

THINK BEFORE YOU LEAP

You pick up this hand as South and open 1NT. The auction is short and sweet: 1NT – 3NT. West leads the ♠J and you see this dummy.

	North	
	♠Q42	
	♥653	
	♦AQ1096	
	♣K6	
West		East
♦A		
	South	
	♠A6	
	♥AK7	
	♦J832	
	♣A875	

With 11 HCP and no 4-card major, North is correct in ignoring the long diamond suit and just jumping into the 9-trick game.

As usual, you count the top tricks; the tricks you can take without giving up the lead. There is 1 spade, 2 hearts, 1 diamond and 1 club. You need 4 more tricks for your contract. These can come from diamonds, even if the ♦K is off side. Now that you seem to have things wrapped up, it's time to stop and think: What can go wrong?

Of course the spade suit can give the opponents the opportunity of taking 4 tricks plus the ♦K. How should you play on the first trick?

If you put up the ♠Q, East may play the ♠K and your only spade stopper will be used up. By the way, before you play, you should ask what the opponents lead conventions are. Many who lead the jack deny any card higher. That's called "Jack Denies". In that case the ♠K is certainly in the East hand.

What you must do is play low from the dummy and take the trick in your hand with the ♠A. Now you can use the ♠Q as a second stopper if East leads another spade. Since the diamond finesse will be into the East hand, West will not get the lead where he could send another spade through dummy's ♠Q.

Playing too quickly and rising with the ♠Q hoping for an extra trick is foolhardy. Even if West lead from the ♠KJ109(x), you can always make the ♠Q good by leading up to it later.

This is the complete board:

11 D	N North	W N E S
	♠ Q42 ♥ 653 ♦ AQ1096 ♣ K6	P 3NT P 1NT P P
W West		E East
♠ J108 ♥ Q82 ♦ 54 ♣ J9432		♠ K9753 ♥ J1094 ♦ K7 ♣ Q10
	S South	
	♠ A6 ♥ AK7 ♦ J832 ♣ A875	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

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

<http://tinyurl.com/mmnahwc> . 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.