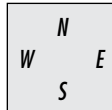


You are South, declarer in 3NT.

♠ 6 5 4
 ♥ A J 7 2
 ♦ 3 2
 ♣ A J 6 4



♠ A K Q
 ♥ 5 3
 ♦ A 9 5 4
 ♣ Q 5 3 2

West	North	East	South
pass	2♣	pass	1NT
pass	3NT	all pass	2♦

You have a balanced hand with 15 points, so you open 1NT. Partner has 10 points with four hearts and bids 2♣ (Stayman). You have no four-card major so you bid 2♦ to show that, and partner jumps to game in notrump.

West leads the ♦K. How do you plan to play the hand?

Analysis

This is a very thin 3NT despite the combined 25 HCP between your hand and dummy. You have no useful spot cards and not a five-card suit to be seen. It's good that you like a challenge! You start with six tricks — three in spades, one in hearts, one in diamonds and one in clubs.

There are no more tricks available in spades and the chances of developing an extra heart or diamond trick are remote. The only realistic source of extra tricks is the club suit. You need to take a total of four tricks in clubs. If West has the ♣K, you can finesse against it.

What is the best way to do it? Should you lead the ♣Q?

	♠ 6 5 4				
	♥ A J 7 2				
	♦ 3 2				
	♣ A J 6 4				
♠ 9 7 2	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ J 10 8 3
N					
W E					
S					
♥ 10 9 6 4		♥ K Q 8			
♦ K Q J 10		♦ 8 7 6			
♣ K 8		♣ 10 9 7			
	♠ A K Q				
	♥ 5 3				
	♦ A 9 5 4				
	♣ Q 5 3 2				

First, win the opening lead with the ♦A in your hand. You decide not to hold up the ♦A because a heart switch would not be welcome.

Think about what will happen if you lead the ♣Q. West will cover it with the king. You can take the ace and then the jack will take the next trick but the opponents will be left with the ten, which will be high. You will have used two honors to capture one! It is a no-win play.

Your only chance is that West has the doubleton ♣K. The correct line is to lead a small club from your hand and, if West plays low, finesse the jack from dummy. This wins and then you play the ♣A, felling the king! East follows suit so you now know that the suit is split 3-2. The queen then takes the third round and the opponents have no more, so you take four club tricks.

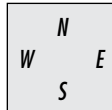
You were lucky that West had the doubleton ♣K, but that was your only hope. Sometimes dreams come true!

Key Point

In general, lead low for a finesse.

You are South, declarer in 3NT, your favorite contract.

♠ 4 2
 ♥ A 7 5
 ♦ A J 9 5 2
 ♣ K 8 6



♠ A K 10
 ♥ 4 2
 ♦ K 8 6
 ♣ A J 9 5 3

West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	all pass	1NT

You have a balanced hand with 15 HCP so you open 1NT. Partner, with 12 HCP and no four-card major, raises you to game.

West leads the ♥Q. How do you plan to take nine tricks?

Analysis

You have seven winners so you need to find two more. The diamond and club suits are possible sources of extra tricks. The queen is missing in both suits.

First of all you would like to exhaust one opponent of hearts, so you duck the opening lead. West continues with the ♥J which you also duck. East overtakes the ♥J with the ♥K and leads a third round of hearts, which you take in dummy with the ♥A, discarding the ♠10 from your hand. It seems that West led from a five-card suit and now East has no more hearts.

You now have a choice of finessing for the ♦Q or finessing for the ♣Q. Which finesse will you take?

	♠ 4 2				
	♥ A 7 5				
	♦ A J 9 5 2				
	♣ K 8 6				
♠ Q J 3 ♥ Q J 10 9 8 ♦ 4 3 ♣ Q 10 7	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ 9 8 7 6 5 ♥ K 6 3 ♦ Q 10 7 ♣ 4 2
N					
W E					
S					
	♠ A K 10				
	♥ 4 2				
	♦ K 8 6				
	♣ A J 9 5 3				

This is a deal where you need to recognize the ‘danger hand’ and try to avoid giving that hand the lead. West’s opening lead was a heart and it was probably from a five-card suit because East overtook the second round with the king to unblock the suit and then led a third round. If West has only four hearts you can afford to lose a trick to either hand, so assume the worst: West started with five hearts and has two winners ready to cash.

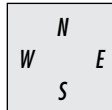
You must avoid taking a finesse that West could win, and so the way home is to finesse in diamonds, losing to East if necessary. So lead a small diamond to the ♦K in your hand then lead the ♦6 and play the ♦J from dummy. East will take a trick with the ♦Q but cannot hurt you because there is no choice but to lead a suit other than hearts. Fortunately, the diamonds are split 3-2 (which happens about two-thirds of the time), so you will take four diamond tricks, bringing your total to nine.

Key Point

Lose tricks to the safe hand.

You are South, declarer in 4♥ after a competitive auction.

♠ A J 7 6
 ♥ A 9 8 6
 ♦ 4 3
 ♣ K Q 6



♠ K 5 4
 ♥ K J 7 5 3
 ♦ A 9 5
 ♣ 10 7

West	North	East	South
3♦	dbl	pass	4♥
all pass			

West opens 3♦. This is a preemptive bid showing a hand with seven diamonds and less than an opening bid. Your partner doubles, showing a good opening hand with a shortage in diamonds and support for the other suits. You have close to an opening hand with five hearts, so you jump to 4♥, which becomes the final contract.

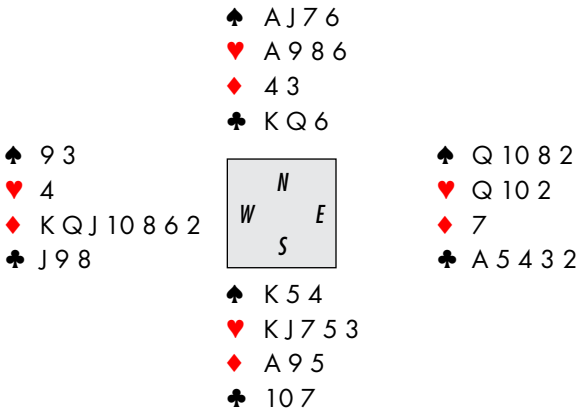
West leads the ♦K. How will you play the hand?

Analysis

You have one loser in spades, two in diamonds, one in clubs and a possible loser in hearts. One diamond loser can be ruffed in dummy so you would like to avoid losing a trick in trumps.

FIRST TRICKS

You win the ♦A in your hand, East following suit. There is no reason to postpone drawing trumps so you lead the ♥3 to the ace, both opponents following suit, and lead the ♥6 from dummy. East follows with the ten. Which card do you play from your hand — the king or the jack?



There is an old bridge adage: ‘eight ever, nine never’. This means that with eight cards missing the queen you should always finesse but with nine cards you should play for the drop. Playing for the drop here means cashing the ace and then the king hoping that the queen will fall. The ‘eight ever’ part is generally true but the ‘nine never’ is a big exaggeration. With nine cards missing the queen the odds slightly favor the drop, but it is still close to even money.

Here you know that West started with seven diamonds and East must have started with only one. So East has much more room for the ♥Q than West. Because of this you should assume that East has the ♥Q and play the jack from your hand. The jack wins and you then draw the queen with the king.

Now you can lead a club from your hand towards the king and queen in dummy. If West has the ace (very unlikely after the preempt), you can discard your spade loser on a club. That doesn’t work here, so try the spade finesse. Play the ♠K, then lead a small one towards dummy and insert the jack. This also fails here but you are still able to ruff a diamond in dummy and make ten tricks.

Key Point

In a suit with nine cards missing the queen it is usual to play the ace and king, but the odds change dramatically after an opponent preempts in another suit.

You are South, declarer in good old 3NT.

♠ Q 7
 ♥ A K 5 3 2
 ♦ 10 8 7
 ♣ 7 4 3



♠ A 3
 ♥ 6
 ♦ A K Q 6 5
 ♣ A 10 9 6 5

West	North	East	South
		pass	1♦
pass	1♥	pass	3♣
pass	3♦	pass	3NT
all pass			

You have a strong hand with both minors, so you open 1♦, the higher of two five-card suits. Partner responds with 1♥ and you jump to 3♣ to show your strength. Partner gives diamond preference by bidding 3♦. You have a spade stopper so you try for the nine-trick game instead of 5♦.

West leads the ♥Q. How do you plan to play the hand?

Analysis

You count your winners — one spade, two hearts, three diamonds and one club. If the diamonds split 3-2 your small diamonds will become winners, making a total of nine.

Are there any problems?

	♠ Q 7 ♥ A K 5 3 2 ♦ 10 8 7 ♣ 7 4 3				
♠ J 6 5 4 ♥ Q J 10 7 ♦ J 3 2 ♣ Q 2	<table border="1" style="margin: auto; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">N</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">W E</td></tr> <tr><td style="padding: 5px;">S</td></tr> </table>	N	W E	S	♠ K 10 9 8 2 ♥ 9 8 4 ♦ 9 4 ♣ K J 8
N					
W E					
S					
	♠ A 3 ♥ 6 ♦ A K Q 6 5 ♣ A 10 9 6 5				

You take the opening lead in dummy with the ♥A. The friendly split of the diamonds is your only real hope of making nine tricks. But if you play diamonds immediately you are doomed! You will no longer have access to the ♥K!

Once you realize there is a lack of entries to dummy, you will see that you have to cash the ♥K immediately and then start on the diamonds. They turn out to be friendly and you make your contract.

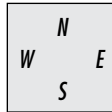
The chance of the 3-2 split when you hold eight cards in a suit is about 68%, which is a pretty good bet.

Key Point

Planning before you play to the first trick is vital.

You are East. South is declarer in 3NT.

♠ K Q J
 ♥ 5 2
 ♦ K J 9 4
 ♣ K J 9 2



♠ A 6
 ♥ Q J 10 4
 ♦ 10 8 6
 ♣ 10 8 7 6

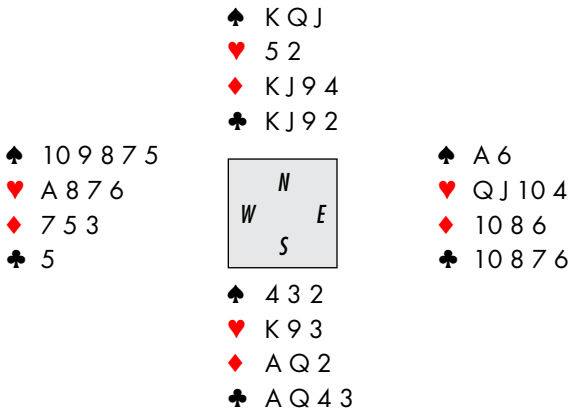
West	North	East	South
pass	3NT	pass all pass	1NT

Partner leads the ♠10. How do you plan the defense?

Analysis

A good thing to do as a defender is to count the high card points around the table. Declarer has 15-17 and dummy has 14, which is a lot. You have seven, so that does not leave much for partner. Partner has 2-4 points.

Declarer plays the ♠J from dummy and you take your ace. What should you do? Partners always like you to return their suit. Should you do that?



The chances of defeating this contract are slim, but don't give up. Where can you get four more tricks from? There is not a lot of point in returning spades because dummy has the king and queen left. Is there any chance in another suit?

The only faint hope lies in the heart suit. You have to hope that declarer has the king and partner has the ace. So you switch to the ♥Q (top of a sequence). Declarer ducks and so does partner of course, and you continue with the jack. Declarer ducks again in the hope that West was dealt only two or three hearts to the ace. No such luck. You lead a third round and your side takes two more heart tricks. Declarer loses the ♠A and four hearts, mutters incoherently and vows to take up Poker instead of Bridge!

Key Point

Defenders, as well as declarer, need to plan at Trick 1.