

♠♥♦♣ A CLASSIC NOTRUMP PROBLEM ♠♥♦♣

It's two passes to you. You hold this hand:

S	South
♠	AK4
♥	A652
♦	QJ
♣	KQ32

You have 19 HCP and you almost have enough to open 2NT - but not really. The honor doubleton in diamonds is not doing its duty. This is worth a 1 or 2 point deduction. Your hand is worth more like a bad 18 points. This hand should be opened 1♣ with the intention of jumping to 2NT after partner responds.

West, your LHO overcalls 1♠ and partner passes, as does East. It's back to you. What is your call?

A reopening of 2NT would be wrong. Your partner is too weak to respond at the 2-level. If he responded 1NT, he would promise a spade stopper, so he has to pass. But, he knows that if you had only 12-14, you would pass. If you had 15-17, or 20-21, you would have opened 1NT or 2NT. Therefore, a 1NT bid in the balancing seat says you must have 18- 19 points.

Your partner now raises you to 3NT and West leads the ♠6. What's your plan?

N	North
♠	92
♥	K83
♦	109762
♣	A74

East leads ♠6

S	South
♠	AK4
♥	A652
♦	QJ
♣	KQ32

You have 7 top tricks; 2 spades, 2 hearts and 3 clubs. You must find 2 more. If both the clubs and hearts break 3-3 you can get an extra trick from each

suit. But the probability of that happening is infinitesimal. Your only chance in to get the extra tricks from diamonds.

You put up the ♠9 and East plays the ♠J. Do you duck this trick or win it and go about setting up the diamonds? If you win this trick and the top diamond honors are split, East will have another spade to clear the suit when he wins the first diamond lead. Then West will win the next diamond and have clear sailing to run his spades. But if you duck the first spade, East may have to use his last spade to return his partner's lead, and will have no spades left when he wins the diamond lead. This gives you the tempo to get to the dummy for the extra diamond tricks.

When you have two top cards in a suit outstanding, it is usually a good idea to duck the first lead once.

Look at the entire deal:

D 5	N North ♠ 92 ♥ K83 ♦ 109762 ♣ A74	W N E S P P 1♣ 1♠ P P 1NT P 3NT P P P
	W West ♠ Q107653 ♥ J74 ♦ A5 ♣ 95	E East ♠ J8 ♥ Q109 ♦ K843 ♣ J1086
	S South ♠ AK4 ♥ A652 ♦ QJ ♣ KQ32	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

You can see how this hand should be played by clicking on this link:

<https://tinyurl.com/y287zj8r> or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own.