On these hands, which were dealt in the recent Surfers Teams Congress, South plays 4H after the sequence 2C-2D <> 3C-3H <> 4H. West leads the ♦Q; East wins and returns the ♠Q to West’s 7. The opponents overlead from touching honours and play high to encourage.

How should declarer proceed? State the chance of success of your chosen line, given the play so far?

SOLUTION:
We conclude that West was dealt the ♠K (not just ♠K7 bare or else he would have unblocked) and either the ♦Q bare, ♦Qx doubleton (not the preferred choice by experts, but allowed), ♦QJx (where x = any lower card) or a longer ♦ suit headed by the QJ10 or QJ9. East’s ♠Q promises one of the same holdings in the spade suit.

We also assume that no defender has a 6-6 or 7-5 shape in view of their silence in the bidding.

Four lines are considered in detail, each commences with winning the spade on trick 2. Any overtrick achieved is unimportant. It quickly becomes evident that Line B is the best by a comfortable margin.

Line A (draw trumps, hope ♠️s 3-3)
Play A, K and Q of trumps (though taking any marked finesse of East’s J and thence playing a 4th round). Hope that all trumps have gone and that clubs are 3-3. (Chances = 29.94%).

Line B (play high ♠️s first, then crossruff or establish ♠️s)
On trick 3, play ♠️A1 then the ♠️K, planning to pitch a spade.
• If West was dealt only one club, he ruffs and cashes the ♠️K. He may, however, be uncertain about his next play.
  * Dealt 3+ trumps with the J, any exit except the obviously bad ♥J will defeat the contract (even if he doesn’t know which card to select).
  * Dealt 3+ without the J, West knows that a trump lead will stop the full cross-ruff whilst losing nothing for the defence. So again the contract fails.
  * Dealt ♥Jx or ♥xx, West loses his capacity to ruff the ♠️Q if he leads his last trump. So he would exit with a ♠️ or ♠️. South can guess the reason for no trump exit, play a trump to the A, then ♠️Q followed by a cross-ruff (making 3 black tricks and 7 hearts, unless East has the ♥J and only one diamond).
  * Likewise when West was dealt just 1 trump!
• If East was dealt only one club, South plays a cross-ruff with the proviso that he doesn’t ruff a high club unless East ruffs before him. East has <5 spades and 3+ diamonds, so declarer succeeds whenever the ♥J is with East and also when West has the 3-1-4-5 or 3-4-1-5 shapes with the ♥J.
If both follow to the ♠️K, play the ♠️Q planning to pitch another spade.
• If both follow, ruff two ♠️s and a ♠️ and claim.
• If East ruffs, overruff and play a ♠️-♣️-♦️cross-ruff (using the ♥K to ensure that

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1 Concede if the A is ruffed.
2 With 3-1-4-5, West cannot shorten clubs when diamonds are led; With 3-4-1-5, East cannot ruff both the K and the Q.
the last ♦ can be ruffed); 7 ♥ tricks plus the 3 black tricks are achievable unless West was dealt the ♥J and a singleton ♠.

- If West shows out but doesn’t ruff, cross-ruff and claim.

If West shows out and ruffs, 10 tricks are still possible.

- If he exits with a ♠, ruff with the 9, then ruff two ♠s and two more ♠s and claim (citing 2 more tricks from the trump combination ♥K108). This ploy fails only if East can over-ruff the first of three diamond ruffs and was dealt ♥Jxxx and at least one of the ♣J or ♣10.
- If his exit is a ♦, ruff it, a ♠, a ♠, a ♦, a ♠ with the K and a ♦. Concede the ♥J and claim – fails in the same remote circumstances as for a ♠ exit.

If he exits with a low trump, play the 9, claiming if the J covers it (citing a black-suit and ♦ cross-ruff). If the 9 is not covered, there are a few cases.

- If East follows low, cash the ♥A and ruff a club, thereby establishing the ♦9x as two tricks. The heart situation is also known by now.
  * If originally Jxx-x, West can choose to overruff for his 3rd and last trick or not (whereby declarer comes home by leading low to the ♥A, drawing the J, and running clubs -- giving up a ♦ at the end).
  * If originally Jxx.xx (where East has, for his own reasons not covered the 9), low to the ♥A wins.
- If East shows out, win in dummy, ruff 2 ♠s and 2 ♦s.

* If West started with 3-5-3-2, he can now be endplayed.
* If other shapes with 5 trumps and ♥J10 doubleton he has a choice of being endplayed or conceding the ♦9 as a trick.

In short, West will exit with a trump, unless he doesn’t have another one. He has a small chance of defeating the contract in either case. (Overall chance = 89.45%.)

**Line C (ruff a low ♠, draw trumps and hope ♥s and ♦s behave)**

Win the spade, play the ♠A as in B and ruff a low club with the 10 (say).

- If over-ruffed, West leads ♠K and another spade to set the contract.
- If pre-ruffed (indicative of <4 trumps with East), over-ruff. Now ruff a diamond with the 9 and lead another low club. East does not serve his cause by ruffing again. In any case, South ruffs and leads a low heart to dummy. He cashes dummy’s last heart and runs the established clubs, pitching two spades and a diamond. The ♥K is then the 10th trick. In summary, the pre-ruff causes no problems.

- If East shows out and pitches a ♦ (say) instead of ruffing, he must have been dealt at least 3 ♦s as he has at most 4 ♦s and 5♥s. Ruff a ♦ now (with safety, using the 9) and continue the ♦-♦ cross-ruff for 10 tricks.

If both follow to the 2nd round of clubs, play ♥K from hand. If both follow low, play low to a high trump in dummy.

- If both players follow, cash dummy’s last trump. Run the clubs for 11 tricks.

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3 Then he can pitch a ♦ on the 2nd round of ♥s.
4 This claim also applies if West’s trump exit is the J itself (which you cover with the Q).
• If trumps break 1-4, East has the ♥J. Play the top clubs, pitching ♠s and then ♦s, until East ruffs with his J and forces dummy with a ♠. South only succeeds if East were dealt 4 clubs.

• If 4-1, the defence will succeed unless West was dealt 4 clubs. (Then declarer comes home by playing his two top clubs, pitching spades, and then ruffing a ♠ and a ♦.)

Should trumps break 5-0 or 0-5, do not draw the 2nd round of trumps. Ruff a ♠, play ♣K, ♣Q (pitching spades) praying that the hand with long trumps also has 4 clubs. If so, cross-ruff ♠s and ♦s, in the style of Line B, to make. (Chance = 66.07%. Note: The combined chance of ♠s no worse than 4-2 and ♥s no worse than 3-2 is 55.36%; the rest comes from long ♥s and ♠s in the same hand plus the case “West has 5 ♠s”.)

**Line D (two black aces and 8 ♥ tricks from a ♥-♠ cross-ruff)**

Win the spade, play the ♣A and ruff a low club as in Line C. Continue as in C, if ♠s are 5-1 or 1-5. Otherwise, cross-ruff ♠s and ♦s, hoping for 8 ♥ tricks -- playing the high clubs thereafter (and pitching spades if it is known that the high club will win). If the 1st ♠ or a ♠ is over-ruffed, the defence cashes two ♠s to set the contract (less any previously pitched on high clubs). East can thwart the pitches by pre-ruffing ♠s and would do so except when he sees that declarer can change tack and draw all the trumps, ending in dummy.

• So on trick 6, he pre-ruffs when short in clubs if dealt 1, 2 or 4+ trumps.

• On trick 8, he always pre-ruffs when he knows that his partner must follow suit. Note: Partner, if short in ♠s, will have pitched ♠s on the ♠ leads. (Chance = 49.28%).