

Improve your bridge with me

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Experience is the mother of wisdom. No, I am not going to bore you with a list of proverbs, I only meant to remark on how incredibly useful, experience can be in our game. We all make mistakes and quite a few of them will be based simply on lack of knowledge: we did not know that we should not underlead our aces or that it is unwise not to duck the lead in a NT contract where we only have Axx facing xx. Next time we will know and we will avoid that mistake (or not!). Believe me, all the great players have had to start somewhere. All of them will have sat down sometime in their life wondering about this new “finessing” play they had just learnt: the difference is that they grasped it quickly and progressed to solve more difficult problems. What is their secret? Simple, beside their talent, they were eager to learn from their mistakes. We should all remember that and make sure that our blunders, far from discouraging us, become the springboard from which to raise the level of our game.

Pairs None Vul N Dealer
You hold:

♠ AJ2
♥ K83
♦ J108652
♣ 8

Your partner in North opens 1♣ and after East passes, you reply 1♦ to which your partner rebids 1♥.

What do you bid now?

There are really only two possibilities: 2♦ and 1NT (2♥ would be a very remote third option). Despite showing the stop in the unbid suit 1NT would greatly misrepresent our shape so 2D is certainly best.

Your partner continues with 2♠.

What do you bid now?

Partner's use of fourth suit forcing when we have clearly limited our hand to 6-9 points with our 2♦ rebid means that he has a strong hand, and that he is still

interested in game. Since we have nearly a maximum for our 2♦ bid and a very good stop in spades, we should bid 3NT.

Let us recap the bidding:

West	North	East	South
	1♣	Pass	1♦
Pass	1♥	Pass	2♦
Pass	2♠	Pass	3NT
Pass	Pass	Pass	

West leads the ♠9 and dummy hits the table:

♠ K74
♥ A1074
♦ A
♣ AQ943



♠ AJ2
♥ K83
♦ J108652
♣ 8

What is the first thing we shall do?

Since we are in a NT contract we shall try to count our winners.

How many winners do we have?

Seven after the spade lead: three in spades, two in hearts and one each in the other suits.

Where can we find the two remaining tricks we need?

We can either set up the clubs by finessing the ♠K and hoping that they split 4-3 or we can try to make good the diamonds in hand, which should work if diamonds split 4-2 (with a doubleton honor) or 3-3. The second option gives by far the best chances but there are great communications problems, since we need to come back to hand three times before we can finally enjoy the tricks we set up and we can only count on two more entries after we win the first spade in hand: a spade and a heart.

How can we solve this dearth of communications?

First we must ask our opponents if they have any special agreement when they lead the 9 of a suit. Some people play that such a card promises two higher cards, some play that it denies any higher card. It is always very important to obtain such information as well as asking about carding methods at trick one, before we start making our plan. You might very well be surprised to learn that in many contracts the extra knowledge we can gather from these questions can often mean the difference between making and going off. Anyway, assuming that our opponents do not have any special agreement on the lead, we can safely gather that the ♠Q is very likely with East. This means that if we rise immediately with the ♠K, we can now unblock the ♦A and enjoy a second spade entry to hand, which is all we need for our plan.

As agreed, we take the ♠K, play the ♦A (to which both opponents reply with a small diamond) and get back to hand with a heart to the ♥K.

Which diamond should we play now?

This is a tricky one. The correct card to play is a small diamond and not the ♦J as one might instinctively think. Let us see why: if the diamonds split 3-3, it does not make a difference what one plays. If they split 4-2 with KQ9x or KQ7x in the same hand, we will never be able to set up the suit without losing three more tricks. But if they split 4-2 and there is a honor doubleton in either hand, we must play small to catch the stiff honor in order to be able to play the ♦J next time and set up the suit. If we had played the ♦J now, we would then have to play from 108 towards Honor-9 and go inevitably down.

Here is the complete hand:

♠ K74		♠ Q105
♥ A1074		♥ J965
♦ A		♦ Q3
♣ AQ943		♣ K1072
♠ 9863		
♥ Q2		
♦ K974		
♣ J65		
♠ AJ2		
♥ K83		
♦ J108652		
♣ 8		