

THE SUCKER PLAY

	♠ 6 3		
	♥ A 9 7 5 2		
	♦ J 9		
	♣ Q 10 9 2		
♠ A Q 7		♠ K J 10 9 5	
♥ K J 6 3		♥ Q 10 4	
♦ 10 6 3		♦ Q 8	
♣ J 7 4		♣ A K 5	
	♠ 8 4 2		
	♥ 8		
	♦ A K 7 5 4 2		
	♣ 8 6 3		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
	Pass	1NT (14-17)	Pass
3NT	All Pass		

South led the ♦5, which declarer won with the Queen (gratefully). She had 8 tricks now, so opted for the 'sucker play'. She led a spade to the Queen, then pulled a small heart from dummy. When North played low, she cashed her 9 tricks quickly!

Why did declarer choose to play this way? She realised that if South held the ♥A, she would win and cash however many diamonds she held, so her best chance was to lead through North's hoped-for ♥A.

North, however, should have worked out what was going on, winning the ♥A and returning a diamond.

When playing with Candice, against No Trump contracts we play a signalling method called "Smith Peters". When declarer has won trick 1, our card at trick 2 only indicates to partner whether we like our opening lead suit or not. Since we play natural carding, we use a high card to say, "Please continue the suit". If you play reverse signals, you can play a low card on declarer's lead at trick 2 to give the same message. Furthermore, either of us can use the signal.

Using the above hand as an example, South would play the ♠8, indicating that they love the diamond suit. North, if watching, would know to win the ♥A to return the diamond. (At the same time, North would play their smallest spade, the ♠3, showing no interest in diamonds.)

And – for my admission – I was North and failed to notice the ♠8 (!!) and also failed to win the ♥A.

There is another 'classic' sucker play when you are declarer in 3NT needing to establish an outside suit (by losing the lead) but holding a weak suit elsewhere.

If in dummy, at trick 2, lead your weak suit towards your hand. Your LHO will win the trick (unless you unfortunately find RHO with something like A-K-Q-x-x), but will not think to continue the suit.

Here's an example:

♠ 8 7 6
♥ K 8 4
♦ Q J 9 8 7
♣ K 4

♠ J 10 2
♥ A Q 2
♦ K 10 3
♣ A Q J 6 5

You are playing in 3NT and West leads a heart. You obviously need to knock out the ♦A, but you don't want a spade switch. You win with the ♥Q in hand, to leave West some hope that East may hold the Ace over dummy's King.

Cross to the ♣K and lead a spade, 'finessing' the 10. West is extremely unlikely to realise to continue spades. When you start working on the diamonds, you may get another heart continuation. It's worth trying!

Obviously, this is a play you can only execute irregularly. Otherwise, you will become known for the play and the opponents will learn to continue the suit. (Apart from that, you don't want too many people to see you do it or they may learn to practise against you.)

(There is one more hand on the next page.)

THE SAFETY PLAY

This hand comes from the Slava Cup, held in Moscow in February 2020.

	♠ A 3 2		
	♥ A Q 8 3		
	♦ A Q 6		
	♣ K J 8		
♠ Q 5		♠ K 10 8	
♥ J 10 6 5		♥ 9 7 2	
♦ K 5 4 2		♦ 10 3	
♣ 7 4 3		♣ A Q 9 6 2	
	♠ J 9 7 6 4		
	♥ K 4		
	♦ J 9 8 7		
	♣ 10 5		
<i>West</i>	<i>North</i>	<i>East</i>	<i>South</i>
Pass	2NT	Pass	3♥
Pass	3♠	Pass	3NT
Pass	4♠	All Pass	

Would you have chosen, as North did, to play in 4♠, or would you have preferred to play in 3NT with your 3-4-3-3 hand and no obviously weak suit? It's a close decision (though I may well choose to pass 3NT).

East led the ♦10 – Jack – 2 – winning. This resolved the diamond suit for declarer.

Declarer now led the ♠6 and ducked it to East's ♠8. A second diamond was ducked to declarer's Queen, and North now cashed the ♠A, then played the ♦A, ruffed. East returned a heart, but declarer was now in control. He won the heart in dummy, ruffed dummy's last diamond, then discarded a club on his two top hearts, losing just one club at the end, making 10 tricks.

This seemingly unusual play in spades was designed around keeping West from the lead. Declarer had two spade losers (unless doubleton ♠K-Q fell), so wanted to avoid two club losers.

You don't often see that sort of trump avoidance (safety) play!

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