

Build Up a Picture of the Unseen Hands

By Bob Hamman

Bob Hamman of Dallas has been the highest ranked player in the world since 1985. All the superlatives that have been used in conjunction with the great Italians in the 1960s and early 1970s can be applied equally to Hamman over the last twenty years. An early member of the Dallas Aces, he is one of the eight triple crown holders: World Team Olympiad (1988), World Pairs (1974) and Bermuda Bowl (seven occasions from 1970 to 1995).

Would you try to play golf or tennis blindfolded? That does not seem a very intelligent thing to do, but most players do exactly that when they play the hand at contract bridge.

If you are ever to amount to anything at this game, you must build up a picture of the unseen hands. The idea is to know what the problem is before you try to solve it.

Board 27
South Deals
None Vul

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

West	North	East	South
			1 ♠
2 ♦	Pass	Pass	2 ♠
Pass	3 ♠	Pass	4 ♠
All pass			

I recently found myself playing in four spades on a low heart lead. I had two diamond losers for sure. I had to assume the trumps were 3-2, and I also had to hold myself to one club loser. What picture could I form of the opponents' hands?

First, diamonds. West had bid this suit, but he obviously didn't have both high diamonds or else he surely would have led one. Therefore the ace-king of diamonds are split, with East probably clutching the king.

What about hearts? Could the lead be a singleton? Hardly. In that case East would have K-Q-J-x-x of hearts and the king of diamonds and certainly would have ventured two hearts, not vulnerable. So West is leading low from an honor. With K-Q-x West would have led the king, so East clearly has at least one high honor in hearts along with that diamond honor.

Now it is easier to figure out the club situation. East's silence would be incomprehensible with a diamond honor, at least one heart honor and the king of clubs as well. Therefore, West has the king of clubs and it will be pointless to take a finesse. Instead I must rely on the likelihood that West is short in clubs.

Accordingly, I lead a club to the ace at trick two. The king falls, but I'm still not home. I still have two club losers unless I can arrange to lead a second round of the suit from dummy – and unfortunately I can't draw all the trumps before going over there.

So, I simply do the best I can. I play the ace of spades and a spade to dummy's queen, then a low club from dummy. East inserts the nine and I win the queen as West does not (thank God) have the last trump.

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Quickly I draw the last trump and concede a club and two diamonds to make four spades. I notice that only my partner is congratulating me. East is eyeing me suspiciously and West has already slid his chair a foot back from the table.

My BOLS bridge tip to you is:

BOLS TIP: *Whenever you are declarer, try to build up a picture of the unseen hands.*