

MAXIMIZING TRICKS IN NOTRUMP

S	South
♠	J108
♥	AQ96
♦	AQ52
♣	AQ

You are the dealer with this balanced hand. It has 19 HCP and is too strong for a 1NT opening and too weak for 2NT. You open 1♦ and jump to 2NT over partner's 1♠ response. This shows a balanced hand of 18-19 points. Partner raises to 3NT, which becomes the final contract.

West leads the ♥10. What is your plan?

N	North
♠	Q932
♥	KJ
♦	4
♣	1087543

West leads ♥10

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♥	AQ96
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♣	AQ

In a notrump contract, you must start by counting top tricks – tricks you can take without losing the lead. You have 4 hearts, 1 diamond and 1 club. You need to find 3 more tricks.

You can promote 2 more tricks by forcing out the top two spades and you can try the two minor suit finesses. There is another approach: developing dummy's long club suit. For this to succeed, you need to keep an entry to access the clubs once the suit is set up; and you will need the suit to break in the normal 3=2.

Win the opening lead in the dummy and lead a club to your ♣Q. This succeeds. Now play the ♣A. Both opponents follow to these two club tricks, but the ♣K is still outstanding. You can get back to the dummy to force out the club king using dummy's remaining heart; but you will need another entry to get back to the dummy to enjoy them. That entry must be the ♠Q.

East will win the first spade trick with the ♠K. The probability is high that West will hold with ♠A. Win East's return and lead up to the ♠Q. If West is sharp, he will win the ♠A on the second spade. If he rises on the first spade he will crash with East's singleton ♠K; if he ducks the second spade, you will access the dummy's clubs and be able to discard all your remaining spades and take 11 tricks in all. If West plays his ace on the second trick, they will take 3 tricks; you making 4NT.

This is the entire deal:

15 D	N North	W N E S
	♠ Q932 ♥ KJ ♦ 4 ♣ 1087543	P 1♠ P 2NT P 3NT P P P
W West		E East
♠ A7654 ♥ 108 ♦ 8763 ♣ 62		♠ K ♥ 75432 ♦ KJ109 ♣ KJ9
	S South	
	♠ J108 ♥ AQ96 ♦ AQ52 ♣ AQ	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

Notice that if West had led a diamond initially and kept leading diamonds each time they got in the lead, they could have held you to 9 tricks.

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

<http://tinyurl.com/y8urgxos> , 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.