

WHICH WAY TO TURN

You are sitting in the South seat and reach a 3NT contract with a straight forward auction:

West	North	East	South
Pass	3NT	All Pass	1NT

West leads ♥4. You see this dummy:

	North	
	♠62	
	♥72	
	♦AKJ10943	
	♣85	
West		East
♥4		♥J
	South	
	♠K54	
	♥AK5	
	♦762	
	♣AK74	

What would be your plan? Specifically, what are you going to do about the opening lead? Once you get the lead, what suit will you lead? What if West shows out on the first diamond lead?

North was correct to respond 3NT. With a long, powerful diamond suit, no singleton or void, and insufficient point count to think of slam, a simple game raise is the best bid.

Of course, the first thing you do is pause to count top tricks. The lead of the heart gives you 2 heart tricks, 2 diamond tricks and 2 club tricks. You need three more tricks which can easily come from the diamond suit.

If the heart suit is breaking 4-4, they get only 2 heart tricks which can't harm you. If it's breaking 5-3, it seems best to duck the first trick. Then you will win the next 2 heart tricks and by that time, East will be out of hearts and can't lead them back if he wins the lead. But what if East wins the first trick and switches to a spade through your ♠K? Not good!

You don't want to duck that first trick but instead win it. But with which honor? Not with the ♥A. Win with the ♥K. If you win the ♥A, it will be obvious you are strong in hearts. The play of the ♥K keeps the location of the ♥A ambiguous to East.

There are only three outstanding diamonds and so you lead up to the dummy's diamonds, expecting to claim. But West shows out. Now you must change your plan and play the ♥9, letting East take his ♥Q. If you take the ♦AK and lose a diamond, you will have no way to reach the remaining diamonds. If East returns his partner's lead you can claim 10 tricks. And East might just do that. West could have started with ♥AQ10xx, and a heart lead will allow West to clear the heart suit and set the contract.

This is the complete board:

11 D	N North	W N E S
	♠ 62 ♥ 72 ♦ AKJ10943 ♣ 85	P 3NT P P P
W West	E East	
♠ AJ83 ♥ Q10843 ♦ ♣ J962	♠ Q1097 ♥ J96 ♦ Q85 ♣ Q103	
	S South	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0
	♠ K54 ♥ AK5 ♦ 762 ♣ AK74	

As you can see, West wants East to return a spade. A heart return is the wrong move; a spade shift will set the contract. But how does East know this when he wins the ♦Q on the second trick?

Because West tells East with his discard on the first diamond lead. West knows that South started with the ♥AK; otherwise, East wouldn't have played the ♥J on that first trick (he plays as high as necessary to win the trick). West must discard a heart at trick 2, telling his partner to switch. And a thoughtful West will drop the ♥Q (or the ♥10), the unnecessarily high card being a suit-preference signal for spades.

You can see how this hand should be played by the defenders by clicking on this link: <http://tinyurl.com/n7ifzgg>. Or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick.