

HOW WOULD YOU PLAY? (1)

You are in 3NT, no opposition bidding, and receive the ♥10 lead.

♠ 6 4 3
♥ Q J
♦ A 7 5
♣ A 8 6 5 4

♠ A K
♥ A K
♦ K 9 8 6 2
♣ 9 7 3 2

You have seven top tricks, so need to work on one of the minor suits. What is your plan?

Are you thinking you should play the club suit first?

Are you thinking you should play on the diamond suit?

Are you trying to find a way to combine those options?

Interestingly, it is superior to test the diamond suit before the club suit. There are two reasons for this: (a) the percentages, (b) the ability to combine your options.

The heart lead will remove one of your two stoppers, given your unfortunate holding in the suit. Therefore, you need to find a line that can cope with losing the lead only once more; after that, the opponents have at least three more heart tricks to take.

Now, let's look at each minor suit.

You hold nine clubs, so the opponents have four cards in clubs. You need the clubs to break 2-2, since the opponents have the K-Q-J-10. The odds of a 2-2 break are 40.7%.

You hold eight cards in diamonds, needing the suit to break 3-2 to create the extra winners. The odds of a 3-2 break are 67.8%.

Most of the time, you don't need to know precise percentages. However, you should memorise this:

- *If you are missing an 'even' number of cards in the suit, they will break as evenly as possible (e.g. 2-2) less than 50% of the time.*
- *If you are missing an 'odd' number of cards in the suit, they will break as evenly as possible (e.g. 3-2) more than 50% of the time.*

Therefore, playing on diamonds is your better option.

On this hand, entries are not an issue so you should NOT duck a diamond. You must cash the ♦A and ♦K first. Should the suit break 4-1 and you ducked the first or second round, you will have no fall-back position. The heart return will lead to your early defeat.

If, instead, you can the top two diamonds and find a 4-1 break, you can revert to your second option – the anti-percentage chance of clubs breaking 2-2.

Of course, if diamonds prove to be 3-2, you continue by losing a diamond trick and establishing two additional winners in the suit.

If you played on clubs first, whether cashing the Ace or ducking a round, any 3-1 break will have beaten your contract, and you have no fall-back position because your second heart stopper has already been removed when you lost your club trick.

This next offering is more challenging:

♠ K 3 2
♥ 8 5
♦ 9 8 7 5 2
♣ A K 2

♠ Q J 6
♥ A K
♦ A 6 4 3
♣ Q 8 7 5

Once again you are playing in 3NT with no opposition bidding, and receive the lead of the ♥J. You have six top tricks, so need to find at least three more. How would you approach this hand, given you are now alert to percentages?

The diamond suit can provide those extra tricks, but that relies on a 2-2 break, only ~41%. However, the spade suit can only provide two additional tricks, though it is obviously a 100% option for those winners.

Once again, the opening lead has removed one of your two heart stoppers, so whatever line of play you opt for must only involve losing the lead once more.

Counter-intuitive as it is, your best line of play is to test the club suit first. You already have three winners in clubs but, should they break 3-3 (odds against, but 35.5%), you have one extra trick. If that is the case, you now need only two extra tricks, so you can play on spades and create your two extra winners, ensuring your nine tricks. On the other hand, if the clubs break 4-2 (or 5-1), you stop playing clubs and fall back on the diamond suit, hoping for a 2-2 break, since you need three additional winners.

Over the page are the two different hands you are allowing for. Try this play and see how it works:

Option 1

♠ K 3 2		
♥ 8 5		
♦ 9 8 7 5 2		
♣ A K 2		
♠ A 8 7 4		♠ 10 9 5
♥ J 10 9 6 4		♥ Q 7 3 2
♦ 10		♦ K Q J
♣ J 9 6		♣ 10 4 3
	♠ Q J 6	
	♥ A K	
	♦ A 6 4 3	
	♣ Q 8 7 5	

Once the clubs break 3-3, you play on spades.

Option 2

♠ K 3 2		
♥ 8 5		
♦ 9 8 7 5 2		
♣ A K 2		
♠ A 8 7 4		♠ 10 9 5
♥ J 10 9 6 4		♥ Q 7 3 2
♦ Q 10		♦ K J
♣ 4 3		♣ J 10 9 6
	♠ Q J 6	
	♥ A K	
	♦ A 6 4 3	
	♣ Q 8 7 5	

When the clubs prove to be 4-2, you change tack and play on diamonds. (The club trick that the opponents have is perfectly safe.)

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