

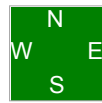
# The Key Card

West opens three spades and eventually South becomes declarer in six hearts. West's opening lead is the ♠K, won by declarer's ace. Looking just at the North-South hands, declarer can count four side-suits tricks, with a fifth available if the ♠K is with East. That means that he will need to score seven or eight trump tricks if he is to make his slam. And with East sure to be out of spades by now, any spade ruffs will have to be high. How do you make twelve tricks?

**Board 20**  
West Deals  
Both Vul

♠ K Q 10 9 8 5 2  
♥ 5  
♦ 8  
♣ K 9 8 2

♠ 3  
♥ A K Q 2  
♦ A K 9 5  
♣ A 7 6 5



♠ J  
♥ 10 4 3  
♦ Q J 10 7 6 4 2  
♣ J 10

♠ A 7 6 4  
♥ J 9 8 7 6  
♦ 3  
♣ Q 4 3

6 ♥ by South

Lead: ♠ K

One possibility is to hope for 2-2

trumps and for East to have the ♠K. In that case, trumps are drawn, and declarer gets up to twelve with five trumps in his hand, five side-suit tricks and two spade ruffs on the board. That's not a good plan ... firstly, as West has extreme spade length, he is likely to have less than his share of the hearts ... secondly, this line requires the ♠K with East, and those readers who have peeked at the East-West hands can see that this is not the case.

Better, but still not good enough, is to arrange for two high spade ruffs, and to pick up trumps by finessing against East's ten. That caters for the 3-1 trumps, but it's down one when the ♠K is offside. The route to success is to ruff *three* spades high in dummy: win the ♠A, cross to the ♣A, finesse the heart nine, ruff a spade, cash ♦AK (pitching a club from hand), and then merrily cross-ruff the hand. That well-timed line of play works against most distributions, requiring only that East has the ♥10. *That's* the key card on this deal, not the ♠K!