

## THE FIRST TRICK CRITICAL PLAY

You are sitting in the South and after your RHO passes, you open this hand 1♦.

South  
 ♠ A75  
 ♥ K105  
 ♦ A10985  
 ♣ J3

It only has 12 HCP's but it does have two quick tricks. It also meets the Rule of 20. This is a test for an opening hand where you add your HCP to the length of the two longest suits. If they equal 20 or more, then you open.

Your partner responds 1♥ and it comes back to you. The opponents are silent for a change!

You have only 3 hearts. Raising on three cards is okay provided you have a singleton or void in your hand. Since this hand is balanced, rebidding 1NT is appropriate. Your partner raises you to 3NT, which becomes the ultimate contract. West leads the ♣6. How do you go about making this contract?

	North		
	♠ 64		
	♥ AQ97		
	♦ K63		
	♣ A1042		
West		East	
♣ 6			
	South		
	♠ A75		
	♥ K105		
	♦ A10985		
	♣ J3		

West	North	East	South
		Pass	1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	1NT
Pass	3NT	All Pass	

Your opponents are using standard leads against notrump contracts. You can assume the ♣6 is fourth best from his longest suit. You are thankful that the lead wasn't a spade, your most vulnerable suit. You have your work cut out for you.

You start out, as usual, with counting top tricks. You have 1 spade, 3 hearts, 2 diamonds and 1 club trick. You need 2 more tricks and they will have to come from diamonds. You plan to finesse against the  $\heartsuit JQ$ . If one of these are successful, you will have your two extra tricks.

What do you play on the first trick? There is a lot to be said about playing low from the dummy and finessing against the  $\clubsuit KQ$ . Your  $\clubsuit J$  gives you a double stopper with the  $\clubsuit A10$  sitting in the dummy. If East does have either honor and wins the trick, do you think he will return a club? Not with the  $\clubsuit A10$  sitting over his partner's honor or honors. He will look at the low doubleton spade in the dummy and switch to spades. This can lead to defeat. He must disguise his strength in clubs and play the  $\clubsuit A$  on that first trick. Now when he loses one of the diamond finesses, the defenders will sense vulnerability in clubs and return to that suit where your  $\clubsuit 10$  will provide the stopper.

After you win the  $\clubsuit A$ , you lead the  $\heartsuit K$ , intending next to lead a low diamond, inserting the  $\heartsuit 8$  from your hand. But West plays the  $\heartsuit J$  under your initial  $\heartsuit K$  lead. You go back to the dummy in hearts and play another diamond. Should you play West for the  $\heartsuit Q$  and a 3-2 break, thus playing your  $\heartsuit A$ ; or should you play for the 4-1 break and repeat the finesse? Even though a 3-2 break is slightly more probable, the probability that the queen and jack are not in the same hand is much more probable. The finesse works and you take 11 tricks.

This is the entire hand:

14	D	N North	W N E S
		♠ 64 ♥ AQ97 ♦ K63 ♣ A1042	P P P P 1♥ P 1NT 3NT P P
W West		E East	
♠ KJ108 ♥ 432 ♦ J ♣ Q9865		♠ Q932 ♥ J86 ♦ Q742 ♣ K7	
		S South	
		♠ A75 ♥ K105 ♦ A10985 ♣ J3	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

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

<http://tinyurl.com/oad32ol> . 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.