

♠♥♦♣ PLAYING THE ODDS ♠♥♦♣

You are vulnerable and were dealt this hand.

S	South
♠	AJ10864
♥	A9
♦	Q9
♣	K62

You were getting ready to open 1♠, but East, the dealer, opened with a preemptive 3♥. Rats! You could pass and miss out on a potential spade game; or overcall 3♠ and go down a bundle if partner is broke.

That's what preemptive openings do – they make life miserable for us. Even though you are vulnerable, you forge ahead and make the overcall. After all, you can add 2 points to your 14 HCP for length and add one more point for the quality spade suit. That's 17 points and should serve as some kind of a safety net.

West passes and unexpectedly, partner raises you to 4♠. West leads the ♥2 and you see this dummy:

N	North
♠	K93
♥	1083
♦	K863
♣	A94

West leads 2♥.

S	South
♠	AJ10864
♥	A9
♦	Q9
♣	K62


You have 1 loser in each of the 3 side suits. That means you can't afford a spade loser. How will you play this hand?

You win the lead with your ♥A. There's no reason not to pull trump, and you lay down the ♠A. This is always the preferred way to approach this type of holding, because there is a chance that the ♠Q will be singleton in someone's hand. Here, though, both play low spades. Now you lead the ♠4. West plays the ♠7. What should you play from the dummy?

If you were playing with no information, the odds of 4 outstanding cards breaking 2-2 are slightly better than the odds of the finesse working (eight ever – nine never). Therefore, the correct play would be the ♠K, expecting to see the ♠Q fall from East's hand.

However, you do have additional information. You know that East started with a 7-card heart suit. That changes the probabilities of the finesse. If East is long in hearts, he is short in the other suits. It's very probable that he started with a singleton spade. Your best chance is to insert the ♠9. It's not guaranteed, but you want to go with the probabilities and the bidding tells you that the probabilities favor West holding 3 spades to East's 1 spade.

Look at the entire deal:

	N North ♠ K93 ♥ 1083 ♦ K863 ♣ A94	W N E S 3♥ 3♣ P 4♠ P P P
	W West ♠ Q72 ♥ 2 ♦ AJ1075 ♣ Q1053	E East ♠ 5 ♥ KQJ7654 ♦ 42 ♣ J87
	S South ♠ AJ10864 ♥ A9 ♦ Q9 ♣ K62	4♠ S NS: 0 EW: 0

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

<http://tinyurl.com/y3jodujt>, 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.