

Learning Points – How does counting shape inform our choices as declarer?

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Declarer Play Level: Basic/Intermediate

Here is a classic.

You	LHO	Partner	RHO
1♦	2♦ ¹	2♥ ²	Pass
3N	All Pass		

1= Michaels Cue Bid – 55 Majors

2= ♥ Stopper for NT. Invitational +

Dummy	Declarer
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♠87	♠AQ10
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♥K103	♥92
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♦KQ52	♦AJ32
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♣AJ103	♣K942
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LHO leads the ♠6. They are using 4th best leads.

Counting the Lead – Rule of 11 shows RHO has no ♠ higher than the 6!

Counting our HCP – Dummy has 13, Declarer has 14 for 27.

Counting our Tricks – After the ♠ lead, we have 8 tricks off the top. If the ♥ A is with LHO, we can lead low to Dummy's ♥ K finessing the Ace. We have a 2-way finesse in ♣s.

Counting a side suit – Since LHO's bid shows 10 Major suit cards, LHO has only 3 cards in the minors. Let's play on ♦s to see how many ♣s LHO has. Leading the ♦ A then K shows LHO follows to the 1st 2 rounds of the suit. ♦s are breaking 3-2.

LHO has room for only 1 ♣ card in their hand. So, play the ♣ A. If LHO does not play the ♣ Q, play the ♣J from dummy finessing RHO for the ♣ Q. This way we can postpone the finesse in the danger suit.

Running off 10 tricks (2 ♠s, 4♦s, 4♣s) will put pressure on LHO. They will likely discard to hold ♠KJ ♥A. If you keep ♠AQ and ♥9, you can lead a ♥ at trick 11. That will force LHP to lead from their remaining ♠KJ into your ♠AQ. You managed to lose only one trick! Isn't counting shape wonderful? You play so brilliantly!

DISCOVERY is a powerful strategy. Many successful declarers use discovery well. Discovery means playing side suits and watching for SHOWOUTS. Declarers can count exact hand patterns. Hand pattern alone does not guarantee finding a missing honor. Knowing the exact suit split allows a declarer to play with the odds rather than against them. You can also use discovery to learn who holds major honor cards.