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Bridge Tips Tanna Hirsch

24-02-2011 East-West vulnerable. South deals.

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

North	East	South	West
--	--	1 NT	Pass
3 NT	All Pass		

Opening lead: Five of ♠

Bear in mind that all those cliches and point-count guidelines are generalities. With a combined high-card count of 29 points and a five-card suit, three no trump should have been a shoo-in. Yet it required careful play to land the contract.

The auction was simple enough. With 13 points and a five-card minor, North had no reason to look for any game other than three no trump after South's no-trump opening bid. West led a spade and, when the jack won, declarer had five fast tricks outside the diamond suit and, therefore, needed only four diamond winners to land his game. Complicating life was the fact that, should East gain the lead, a spade through the king could lead to defeat.

The bromide is that, with a combined eight cards in a suit, you finesse if you are missing the queen but, with a holding of nine cards, you play for the drop. However, with a combined nine cards in the two hands the difference between the finesse and the drop is slight, so the interests of safety should be paramount. Declarer, acutely aware of the threat to the contract, briskly led a diamond to the ace and returned the suit, finessing the jack when East followed low. When that held, South was rewarded with an overtrick.

Had South gone for the drop, the contract would have been defeated. At rubber bridge, there is no problem here. But what if the hand had been played at duplicate? Because there is so little to choose between the two lines, we would still have taken the safety play! A plus score is a plus score, and there is that overtrick into the bargain.

gorenbridge@aol.com