spades, they will defeat the contract.</p> <p>Execute: Cash the ♥A. Then take the five diamond tricks and the three club tricks to make the contract.</p>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <tr><td colspan="4" style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">NORTH</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♠ Q 4 3</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♥ 8 7</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♦ Q J T 8</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♣ K Q 7 4</td></tr> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">North</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">East</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">South</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">West</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">1NT</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">3NT</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td colspan="4" style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">SOUTH - YOU</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♠ 8 5</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♥ A 6 2</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♦ A K 9 6 2</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♣ A 8 3</td></tr> </table>	NORTH				♠ Q 4 3				♥ 8 7				♦ Q J T 8				♣ K Q 7 4				North	East	South	West	Pass	Pass	1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass	SOUTH - YOU				♠ 8 5				♥ A 6 2				♦ A K 9 6 2				♣ A 8 3			
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<p style="text-align: center; margin: 0;">OPENING LEAD ♥5</p> <p>Listen: The bidding is no help.</p> <p>Observe: The ♥5 should be fourth highest. Because you see the ♥432, the missing hearts must be split 4-3. The <i>Rule of 11</i> confirms East has three hearts higher than the five.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin: 10px 0; text-align: center;"> $11 - 5 \text{ lead} = 6 - 1 \text{ higher in dummy} = 5 - 2 \text{ higher in hand} = 3$ </div> <p>Pause: You must take 9 tricks.</p> <p>Look: You have 6 sure winners (4 ♠ + 1 ♥ + 1 ♦ + 0 ♣).</p> <p>Analyze: You can promote four clubs by losing one trick.</p> <p>Guideline of 7: Suggests you holdup the ♥A one trick. But the defense can only take three heart tricks. If you holdup and the defence switches to diamonds before you promote the clubs, the defence will take one heart trick, one club trick, and three or or four diamond tricks to defeat the contract.</p> <p>Execute: Cash the first trick with the ♥A. Lead the ♣K to start the club promotion. When you regain the lead cash the remaining winners to make the contract.</p>	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <tr><td colspan="4" style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">NORTH</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♠ K J T</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♥ J 4</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♦ A 7 5</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♣ J T 9 8 2</td></tr> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">South</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">West</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">North</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">East</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">1NT</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">3NT</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td style="padding: 2px;">Pass</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </table> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td colspan="4" style="text-align: center; padding: 2px;">SOUTH - YOU</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♠ A Q 6 3</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♥ A 8 3 2</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♦ 8 4</td></tr> <tr><td colspan="4" style="padding: 2px;">♣ K Q 6</td></tr> </table>	NORTH				♠ K J T				♥ J 4				♦ A 7 5				♣ J T 9 8 2				South	West	North	East	1NT	Pass	3NT	Pass	Pass	Pass			SOUTH - YOU				♠ A Q 6 3				♥ A 8 3 2				♦ 8 4				♣ K Q 6			
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