

## Simple Slams

### Chapter 8 : Playing a Slam

Let's now have another interlude and talk about how to PLAY slams, once you've managed to bid one. As an example, take the following hand.

You opened 3S at FAVOURABLE vulnerability and partner put you into SIX!  
Here's what you see when the opening lead is made:

Dir S EW VUL

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

THAT is about as bad a preempt as you could imagine, but then again, the vulnerability is favourable and you might never have reached such a great slam otherwise. Just make sure you make it if at all possible. Partner has given you a wonderful dummy.

How would you play the slam

- On the TWO OF DIAMONDS lead
- On the FOUR OF HEARTS lead
- On a TRUMP lead, R.H.O. following
- On a trump lead, R.H.O. dropping a high diamond
- On a club lead to the ace and a trump return, L.H.O. throwing a club

Slams should be quite EASY to play because there are, as a rule, only two possible losers, or else twelve or even thirteen easily available tricks. So, fewer tricks need to be developed, and fewer losers taken care of.

Follow the standard procedure: Take stock. A good look at dummy never hurt. Then take a look at your immediate LOSERS, and count your TRICKS, both TOP tricks, and POTENTIAL tricks. Now work out a plan to either eliminate your losers, or develop your winners. SIMPLE, isn't it? At least THIS hand should be anyway, irrespective of which of the above situations occur. Let's look at them all in turn.

*(hands repeated for convenience)*

Dlr S EW VUL

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

Counting your tricks, you have SEVEN spades, TWO hearts and ONE diamond. THAT adds up to only TEN. As against that, you have only one LOSER, a club, and POTENTIAL for extra tricks. But the fact of the matter is that you DON'T have twelve tricks. So, TWO extra tricks have to be made somehow.

The easiest source of two extra tricks on the diamond lead seems to be if the KING has been underled. Playing low from dummy will allow you to make the JACK in your own hand and later, the queen with a second finesse. Do you take the risk of RUNNING the diamond and hoping that the hand on lead has underled the king? It certainly is a quick way to make your contract, but ALSO a quick way to die!

As a rule, underleading a king or queen against a SMALL slam is a GOOD strategy, so chances are a GOOD defender WILL have underled the king. But do you NEED to take that risk? Should R.H.O. win the king, nothing is surer than the fact that you will lose a club at the very next trick.

The diamond lead has also presented you with another problem, that of entries. If you win the ace immediately, an entry will be taken away from dummy, AND a second immediate loser has been created as well. That means your TRUMP entries must be used wisely. Drawing trumps immediately, without considering the implications, will often cost you dearly, as it may well do in this case. Also, disposing of losers immediately can do the same thing. Look what might happen if you win the ace of diamonds and immediately draw trumps. You CAN then dispose of your diamond loser on the second top heart, but UNLESS you have managed to set the heart suit up for TWO club discards, you will lose two club tricks at the end.

On the other hand, if you immediately try to cash your two hearts in order to dispose of your losing diamond, L.H.O. may ruff the second heart and cash a club. Or R.H.O. may ruff in BEFORE you, and even if you over ruff, you will not be able to set ANY heart tricks up and will still have a losing diamond undisposed of! So you see it's not all that easy after all, is it?

The OPTIONS are still limited, if you consider them carefully enough. AND the technique is still the same. But given that you DON'T want sudden death at tricks one and two, you should WIN the first trick with the ace of diamonds in dummy. But disposing of your diamond loser CAN wait. It is more important NOW to work on your ONLY source of extra tricks, and that is the HEART suit. Asking yourself what will happen if you draw trumps, you'll realise that you NEED them for entries to the heart suit, and you'll need the LAST trump for an entry when the hearts have been set up.

So, DON'T draw trumps without doing what you MUST do first. After winning the ace of diamonds, play dummy's ace of hearts, but then....STOP! There is NO need to dispose of your diamond loser on the SECOND top heart immediately, because of the possibility (unlikely admittedly) that either opponent will be able to ruff in. Instead, RUFF A LOW HEART. YOUR trumps are pretty good after seeing dummy's, and you WON'T be over ruffed if you ruff high. If both opponents follow, you now KNOW that the hearts CAN be set up after just one more ruff, irrespective of how many trumps are out (there ARE only three out, aren't there, you HAVE counted them as well, haven't you). So, enter dummy with a trump, ruff another low heart HIGH and draw trumps ending in dummy to dispose of THREE losers from hand, THIS time playing the hearts from the top!

*(hands repeated for convenience)*

Dlr S EW VUL

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

If the HEARTS fail to break better than 5-1, you can STILL make if TRUMPS are 2-1, which you'll find out about when you enter dummy for the first time. You'll need to ruff THREE small hearts AND dispose of your diamond loser before giving up a club trick. Difficult, but work through it: Win the ace of diamonds, ace of hearts, low heart ruff; trump to the ace, low heart ruff, trump to the king. Now trumps are gone, having been 2-1. Cash the top heart discarding a diamond, ruff a heart establishing the last heart, and give up a club. Now ruff the diamond return in hand, ruff a club with dummy's last trump and discard your last club on the good heart! Ruffing LOW cards while holding TOP ones is a principle which many players neglect, with the sorry result that they either get a top card ruffed, or end up short of entries. One final consideration: if a DIAMOND has been led, chances ARE that the person on lead has underled the king. But given that they might ALSO have led a singleton heart, and that with proper play hearts CAN almost certainly be established to result in the required number of tricks (unless hearts are 5-1 and trumps 3-0 as we have just found out), it is certainly NOT worth it to gamble with certain death at trick one. If you do, whether you make or not, isn't trying to work out a more CHALLENGING and BETTER way of making your contract more fun? We don't ALWAYS take the 'SIMPLE' line.

Now, let's look at the other options, with different leads.

A HEART lead. It really matters not WHICH heart is led. If dummy's ace is not ruffed, we saw that even if hearts are 5-1, as long as trumps are 2-1, the hearts can be established for the required number of tricks. When dummy wins the ace of hearts, there is no reason to play the hand any differently than you would have on a diamond lead. Ruff a LOW heart HIGH at trick two. This is completely safe and will tell you how hearts are breaking. Absolutely NO need at all to draw ANY trumps.

*(hands repeated for convenience)*

Dlr S EW VUL

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

If both opponents follow, you're now cold for six and might make seven if hearts are 3-3 since you can then dispose of your THREE club losers and take the diamond finesse for the overtrick. Start drawing trumps, and if you find that neither trumps nor hearts 'behave', you've just lost a stone cold slam!

Now let's try it with a TRUMP lead, both opponents following. A trump lead, incidentally, against a SMALL slam is generally a BAD lead. The theory is that leading a trump against a small slam does what declarer NORMALLY wants to do anyway, in other words it gives DECLARER the 'TEMPO'.

In SMALL slams, declarer normally will be expected to lose ONE trick while developing a side suit or suits which will be expected to produce the required twelve tricks. If you manage to set up a trick for the defence BEFORE declarer establishes tricks in a side suit when losing the one trick they expect to lose, you will be able to cash YOUR established trick. The TRUMP lead will certainly not enable you to establish a defensive trick immediately. But SOMETIMES a trump lead works out best, especially when dummy looks like it might have LIMITED ruffing power, as in this case.

The trump lead has put paid to the possibility of more than one club ruff, since the moment you lead a club the defender with the second trump will leap in and shoot back that trump. So you can forget about that.

The only option after a trump lead therefore is to develop the heart suit, and you should proceed just as you would against the diamond and heart leads. Win in dummy, ace of hearts, ruff a heart high and return to dummy with a trump to ruff another heart. If hearts are 5-1 you'll still make. You'll come to a position where you'll have a trump left in dummy and a high heart and the ace of diamonds.

Now when you lose a club and your L.H.O. pushes a diamond through, you can once more say 'no thanks' to the diamond finesse. Win the ace, dispose of your diamond loser on the ace of hearts, ruff a heart establishing the sixth one, ruff a club with dummy's last trump, and dispose of the club loser on the heart. It's all in the timing, as they say.

*(hands repeated for convenience)*

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

Next, what if a trump is led and R.H.O. shows out, signalling encouragement with a high diamond? This is probably the worst scenario, but to start with there's no difference in your approach. The hearts need to be tested and you do so as soon as possible: win the ace of trumps, ace of hearts, ruff a low heart high. If L.H.O. shows out, that is now the worst case, since you won't have enough tricks without a club ruff. So you try the QUEEN of clubs in case R.H.O. has both the ace and king. But as you have feared, it is L.H.O. who wins the king and instead of giving you your ruff or leading another trump, has the gall to switch to a diamond. What now?

If you've been keeping track of what's going on, you will have realised that you simply can't make unless you take the diamond finesse. AND that you would never have made on a diamond lead by going up with the ace, as suggested earlier. The 'perfect' defence has now given you NO option but to take the diamond finesse. VERY tough on your poor L.H.O. if he actually has the diamond king, but then, at least you can point out to them the folly of NOT following our advice on leading against small slams!

Finally, the problem of how to play the slam when a club is led followed by a trump return. At least you don't any more have to worry about any more losers, because the opponents have already got the only one they're allowed! If you follow the earlier plan of play on a non club lead, you'll play ace of hearts and ruff a heart, enter dummy with a club ruff and ruff another heart, then enter dummy with the final trump to ruff the fourth heart. After drawing trumps, you can cross to the ace of diamonds and discard one diamond on the king of hearts and one club on the established sixth heart. Having got a club ruff, that's all you need. TWO club ruffs are not necessary. While there's no apparent danger in trying to discard a diamond on the second heart and playing to ruff TWO clubs, nevertheless it IS possible for R.H.O. to have a singleton heart and be able to ruff the second top heart. In that case you'll have to over ruff, and ruff your last club, then eventually have to rely on the diamond finesse. Hardly worth the hassle since you CAN establish your hearts with the proper sequence of plays. Only if opponents give you the opportunity to ruff two clubs with total impunity should you take that line. Always safeguard your TOP tricks from ruffs while going about your other business. And that means controlling your entries wisely. Here, again, the defender on lead had the chance to lead a diamond, which is the only lead to put declarer under any pressure. Another good reason to lead from a holding like Kxxx especially when DUMMY is going to be the STRONG hand. If declarer has any options at all, the finesse at trick one is the most unpalatable if it means losing immediately. And you can see why. There are USUALLY better ways to make your contract than finessing at trick one!