



Play & Learn

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The impact of distribution

You open 1♠ holding:

♠ A K Q 5 3 ♥ 4 ♦ J 10 5 4 ♣ Q 8 6.

What would your decision be after partner shows a spade fit and limit-raise strength (a good 10 to 12 points)? This could be the complete deal:

Dlr: South	♠ 8 7 4		
Vul: Both	♥ J 6 3 2		
	♦ A K Q 2		
	♣ 9 3		
♠ 9 2		♠ J 10 6	
♥ K Q 7 5		♥ A 10 9 8	
♦ 8 6 3		♦ 9 7	
♣ K J 5 2		♣ A 10 7 4	

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

Declarer's losers are a heart and three clubs. Unless the defenders get off to an unlikely trump lead, which enables them to draw all of dummy's trumps, it appears that declarer can ruff the third club in dummy. However, watch what happens on a likely ♥K lead. East encourages with the ♥10 and South ruffs the second heart. Declarer has a dilemma. Drawing trump requires three spade leads and takes away all of dummy's spades, so the club loser must be ruffed before declarer draws all the trumps. However, giving up a club lets the defenders in to lead a third heart, which leaves declarer with only three trumps. When declarer gives up the second club, the defenders can lead a fourth heart. Ruffing that

leaves South with only the ♠A K remaining and allows East's ♠J to win the setting trick. When forcing the long trump hand to run out of trumps too soon creates an unexpected trump trick for the defenders, we say declarer has lost control. Many defenders fail to take advantage of a forcing defense because they are too impatient and don't appreciate the advantage that can come from making the long trump hand spend those long trumps on ruffing. Declarer sometimes has a counter to a forcing game but South is doomed on this deal and declarer would do best to stop in 3♠.

Trade West's ♠2 for North's ♦2 and 4♠ has an excellent chance of making.

Dlr: South	♠ 8 7 4 2		
Vul: Both	♥ J 6 3 2		
	♦ A K Q		
	♣ 9 3		
♠ 9		♠ J 10 6	
♥ K Q 7 5		♥ A 10 9 8	
♦ 8 6 3 2		♦ 9 7	
♣ K J 5 2		♣ A 10 7 4	

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

As long as trumps don't split 4-0, declarer still has nine top tricks and can get a 10th trick by ruffing a club in dummy after trumps are drawn. A forcing defense should no longer work. Suppose the defenders attempt it and play as before. This time, declarer ruffs the second heart and draws three

rounds of trump, leaving one spade in South and one spade in North. With no fear of a defensive ruff, declarer plays dummy's top three diamonds and gives up a club. The defenders can force out South's last trump but declarer then cashes the ♦J, discarding either a club or heart from dummy. The 13th trump remaining in dummy will provide the 10th trick. This time, South does best to carry on to game.

Last month we saw that a singleton in dummy is worth more when dummy has more than three trumps. The methods of hand evaluation used in the ACBL texts don't suggest adding any distribution points for shortness in the long trump hand. That would work out well on our first deal where South's hand values to 13 points (12 high-card points plus 1 length point), and South would have little interest in game opposite a limit raise. But South has the same hand in our second example, and the pair would miss a good game. Because the fourth trump in dummy makes the difference, wouldn't it be nice to know about it before deciding whether to accept partner's limit raise? This is why many pairs like an immediate limit raise to promise four-card support and prefer to make a two-step raise with only three-card support. While declarer might not add specific points for a short suit, knowing the number of trumps responder's limit raise shows does let declarer use judgment and bid more aggressively with a bigger than eight-card fit. ■