

Simple Slams

Chapter 10 : Slams in Teams Play

Any regular teams competition generally produces its fair share of interesting hands, in particular slams. Slams are always exciting for most players, and NORMALLY easy to discuss and analyse because with only one trick to lose, and NONE in the case of grand slams, the number of possible lines of play are few. Compare that to game level contracts, where there are more options, and then to part score hands, where both declarer and defence can contribute tricks to each other at an unnerving rate.

Here are two examples from recent play:

Dlr S ALL VUL

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

After West opens 1S and East checks for aces, whatever system you're playing, you should end up in 6S. The most sensible lead is a low DIAMOND. A club, looking for a ruff, is quite silly, because North has a natural spade trick anyway, and getting a ruff against a SMALL slam means you expect to defeat the contract by TWO tricks, doesn't it?

Those declarers who drew trumps immediately ran into trouble. After ace of spades, king of spades, South showing out, declarer still has good chances. One possibility is to play on clubs for the needed tricks. But as you can see, the finesse loses, and playing ace, king and ruffing results in North overruffing and declarer is an entry short when the clubs become established. Another option is to discard a heart on the king of diamonds, play king, ace of hearts and ruff. If hearts are 3-3, the diamond loser is pitched on the second top club and all declarer loses is the one trump. THAT also doesn't work.

UNLUCKY? Yes, but the technically BEST line, in my opinion anyway, is to try to establish the clubs IMMEDIATELY. You find out soon enough if that can be done. Play the ace of clubs at trick TWO and RUFF a LOW club at trick three. This is a play that in essence saves on entries AND stops your TOP card being ruffed in case of a bad break, one that is often missed by the less experienced players.

(hands repeated for convenience)

Dlr S ALL VUL

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

When both opponents follow to the second club, you KNOW that the clubs DO break well enough to make your contract as long as the SPADES also behave REASONABLY. But care still has to be taken. Cross to the trump ace, and when both opponents follow, you know trumps ARE breaking well enough to make your contract. Ruff another LOW club. If SOUTH ruffs, you over ruff, but it is NORTH who is short of clubs. North over ruffs but must put you in hand with whatever they return, and you now draw the last trump and can cross with the king of hearts to play the clubs, FROM THE TOP.

But what if North is smart enough NOT to over ruff? You're in trouble! Or are you?

If you ask yourself WHY North did not over ruff, the answer will be clear enough: North, being short in clubs, is long in trumps, and there's no advantage in over ruffing. North would certainly have over ruffed with only one or two trumps left. You're now in danger of running out of trumps, but your entry conserving play of not leading more than ONE trump can now pay off: you ruff a LOW diamond in dummy and can STILL run your clubs from the top. North HAS to ruff sooner or later and whatever North returns, you draw the last two trumps and enter dummy with the king of hearts.

Note that on a CLUB lead, the hand is much easier, because you don't need to use up your ace of diamonds entry early: ace of clubs, low club ruff, ace of SPADES, low club ruff. NOW the non over ruff doesn't matter at all since declarer draws two trumps and leaves the only trump in North's hand, crosses to the ace of diamonds and peddles clubs from the top! Declarer has the king of diamonds to stop the suit, and dummy has the king of hearts to gain entry for the rest of the clubs!

The next slam was easy enough to bid to 6C, but some Souths took the very inexpensive sacrifice in 6D, doubled for -500. But it is more interesting if East gets goaded by this into bidding SEVEN clubs and South leaves this contract well alone.

The declarers in 6C quickly claimed, without the exercise of attempting the overtrick. Can't blame them I suppose, but imagine that you DO end up in SEVEN clubs as East, and South leads the ace of diamonds:

Dlr N NS VUL

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

South isn't to know that there's a slam EW way. If South DID, then the opening bid may be more like 3NT or 4D, maybe 5D. But, given that South opens 1D and West overcalls 1S, the next thing we might hear from East could be 6C.

But this isn't about bidding, and let's return to the hypothetical case where East is goaded into 7C and South hopefully leads the ace of diamonds. East ruffs, and then proceeds to run off the trumps. With twelve top tricks, there is normally a squeeze for the thirteenth. Neither North nor South have any discard problems at an early stage. As long as North keeps the same number of spades as dummy, no extra spade can be established with a ruff, and South has diamonds coming out of their ears! Let's say after six rounds of clubs including the first ruff, this is the position:

Dlr N NS VUL

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

Declarer can lead another club but it is DUMMY that feels the pressure, and has to let go a diamond, and now both defenders can throw diamonds away. So, rather than lead another club, declarer now plays two top spades and ruffs a third. The spades don't come down, but on the third ruff, South comes down to one top diamond and three hearts. When declarer leads the last club, South has no choice but to part with the last diamond, but NORTH can keep the queen and discard a spade if dummy discards one, or the queen of diamonds if dummy discards the nine. So the squeeze doesn't work! IS there an answer?

Try this one also as a double dummy problem, and see how you get on.

If you manage to last out until a later chapter, I may have come up with an answer by then!