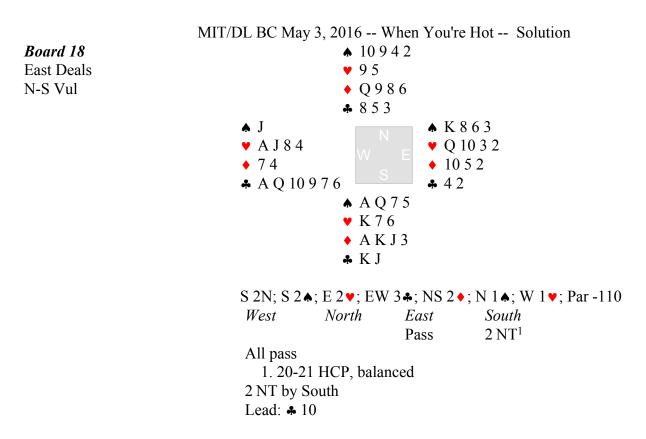


This is a normal contract with a normal lead. East plays the **4**. Plan the play.



Before even calling a card from dummy, I made a plan. More mistakes are made at trick one than at any other.

First, count top tricks: with the club lead, I had six. The contract appears likely to fail, and it would be easy to go down two (or more, as it happens). I decided to play for down 1, and hope to come up with one more trick at the end. There was one more factor: I held the AK, and West knew I had it. He might not cash out the clubs, if my first finesse lost. I decided to play for *one* more spade trick, hoping not to lose the lead.

When I cashed the \blacklozenge A and K, both followed. This allowed me to overtake the \blacklozenge J with the Q, preserving a second entry to dummy in the \blacklozenge 9. If my first spade finesse lost, I wanted the possibility of trying again.

Leading small to the AQ produced a huge bonus: West played the AJ. A diamond to dummy let me finesse again in spades. I cashed out all eight tricks, as many declarers would not do that well. I remained with a losing spade, my three original hearts, and the AK, with which I exited. West eventually conceded a trick to my VK.

Making 9 tricks on this deal took some skill, but also incredible luck. That's how it goes with a 70% game. See you next time, back in the 40s or 50s!