

A DIFFICULT 3NT CONTRACT

East is the dealer and he passes to you:

South
 ♠ A862
 ♥ K63
 ♦ Q872
 ♣ 104

You have 9 balanced points. You are in the second position and in that position, your bids should be disciplined. One of your opponents has already passed, so you have an equal shot of misleading your partner or your LHO. You pass and West also passes. Your partner opens 1NT and East overcalls 2♠. You were planning to use Stayman to see if your partner held 4 spades, but you now have no intention in playing in a spade contract. You invite with 2NT, showing 8 or 9 points and a spade stopper. Partner raises you to 3NT.

West	North	East	South
Pass	1NT	Pass	Pass
Pass	3NT	2♠	2NT
		All Pass	

Take the North hand and see if you can figure out a way to take 9 tricks:

North ♠ 974 ♥ Q104 ♦ KJ ♣ AKQ73	East ♠K
South ♠ A862 ♥ K63 ♦ Q872 ♣ 104	

You start by counting your sure tricks. You have 4 top tricks: the ♠A and the three top clubs. The opponents have started off in your vulnerable suit, of course. Where are you going to find 5 more tricks? The club suit offers potential. If they break 3-3, you get 2 more tricks in that suit. The probability of a 3-3 break is only 36%, but even with a 4-2 split (49%), you get one more trick. Once you knock out the red suit aces, you get 3 or 4 more tricks. Even though your diamond and heart suits are short, they do contain a total of 6 honor cards.

The big problem is that East has a slew of spades and when he regains the lead, he will set the contract with at least 4 more top spades. Your only hope is that the outstanding aces are in West and he will have no more spades to lead back.

Your first decision is what to do with the ♠K? You must take it with the ♠A right now. There is no sense in holding up. If West has more than 1 spade, then East will have started with less

than five spades and the spade attack will be short lived. The Rule of 7 helps you calculate the number of times to hold up. If the lead is standard 4th best, then you subtract the total number of spades you have from 7. The difference is the number of times to hold up. You have 7 spades, and $7-7=0$. The rule says you don't hold up at all. A more important reason not to hold up is you need the dummy's spades to discard on your long clubs. You must keep the length in dummy's red suits.

After winning the ♠A, lead a club to the ♣AKQ. East discards on the third club. That means you can only get one extra club trick. You play the fourth club to West to set up your fifth club. West, of course has no spades so he leads the ♥J. You pray he is leading from ♥AJ and you put up the ♥Q from your hand. You might need to keep the ♥K in the dummy to get to the longer diamonds.

The ♥Q holds and you now shift to the diamond suit. You lead the ♦K which is ducked all around. You next lead the ♦J and overtake with dummy's ♦Q. You do this so you can continue leading diamonds if West ducks the second diamond. West, however, wins the ♦A. The best he can do is take his ♦9 and ♥A. He then must lead either a heart or diamond into the dummy's higher cards.

You have magically taken 1 spade, 2 hearts, 2 diamonds and 4 clubs: 9 in all. And with only 24 HCP. I've tried playing this hand several other ways and they all lead to defeat. Try it yourself.

Here is the entire hand:

<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">14^D</div>	N North ♠ 974 ♥ Q104 ♦ KJ ♣ AKQ73	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>W</th> <th>N</th> <th>E</th> <th>S</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td>P</td> <td>P</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>1NT</td> <td>2♠</td> <td>2NT</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td>3NT</td> <td>P</td> <td>P</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P</td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	W	N	E	S			P	P	P	1NT	2♠	2NT	P	3NT	P	P	P			
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W West ♠ 5 ♥ AJ8 ♦ A9643 ♣ 9852		E East ♠ KQJ103 ♥ 9752 ♦ 105 ♣ J6																				
	S South ♠ A862 ♥ K63 ♦ Q872 ♣ 104	3NT N NS: 0 EW: 0																				

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

<http://tinyurl.com/zj47rbf>, 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.