

10 What's going in Spades – 1

By Mike Lawrence

One of the beautiful moments in bridge comes when declarer is faced with a problem that he can solve. Take counting out a hand. When you learn that one player has five spades, three hearts, and four diamonds, then you know he has just one club. This is just one of the skills that players develop over time and each time one of these skills turns out to be helpful, it is a lovely moment.

Here is a hand that comes from the world of counting. Playing against a Two Over One pair, you have this auction.

West	North	East	South
1♠	P	2♠	3♦
All Pass			

You are South and you get to play the hand in 3♦.

West leads the ♠5, the suit that they have bid. These are the spades you can see.

	84	
5		A
	63	

Here are some questions that any counter will know to ask. If you routinely keep track of information, you should be able to answer these questions.

Who has the ♠A?

Who has the ♠K?

Who has the ♠Q?

Who has the ♠5?

Who has the ♠2?

How do the spades divide?

Most importantly, how can you tell?

Let's start with the ♠A. East just played it so this question is a gimme.

Who has the ♠K? The answer is that West has it. How can you tell?

The answer is that if East had the ace and king of spades, he would win the first trick with the king, not the ace. This is a standard technique for defenders. When they are playing third hand to a trick, if they have an honor sequence, they play the lowest card in their sequence.

With AK52, it is correct to play the king.

With KQ53, it is correct to play the queen.

With QJ1032, it is correct to play the ten.

The idea is that you want your partner to have a good idea of what your holding is. If, with the AK52, you take the first trick with the ace, your partner won't know that you have the king. Declarer might have it for all your partner knows. True, if you play the ace and continue with the king, he will know, but if you win the ace and shift to another suit, he will spend the rest of the hand wondering about that king of spades.

West has the ♠K because East's play of the ace denies having the king. This is a very strong clue since a defender wants more than anything to have an informed partner. Playing phony cards is a good way confuse your partner, and that is not what you want.

So, you know East has the ace because you saw it. You know West has the king because East's play at trick one denied it.

Who has the ♠Q?

Think about what West led. He led a little card. You know he has the king. What would he lead if he had the king and queen?

He would lead the king. West does not have the ♠Q. East has it.

Who has the ♠5? You can work this out on the information given. Turns out that West has the five. You know this because he led it.

Finally, I asked who has the ♠2. This is a real question which you can figure out.

Clue. Did you happen to notice the spade spots you started with in your hand and dummy? In case you do not remember them, here is what you saw at trick one.

	84	
5		A
	63	

One more thing you need to remember is the bidding.

West is known to have five spades. He led the five, which is his fourth best. This means he has three spades higher than the five and one spade lower. Your dummy has the four and you have the three. The only spade that West can have lower than the five is the two.

West has something like KJ952 and East has something like AQ107. West cannot have six spades for two reasons. First is that the spot cards tell you that West has five. The second reason is that if West had six spades, he would have bid over 3♦. This is human nature, almost as strong a clue and as there is.

Believe it or not, there is another important point you can learn from what you see at trick one.

East raised 1♠ to 2♠ with the AQ107 (or so) of spades. Then he passed when you bid 3♦, which was passed to him. East did not bid 3♠. He must have a really bad hand. Almost certainly he has something like this hand: AQ107, 543, 543, 543.

If East had a doubleton or if he had any extra values such as a jack or a queen, he might have bid 3♠.

You should be able to use this information in the play. Amazing how much you can learn if you know which questions to ask and how to use the answers.

Final test.

What was the bidding?

What spades did you see when dummy came down? By now you should have the answers.