

**SOLUTIONS**

**Oct 1.** We begin with a fairly conventional (for him) Bridge problem from Larry Kells, who writes that this problem was solved at a tournament table by exactly one declarer, to the amazement of onlookers. Kells believes that he would never have solved it at the table, and wonders if you will be able to solve it away from the table assuming that after the opening lead the defenders play perfectly.

<b>North</b>	<b>South</b>
AQ9	J108542
AQ75	K
A87	3
743	AK852

After a 1NT opening by North, the dealer, and a weak 3 Diamond jump overcall by East you have arrived at 6 Spades. Your side is vulnerable and the opening lead is the Diamond King. Plan the play to give yourself the best possible chance of success assuming that East is neither overly cautious nor overly aggressive with his preemptive bids.

The following solution is from the proposer.

The obvious way to play for slam is to take the trump finesse. However, since East's diamonds are only queen-high, it may be more likely that he has the Spade King. If he holds Kx you can play for an endplay by taking the Diamond Ace, ruffing a diamond, cashing the Heart King, leading to the Ace of Spades, cashing two more hearts and the Ace of Clubs. Now lead the Club King. If East is 2-3-7-1 he can ruff in, but will have only diamonds left and has to yield a ruff-sluff. If he follows to the Club King he is 2-3-6-2 and you can lead a spade to throw him in; similarly if he is 2-3-7-1 and doesn't ruff the Club King.

The problem with this line of play is that it fails if East has three spades, or fewer than three hearts. You have to find him with a singleton or doubleton King of Spades as well as guess exactly how many hearts or clubs he has. This reduces the probability of success considerably below the odds of finding him with the King to begin with. Whereas, even if the chances of West holding the Spade King are less than half, the finesse is straightforward and, if it works, the contract is almost assured. All things considered, the spade finesse must be your best shot.

But we are told to absolutely maximize our chances. There is one remaining vulnerability even if the Spade King is onside. What if West holds all four spades? Then we cannot finesse him out of the King. Is there anything we can do about that? The only hope would be to execute a form of trump coup known as a Smother Play. Can we plan our finessing strategy to include this possibility?

The idea is to throw East in at trick 11 with nothing but diamonds left, with South holding S-J10, West S-Kx and North S-A and a small side card (not a diamond.) Then West's trump trick disappears. Under what conditions can this be done? As in all trump coups, South first has to shorten his trumps to be equal to West's. Since dummy's third diamond is to be the

throw-in card, this means that South has to ruff a small diamond and heart in his hand. So West must have exactly two diamonds (with only one he will overruff if South tries to ruff a diamond, and with three he can prevent his partner from being thrown in with the third diamond) and at least four hearts (or he could overruff a heart.) East must have at most two clubs, or you can't strip him and he will have a safe exit there. Therefore West must have at least three clubs. Tying this together, the only possible distribution for West that may allow a Smother Play is 4-4-2-3.

Because of limited entries to dummy, if we want to play for a possible Smother Play we must take the Diamond Ace and ruff a small diamond immediately. (There is a slight risk of an unnecessary overruff in a situation where West does not have all four trumps. However, in that case East would have eight diamonds and presumably would have preempted to the four-level at favorable vulnerability.) Then cash the Heart King and finesse the Spade Nine. If East follows low, we are home. In the actual deal, East shows out:

	<b>North</b>	
	AQ9	
	AQ75	
	A87	
	743	
<b>West</b>		<b>East</b>
K763		J963
10842		QJ96542
K10	<b>South</b>	Q10
J96	J108542	
	K	
	3	
	AK852	

Now cash the Heart AQ, ruff a heart, cash the Club AK and finesse the Spade Queen, leaving:

	<b>North</b>	
	A	
	8	<b>East</b>
	7	
<b>West</b>		Q96
K7	<b>South</b>	
	J10	
J	8	

Lead the Diamond Eight and discard the Club Eight. The defenders are helpless!

In summary, for a correct solution, two things must be realized: The trump finesse has a better chance than an endplay. Preparation must be made to execute a Smother Play if trumps are 4-0.