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Bridge Tips Tannah Hirsch

12/26/2009 Both vulnerable. West deals.

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

WEST	NORTH	EAST	SOUTH
2 Heart* All Pass	3 Diamond	3 Heart	4 Spade

*= Weak

Opening lead: Ace of

Consider the spade suit in the North-South hands. How would you play it to lose no more than two tricks?

South had a difficult bidding problem. Most play that a bid of three spades would be forcing, since it leaves room to explore for a better spot. But, facing an unfamiliar partner, South was not sure how North would treat that bid so, to avoid a misunderstanding, South elected to leap to four spades, and that ended the auction.

The fate of the hand depended on the trump suit. Should declarer be able to hold his losers to two, all would be well.

West led the ace of hearts and then shifted to a club. Declarer took the club shift in dummy with the ace, discarded a club on the king of hearts and then led a trump to the king, which held. What now?

If trumps were 3-3, South will lose just two spades, but for all 5-1 distributions there is no way to succeed. So declarer must worry about 4-2 combinations. One possibility that would work was if either defender held a doubleton ace, in which case continuing with a low spade would be the winning line. Since West started with six hearts, it is unlikely that he holds four spades. In addition, if that were the case West could have removed that option from declarer by winning the first spade with the ace. A far better chance is to play West for a doubleton ten or jack, so at trick four declarer must lead the queen from hand!

When that fetches the ten from West, it is a simple matter to force out the jack of spades. Declarer can then draw the remaining trump and take the rest of the tricks.

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