

**Play Low, Score High  
by Roger Lord**

**Dealer: North  
Vul: None**

	<b>North</b>	
	♠ QJ62	
	♥ 108	
	♦ KQ93	
	♣ J102	
<b>West</b>		<b>East</b>
♠ 54		♠ 983
♥ KJ9542		♥ Q6
♦ 874		♦ A106
♣ 96		♣ KQ854
	<b>South</b>	
	♠ AK107	
	♥ A73	
	♦ J52	
	♣ A73	

<b>North</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>West</b>
Pass	Pass	1 Notrump	Pass
2 Clubs	Pass	2 Spades	Pass
3 Spades	Pass	4 Spades	All Pass

Contract: Four Spades

Opening Lead: Club Nine

The North-South pair had no problem reaching four spades. Both hands were textbook material for a 14+-17 HCP opening one notrump, a Stayman inquiry, an answer with a four-card spade suit, an invitational raise, and a game acceptance. How, then, could a pair who strive for a top gain an advantage?

The club nine opening lead was favorable for the defense. Declarer covered with the ten, East with the queen and South with the ace. After drawing trumps in three rounds, declarer went after diamonds.

East relied upon a count signal in diamonds, as West followed suit with the four (lowest) and then the eight (highest), signifying an odd number of cards, in this case three. South's diamond holding therefore was computed to three also, and East was alert to ducking the first and second rounds of diamonds, capturing the third with the ace, and leaving declarer with no quick entry to dummy's fourth diamond. East exited with the queen of hearts, South played low, and West carefully overtook with the king to lead the club six through dummy's J-2 into East's K-8, for down one.

The matchpoint result for North-South's minus 50 was a tie for zero. It would not have availed declarer to lead a fourth trump, crossing to dummy to cash the long diamond, because that would eliminate the separate ruffing trick.

However, South could have thwarted the defenders' attack on clubs at trick one by following with the three of clubs, allowing East's queen to hold! In the resulting position, East cannot effectively continue clubs without giving up a trick. Whatever else East returns, declarer will have time to draw trumps, knock out East's diamond ace, and concede a heart trick. At that point, with clubs still stopped, declarer can proceed to win a club return, ruff a heart entering dummy, and play the good diamond, discarding the seven of clubs.

The opening lead of the club nine, presumably top of nothing, tips off declarer to the location of the K-Q and allows him to figure out the winning maneuver.