

♠♥♦♣ A PERPLEXING SITUATION ♣♥♦♣

You have dealt yourself this nice hand. You open 1♠.

S	South
♠	AKJ72
♥	KQ43
♦	65
♣	A2

With silent opponents, your partner responds 2♠. What is your call?

When your partner raises you to 2 of your major, it is a time to use Losing Trick Count. You count the losers among the first 3 cards in each suit. Thus, you have 1 spade loser (the ♠Q), 1 heart loser (the ♥A), 2 diamond losers and 1 club loser; 5 in all. That means you can take 8 tricks in your hand alone and you only need 2 from partner to make game. His single raise usually promises 2 "cover cards". These are cards that can eliminate one of your losers. With a 5 loser hand, assuming partner's hand can reduce that to 3 losers, jump to game over a single raise.

With a 7 loser hand, which is the normal minimum opening hand, just pass. There is no hope that partner can have 4 cover cards. With a 6 loser hand, invite to game using some sort of a game try bid. Partner will know you have a 6 loser count and if he has 3 cover cards, he will jump to game, otherwise he will return to your suit at the 3-level.

You are at 4♠ and West leads the ♠K. Plan your play.

N	North
♠	Q65
♥	A65
♦	Q73
♣	9654

East leads ♠K

S	South
♠	AKJ72
♥	KQ43
♦	65
♣	A2

Notice that North did provide 2 cover cards – The ♥A and the ♠Q. The queen is not normally a cover card, but when it is in the trump suit, it serves to solidify the trump situation and is counted as a cover card. You do not count the ♦Q as a cover card.

You want to count your losers. You have 2 diamond and 1 club loser, for sure. The spades are solid but the 4th heart might present a problem.

Since there are 5 spades outstanding you will need to pull them 3 times. However, if you do that first, you will have to depend on a 3-3 break in hearts to make your contract. That is only a 35% probability. If you don't pull trump at all, the defenders may ruff one of your top hearts. Here a compromise is called for. You must keep 1 spade in the dummy to trump the 4th heart if they do not break evenly. So, you can afford to pull exactly 2 rounds of trump. Remember to leave the ♠Q in the dummy so you cannot be overruffed by East if he is short of hearts.

You want to win the initial lead with your ♠A and turn to the trump immediately. You will find the hearts break 4-2, so your preserved ♠Q was required after all.

Look at the entire deal:

11	N	North	W	N	E	S
	♠	Q65				1♠
	♥	A65	P	2♠	P	4♠
	♦	Q73	P	P	P	
	♣	9654				
	W	West			E	East
	♠	104			♠	983
	♥	97			♥	J1082
	♦	10984			♦	AKJ2
	♣	KQJ103			♣	87
	S	South				
	♠	AKJ72				
	♥	KQ43				
	♦	65				
	♣	A2				
			4♠ S		NS: 0	EW: 0

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/yhkaqb4>, or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.

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