

Playing the Percentages

West leads the $\heartsuit J$ and when dummy goes down you can count only eleven tricks: six trumps in hand, two diamonds and a ruff in dummy, and two spades (regardless of who holds the $\heartsuit K$). Where's the twelfth trick?

To make your contract, you will need to score a third spade trick. After the $\heartsuit Q$ has been successfully finessed on the first round, how do you play to the second round of spades? You are doomed to failure if the missing spades are 5-1 ... and destined for success if the suit is 3-3 ... so what's the play that gives you the best chance when the spades are 4-2?

The two choices are:

- Either, cash the $\heartsuit A$, hoping that West started with a doubleton king.
- Or, lead the $\heartsuit J$ from hand (which West will cover with the king). This caters for East holding the doubleton ten or doubleton nine, allowing declarer's mighty $\heartsuit 7$ to provide the twelfth trick!

That should be an easy decision! K-x with West is one winning chance ... 10-x or 9-x with East is two winning chances. It doesn't need a mathematician to figure out which play is more likely to succeed. After the percentage play brings home the slam, declarer will avoid saying "My six hearts was a bit optimistic, but of course I wouldn't have bid it without the spade seven". Unless, that is, he wants to infuriate the opponents.

Board 13
North Deals
Both Vul

\heartsuit A Q 8								
\heartsuit 6 4 3								
\heartsuit K 2								
\clubsuit Q J 7 6 5								
\heartsuit 10 4	<table style="border: 1px solid black; border-collapse: collapse; width: 40px; height: 40px; margin: 0 auto;"> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">W</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 2px;">S</td></tr> </table>				N	W	E	S
N								
W								
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\heartsuit 8 7 5								
\heartsuit Q 8 6 4 3								
\clubsuit K 9 8								
\heartsuit J 7 5 2								
\heartsuit A K Q J 10 2								
\heartsuit A 7 5								
\clubsuit —								
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>					
	1 \clubsuit	Pass	1 \heartsuit					
Pass	2 \heartsuit	Pass	6 \heartsuit					
All pass								
6 \heartsuit by South								
Lead: \heartsuit J								