

Play With All 52 Cards

By Chip Martel

'You played that hand as if you could see through the backs of their cards' is one of the nicest compliments a bridge player can get. Accurate reconstruction of the unseen hands is an essential skill for a successful card player.

Unfortunately, there are often several constructions of the unseen hands that seem reasonable. The ability to come up with the right choice separates winners from losers. Consider the following typical defensive dilemma:

West Deals
Both Vul

	♠ 9 6 3
	♥ 10 7 5
	♦ 8 4 2
	♣ 9 8 5 2
♠ 10 8 4 2	
♥ A J 6	
♦ K 7	
♣ K J 6 3	

West	North	East	South
1 ♣	Pass	1 ♠	Dbl
2 ♠	Pass	Pass	3NT
All pass			

You lead the two of spades against 3NT. This goes to the three, king and ace. Declarer now plays the ace and queen of diamonds with partner playing the ten and nine, showing a doubleton. Decide what you would play before reading on.

It may seem that you must guess what to play. If declarer has:

♠ A Q
♥ K x x
♦ A Q J x x x
♣ A Q

a spade continuation will defeat the contract while a club shift will give declarer his ninth trick.

However, if partner has the queen of clubs, on many lay-outs you must play a club to set up your five tricks before declarer drives out the ace of hearts.

All three hands are consistent with declarer's bidding and play. However, if you turn your attention to partner's bidding, the answer becomes clear. East responded one spade with only a four-card suit. Thus he cannot have four hearts to an honor.

A South hand such as:

♠ A Q
♥ K x x
♦ A Q J x x x
♣ A Q

(giving partner Q-x-x-x in hearts) is impossible for declarer. Thus a club shift will defeat the contract whenever it can be beaten.

This type of reasoning will often turn an apparent guess into a sure thing. A good player considers all 52 cards, not just his own and the dummy's.

If the West player had known this tip he would likely have avoided declarer's trap on the next hand:

West Deals
Both Vul

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

West	North	East	South
1 ♦	Pass	Pass	2 ♥
Pass	4 ♥	All pass	

West led the jack of diamonds against South's four hearts and declarer cleverly played dummy's queen! After winning East's king with the ace (East could hardly know to duck), declarer led a spade at trick two. West flew in with the ace, planning to take a trick in each suit.

While a singleton spade and doubleton diamond is consistent with South's bidding and play, it leaves East with Q-J-x-x-x in spades to go with his king of diamonds. He would surely not have passed over the one diamond opening with this hand, so declarer must have at least two spades. And if that is the case, ducking the spade at trick two is clearly correct.

As a defender, drawing inferences from your partner's bidding and play has an added benefit. While declarer may make bids or plays that are surprising, hopefully you know what to expect from your partner.

Declarers can also benefit from using all 52 cards in their analyses.

Consider the following play problem:

♠ J 3
♥ 9 7 5 3
♦ A J 10 9 3
♣ K Q

♠ A Q 10 9 7
♥ Q 4
♦ K 8 6 2
♣ 8 5

West	North	East	South
		1 NT	2 ♠
Pass	4 ♠	All pass	

East wins the jack of hearts lead with the king. After cashing the ace of hearts (West playing the deuce), East takes the ace of clubs, West playing another deuce. East now exits with the six of hearts as West follows with the eight. You cross to a club and pick up the spades, finding East with K-x-x. How do you play the diamonds to justify your partner's aggressive bidding? In counting East's points, it is clear that he has either the queen of diamonds, the jack of clubs, or both. On this information alone, East is more likely to hold Q-x-x in diamonds than a small doubleton. However, let's turn our attention to West. If East has:

♠ K x x
♥ A K x
♦ Q x x
♣ A x x x x

then West did not lead a singleton diamond from his virtual Yarborough. This is unlikely, so you should play for the drop in diamonds.

My BOLS bridge tip is:

When analyzing a hand, be sure your construction is consistent with the bidding and play of both unseen hands.

If you follow my tip and make sure that when you construct a possibility for one hand you also check the fourth you will 'guess' correctly far more often. Soon your partner and opponents will be complimenting you on your ability to see through the backs of the cards.