

## ♠♥♦♣ THE KEY PLAY ♠♥♦♣

East opens the bidding in third seat with 1♦.

S	South
♠	A108
♥	K8
♦	J9754
♣	K93

You have a hand that is strong enough to overcall or double. However, your shape is all wrong. You can't overcall 2♦ because that would be Michaels for the Majors. You can't double because you can't handle partner's advance in Hearts. Your proper call is Pass!

Over a 1♠ response, East rebids 2NT, showing a balanced hand of 18-19 total points. Again, you must pass. Surprisingly, this becomes the final contract, and you are on lead.

In most defensive play, the opening lead is the most critical. Choosing the suit and card in the suit to lead often can mean the difference in setting or allowing a contract to make; or the difference between making on the nose and making an overtrick.

Normally, leading your longest suit maximizes the chances that you will win the race to develop a suit and get extra tricks. Your Diamonds would represent an excellent start, but for the fact that the declarer bid them. You have 11 HCP and Declarer has 18. West responded but didn't accept the invitation, so he probably has about 5 or 6 HCP. That means your partner has no more than 6 HCP herself. It is unlikely that they are all in the Diamond suit. Leading away from the ♦J in your 5-card suit, is very likely to give East a free finesse and cost you 1 or 2 tricks. It's best to look for another lead.

If you are not leading your longest suit, the second priority is to lead your partner's longest suit. When he hasn't bid one, it's often best to lead your shortest suit. That would be Hearts, but a King doubleton is too dangerous to lead from. You could easily be giving away a trick. It's between Spades and Clubs. I like to lead away from the ♣K and save the ♠A in case I need to take the lead later.

I recommend leading the ♣3.

<b>W</b> West
♠ KJ32
♥ 943
♦ 2
♣ Q10642

<b>S</b> South
♠ A108
♥ K8
♦ J9754
♣ K93

Dummy inserts the ♣10 and the trick is won by partner's ♣J. That means he holds the ♣A as well. Partner returns a low Heart, won by your ♥K. There is no hurry to return to Clubs. You will always be able to lead them when you win the ♠A. Since partner led an encouraging low Heart, you return a Heart to make him happy. As expected, it is won by Declarer.

East will try to set up his Spades to take 3 Spade tricks. You hold up the ♠A until the 3<sup>rd</sup> round, blocking his entry to the Dummy.

In the course of time, you will win 3 Clubs, 1 Spade, 1 Heart and your ♦J to set the contract. Not leading the Diamond forced Declarer to lead the Diamonds from his hand, in the hope of winning all his Diamonds. That initial lead was certainly the Key Play!

This is the entire deal:

	<b>N</b> North	<b>W</b> <b>N</b> <b>E</b> <b>S</b>
	♠ 654	P   P   1♦   P
	♥ J10652	1♠   P   2NT   P
	♦ 86	P   P
	♣ AJ8	
<b>W</b> West		<b>E</b> East
♠ KJ32		♠ Q97
♥ 943		♥ AQ7
♦ 2		♦ AKQ103
♣ Q10642		♣ 75
	<b>S</b> South	
	♠ A108	
	♥ K8	
	♦ J9754	
	♣ K93	
		2NT E   NS: 0 EW: 0

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

<https://tinyurl.com/2jbcpywa>, 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.

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