

# BRIDGEWORKS

## CLASSIC REWIND

### COUNTING THE HANDS

BY ALFRED P. SHEINWOLD

Two strategies will assist counting the hands. First, keep both the bidding and play in focus; many players keep these two aspects in water-tight mental compartments. Second, be modest in your expectations. You won't always get a perfect count. When necessary, be satisfied with an incomplete count, which may yield an improved percentage chance.

A common situation in which a count can help is the problem of whether or not to finesse against the queen when holding nine cards of a suit.

NORTH  
 ♠ J 5 3  
 ♥ K 9 7 6  
 ♦ 8 7 4  
 ♣ A J 9

SOUTH  
 ♠ 8 4  
 ♥ A J 10 8 5  
 ♦ A K 2  
 ♣ K Q 10

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 ♥	1 ♠	2 ♥	Pass
4 ♥	Pass	Pass	Pass

West leads the king of spades; East encourages with the ten. When West continues with the queen of spades, East plays the seven. Then, West leads the ace of spades, and East (after some hesitation) discards the three of clubs.

You ruff and see that the contract depends on drawing trumps without losing a trick to the queen. Since you are a strong player, you lead the jack of hearts (if West is a real palooka, he

might cover.) The king wins in dummy. Then you lead a heart back, and East follows with the remaining low trump. As well as this position, consider what your course would be if East had earlier followed to all three rounds of spades.

An old rule talks about playing for the drop when you have a nine-card holding, but that rule ignores information gained from the bidding and play. Some players look around for a singleton. If they see one in dummy or their own hand, they expect to find a singleton elsewhere, so they play the trumps to split three-one. Such searchers will find no singletons in the North-South hands; nevertheless, the heart finesse should be taken. When your other-suit information identifies two (or more) cards more in one opponent's hand than in the other opponent's, the nine-never rule should be abandoned. The percentage play is to finesse. The exact odds vary with the specifics, but the advantage is always with the finesse.

As an example, consider our four-heart contract. West started with six spades and one low heart; East started with two spades and two low hearts. Assuming that the bidding would have been the same whichever opponent holds heart queen, West has six cards you don't know and East nine, so the odds are 3 to 2 in favor of a finesse. The specific club that East discarded gives you no hard information; the rules require him to play something.

If West has only a 1 suit, the odds come do favor of the finesse. The memorize those figures. to play an opponent f trump when the biddin cate longer side suits b in his hand than his pa difference is one card, t finesse and the drop are

More typically in a c tion, the information tha process is more complex

NORTH  
 ♠ 7 5  
 ♥ 9 8 4  
 ♦ 7 6 5 3  
 ♣ A J 7 6

SOUTH  
 ♠ A K Q  
 ♥ A 2  
 ♦ A 9  
 ♣ K 8 5

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
—	1 ♥	Pass
Double	2 ♦	Pass
3 ♠	Pass	4 ♠

West leads the king of d you win with the ace. You ace of spades, and both c low low. Now what?

The best plan is to l diamond. If West is oblig continue the suit, you ar and lay down the king of s West show out, cash the and lead your remaining even if West returns a c to give you another ruff king-ace of clubs, follow red-suit ruff. When you club, any return permits two more trump tricks.

Suppose West is not o to continue diamonds.

# WORKS

## REWIND

### THE HANDS

REINWOLD

(right cover.) The king wins in dummy. When you lead a heart back, and East follows with the remaining low trump. As well as this position, consider what your course would be if East had earlier allowed to all three rounds of spades. An old rule talks about playing for a drop when you have a nine-card holding, but that rule ignores information gained from the bidding and play. Some players look around for a singleton. If they see one in dummy or their own hand, they expect to find a singleton elsewhere, so they play the trumps split three-one. Such searchers will find no singletons in the North-South hands; nevertheless, the heart finesse could be taken. When your other-suit information identifies two (or more) cards more in one opponent's hand than in the other opponent's, the nine-card rule should be abandoned. The percentage play is to finesse. The exact percentages vary with the specifics, but the advantage is always with the finesse. As an example, consider our four-trick contract. West started with six diamonds and one low heart; East started with two spades and two low hearts. Assuming that the bidding would have been the same whichever opponent discards heart queen, West has six cards he doesn't know and East nine, so the odds are 3 to 2 in favor of a finesse. The specific club that East discarded requires you no hard information; the odds require him to play something.

If West has only a five-card spade suit, the odds come down to 8 to 7 in favor of the finesse. There is no need to memorize those figures. Just remember to play an opponent for a singleton trump when the bidding and play locate longer side suits by two or more in his hand than his partner's. (If the difference is one card, the odds on the finesse and the drop are even.)

More typically in a counting situation, the information that declarer must process is more complex.

NORTH  
 ♠ 7 5  
 ♥ 9 8 4  
 ♦ 7 6 5 3  
 ♣ A J 7 6  
 SOUTH  
 ♠ A K Q 10 9 8  
 ♥ A 2  
 ♦ A 9  
 ♣ K 8 5

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
—	1 ♥	Pass	Pass
Double	2 ♦	Pass	2 ♥
3 ♠	Pass	4 ♠	(All Pass)

West leads the king of diamonds, and you win with the ace. You lay down the ace of spades, and both defenders follow low. Now what?

The best plan is to lead your last diamond. If West is obliging enough to continue the suit, you are home: Ruff and lay down the king of spades; should West show out, cash the ace of hearts and lead your remaining heart—then, even if West returns a club, refusing to give you another ruff, you take the king-ace of clubs, followed by another red-suit ruff. When you exit with your club, any return permits you to make two more trump tricks.

Suppose West is not obliging enough to continue diamonds. He works on

the theory that if both sides lead the same suit, one side is crazy. He shifts to the king of hearts. You win with the ace and lead back your remaining heart. If West returns a red suit, you can continue with the same ruff-in-the-closed-hand plan. But West stubbornly refuses to follow your lead. He shifts to a club. You put up dummy's jack (you don't expect it to hold, but it costs nothing to try), which is covered by the queen, and you win with the king. You continue with a club to dummy's ace and, as there is no way to shorten yourself sufficiently in spades, lead a trump from dummy. When East follows low, you must consider whether to finesse.

From the very beginning you have worried about the trump split. [The very beginning? In theory, East might have been able to take a red-suit trick and to lead a second round of trumps, forcing a premature decision. Perhaps South should lead back his remaining diamond at trick two.—Ed.] West's bidding leaves room in his hand for at most three or four black cards, almost surely only three. If West follows to two rounds of clubs, you should assume that he started with only a singleton spade. In the less likely situation that West started with two cards in each black suit, the spade finesse will not always lose.

If West discards a red card on the second club, the position is more difficult. Your best move depends on the bidding habits of the opponents, plus perhaps the specific cards they played to early tricks. As noted, one does not always get a perfect count. Sometimes you must guess, but only after calling to your aid everything you know about your opponents and their hands.

Try another one:

NORTH  
 ♠ 7 5  
 ♥ K 6 5 2  
 ♦ K J 9  
 ♣ J 10 6 2

SOUTH  
 ♠ A J 6  
 ♥ A 8 3  
 ♦ A 10 6  
 ♣ K Q 8 4

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 ♣	1 ♠	2 ♣	Pass
2 NT	Pass	3 NT	(All Pass)

West leads the king of spades, East follows with the four, and you contribute the six. West shifts to the jack of hearts. When East plays the four, no harm can come from passing up the trick, which keeps East off lead, so you duck. (Had East put up the queen of hearts, you would have been constrained to win the trick to avoid a spade through.) West continues with the ten of hearts, dummy plays low, East puts up the queen and you win with the ace. Now what?

It's time to knock out the ace of clubs. Hearts and diamonds can both wait, and you hope for more information before you must broach diamonds. As it happens, East turns up with the ace of clubs and leads the eight of spades. You win with the ace, keeping the jack for a possible throw-in card; West follows with the deuce. You cash dummy's heart king, but East throws a diamond. You take three clubs ending in the closed hand. West discards the nine and ten of spades, East the three of diamonds. *Now what?*

You can't aim at a throw-in, because West has a winning heart to go with his top spade. So you cross to dummy's king of diamonds and continue with

the jack. Once again you have only a partial count. West might have been 6=4=1=2 or 5=4=2=2. You might want to take your opponents into consideration. Would West overcall on such a weak hand with only five-four? If he did, does that affect the chance that he holds the queen of diamonds? The bidding aside, the odds strongly favor the diamond finesse: It is either a five-to-two favorite or a sure thing. Another factor is that if the opponents are not likely to falsecard, it appears that East holds the three of spades.

There are times when the clues to a queen-guess are not this strong, and declarer can only give the opponents a chance to discard. A good rule to follow in such a case is: Against masters, the defender who discards from the key suit holds the queen; against weak players, the one who discards from the key suit does not hold the queen. (And no, we do not guarantee this advice!)

Declarer will at times recognize early in the play that the overall count will be unnecessary; the play may even be entirely automatic with no counting whatsoever. This is practically never true for a defender. Even when one has a very weak hand, it is essential to hope that partner has enough to defeat the contract; you may need to provide information to partner or to conceal it from declarer. Informing partner is sometimes indicating where your strength lies, or which suit you would like to have led or discontinued. Almost as often, the most important information given to partner is the count in a suit.

Here is a routine deal from my last duplicate game:

South dealer; both sides vul

NORTH  
 ♠ 6 3  
 ♥ J 10 6  
 ♦ A K 8 5  
 ♣ J 9 4 2

WEST  
 ♠ 9 2  
 ♥ Q 8 5 3  
 ♦ Q 10 6 2  
 ♣ Q 10 5

SOUTH  
 ♠ A Q J 10  
 ♥ K 4  
 ♦ 9 3  
 ♣ A K 6

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♦
4 ♠	Pass	Pass

At most tables, West against four spades. East the ace and returned a heart king. South then entered with diamonds to finesse king of trumps and led

## IMPE

### Problem A

Rubber bridge; South dealer;

NORTH  
 ♠ 7 5 2  
 ♥ 9 5 4 3  
 ♦ K 7  
 ♣ 5 4 3 2

SOUTH  
 ♠ A 8 6  
 ♥ A K Q J  
 ♦ —  
 ♣ A K 9 7

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦
2 ♥	Pass	2 ♠
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♥
3 ♠	Pass	4 ♥

relay

West leads the diamond

Plan the play.

jack. Once again you have only a trial count. West might have been =1=2 or 5=4=2=2. You might want to make your opponents into consideration. Would West overcall on such a hand with only five-four? If he does that affect the chance that he holds the queen of diamonds? The thing aside, the odds strongly favor diamond finesse: It is either a five-two favorite or a sure thing. Another possibility is that if the opponents are not likely to falsecard, it appears that East holds the three of spades.

There are times when the clues to a declarer's guess are not this strong, and a declarer can only give the opponents a chance to discard. A good rule to follow in such a case is: Against masters, the defender who discards from the suit holds the queen; against weak masters, the one who discards from the suit does not hold the queen. (And we do not guarantee this advice!)

A declarer will at times recognize a mistake in the play that the overall count would be unnecessary; the play may even be entirely automatic with no counting whatsoever. This is practically never true for a defender. Even when one has a very weak hand, it is essential to know that partner has enough to defeat the contract; you may need to provide information to partner or to conceal information from declarer. Informing partner sometimes indicating where your strength lies, or which suit you would like to have led or discontinued. Almost as often, the most important information given to partner is the count in a suit.

Here is a routine deal from my last bridge game:

South dealer; both sides vulnerable

		NORTH			
		♠ 6 3			
		♥ J 10 6			
		♦ A K 8 5			
		♣ J 9 4 2			
WEST				EAST	
♠ 9 2				♠ K 7 4	
♥ Q 8 5 3				♥ A 9 7 2	
♦ Q 10 6 2				♦ J 7 4	
♣ Q 10 5				♣ 8 7 3	
		SOUTH			
		♠ A Q J 10 8 5			
		♥ K 4			
		♦ 9 3			
		♣ A K 6			

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♦	Pass
4 ♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

At most tables, West led a heart against four spades. East won with the ace and returned a heart to South's king. South then entered dummy twice with diamonds to finesse against the king of trumps and led out the rest

of his trumps in hope of a discarding error. On the third round of trumps, every West discarded a low heart. On the fourth round, every West discarded the ten of diamonds. But on the fifth trump, there was a big separation between the sheep and the goats. The counters knew exactly what to do, and the non-counters had to guess which of West's three queens would win the second defensive trick.

The counters' knowledge came from East. East's heart return was the deuce, showing exactly four hearts originally. On the fourth round of trumps, East discarded the jack of diamonds, just in case West might have wondered whether East would necessarily have given a correct diamond count when declarer started the suit. This is all very simple, but it takes a certain amount of effort.

## IMPROVE YOUR PLAY

### Problem A

Rubber bridge; South dealer; E-W vul.

NORTH	
♠ 7 5 2	
♥ 9 5 4 3	
♦ K 7	
♣ 5 4 3 2	
SOUTH	
♠ A 8 6	
♥ A K Q J 10 7	
♦ —	
♣ A K 9 7	

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♦	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	2 ♠†	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♥	Pass
3 ♠	Pass	4 ♥	(All Pass)

†relay

West leads the diamond queen.

**Plan the play.**

### Problem B

Rubber bridge; South dealer; N-S vul.

NORTH	
♠ 6 5 4	
♥ A K 10 6 4 3 2	
♦ J 8	
♣ 3	
SOUTH	
♠ A K 7	
♥ —	
♦ A Q 6 3	
♣ A K Q J 10 9	

SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
2 ♣	Pass	2 ♥	Pass
3 ♣	Pass	3 ♥	Pass
4 ♦	Pass	4 ♥	Pass
6 ♣	Pass	Pass	Pass

West leads the queen of spades.

**Plan the play.**

(Solutions on page 37.)

A defender will not always get an exact count. Like declarer, he must make do with what he has. In the next deal, the count is not complete, but enough is known to indicate an unusual line of defense.

NORTH			
♠ K 9 7 5			
♥ 8 3			
♦ K J 10			
♣ K 8 7 3			
WEST			
♠ 6 3			
♥ 10 4			
♦ A 9 8 5 4 2			
♣ J 10 6			
EAST			
♠ 4 2			
♥ A 9 6 2			
♦ Q 7 3			
♣ A Q 9 2			
SOUTH			
♠ A Q J 10 8			
♥ K Q J 7 5			
♦ 6			
♣ 5 4			
SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 ♠	Pass	2 ♣	Pass
2 ♥	Pass	2 ♠	Pass
3 ♠	Pass	4 ♠	(All Pass)

West led the jack of clubs, which held the trick. East was compelled to play the deuce, since he could not afford the nine. West came to the conclusion that his partner had been unable to spare a higher club, so he continued with the ten of clubs, again holding the trick. When West then led the six of clubs, South considered it possible that West had attempted a steal with ace-jack-ten-six, so he put up dummy's king, then ruffed East's ace with the ten of spades. South led the eight of spades to dummy's nine for a heart return; East ducked, and South's king won. Declarer next led the jack of spades to dummy's king and played another heart; East put up the ace.

Had East automatically returned a club, South would have ruffed, run hearts to discard dummy's diamonds,

and made the contract. But East knew that South had six red cards and had bid hearts, so there was no way that the defense could take more than one diamond trick. If South had a five-card heart suit, a diamond return was mandatory.

Sometimes, the count may indicate a defender's correct play in an individual suit.

NORTH			
♠ Q 5 3 2			
♥ 7 6 3			
♦ K 5 4			
♣ 7 6 3			
WEST			
♠ 7 4			
♥ 9 5 2			
♦ Q J 10 6			
♣ Q 8 5 2			
EAST			
♠ J 6			
♥ J 10 8 4			
♦ A 8 7 3			
♣ K 10 4			
SOUTH			
♠ A K 10 9 8			
♥ A K Q			
♦ 9 2			
♣ A J 9			
SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
2 ♠	Pass	2 NT	Pass
3 ♠	Pass	4 ♠	(All Pass)

South's two-bid was a trifle shabby, but North's holding made up for it.

West led diamonds, and South ruffed the third round. Declarer cashed the ace-king of spades, ran three high hearts, then entered dummy with a spade to the queen in order to return a club. East, who by now had counted that declarer had three clubs, put up the king to preclude the nine-finesse that would have endplayed West. It is noteworthy that this play risked losing an overtrick if South held ace-queen-jack of clubs (as his bidding suggested).

The next example is a bit more subtle:

NORTH			
♠ K 10 9			
♥ J 6			
♦ A K 10			
♣ 6 5 3			
WEST			
♠ 6 5			
♥ K Q 9 8			
♦ 7 3 2			
♣ K 10 4 2			
SOUTH			
♠ A Q J 8			
♥ A 10 4			
♦ 8 4			
♣ A Q			
SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	
1 ♠	Pass	3 ♠	
6 ♠	Pass	Pass	

South took the king-queen with the ace, cashed the ace, ruffed a diamond, entered dummy with a trump, ruffed another diamond, the last trump, and led the ace from his hand. In principle, the give count on this trick indicates South's deception, but since declarers do not trust their partner, there is no alternative. Even if counting. If South had only the ace-ten of hearts, a club lead might set the contract as a trump. But a ruff-sluff from the hearts would not allow the contract to be made, whereas in the actual club shift would be fatal.

Declarer is not the only one who can paint a false picture. Defensive falsecards used for the purpose of misleading declarer in the suit of the falsecard is the purpose of the deceptive play of another suit. The declarer to adjust his line of attack.

South dealer; East-West vulnerable

NORTH		NORTH		NORTH		NORTH	
♠ K 10 9 4		♠ 3		♠ Q 10 3 2		♠ —	
♥ J 6		♥ 7 5 3 2		♥ K J 10		♥ 9 7 5 4 3 2	
♦ A K 10 6		♦ Q J 9 5		♦ K 5 2		♦ A 9 8 3	
♣ 6 5 3		♣ J 9 8 7		♣ A J 10		♣ Q 6 5	
WEST		EAST		WEST		EAST	
♠ 6 5		♠ 3		♠ 9 7 4		♠ —	
♥ K Q 9 8		♥ 7 5 3 2		♥ A Q 8 6		♥ 9 7 5 4 3 2	
♦ 7 3 2		♦ Q J 9 5		♦ Q J 10		♦ A 9 8 3	
♣ K 10 4 2		♣ J 9 8 7		♣ 7 3 2		♣ Q 6 5	
SOUTH		SOUTH		SOUTH		SOUTH	
♠ A Q J 8 7 2		♠ A Q J 8 7 2		♠ A K J 8 6 5		♠ —	
♥ A 10 4		♥ A 10 4		♥ —		♥ —	
♦ 8 4		♦ 8 4		♦ 7 6 4		♦ 7 6 4	
♣ A Q		♣ A Q		♣ K 9 8 4		♣ K 9 8 4	
SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH	WEST	NORTH	EAST
1 ♠	Pass	3 ♠	Pass	1 ♠	Pass	3 ♠	Pass
6 ♠	Pass	Pass	Pass	4 ♠	Pass	Pass	Pass

South took the king-of-hearts lead with the ace, cashed the top diamonds, ruffed a diamond, entered dummy with a trump, ruffed another diamond, drew the last trump, and led the *ten* of hearts from his hand. In principle, East could give count on this trick, revealing South's deception, but successful players do not trust their partners unless there is no alternative. West did a bit of counting. If South had started with only the ace-ten of hearts, consequently three clubs, a club lead was safe and might set the contract an extra trick. But a ruff-sluff from the third round of hearts would not allow the contract to be made, whereas in the actual layout a club shift would be fatal.

Declarer is not the only one who can paint a false picture of the count. Defensive falsecards usually have the purpose of misleading declarer about the suit of the falsecard, but at times the purpose of the deception is to influence the play of another suit or to cause the declarer to adjust his overall plan of attack.

West led the queen of diamonds and the defense took three tricks in the suit. West, on lead, shifted to a trump. Declarer took two rounds ending in dummy and led the ten of hearts, which he ruffed. West dropped the queen!

Declarer looked at both East and West with an air of deep suspicion. He led a trump to dummy's queen, and ruffed another heart. West played the ace! West's play of the queen of hearts was flippant, but later the defender recognized that South was trying to get a count. The shorter West seemed to be in hearts, the longer he would seem to be in clubs. South might thus be induced to finesse in clubs through West.

If West really had only two hearts, he would hold five of the missing clubs. It seemed to South a certainty that West would not throw away the ace of hearts unless he had to.

So South played the king of clubs and went down. What would have happened if West had not been so fancy? No one knows.