

♠♥♦♣ THE DUCKING DECISION ♠♥♦♣

East deals and passes. You have 16 HCP and a balanced hand. 1NT is the obvious opening bid.

S	South
♠	A73
♥	A104
♦	J82
♣	AQJ10

Your partner raises you to 3NT, which ends the auction. West leads the ♥3 and the dummy comes down:

N	North
♠	J4
♥	82
♦	AQ10976
♣	K54

West leads ♥3

S	South
♠	A73
♥	A104
♦	J82
♣	AQJ10

Time to start planning your play. You first want to count your top winners. You have 1 spade, 1 heart 1 diamond and 4 clubs. You need 2 more tricks. These will come from the diamond suit On first look there doesn't seem to be any problem. The diamonds can produce 5 extra tricks if the ♦K is on side. If the ♦K is in East, you still have 4 more diamond tricks.

The problem is that you've used your one heart stopper in order to take the diamond finesse. When East wins the ♦K, he will clear the heart suit.

Your first decision is whether or not to duck the heart lead. Yes or No?

The reason you duck the opening lead in notrump, is to allow one of the defenders to use up all his cards in that led suit (hearts). So, when he later takes the lead (like winning the $\heartsuit K$) he will have no more hearts to lead back. This is based on the the leader have 5 or 6 hearts. But you should know that this is not the case, here. The standard lead of the 3 assures you that West started with only 4 hearts. You can see the $\heartsuit 2$ in the dummy, so when West led the 4th card down, he was leading the bottom of a 4-card suit. Furthermore, if West started with 4 hearts, then East also started with 4 hearts. There is no sense in holding up on this first trick. One, you cannot void East of hearts because he as more hearts than you have. Secondly, the opponents can only take a total of three hearts. These tricks along with the $\heartsuit K$, cannot set a 3NT contract. Lastly, if you hold up, East can switch to spades, knocking out your spade honor. When he regains the lead, he can take 3 spades to add to his 1 heart and the $\heartsuit K$, setting the contract.

Therefore, win the first heart trick and take the diamond fineese, With the lay of the cards in this deal, East will win, but the best he can do, is take 3 more heart tricks and let you back in with the spade shift.

This is the full deal:

14 \heartsuit	N North	W	N	E	S
	\spadesuit J4 \heartsuit 82 \heartsuit AQ10976 \clubsuit K54			P	1NT
W West				P	3NT
\spadesuit 8652 \heartsuit Q763 \heartsuit 43 \clubsuit 972				P	
	E East				
	\spadesuit KQ109 \heartsuit KJ95 \heartsuit K5 \clubsuit 863				
	S South				
	\spadesuit A73 \heartsuit A104 \heartsuit J82 \clubsuit AQJ10				
					3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

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

<https://tinyurl.com/yx4ct8q>, 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.