

♠♥♦♣ READ THE LEAD ♠♥♦♣

When you declare a contract, you need to use all the clues the opponent's drop. Sometimes they enter the bidding and leave fingerprints. Sometimes they are silent during the auction, but LHO's initial lead tells a story.

You are the dealer with this hand:

S	South
♠	KQ
♥	A942
♦	A742
♣	Q109

You have 15 HCP and a balanced hand. You open 1NT and your partner raises you to 3NT.

West leads the ♦K and you see this dummy.

N	North
♠	A9
♥	K53
♦	J95
♣	A7642

West Leads: ♦K

S	South
♠	KQ
♥	A942
♦	A742
♣	Q109

All notrump hands start the same way: Count your winners and make a plan to get any more necessary for your contract. Then look for overtricks.

You have 3 top Spades. Unfortunately, they will only produce 2 tricks. You also have 2 Hearts, 1 Diamond and 1 Club. You need 3 additional tricks.

There are several possible opportunities for extra tricks. Most of them need a bit of luck. You have 7 Hearts and if they break 3-3, you get an extra Heart trick (35%); if the ♣K is in East, you can finesse the ♣Q (50%); and if the ♦Q is in West, you can score the ♦J (99%).


Why is the Diamond play so probable? Because if West has taken even one bridge lesson, he will not have led the ♦K without the supporting ♦Q.

The next part of the plan is to arrange the order in which you will try each of these necessary suit developments, including the decision of what to do with the opening lead.

Since you have a total of seven Diamonds, there is no need to hold up. Win the opening lead with the ♦A and lead up to the ♥K to get into the dummy. Then lead a Club to your ♣Q. When you do, East plays low and your ♣Q wins. Now lead a low Heart and pray that East wins the trick.

East does win his ♥8 and switches to the ♠J. This switch indicates that the Diamonds have split 5-1, and East is out of the killer suit. You win the Spade in your hand and play the ♥A, clearing the suit and giving you the extra Heart trick. Now you can lead a Diamond up the Dummy. West takes her ♦Q but can only return a Spade to Dummy's ♠A. You have taken your 3 extra tricks - the Heart, Club and Diamond tricks for 9 tricks in total.

This is the entire deal:

	N North ♠A9 ♥K53 ♦J95 ♣A7642	
W West ♠8752 ♥1076 ♦KQ1063 ♣8	W N E S Pass 1NT Pass 3NT Pass Pass Pass	E East ♠J10643 ♥QJ8 ♦8 ♣KJ53
	S South ♠KQ ♥A942 ♦A742 ♣Q109	3NT South 0 0

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

<https://tinyurl.com/2mt85eum> , or copy and paste it into your browser. Click on the "Next" button on the bottom to advance through each trick. If you don't want to see the opponents hands, click on the white area in the South hand before you start.

Alternatively, by clicking on "Play" you can play all four hands and see if you can make the hand on your own. <https://tinyurl.com/2p3hmb44>

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