

Process of Elimination  
By Roger Lord

Dealer: North  
Vul: none

**North**  
♠ J973  
♥ K84  
♦ AJ85  
♣ A7

**West**  
♠ ---  
♥ J1075  
♦ 1064  
♣ QJ8654

**East**  
♠ KQ  
♥ Q632  
♦ Q93  
♣ K932

**South**  
♠ A1086542  
♥ A9  
♦ K72  
♣ 10

North	East	South	West
1 Diamond	Pass	1 Spade	Pass
2 Spades	Pass	3 Hearts	Pass
4 Clubs	Pass	6 Spades	All Pass

Contract: Six Spades

Opening Lead: Club Queen

This deal occurred in a SLBC game. Cover the East-West cards.

North opened a sound one diamond, South responded one spade, and North raised to two spades. At this stage, South judged his hand to be worth a slam investigation.

South bid three hearts, an ambiguous action. To his partner, it meant either that South was inviting game (four spades), or that he was inviting a slam (six spades).

North's four clubs, a control bid, sent South a dual message—she was accepting the game try, and at the same time she was cooperating in advance in a possible slam try (in case South had that in mind). Now, South believed he held enough taking tricks, key cards, and information from partner to drive directly to the six spade slam.

As South, play six spades with the club queen opening lead. “Easy,” you say? With an 11-card trump fit, did you bang down the ace of trumps to find out whether the king and queen fall together? Both honors are in the East hand, creating one defensive trump trick. Then, did you play your diamond king and lead toward dummy, finessing the diamond jack? That loses to the guarded queen. Down one in a slam which originally had more than a 77% chance to succeed. Too bad—on to the next hand.

Not so fast! There is an additional chance which would succeed whenever the king and queen of spades belong to the East hand. At trick two, ruff dummy’s small club in the closed hand. Lay down the spade ace, noting that the suit breaks 0-2. Next, play the heart ace, a heart to the king, and the third heart, ruffing it.

Now, all you have to do is exit with a trump, which throws East on lead. Whatever East leads will give you the slam-going trick. A diamond will ride around to dummy’s ace-jack. And, because the side-suit elimination has been effected, either a club or a heart will yield a sluff-ruff—your hand sluffs a little diamond while dummy ruffs the suit led.

There’s a catch! Declarer must be aware of the “strip play” at the start. If a club is not ruffed at trick two, the entries will be insufficient to enact the elimination in time for the sure-trick throw-in. Try it and see.

