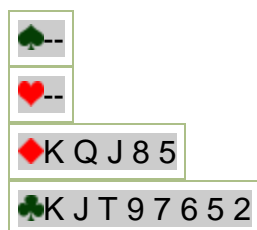


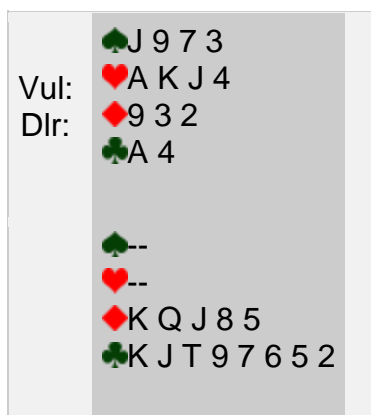
I recently played in a regional in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico. It was a most enjoyable tournament...We had two other fun deals at the same tournament. First, I had a hand with 8-5 distribution. As soon as I picked up this hand, I had a flashback:



The last time I held 8-5 distribution was 25 years ago and it was maybe the most famous deal of my life. Anyone who wishes to play that deal can do so on my [website](#) (download the free demo of "My Favorite 52"--that infamous deal is appropriately, "Deal #1"). With my modern-day 8-5, in Mexico, there was lots of excitement. My partner, Steve Weinstein, opened 1♦! With both vulnerable, I responded 2♣, game forcing. I figured the opponents might get in our way, and sure enough, LHO entered with 2♠, doubled (for penalty) by my partner. RHO passed, and it was up to me.

Surely, I wasn't sitting for this one. I really wanted to know about the minor-suit aces, but there was no bid to ask for them. (Some advanced readers will be aware of an animal called "Exclusion Blackwood" -- whereby you can jump, to say, 5♥, to ask for aces outside of hearts. Here, that wouldn't help--I needed "double-exclusion!")

Anyway, I bided my team by raising to 3♦ to await developments. Partner bid 3♥, presumably showing some heart values. Not much help there. I continued my stalling process by bidding 4♣. Partner raised to 5♣. This was getting me nowhere. I had no idea if he held the right cards for me, so I just guessed to bid 6♣, doubled by LHO. This was passed back to me. I considered running to 6♦, or redoubling, but eventually passed and awaited the opening lead.



The opening lead was the A♣, which I ruffed. How would you play the clubs? The penalty double was probably based on two aces, not on queen-third of clubs and an ace. A player with such a trump holding would do anything but

double, for fear of giving away the trump position. So, if anyone had queen-third of clubs, I thought it would be RHO. I led the J♣ (you never know when somebody might cover) and LHO showed out. What is the plan after winning dummy's A♣? Before finessing East out of his Q♣, you had better use dummy's top hearts. Hearts will not break 8-1--this is a safe play. On the high hearts you throw your little diamonds and take a club finesse and claim for 1540. This was the full deal:

Vul: Both Dir: North	♠ J 9 7 3 ♥ A K J 4 ♦ 9 3 2 ♣ A 4	
♠ A K Q T 4 2 ♥ Q T 9 ♦ A T 7 4 ♣ --		♠ 8 6 5 ♥ 8 7 6 5 3 2 ♦ 6 ♣ Q 8 3
	♠ -- ♥ -- ♦ K Q J 8 5 ♣ K J T 9 7 6 5 2	

As you can see, West chose the wrong opening lead. If he starts with the ♦A and gives his partner a ruff, he beats the contract. At the other table, South drove to 6♦ after the 1♦ opener. This was doubled and could have been down 800 on a spade lead. Sloppy defense beat it only one trick, but still, our team won 17 IMPs for 1540 and 200, and I had a deal for my next Favorite 52.

Here is one last strange deal from Mexico, and a chance to win more than 17 IMPs. In a knockout match, with both vulnerable, try having a truly enjoyable bridge experience:

♠ Q 8 6 5 4
♥ A J T 9 8 5
♦ A
♣ 8

What would you bid as dealer? You should open 1♥. I know it is tempting to open 1♠ (to avoid reversing), but this is not proper bidding. You should start with your longer suit and judge later whether or not (and how) to get spades into the picture.

Your 1♥ opening is doubled and your partner raises to 2♥. RHO bids 2♠. Your thoughts?

There is no "correct" answer, but I think a jump to 4♥ is best. This contract rates to have play, so there is no reason to dilly-dally and risk having the opponents get together in a minor-suit contract. Four hearts is passed back to RHO who surprises you by bidding 4♠.

I know some people think this way: "The opponents have lots of spades, my partner is short in spades, therefore I can ruff spades in dummy and do very well in hearts." Bad thinking. You won't be able to ruff all of those spades, and meanwhile, those spades will be great on defense. Another way to think of it is to use the [LAW of Total Tricks](#) (so glad I thought of mentioning it.) Even if partner is void in spades, they have only 8 trumps. Your side probably has 9 trumps, a total of 17, indicating 17 tricks. If you were to bid on to five hearts, contracting for 11 tricks, that means the opponents would have only 6 tricks their way. With both sides vulnerable, why try for 650 when you might have 1100? So, you should double 4♠ (as I did at the table). Everyone passes and it's your lead.

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