♠♥♦♣ RESTRICTED CHOICE ♠♥♦♣

Your partner is the dealer and opens 1♦. East passes and this is your hand:

S South

- ♠ Q5
- ♥ KJ4
- ♦ K4
- ♣ AK8764

This is a rather unbalanced hand, but it does have 16 HCP. You certainly have enough total points to support a game with partner. But what game will it be?

You are playing the 2/1 Game Force system, so a response of 2♣ denies a 4-card Major and promises 13 total points. The primary advantage of this system, is that all succeeding bids are forcing to game. Neither partner needs to jump to force, and there is much more room to search for the best strain.

You hear North rebid 2NT. This usually implies stoppers in the unbid suits. The bid also limits his hand to about 15 HCP. You are a couple of points shy of slam values, so you settle for 3NT.

West lead the ♠10 and you see this dummy. What is your plan?

N North

- ♠ AJ8
- ♥ Q8
- ♦ AQ1053
- ♣ 1092

West Leads: ♠10

S South

- ♠ Q5
- ♥ KJ4
- ♦ K4
- ♣ AK8764

This is just the hand you envisioned during the auction. It fits pretty well with your hand. You have 6 top tricks and the potential for many more. Your 7-card Diamond suit and 9-card Club suit are both ripe for extra tricks. You also have an extra Spade and Heart tricks coming.

What are you going to play to the first trick? Consider the lead.

The ♠10 is not 4th card down. You hold 3 of the 4 higher cards yourself. Therefore East surely holds the ♠K. The normal play is to duck in the dummy, let East win the ♠K and regain the lead with a backup stopper. However, if the Diamond and Club suits both run for 11 tricks, you might be giving away an unneccesary tick to the ♠K. Also, winning the ♠A now, still leaves you with the backup stopper should the opponents get the lead later.

You win the ♠A and start on the longer of the two minors. You lead a Club to your ♣A and West plays the ♣Q. Do you play the ♣K and assume a 2-2 break (9-Never) or finesse ♣10?

This is one of the applications of The Rule of Restricted Choice. Restricted Choice is a very complex, mathimatically based rule that the Bridge Encyclopedia devotes 5 very large pages to. Basically, it says that when one defender plays one of two missing honors when he doesn't have to, it is more likely that his partner holds the other honor. That is an over-simplification, but it is good enough for our purposes.

In our heads, we're going to assume East holds the J♣. We have to lead the next Club from the dummy and there is only one entry to get there without losing the lead. Therefore, we must play the top Diamonds and hope for a 3-3 split.

Miraclulously, the Diamonds do divide evenly and we take all 5 Diamonds, discarding Hearts in our hand. Then we lead the ♣10. If East plays low, we let it ride and all our Clubs are winners. Eleven cards in the minors and the ♠A make 12 tricks. The defenders must eat the ♥A which they would have taken had we ducked the first Spade lead.

This is the entire deal:

D 8	N North	W	N	E	S
	♠ AJ8	P	1♦	P	2♣
	♥ Q8	P	2♦	P	2NT
	♦ AQ1053	P	3NT	P	P
	♣ 1092	P			

W West		E East
♠ 109743		♠ K62
♥ 10762		♥ A953
♦ J76		♦ 982
♣ Q		♣ J53

S South	
♠ Q5	
♥ KJ4	
♦ K4	
♣ AK8764	3NT S NS: 0 EW: 0

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

https://tinyurl.com/2knqce4j, 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.