

MATTHIAS FELMY

CAN YOU WIN THE USBC
TEAM TRIALS 2013?



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Introduction

In this book, I show you all the problem deals that occurred during the final of the USBC Team Trials. These trials determined which team would represent the USA in the 2013 Bermuda Bowl in Bali. All problems took place at the table; I did not change the layout or the cards that were played, even if a player had made a mistake earlier in the deal. You are not in the seat of any specific player, but will instead face all the interesting problems that arose. When a deal is of interest from multiple perspectives (declarer play, lead, or as a defensive problem), you will only face one of these challenges.

This book is organized as follows:

In the first chapter, you will find 35 play problems (on declarer play and on defense). Most of these play problems are quite difficult, and I need to assume a fair grasp of advanced techniques. As in real life, the single-dummy best play will not always be successful. On some hands you will think long and hard – but as the cards lie, it will end not making a difference to the final result. Hints and additional problems will sometimes be given in the solution before I discuss the various possible lines.

In the second and third chapter, you will find 32 bidding problems (the East hands followed by the West hands). You should bid these hands with your regular partner before you look at the play problems in chapter five (“Hands that should be bid first”). Scores are assigned in chapter four. Usually, I will present how the players coped with these problems at the table. In some cases, you have to play the hand first, and then be referred to chapter five.

Is your score relevant? If you understand the solutions, then your exact score is not so important. What matters is that you become more familiar with the themes of the card play, and that you expand your technical horizon. I am sure you will find some new and worthy concepts you have not seen before.

I would like to thank my great friend Oliver Hevemeier for his analytical contributions and his several improvements to my original text. Any errors that remain are mine.

Happy solving!

Matthias Felmy

Oldenburg, December 2013

Chapter 1

CARD PLAY PROBLEMS

Congratulations! After a grueling week of Bridge against some of the best players in the world, you've made it to the final for USA I. You will be playing against one of the strongest teams in the world. Your opponents are tough and tricky, and you need to be at your best to qualify for the 2013 Bermuda Bowl in Bali.

Good Luck!

Board 1

North Deals

None Vul

♠ 10 7 4 2
♥ A K 5 3
♦ 4
♣ J 7 6 5



♠ A 3
♥ 10
♦ A K J 9 8 2
♣ 10 8 4 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	Pass	1 ♦
Pass	1 ♥	1 ♠	2 ♦
All pass			

2 ♦ by South

How do you play the hand?

Solution

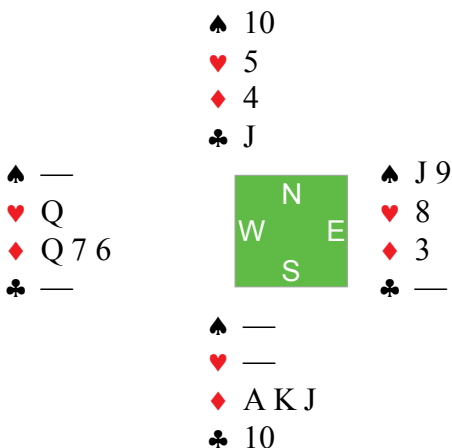
You need to win the trick and discard a spade on the ♥ K. Then you should ruff a heart with the ♦ 2 and continue with the ♣ 10. If spades are 5-2, you will get one more spade ruff and can try to arrange to hold ♦ AKJ9 ♣ x in the five-card ending, which allows for an endplay. If the opponents play on diamonds, you will establish your clubs, winning against every 4-2 break in diamonds.

The whole deal:

♠ Q 6	♠ 10 7 4 2	♠ K J 9 8 5
♥ Q J 9 2	♥ A K 5 3	♥ 8 7 6 4
♦ Q 10 7 6	♦ 4	♦ 5 3
♣ A Q 9	♣ J 7 6 5	♣ K 2
	<div style="display: inline-block; border: 1px solid black; background-color: #4CAF50; padding: 5px; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ A 3	
	♥ 10	
	♦ A K J 9 8 2	
	♣ 10 8 4 3	

At the other table, South opened 3 ♦ ending the auction, down one.

Since West has ♦ Q1076, you can also lead a club at trick four. Say West wins and returns a spade. Now you ruff and lead another club. East wins and leads a spade, which you ruff. West overruffs and leads a heart. You ruff and exit with a club. East can ruff and is on lead at this four-card ending: (see next page)



East plays the ♠ J.

You ruff with the ♦ A and play the ♣ 10. Since East cannot overruff West's ♦ 6, you will make your contract. If West decides to underruff, you need to guess, whether to play him for four diamonds with precisely ♦ Q1076 (play the ♦ K and lead a club) or to play him for a forced underruff from five diamonds.

It is better to ruff a heart at Trick 4. You will also win against West's ♦ Q1073, and you will not need to guess the ending.

Results: Other table, 3 ♦ -1, EW +50.

You ruff a heart, 2 ♦ =, +4 IMPs (recommended play).

You cash ♦ A-K, 2 ♦ -1, 0 IMPs.

You play on clubs and guess the ending, 2 ♦ =, +4 IMPs.

You play on clubs and misguess the ending, 2 ♦ -1, 0 IMPs.

Board 2

East Deals

Both Vul

♠ 7 6
♥ Q J 9 6 5
♦ J 10 5 4 2
♣ A



♠ Q J 8 2
♥ A 10 8 2
♦ A 3
♣ K 10 5

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		2 ♠ ¹	2 NT
Pass	3 ♦	Pass	3 ♥
Pass	3 NT	Pass	4 ♥
All pass			

1. 10-13 HCP, 5 spades and a 4+ minor suit

4 ♥ by South

Perhaps you are a little light on HCP for your 2 NT bid but since West leads the ♦ 8 (standard, MUD), you are not down yet. You play the ♦ J from dummy, and win East's queen with the ace. You lead a club to the ace (West follows with the eight, East with the two) and continue with the ♥ Q. East discards the ♣ 2 (standard carding, high-low encouraging or even).

How do you proceed?

Solution

Additional problem:

Let's say you discard a spade on the ♣ K and continue with a diamond. East wins with the ♦ K and returns a club – how should you proceed?


It is obvious to overtake with the ♥ A and discard a spade on the ♣ K.

West has the ♥ K and therefore controls the trump suit. You need to be careful. West may try to break up your attempted crossruff by overruffing and leading a trump back, holding you to at most six trump tricks, in which case you still need at least one more diamond trick. Therefore, you must threaten a crossruff whilst establishing your diamonds.

If West has a doubleton diamond, you cannot make the contract. You would be forced to ruff diamonds with the eight and the 10, and will lose trump control when West declines to overruff.

If West has four diamonds and you misguess the diamond position, he will continue with the ♥ K and a small heart after he wins a trick in spades or clubs.

If diamonds are 3-3, the layout may look like this: (see next page)

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

South to play, NS need five tricks.

Here you can play on a crossruff: scoring either five trumps from dummy and two from hand, or four from dummy and three from hand (if West does not overruff). As long as West does not have one more trump than you do, he cannot stop your crossruff by overruffing with the ♥ K and playing a trump, since in that case, your diamonds are good.

Therefore, you need to play a diamond right now. If West wins and plays the ♥ K and a small heart, the hand is over. You simply ruff a diamond with the ♥ 2.

Additional problem

You need to avoid one more trap: if the opponents play on clubs, you need to discard your spade first. If instead you ruff in dummy, ruff a diamond and lead a spade, then West can win, play the ♥ K and a spade. You have already lost trump control and cannot make more than six trump tricks in total (the ♥ A and at most five ruffs).

Therefore, correct timing requires you to discard your spade first so that you can ruff a diamond low, ruff a spade and ruff a

diamond with the eight. West cannot overruff and return a trump at this point, because your diamonds are good.

The whole deal:

♠ K 10	♠ 7 6	♠ A 9 5 4 3
♥ K 7 4 3	♥ Q J 9 6 5	♥ —
♦ 9 8 6	♦ J 10 5 4 2	♦ K Q 7
♣ Q 8 7 6	♣ A	♣ J 9 4 3 2
	<div style="display: inline-block; background-color: #90EE90; padding: 10px; border: 1px solid black; margin: 5px;"> N W E S </div>	
	♠ Q J 8 2	
	♥ A 10 8 2	
	♦ A 3	
	♣ K 10 5	

Results: Other table, 4 ♥ =, NS +620.

At the other table a club was led. Declarer played a diamond to hand, discarded a spade on the ♣ K and played a second. Declarer avoided touching the trump suit, and so the hand was a lot easier to make.

You play a diamond and discard a spade on the club return: 4 ♥ =, 0 IMPs (recommended play).

Otherwise: 4 ♥ -1, -13 IMPs.

Board 3

South Deals

E-W Vul

♠ J 9 7 6

♥ Q J 5 2

♦ A J 10

♣ J 4



♠ 10 4

♥ 9 8 4 3

♦ 7 4 2

♣ A 9 6 2

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
			1 NT ¹
Pass	2 ♣	Pass	2 ♠ ²
Pass	4 ♠	All pass	

1. 14-16 NT, five-card major possible, 5422 possible
2. does not deny four hearts

4 ♠ by South

Lead: ♥ A

Which card do you play? I will discuss UDCA and standard options.

Solution

Where are your tricks coming from? Partner might have one or two useful cards in the remaining suits, so it looks like you will (likely) make two heart tricks, one or two club tricks and maybe even a spade trick. From partner's point of view, a heart ruff is possible. Therefore, you should play a sequence of cards that denies a doubleton.

If you start with a discouraging signal, your partner might switch to a diamond, thinking that a heart continuation would establish declarer's hearts in dummy, enabling him to discard a diamond. This is devastating for the defense if declarer has ♠ AKQx ♥ xx ♦ KQxx ♣ Qxx.

Since South probably did not open 1 NT on a singleton heart, you can afford a two-card sequence to show your four-card holding. Let's say you use UDCA signals. If you play low-high, partner may think you have a doubleton. If instead you play 9-3, partner will misread your signal as showing an odd number – maybe with a suit preference for clubs. But since you would play your highest spot card first, playing ♥ 4-3 is a non-existent order, so it can be used to show a four-card holding.

If you play standard signals (high-low even) you can play ♥ 8-9. If you start with the ♥ 4, partner will cash the ♥ K, just in case you have a doubleton, and then he will revert to clubs (establishing diamond tricks would be too late). If your partner had ♦ KQ, he would have switched to a diamond at Trick 2.

The whole deal:

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

Results: Other table, 4 ♠ -2, EW +100.

You play the ♥ 4 (UDCA) or the ♥ 8 (high-low even or encouraging): 4 ♠ -2, 0 IMPs (recommended play).

You play the ♥ 3 (UDCA) or the ♥ 9 (high-low even or encouraging), 4 ♠ =, -11 IMPs.

You play a discouraging card, 4 ♠ -2, 0 IMPs.

Board 4

East Deals

E-W Vul

♠ Q 5 4
♥ A 5 2
♦ K Q 8 3
♣ Q J 2



♠ A J 9 7 3 2
♥ J
♦ J 9 2
♣ 7 6 3

<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
		1 ♥ ¹	1 ♠
2 NT ²	4 ♠	All pass	

1. Precision, 5+♥, aggressive opening style
2. 4+♥, limit +

4 ♠ by South

Lead: ♥ 7

West leads the ♥ 7 (third and low), you play the ♥ A, East follows with the ♥ 3 (negative). How do you play the spades?

Solution

Additional problems:

- 1) If you lead a spade to the jack, what should you do if West follows with the 10?
- 2) If you lead the ♠ Q from dummy, what should you do if East covers with the ♠ K?

You need to guess spades, while avoiding a third club loser and the possibility of a ruff.

According to the bidding, the high card points are distributed fairly evenly between East and West. So there is no reason not to play East to hold the ♠ K. West lacked the strength to splinter in spades, hence you cannot rule out a singleton spade holding in the West hand.

Leading a small spade is best, if East has the ♠ K singleton (6.2%). If West has a 3-4-3-3 distribution, he might not be strong enough for an invitational raise, or he might regard his hand as a three-card raise. Therefore, this probability is smaller in practice.

If you lead a spade to the jack, what should you do if West follows with the 10?

If spades are 2-2, East or West can manage a ruff approximately 30% of the time. Most often the defense gets a ruff if East has four

diamonds and two clubs. See below how this probability can be calculated. Note that in reality a ruff happens somewhat less often. With a singleton diamond, West would often lead it; while on some distributions, the bidding sequence might differ. West has ♠ 10x approximately 14% of the time, whereas ♠ Kxx to ♠ 10 has a probability of around 5.3% (you will not run into a ruff 40% of the time). So being fooled by ♠ 10x happens 4.2% of the time, whereas you will win against ♠ Kxx in the East hand 2.1% of the time. Therefore, if West is capable of playing the ♠ 10 from ♠ 10x more than half the time, you should cash the ♠ A next.

Leading the ♠ Q is better than leading a spade to the jack if:

1) East has ♠ K10xx and cannot ruff a minor suit (unlikely, he would need to have the ♦ A and a stiff club honor); or

2) East has ♠ Kxx and can ruff a minor suit

a) he has three-diamonds and two clubs (and the suits are not blocked, i.e. West has the ♦ A and ♣ xxxxx – in that case, you will be down because West can duck diamonds twice, and you will misguess clubs later), or

b) one diamond and four clubs, or

c) four diamonds and one club (and East can put West in), or

d) 5-0 either way.

In total, a) – d) will happen in approximately 60% of the cases (East will have two diamonds and three clubs in 40% of the cases); or

3) East has ♠ Kx and West would have played the ♠ 10 on the first round (if you started with a spade to the jack), and East or West

gets a ruff later (30% of the cases (see below). Case 3) yields a gain approximately 4.2% of the time (see above).

The probability of a singleton 10 (and no ruff) and the probability of a winning false card from 10x combine to make starting with the ♠ Q a little bit better than leading a spade to the jack (and cashing the ace if West follows with the 10).

If you lead the ♠ Q from dummy, what should you do if East covers with the ♠ K?

Then the odds favor a remaining 1-1 spade break, since there is no reason for East not to cover from a doubleton and usually no reason not to cover from K10x. Also, you should take into account that the opponents might be able to manage a minor-suit ruff. Finessing again in spades is only successful if West has a 1-4-4-4 shape, but loses to 1-4-5-3 (if they find the ruff) or 1-4-3-5 (where East will surely find the ruff). Further, if the spades are 2-2, you have an additional entry to dummy. This entry is necessary if you have three diamond tricks and East has both club honors.

So the best play is to start with the ♠ Q. If East covers, cash the ♠ A.

How can you estimate the probability of a ruff?

Note that the probabilities of a ruff are only estimates, because both opponents might have bid differently. How can you estimate these probabilities at the table? Let's say you know hearts are 4-5, and East has three spades. What is the probability that East has a 3-

5-2-3 shape? You can think of two diamonds and three clubs as a 3-2 break (so $68\%/2 = 34\%$), and add some percentage points for the fact that you have more diamonds than clubs, making more clubs in the East hand more likely.

Note that this statement would not be true if you knew how many honors East has in the minor suits. In that case, the probabilities of his minor suit lengths depend only on his small cards in the minor suits. Since you have four small cards in each minor suit, small cards in clubs and diamonds are equally likely distributed to the East hand. You cannot calculate the exact probabilities anyway, as this requires an exact knowledge of West's leading tendencies.

TEST YOUR BRIDGE SKILLS. WOULD YOU HAVE MADE THE TEAM?

In quiz format, this book presents bidding, declarer play and defensive problems taken from the deals that occurred during the final of the 2013 USBC Team Trials. Compare your solutions to the plays and bids actually made, and see how you would have scored if you had been playing. In-depth analysis of each deal is given.

The analyses include discussion of several advanced topics such as counting combinations in defensive problems, third-level thinking, balancing in guessing situations, as well as some rare advanced play positions. This book will enhance your understanding of deductive processes, foreseeing possible end positions and applying math to real-world bridge problems.



MATTHIAS FELMY (Oldenburg) is a German international player. His bridge successes include the European Schools Championships, three German national championships, wins in Austria's most important team and pair events as well as other high finishes in major tournaments across Europe.