

Declarer Play – Counting Tricks

By Neil Kimelman

Here is a recent hand that came up in the popular CBF Friday Night Maple Leaf Games:

Board 1, North dealer, neither vulnerable. Matchpoints.

<u>Dummy</u>	<u>Declarer</u>
♠ KJ10	♠ Q984
♥ A8762	♥ Q
♦ 54	♦ AQ987
♣ Q93	♣ K766

You are declarer in 2♠ on the following auction:

West North East South

Pass 1♦ Pass

1♥ Pass 1♠ Pass

1NT Pass Pass 2♣

2♠ All Pass

South leads the ♥9. How do you play?

First, a couple of comments about the auction.

- West had an absolute maximum for their 1NT bid, but the 1NT rebid was the best choice.
- South's balance was sound matchpoint strategy – if at all possible, not letting the opponents play in 1NT.

- Although West's 3rd call of 2♠ was ok, double is much better. It tells partner you have a maximum for your previous bidding and suggests no fit for partner's suits. At the end of the article we will look to see how 2♣ doubled would have fared.

On to the actual contract, how do you play?

A Moysian (when you have a 4-3 trump fit) is always a tricky contract to play. Quite often you cannot pull trump, as when you can on an eight card, or longer fit. The best you can do is to gather as many tricks as possible. Here we know that South has five or more clubs, but not a good enough hand to overcall on the first round of bidding. The lead also indicates likely heart shortness.

The heart lead seems like a good start for the defence. The first step is to count your tricks. 3 spades, 1 heart, 1 diamond and 1 club. Only 6, not good 😞. The best strategy is to try and score as many of your 7 your trumps separately.

First start off with the diamond finesse. This loses to South who returns a 2nd heart. Now what?

Before playing, think what you know, or think you know. You 'know'* that South has the ♣A from the bidding. You also 'know' North has the spade ace, as with that card South would definitely have overcalled 2♣ over 1♦.

**When I say know, what I mean is confidently infer.*

Armed with that information, ruff the heart, and lead a club. 99% of the time South will play small, not the ace. Now ♦A, ruff a diamond with the ♠10, ruff a heart with the ♠8, and ruff another diamond with the ♠J. North will over ruff and return a trump.

In total you score 1 trick in each side suit, plus 5 trump tricks (four in your hand one in dummy), making two. The full deal:

♠ A632

♥ KJ1043

♦ J63

♣ J

♠ KJ10

♠ Q984

♥ A8762

♥ Q

♦ 54

♦ AQ987

♣ Q93

♣ K76

♠ 75

♥ 95

♦ K102

♣ A108542

The actual South tried to pull trump and ended up down two. Notice the importance of playing a club at trick four. Even if South rises with the ace, and gives partner a club ruff, it does not help the defence get any more tricks.

How does 2♣ do? Not well on a spade lead. Declarer can win and lead a diamond (best). East goes up with the ace, heart to the ace and heart ruff, leaves declarer no entry to dummy. In 2♣, declarer loses 1 spade, 1 heart, 2 diamonds, and 3 clubs, down 2 on best defence.

So the best choice was to defend against 2♣ doubled. This was your only sure plus, and any plus score on this hand will earn you at least an average plus.