Playing set contracts commentary

Learners with very little experience of trick-taking card games will probably have taken a whole session on 'partnership whist' and will now spend a complete second session on the present topic.
Those with a little more experience may well have shortened the first topic and started on this topic in their first session - they may even have started on 'opening one of a suit' in session 1, and certainly have the option to do so now. The choice lies with you - the group leader.

On the first 2 boards the primary emphasis should be on the mechanics of dummy play
From hand 3 onwards a secondary emphasis should be on pausing and planning the play after the opening lead and dummy have been tabled - note that all 3 active players should be planning their play at this point.

In addition to the two main areas of emphasis above, subsidiary themes will be:-
introduce elementary scoring (20, 30, 40, -50) as appropriate during the session; discuss opening leads, leader's partner to encourage or discourage on the opening lead, and returning partner's suit, as the opportunities arise.

Hand 1
The contract is 1NT by North.
East will be on lead.
East does not have an obvious lead - any one of ♠K, ♥7, ♦2, or ♣4 can be justified.
♦2 is possibly the safest option.
Declarer should concentrate on setting up tricks in the majors before cashing tricks in the minors and may well come to 8 tricks.

Hand 2
The contract is 1NT by East.
South should lead the ♥K (top of a broken 3-card honours-sequence), and North will discourage with the 2.
Declarer should start by trying to set up a trick in clubs - small to the Jack.
8 tricks can be made, but it's not easy.

From Hand 3 onwards put a second emphasis on pausing and planning after the opening lead and dummy have been tabled - note that all 3 active players should be planning their play at this point.

Hand 3
The contract is 2♦ by South.
West should lead either ♠4 (4th highest in longest suit) or ♣J (top of a 3-card broken honours sequence).
Declarer's plan will be to clear the trumps then run the hearts.
9 tricks are there for the taking provided you take every opportunity to lead towards the ♣Q.
3♥ is also an excellent contract.

Hand 4
The contract is 2♣ by West (there are better contracts available).
North will lead ♦K.
8 tricks can be made by taking 2 small heart ruffs in hand and a spade finesse alongside the top winners.
Both diamonds and spades make 9 tricks.

Hand 5
The contract is 1♠ by North.
West will lead a diamond.
South should plan to take 2 rounds of trumps and then lead small to the ♥J.
Meanwhile EW will cash 2 clubs, 2 diamond, 1 heart and a spade to hold declarer to 7 tricks.

Note that EW can make 9 tricks in either Diamonds or no trumps.

Hand 6
The contract is 3NT by East.
South will lead ♠2 or ♣2. If clubs then North should encourage with the 8.
Declarer can count 9 top tricks, and the 4th card establishes in both red suits to make 11.

Hand 7
The contract is 3NT by South.
East will lead either ♦8 (2nd of nothing) or ♣3 (small to an honour) - ♦8 works better this time.
Declarer can count 2 spades, 3 hearts, 3 diamonds and 1 club for 9 tricks.
Running the red suits produces 2 further tricks provided that declarer can keep control of his entries.
Running the ♣T will lead to a twelfth trick in clubs.

Hand 8
The contract is 4♥ by West.
North is a bit stuck for a lead. I tend to lead a trump, but ♠4 would be a reasonable 'nothing' card.
Declarer should plan to play a small trump first and then take the Ace second, thereby retaining control whilst leaving two trumps in dummy. He should then aim to take 2 spade ruffs in dummy before cashing the clubs.
This line of play makes 10 tricks.

Hand 9
The contract is 3♣ by North.
East will lead ♦A, and will then switch probably to a small spade.
Declarer's best hope is to lead towards spades, finessing the 9, to create an entry for a trump finesse.
From North's hand alone the contract looks reasonable, but in conjunction with South's hand it is doomed.
The defence will take 2 spades, 1 heart and 2 diamonds leaving declarer with just 8 tricks. The good news is that EW can make 4♥ - perhaps it wasn't such a terrible contract.

Hand 10
The contract is 4♠ by East.
South will do well to avoid a heart lead. ♦J is safest.
Declarer can count 11 tricks - the Diamond split gives him a twelfth.

Hand 11
The contract is 4♥ by South.
The most effective lead is a spade, but in the absence of any other information ♣8 is more likely.
Declarer will plan to clear trumps, finesse in clubs, and then enter dummy with the ♦A to take the last club. If he is brave enough to play to the ♥9 on the second round of trumps having seen the ♥T fall he can make 11 tricks.

Hand 12
The contract is 3NT by West.
Most Norths will lead ♥5.
There are 12 tricks off the top when the clubs split.

Hand 13
The contract is 4♥ by North.
West's most likely lead is ♠J - a two-card honour sequence is sufficient against a trump contract.
Declarer will aim to clear trumps with Ace, then small to the Queen.
2 black suit ruffs in dummy will lead to 12 tricks. (6NT also makes, the 12th trick appearing by running ♣J towards the North hand.)

Hand 14
The contract is 4♥ by East.
South has a difficult choice of opening lead - I'm going with ♣5 - ♠T would not be unreasonable, but it doesn't work on the day.
East will aim to clear trumps whilst leading twice towards his diamonds.
The club finesse and a diamond ruff lead to 11 tricks.

Hand 15
The contract is 3NT by South.
East will probably lead ♠6 although as it happens it gives a trick away immediately. ♥8 works better on the day.
On a spade lead Declarer must play low in dummy, after which he can make 4 tricks in the suit.
A and Q of clubs followed by an early lead towards ♦9 will set up 10 tricks on the spade lead - 9 otherwise.

Hand 16
The contract is 3♣ by West.
North will probably lead ♦J. (Doubleton leads tend not to be great, but this looks like the best of a bad job.)
Declarer should lead a diamond at an early stage if North doesn't, with the aim of taking 2 ruffs in dummy.
Do not attack clubs too soon or North will take out 3 rounds and reduce you to one ruff. Then take as many rounds of trumps as you dare before setting up the hearts and running the spades.

Hand 17
The contract is 1NT by North.
East will lead a club or a heart - West should encourage with 7 on a club.
Declarer must duck the first club.
7 tricks can be made, but it's a bit of a scramble.

Hand 18
The contract is 5♦ by East.
South will probably lead ♥T.
Declarer will aim to clear trumps, play ♠A, and then set up the clubs.
The defence can take 2 aces and a club ruff if they get it right, but in practice this is fairly unlikely.
5♣ actually makes for which reason it pays NS to go 1 down in hearts or spades.