

play bridge

A section designed with the newer player in mind.

Life in Florida is interesting. For about half the year we have relatively empty highways, no lines in restaurants, but we do have hurricane threats and smaller bridge games. For the rest of the year we greet old friends, stay off the roads, eat at home and enjoy the most beautiful weather on the planet. At the club we look forward to our southern migration starting next month.

No matter what season it is, there are always bridge questions. One player came up to me last week with a common dilemma. "I was in 3NT and went down when other people made it." Or "I made my contract, but everyone else made overtricks." Of course I can assure them they were playing against superb defenders, but all too often they failed to pause at trick one.

It is amazing how many deals are successfully navigated by making the proper play at trick one. Did they win the trick when they should have ducked? Did they hold up when they should have won the trick? Did they win the trick in the wrong hand? Did they play the wrong card from the dummy?

Here's a recent deal that involves trick one and formulating your plan. You are in 3NT with an opening lead of the ♠5.

♠ A 4
♥ Q
♦ AKQ9762
♣ 853

♠ K 10 6
♥ KJ 10 9 7
♦ 5
♣ KJ 10 6

Where do you win the lead? What are you doing for tricks? What is your plan?

You might make a lot of tricks on this deal if diamonds divide. Sometimes you like to run a long suit to find out what the opponents discard. In this case, however, you also need to develop tricks in the heart suit. The diamonds will be there later. Besides, if you take the diamonds first, you will have some painful discards to make from your hand.

In order to take heart tricks, you need to save an entry to your hand. While it is tempting to let the spade come around to your ♠K, you must win the first trick in dummy. Next, play the ♥Q. If right-hand opponent plays low, you must overtake your own ♥Q with the ♥K to establish the suit (presuming the hearts divide 4-3 or the ♥8 appears). Sometimes the defenders also use the hold-up play.

Whoever has the ♥A should shift to clubs, but that is easier to see when you are looking at all four hands. If that person sleepily continues spades, you have nine tricks even if diamonds are not 3-2 and 12 tricks if they divide. If your right-hand opponent has the ♥A and returns a club, you need to make your best guess in that suit.

Here is another 3NT contract that requires a plan. LHO leads the ♠Q. Do you win the first trick or hold up? Do you go after clubs or diamonds first?

♠ 7 3 2
♥ K 10 4
♦ AJ 10
♣ QJ 6 3

♠ AK 8
♥ AQ 6
♦ 9 8 4 2
♣ K 10 2



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You should hold up on the first spade trick to try to sever their communications. You can develop nine tricks by playing clubs. This is a game of greed, however, and you would also like to get an extra trick from the diamond suit. It might be tempting to take the first diamond finesse while you are in your hand, but that is a sure way of setting yourself if the ♣A is on your left with the long spades. Save the diamonds for later and go about the business of promoting the club suit.

If left-hand opponent wins the ♣A and takes out your last spade stopper, you may take the diamond finesse into the safe hand. If RHO wins the ♣A, he may not have any more spades to lead because of your hold-up play at trick one. If he shifts to a heart, go for the overtricks now by leading diamonds from your hand. If LHO has either the ♦K or the ♦Q, you can get that precious extra trick by taking two finesses.

Good luck with your declarer play — just remember to pause before playing to trick one. □

Notes from ACBL Accredited Teachers