

## Opening light - thought process

Today I will run through my thought process during a hand that should take into account some of the things we have learnt through all the other mini lessons. As you become more advanced you should be taking in more considerations in your bidding and play. A beginner will normally focus on counting their HCP and making simple but correct bids. In the play a beginner should be playing to basic principles. From there a player can build with more advanced bidding methods and play.

At the start of every hand you should:

- Note your vulnerability
- Note your position
- Count your HCP
- Evaluate your hand

Normally I decide if I have an opening hand first.

- HCP + length points = 13 then opening hand (beginner stops here)
- Advanced will adjust for shape, working honours, spot cards etc.
- Vulnerability (NV) allows you to open a little light
- Position (3rd seat) allows you to open a little light
- An opening hand opposite partners opening hand is very likely to be game on

If I do not have an opening hand I decide if I have a preemptive hand

- Do you have a good single suited or 2 suited hand to preempt with?

I will also prepare for likely opening bids my opponents will make. Remember an opening hand may need to pass after opponents open the bidding. Get ready for overcalls and takeout doubles you might have available.

As bidding progresses I am thinking if the hand belongs to us or the opponents and if game is still an option. I also want to compete and sacrifice as quickly as possible if I find a big fit with my partner and have a weak hand. I often like to bid if I can to get my shape and values off my chest, rather than being quiet and trying to bid out my hand late in the bidding.

The scenarios above are for deciding if you are opening a "little light". In third seat if no-one has bid yet, allows the opportunity to open **very light** (e.g. as little as balanced 8HCP). I do not recommend this for beginners as you will need a convention called drury to make this work - but feel free to discuss it with your partner if you want to try it out. Drury involves bidding 2C! over your partner's 1H/1S opener in 3rd seat, showing a fit and asking if they opened light (opener repeats their major to say they opened light). The other reason this works is your partner is a passed hand so you are able to pass whatever else they bid as game is out of the question. Generally if you open 1C/1D with third hand it will be closer to an opening hand and need to be able to handle all partners potential bids. This allows your side to come into the auction early and get one step ahead of the opponents. In third seat your **preempts can also be incredibly weak** especially at favourable vulnerability as partner will not be interested in game.

Dir: East  
Vul: N/S

♠ 7 6 3  
♥ K 7 6 2  
♦ K 7  
♣ A Q 8 7

♠ A K J 9 5 2  
♥ Q 8 5  
♦ A 6  
♣ 5 2

**NORTH**  
WEST  
2  
EAST  
**SOUTH**

♠ 8 4  
♥ J 10 4  
♦ 8 5 3 2  
♣ K 9 6 4

♠ Q 10  
♥ A 9 3  
♦ Q J 10 9 4  
♣ J 10 3

12  
14 4  
10

	♣	♦	♥	♠	N
N	2	2	1	-	-
S	2	2	1	-	-
E	-	-	-	3	1
W	-	-	-	3	1

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Board No 2 N/S Vul Dealer East									
Deal: Wednesday									
NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
1NS	1EW	3♠	W	♦K	8	50		9	1
2NS	3EW	2♠	W	♣A	9		140	0	10
3NS	5EW	2♠	W	♦K	8		110	4	6
4NS	2EW	2♠	W	♦K	8		110	4	6
5NS	4EW	3♠	W	♦K	8	50		9	1
6NS	6EW	1♠	W	♦K	8		110	4	6

From Wednesday (sitting south).  
VUL vs NV in second seat. Here I have 10 HCP and 1 length point = 11 total points. Not an opening hand on the surface. Nice intermediates, solid 5 card suit (positive) but “squishy” values and a flat hand (negative). This and my position and vulnerability are all telling me not to open and there is no preempt I want to make.

RHO passes, so I pass. LHO opens 1S, my partner makes a takeout double and RHO passes. I have a good hand for my pass, I do not have 4 card major or a stopper in spades, so my choice is between 2D and 3D. I now discount my QT of spades as they are in opponents 5 card suit likely not to be worth much. I could easily jump to 3D but my hand lacks controls and vulnerable makes me cautious. Partner was probably more interested in hearts with their double anyway so I need to cut them some slack with simple 2D.

West bids 2S and North and East both pass. This leaves me in the balancing seat now. The opponents were not interested in game and have stopped in 2S with West most likely having a 6 card suit. My partners double suggests they were fairly short in spades and they have not bid again so they do not love my diamonds and are not strong enough to bid again. My thought is they probably have a comfortably making contract in 2S which will be -110 if they make 8 tricks.

I am considering between passing and competing to 3D. I think 3D would be close to making on the right layout and would be hard for the opponents to double. My hand is also limited so my partner will not get excited. If we go off one that will be -100 and a better score. We may also make for +110. The big risk is they double and we go for -200. The opponents are in an awkward spot now and take the push to 3S which went down one.

East	South	West	North
Pass	<b>Pass</b>	1S	X
Pass	<b>2D</b>	2S	Pass
Pass	<b>3D</b>	3S	All Pass

Dir: South  
Vul: E/W

♠ 10 5  
♥ A Q 8 3  
♦ K 10 4  
♣ Q J 3 2

♠ J 7 2  
♥ 6  
♦ Q J 9 8 2  
♣ 10 8 7 5

**NORTH**  
WEST **19** EAST  
**SOUTH**

♠ A K Q 9 8 3  
♥ J 7 5 2  
♦ - -  
♣ K 6 4

♠ 6 4  
♥ K 10 9 4  
♦ A 7 6 5 3  
♣ A 9

12  
4 13  
11

♣♦♥♠N  
N 1 2 3 - 1  
S 1 2 3 - 1  
E - - - 2 -  
W - - - 2 -

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Board No 19 E/W Vul Dealer South									
Deal: Wednesday									
NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
1NS	3EW	4♠*	E	♣A	8	500		10.00	0.00
2NS	5EW	1♠	E	♣9	10		170	0.00	10.00
3NS	1EW	4♥	N	♠A	9		50	2.00	8.00
4NS	4EW	4♠	E	♥K	7	300		8.00	2.00
5NS	6EW	3♥	N	♠A	10	170		4.00	6.00
6NS	2EW	4♠	E	♣A	8	200		6.00	4.00

From Wednesday (sitting south). NV vs VUL in first seat. Here I have 11 HCP and 1 length point = 12 total points. Not an opening hand on the surface. Sharp values and some shape (positive) but all my honours are split (negative). Taking all this into account and being NV and no bad rebid problems I decide it is best to get in with an opening bid in first chair 1D.

LHO passes and partner bids 1H. RHO bids 1S. I have a fit with partner so I raise to 2H. West now raises their partner to 2S and partner doubles to show good values and interest in game. East passes and now my choices are 3H to decline game try or 4H to accept game try. I decide for another option of 3D to say I am somewhat interested in game and show my shape as I now have a full 13 points with my shortages included and my points are all working.

Partner accepts my invitation and bids 4H. East falls in love with their spade suit and goes on to 4S. I can now compete to 5H, pass or double. 5H would need a bigger fit and more shape. I do not have any spade tricks in defence or extra values I have not shown so I pass and leave it to partner, who doubles. If we can beat this 2 tricks VUL doubled we can pickup +500 which will be better than us making 4H. On this hand 4H would have likely gone down so we collect a big pickup with our confident bidding and punishing with a penalty double.

Note that East should have competed 3S immediately over the double would have made it harder for us to bid out our hands. This also left them feeling the need to re-bid their spades too late in the auction.

South	West	North	East
1D	Pass	1H	1S
2H	2S	X	Pass
3D	Pass	4H	4S
Pass	Pass	X	All Pass

Dir: East  
Vul: N/S

♠ J 9 8 3  
♥ A 9  
♦ Q 10 5 4 3  
♣ 8 6

♠ Q 10 5  
♥ 3  
♦ A K 9 8  
♣ K 9 7 5 3

NORTH  
WEST 18 EAST  
SOUTH

♠ 6 2  
♥ K 6 4 2  
♦ J 7 6 2  
♣ A Q J

♠ A K 7 4  
♥ Q J 10 8 7 5  
♦ - -  
♣ 10 4 2

7  
12 11  
10

♣♦♥♠N  
N - - 2 2 -  
S - - 2 2 -  
E 3 2 - - 2  
W 2 2 - - 2

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Board No 18 N/S Vul Dealer East									
Deal: Friday									
NS	EW	Bid	By	Ld	Tks	+Sc	-Sc	+	-
1A	4B	3♥	S	♦A	8		100	-4	+4
2A	3B	2♥	S	♣5	8	110		+5	-5
3A	2B	3♥	S	♦K	8		100	-5	+5
4A	1B	3♦	E	♠A	8	50		+4	-4
5A	13B	5♣*	W	♥A	9	300		+9	-9
6A	12B	3♥	S	♦A	9	140		+3	-3
7A	11B	1♥*	S	♦A	8	360		+7	-7
8A	10B	3♥	S	♦A	8		100	0	0

From Friday (sitting south). VUL vs NV in second seat. Here I have 10 HCP and 2 length points = 12 total points. Not an opening hand on the surface. Lovely shape with solid 6 card suit and sharp 4 card suit and void (positive) but has quite a few losers and vulnerable (negative). Could easily pass and come in later but I like the playing strength especially in a fit with partner and decide to open 1H.

LHO doubles and partner shows their spades. RHO bids 1NT and I now confirm our spade fit with 2S. LHO competes 3C and RHO raises to 4C. Partner has not shown extras and the opponents are bidding like they have a good club fit. I have 3 clubs so my partner is likely to be short in clubs and maybe we can make game, so I offer partner a choice of games with 4H.

Opponents take the push to 5C. I have nothing more to say, I have shown partner my shape and I only have 2 tricks at best on defence. So I pass knowing my partner can make the best decision, which was to double.

We came out with a good board, but upon analysis my bidding was not good and we should have been punished. 4H should be off 2 tricks on good defence and will be off one even on bad defence. In my analysis I decided opening the hand was okay and my 2S rebid was fine. However my partner had a chance to raise spades and didn't. Also the opponents were bidding strongly. It was very unlikely we were ever going to make game and pushing to a bad game at this vulnerability is poor form. I should have passed 4C for a decent result.

East	South	West	North
Pass	1H	X	1S
1NT	2S	3C	Pass
4C	4H	Pass	Pass
5C	Pass	Pass	X
All Pass			

## Playing hands - thought process

When playing hands it is often best to **count winners in NT** and **count losers in a trump** suit. Hopefully you have bid with the goal of making your contract so that should be your first priority, but getting overtricks is important as well especially if you are in an easy to reach (common) contract. If you have made a sacrifice you should also know how many tricks you can go down to have a good score. So now you know how many tricks you are aiming for.

1NT = 7 tricks

In NT count your top tricks you can cash. It will often only be about 3 tricks, this can be a hard contract for a lot of people as you will often have to tackle multiple suits to make your 7 tricks. You can lose up to 6 tricks here so do not be afraid to let the defence in. Try not to set up tricks for the defence by cashing top tricks at the start of play. Work on long suits but also try to work with the hand you are currently in. Take a finesse while you are in the correct hand and don't be afraid to allow defence to win their tricks early, it is often beneficial for them to be on lead. Often this will come down to final few tricks but hopefully you were able to set up some more winners to cash out.

2S = 8 tricks

Count your losers. You will have a lot of them but you can only have 5 losers to make your contract. Make a plan to get rid of your losers. Often that is ruffing loser or throwing them on winners that you may need to set up. The rule in trumps is draw trumps unless there is a reason not to. There are a lot of good reasons not to but if you don't have one you should be taking away defenders' trumps as a priority. Stick to your plan and hopefully you were able to account for enough of your losers to make.

3NT = 9 tricks

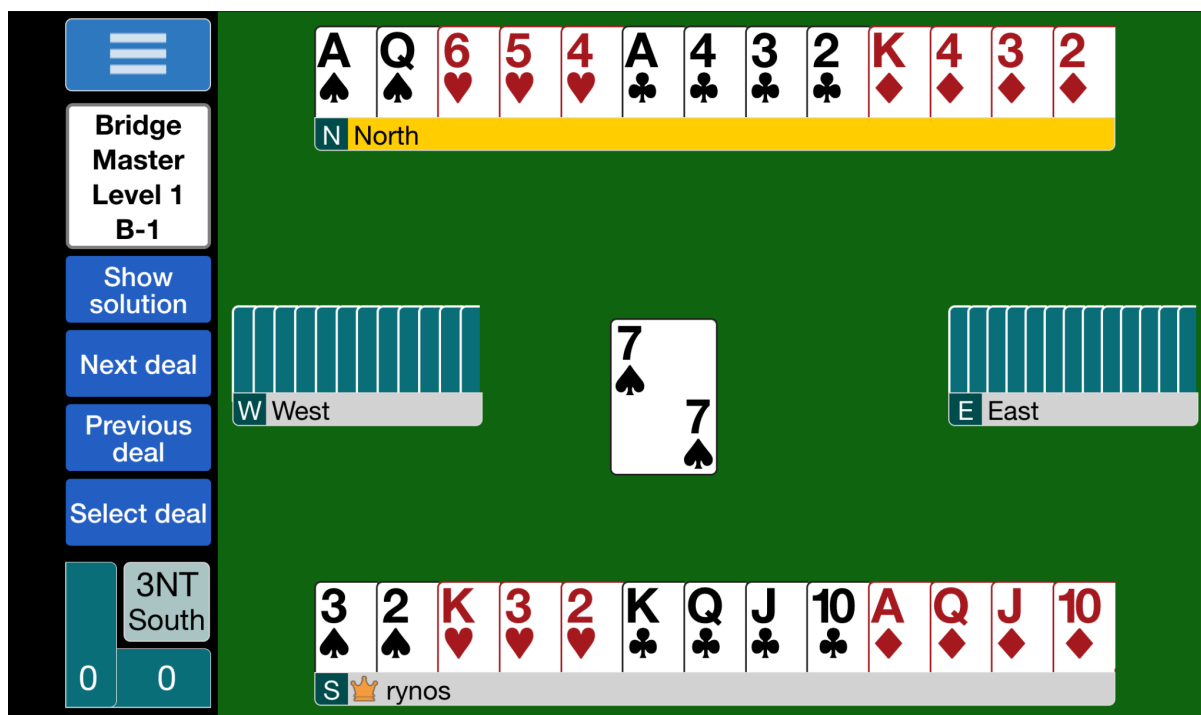
In NT count your top tricks you can cash. You will have limited time to setup your 9 winners. Often you will only have your top tricks and one side suit to setup before the defence is able to take 5 tricks. So you need to find your source of tricks quickly and set them up. If the opponents have a running suit you may need to block their communications. A hold up play is where you allow opponents to take one or two tricks in their suit first to block their communications. Entries and suit blockages may also be an issue for you.

4S = 10 tricks

Count your losers. You need to get this down to 3 losers and you need to come up with a plan that will get you there. You will often have several lines of play, where a finesse may be one option but there will be some other more advanced lines of play that increase your percentages. Just try your best but have a plan.

I highly recommend BBO Bridge Master. **BBO -> Practice -> Bridge Master**

Start from beginner A1 and work your way up. They will show you the bidding and then you will have the opening lead and dummy come down for you to declare. Bear in mind the defender's cards will change to punish you for incorrect play! Also note making your contract is the only goal, overtricks do not matter.



This is a deal from the beginner area. You are in 3NT and are trying to make your contract (overtricks not required).

In NT you start by counting your top cashable winners, suit by suit.

Spades = 1

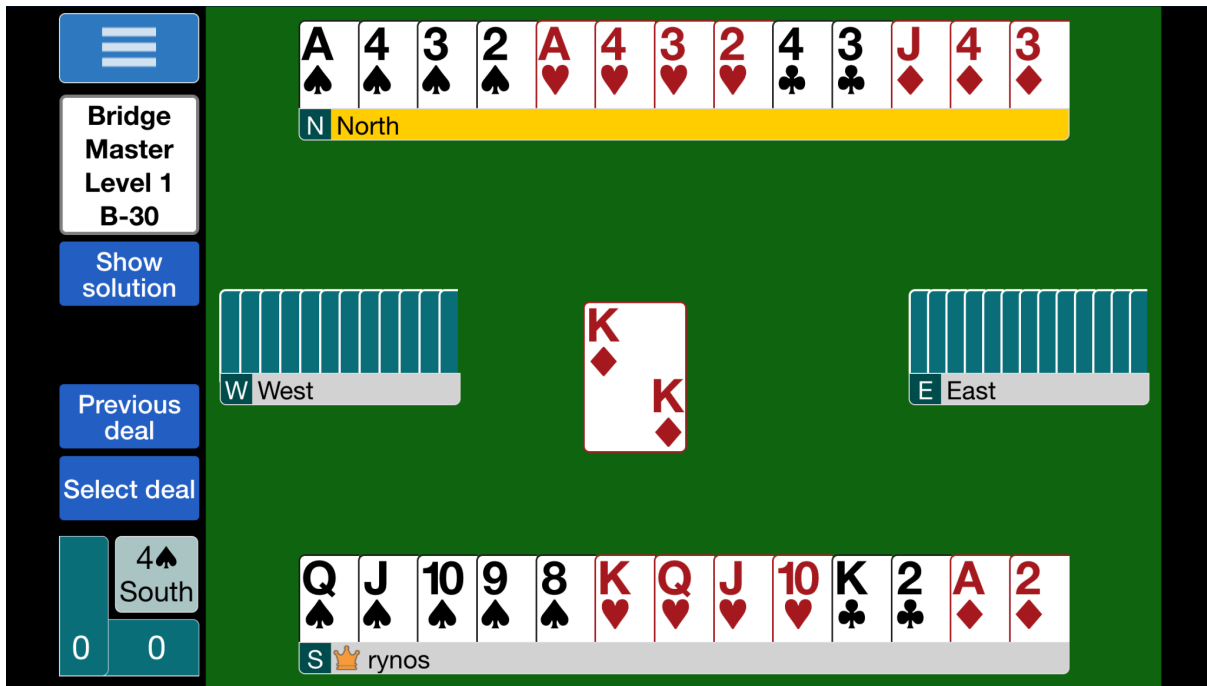
Hearts = 0

Clubs = 4

Diamonds = 4

**Total = 9 tricks**

You already have enough top tricks to make your contract. So you can go up with the ace of spades and make your contract if you want. The decision here is can you take the spade finesse to go for a bit extra? The answer is no, it looks like west has lead high from nothing so it is likely east will win and should know to switch to hearts. If the ace of hearts is with West you will likely have 4 or more heart losers plus the K of spades which will defeat your contract.



This is a trump game contact from the beginners area.

In trumps you start by counting your losers, suit by suit usually from the hand with the longer suit - but you can do it from either hand but often with equal length trumps it will be easier from the stronger of the two hands which is usually declarer's hand.

Here from declarer's hand counting any potential losers always assume worst case scenario. Kx is two losers because you cannot forcefully setup a trick but KQ is one loser because you can force out the ace to create a trick

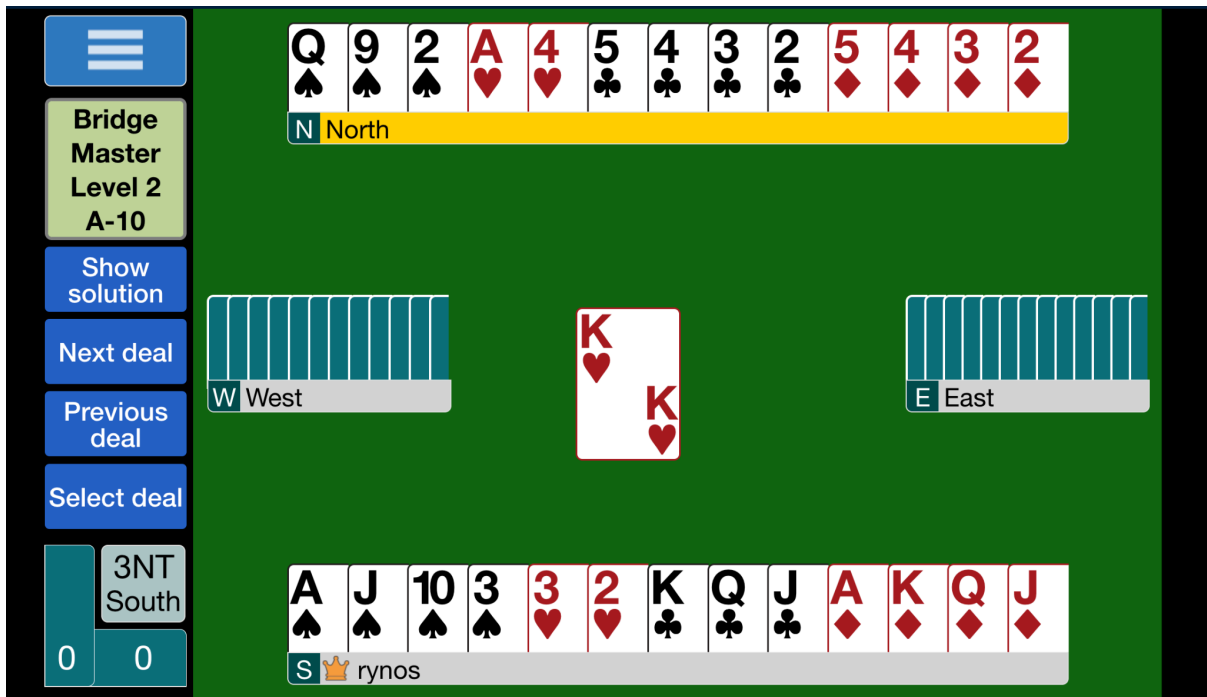
Spades = 1 loser  
 Hearts = 0 losers  
 Clubs = 2 losers  
 Diamonds = 1 loser

**Total = 4 losers**

To make the contact you need 10 tricks so you can only have 3 losers. Make a plan - what are some ways to get rid of the loser.

- Spade finesse may work
- Club finesse might work
- Diamond J might setup for a discard

Now you need to come up with the right sequence to take advantage of as many of these as possible. Drawing trumps is normally a good place to start but if that loses the opponents will be in a spot to cash out their winners. You should see the diamond J is likely to set up based on the opening lead. You need to set it up immediately by leading toward the Jx. If west takes their Ace they will be in the wrong hand to cash out their winners and cannot get to their partner's hand required for the club finesse. You will be able to win their return and immediately throw a club loser on the Jack of diamonds winner. Now you can draw trumps and make your contract as long as they do not ruff any of your winners.



Intermediate deals make you think about multiple or more complex problems on each deal.

In NT you start by counting your top cashable winners, suit by suit.

Spades = 1

Hearts = 1

Clubs = 0

Diamonds = 4

**Total = 6 tricks**

You are in 3NT which needs 9 tricks to make contract so you need to set up 3 more winners.

What is your potential source of tricks?

- Spades might offer 3 tricks if finesse works or 2 if it does not
- Clubs offers 2 tricks after the Ace is forced out, possibly a 3rd trick if they split 3-3 although it may be hard to find an entry to the winning club

The defenders have 9 hearts so if they ever get in they are going to take 4 hearts and beat the contract. That means we need the spade finesse to work to make this. The plan is to win Ace of hearts and finesse east for the King of spades. But there is another small issue, you will need to finesse multiple times and you have no more entries to dummy. So it takes careful play of the suit to keep the lead in dummy. First you must lead the 9 of spades (playing the 3 from hand) then the queen of spades (playing J or T from hand) then finally the 2 and taking final finesse.

If you led the Q first round you may run into trouble when east has Kxxx. If you drop the J or T under the queen then east can cover the 9 and you no longer have a 4th spade trick. If you drop the 3 under the queen you will be forced to overtake your 9 on the second round and will have no way back to take the finesse again.





Another game in suit contract to practise technique. Begin by counting losers from the long trump hand. Sometimes the bidding is important and will give you some helpful clues.

Spades = 1 loser  
 Hearts = 2 losers  
 Clubs = 0 losers  
 Diamonds = 2 loser  
**Total = 5 losers**

W	N	E	S
		Pass	2♠
Pass	4♠	Pass	Pass
Pass			

We need to take care of 2 losers to make our contract. So you should come up with some ways to do this.

- Spade finesse might work (also an option to play for singleton K offside)
- Heart lead might allow us to setup a heart trick
- In diamonds we can finesse A or Q with west
- In diamonds we could also potentially setup some diamond winners to throw losers

Now you should be combining your options to give you the best chance to make contract. You can start with the opening lead it is best to assume West did not underlead their ace so you should play them for QT9X and duck the heart in dummy. This does not work as east now wins Queen and cashes Ace of hearts and leads a club.

At this stage you should re-evaluate you can only allow one more loser and the ace of diamonds is an unavoidable loser so you need to have no other losers. The spade finesse is clearly a better play than trying to drop a singleton king, but we may need to finesse multiple times. We will also need to guess diamonds correctly, no time to set them up now. You finesse trumps starting with the Q and then low and that works. Now how to guess the diamonds? Important detail: east is passed hand so < 13HCP. They already have shown up with AQ hearts and K spades so they cannot have A diamonds as well. Finesse west to have the Ace (low to the king) and you will make your contract.